# Death and the Afterlife in the Ancient Near East (Near E 309/509)

3 credits (A&H)

*University of Washington*

Department of Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures

Spring 2023 – Savery 166 – MW 3.30-4.50

## **Instructor Contact Information**

Instructor: Kathryn McConaughy Medill

Email: kmed1@uw.edu

Mailbox: in Denny 220-D (MELC Department office)

Office: Denny M220B

Office hours: Mon 12:15-1:15 and Wed 2:00-3:00 (walk in), or by appointment at other times

To find my office: Go in the main doors of Denny Hall; head left through the Middle Eastern Languages and Civilization offices. Go down the shallow ramp. At the bottom of the ramp, on your right is the door to the mezzanine stairwell. Go up the stairwell one flight. My office is to the left.

## **Course Description**

 Investigates beliefs about death and the afterlife the ancient Near East, drawing on sources from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Syria, and Canaan to address questions such as, “What did the peoples of this region think happened to them after they died, and how did their ideas shape the ways that they buried their dead?”

 Highlights ways in which ideas of death differed between cultures.

**Course Modality**

This course is offered in person. If you won’t be able to attend most of our in-person meetings, this course may not be a good fit for you.

## **Course Objectives**

By the end of this course, students are expected to learn

* to contextualize burial practices from Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Syria/Canaan
* to explain myths about the afterlife from these three regions and how they may have impacted burial practices
* to identify the purposes for which burial literature was written
* to describe different types of tomb art and artifacts and their purposes
* to identify several genres of royal literature by their distinctive characteristics
* to synthesize their understanding of burial practices and their reasons by creating a burial plan
* to reflect on their own ideas about death and the afterlife and how their modern sociohistorical context has informed those ideas

## **Course Materials**

Course materials will be available on **our class Canvas site**.

## **Course Format**

Class will meet in person twice a week. Each class consists mostly of close reading and discussion rather than of lecture alone, so students are responsible for all readings before the start of class and are expected to actively contribute. At times, the class may be split into smaller groups to further discuss the themes of the class and then each group will present their collected ideas.

## **Grading Policy**

You will be able to track your grades in Canvas during the quarter. If you have concerns, please come see me in my office. Due to FERPA, I can’t discuss your grades over email.

In Canvas, your course grade appears as a percentage. However, if you complete this course, you will receive a numerical grade out of 4.0. Basically, it is your GPA for a single course.

This is the equation that we use:

(course percentage/20) – 1 = GPA

This is then rounded to one decimal place.

So, for example, if you have a 90% in the course, (90/20) – 1 = 3.5

If you have an 80%, (80/20) – 1 = 3.0

0.8-0.7 is the lowest passing grade for undergraduates. Graduate students should be aware of their program’s requirements for passing grades.

**Undergraduate Grading Breakdown**

In-Class Activities 15%

Reading Questions 25%

A Day (and Night) in the Life of a Ba 15%

The Life of a Ghost 15%

Burial Plan Presentation & Reflection 30%

Total Grade 100%

**Graduate Grading Breakdown**

In-Class Activities 15%

Three Reading Reviews 15%

Site Presentation 10%

A Day (and Night) in the Life of a Ba 15%

The Life of a Ghost 15%

Final Paper 30%

Total Grade 100%

**In-Class Activities (All Students)**

We will often do an activity in class which I will collect. Fyi, while it is possible to make these up, the make-up version is usually more difficult than the version done in class.

**Reading Questions (Undergraduates)**

As shown on the syllabus, assigned readings are usually accompanied by a few reading questions to help your comprehension and prepare you for class discussion. Please turn these in on Canvas. There is **one free drop** on these.

**Pro Tip**: Save a copy to your device and bring it to class with you! This will help you out during class discussion and activities.

**A Day (and Night) in the Life of a Ba (All Students) - due 26 Apr**

Within the Egyptian worldview as we’ve discussed it, what would it be like to be a *ba*? Write me a story of at least 850 words describing a day and night in the life of a ba. In your story, make sure you tell me…

* Who were you when you were alive?
* How were you buried? How has that impacted your afterlife?
* As a *ba*, what happens to you at night? What do you do?
* What do you do and experience during the day?

You don’t need to tell me these things in any particular order, as long as you include them all.

You may use first or third person narration, dialogue, poetry, prose, whatever seems good to you, in the construction of your story. But **please do check your spelling, grammar, and clarity**. I can’t give you credit for something if I can’t understand what you’re saying.

**The Life of a Ghost (All Students) - due 10 May**

Within the Mesopotamian worldview as we’ve discussed it, what would it be like to be a ghost? Write me a story of at least 850 words describing a the life of a ghost. In your story, make sure you tell me…

* Who were you when you were alive?
* How were you originally buried? As a consequence of that, what was your initial afterlife experience like?
* Why did you become a ghost? (Make sure you are thinking about why Mesopotamians believed you might become a ghost.)
* What have you been up to since becoming a ghost and how have people responded to that?

You don’t need to tell me these things in any particular order, as long as you include them all.

You may use first or third person narration, dialogue, poetry, prose, whatever seems good to you, in the construction of your story. But **please do check your spelling, grammar, and clarity**. I can’t give you credit for something if I can’t understand what you’re saying.

**Burial Plan Presentation & Reflection (Undergraduates) – due 24 May, 31 May, or 8 june**

For your final project, you will take on the role of an ancient burial salesperson. You have the perfect plan for a burial, and you are ready to convince your classmates (= your potential customers) with a 10-minute sales presentation and some compelling visuals! You will then turn in a short write-up to me (3-4 pages double spaced) reflecting on your choices.

**Presentation**

Using what you’ve learned in the course up to this point, design a burial. Where will it be? What will the tomb/grave/pyramid/etc. be made out of and how will it be shaped? Is this site for an individual burial, a family burial, or what? Is it part of a larger cemetery, and if so, how does it fit into that larger picture? What art or artifacts will be part of the burial package? How will the body be handled? What, if any, funerary rituals will be involved? What is the benefit that the customer will get from each of these things? Tell us all about it, using a slide presentation or a printed “brochure” (one copy for each classmate, please) to show us everything.

**Pro Tip**: Pick one of the ancient worldviews regarding death and the afterlife that we’ve discussed this quarter, and design your burial so that you can justify most of the things that you include based on that worldview.

Images for your presentation may be ones you created (in any medium) or appropriate ones from the readings or the internet.

**Reflection**

In 3-4 pages double-spaced, reflect on the choices you made in your presentation. What decisions did you make about the design, and how did the ancient worldview that you chose to focus on drive your various decisions? Are there elements that were driven more by the ancient society, the circumstances of death, or the physical region in which you set your plan? What other burials that we have studied did you draw upon in your design, and how? How do you think the worldviews of your modern culture drive burial decisions today?

**Three Reading Reviews (Graduate Students)**

For each unit, you will read an extra reading, summarize it, and review it in 2-3 pages double-spaced. Turn your reviews in on Canvas.

**Your review should include**: Full bibliographic information on the article/chapter, a summary of the article (What is the evidence? What argument does the author make based on that evidence?), and a discussion of the significance of this information for our understanding of death and the afterlife in the ancient Middle East. You may also include a critique of the author’s argument if you desire.

**Pro Tip**: What site will you be presenting on? You may be able to pick an article that is relevant to your site.

Review a Reading from the “Egypt Collection”: due 19 Apr

Review a Reading from the “Mesopotamia Collection”: due 3 May

Review a Reading from the “Syria/Canaan Collection”: due 2 May

**Site Presentations (Graduate Students)**

Do a little research on your assigned site and show us what you found! 7 minutes is ideal. What cemetaries, tombs, or graves do we have from this site? What is their sociohistorical context? What is notable about them?

Provide a PowerPoint or handout to show us relevant maps, diagrams, or images.

Pro Tip: If you can find enough information on any one tomb or burial, your best option is to very briefly introduce the larger context and then spend most of your time taking us through that specific tomb or burial and the interpretation of its features.

Another Pro Tip: There is often a relevant article in the “Collection” section to get you started.

Egypt Section

* + Hierakonpolis – week 2 W \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
	+ Avaris – week 3 M \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
	+ Napata or Meroe – week 3 W \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
	+ Memphis (Saqqara) – week 4 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Mesopotamia

* Titriş Höyük – week 5 M \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Kish or Nippur – week 5 W \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Mari – week 6 M \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Babylon (Neo-Babylonian Period; see Baker’s article to start) – week 6 W

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Syria/Canaan/Anatolia

* Gre Virike – week 7 M \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Deir el Balaḥ or Tel Banat – week 7 W \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Megiddo (Bronze Age) – week 8 M \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Khirbet el Qom – week 8 W \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Jerusalem (Siloam Necropolis) – week 9 M \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Final Paper (Graduate Students) due June 8**

Graduate students will complete a research paper of 12 pages double-spaced, with cover page not included in page count. All sources used must be properly cited in footnotes, with author’s last name, publication year, and page number (e.g., Smith 1990:27.).

**Default topic**: What can we learn about death and the afterlife in the ancient Middle East from X ancient site? (Students usually choose to focus on the site for which they did their site presentation. If you want to do a different site or an entirely different topic, please see me.)

**The paper will include the following elements**: Introduction of the site within its historical context (when was the site used and by whom? What was going on in this region during this time?), detailed description (either of all of the burial-related stuff at the site, or a brief description of all the burial-related stuff at the site with a more detailed description of a particular tomb, grave, or burial), summary of the afterlife beliefs that we might guess would be active in this region (based on class discussion), detailed discussion and interpretation of the archaeological data in the light of those potential afterlife beliefs (how might these beliefs motivate the burial practices that we see here? What elements of the burial practices may not be connected to these beliefs? What elements of the physical site, circumstances of death(s), or social structure might motivate these burial practices instead? Are there any practices that you can’t explain at all? If so, what information would you need in order to help you?), conclusion (what can we learn about death and the afterlife in this specific ancient region from this site?), and bibliography (Chicago style).

Further details to follow.

**Optional draft turn-in date** (if you would like to receive feedback from me): 24 May

## **Making Up Work and Late Work**

* Even if you miss class, please try to **turn in any assigned work**. Email it to me. To get full points, turn it in on the day that it was due.
* For missed in-class activities, I may substitute an alternative assignment. The alternative assignment will, in general, be more difficult than the version done in class.
* If assignments are one day late, there will be a 10% penalty; if assignments are two days late, there will be a 20% penalty; and so on. Sunday does not count toward days late since I will not be grading on that day.

**Religious Accommodations**

Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences
or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities.
The UW’s policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is
available at Religious Accommodations Policy (https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/). Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course
using the Religious Accommodations Request form
(https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/).

## **Incompletes**

Course grades of “incomplete” can only be offered under specific circumstances. See the UW information page here: <https://registrar.washington.edu/students/incomplete-grades/>

## **Advising**

College of Arts and Sciences advising is now being handled by the Humanities Academic Services. They are happy to answer your questions! Find them at <https://hasc.washington.edu/> or email them at has-center@uw.edu.

## **Electronic Devices Policy**

Everyone should have their best possible chance to learn. Using electronic devices for non-academic tasks during class is distracting both to you and to those around you.

* Please don’t use cell phones during class. Phones should be off or silenced.
* Laptops may be used to take notes or to view course materials. Students who are distracting themselves and others with non-academic uses of their laptops will not receive participation points for that class period.

## **Academic Honesty and Conduct**

* Students are expected to treat their classmates and instructors with honesty and respect throughout the course. **All exam answers, homework assignments, posters, and so on must reflect original (or correctly cited) work. No form of cheating will be tolerated**. The following link has information on academic honesty, plagiarism, and consequences: http://www.washington.edu/uaa/gateway/advising/help/academichonesty.php
* Student are expected to adhere to the University of Washington Code of Student Conduct which can be found at the following link: <https://www.washington.edu/cssc/for-students/student-code-of-conduct/>
* The University of Washington is committed to fostering an environment where the free exchange of ideas is an integral part of the academic learning environment. Disruption of classroom discussions can prohibit other students from fully engaging and participating. Any student causing disruption may be asked to leave any class session, and, depending on the severity and frequency of that behavior, an incident report may be filled with Community Standards and Student Conduct. As a condition of enrollment, all students assume responsibility to observe standards of conduct that will contribute to the pursuit of academic goals and to the welfare of the academic community. For more detailed information on these standards, please visit: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=478-120>

## **Disability and Accessibility**

* Your experience in this class is important to me. If you have already established accommodations with Disability Resources for Students (DRS), please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so that we can discuss your needs in this course.
* If you have not yet established services through DRS, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but are not limited to mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact DRS at 206-543-8924 or uwdrs@uw.edu or [disability.uw.edu.](http://depts.washington.edu/uwdrs/) DRS offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or temporary health conditions. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between you, your instructor(s) and DRS. It is the policy and practice of the University of Washington to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law.

## **Safety and Wellbeing**

* Call SafeCampus at 206-685-7233 any time – no matter where you work or study – to anonymously discuss safety and well-being concerns for yourself or others. SafeCampus’s team will provide individualized support, while discussing short- and long-term solutions and connecting you with additional resources when requested. Find more information here: <https://www.washington.edu/safecampus/>
* They can connect you with emergency food and shelter services if needed.
* UW, through [numerous policies](https://www.washington.edu/titleix/policies/), prohibits sex- and gender-based violence and harassment, and we expect students, faculty, and staff to act professionally and respectfully in all work, learning, and research environments.
* For support, resources, and reporting options related to sex- and gender-based violence or harassment, visit the [Know Your Rights & Resources](https://uw-s3-cdn.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/181/2021/10/15165536/KYRR-booklet-current-version.pdf) guide on the UW Title IX webpage.
* Please know that if you choose to disclose information to me about sex- or gender-based violence or harassment, I will do my best to connect you (or the person who experienced the conduct) with resources and individuals who can best provide support and options. You can also access those resources directly.
* Confidential: [Confidential advocates](https://www.washington.edu/sexualassault/support/advocacy/) will not share information with others unless given express permission by the person who has experienced the harm or when required by law.
* Private and/or anonymous: [SafeCampus](https://www.washington.edu/safecampus/) provides consultation and support and can connect you with additional resources if you want them.You can contact SafeCampus anonymously or share limited information when you call.

Title IX website: <https://www.washington.edu/titleix/>

Support and help page: <https://www.washington.edu/titleix/resources/>

Confidential advocates: <https://www.washington.edu/sexualassault/support/advocacy/>

Officials Required to Report: <https://www.washington.edu/titleix/title-ix-officials-required-to-report/>

Related policies: <https://www.washington.edu/titleix/policies/>

You can find information here about medical services and mental health support at UW: <http://wellbeing.uw.edu>

**Course Concerns**
If you have any concerns about the class, please try to resolve them first with your classroom instructor. If the matter is not resolved that way, you may turn to the Chair of the MELC Department, Prof. Naomi Sokoloff (naosok@uw.edu). There are also other resources available to students to resolve complaints or grievances, including Humanities Academic Services at https://hasc.washington.edu/, the Bias Reporting Tool at https://www.washington.edu/bias/, the Office of the Ombud at https://www.washington.edu/ombud/, the University Complaint and Resolution Office at https://www.washington.edu/compliance/uciro/, and Disability Resources, https://depts.washington.edu/uwdrs/complaint-mediation/

**Final Note**

By enrolling in this class, you make a commitment to regular and consistent class participation.
Continued enrollment signifies that you have received a copy of this syllabus and that you have
been notified of the requirements, examination schedule, and grading policies for the course.The
instructor reserves the right to revise this syllabus at any time during the quarter. This may involve adding or subtracting readings. Students will be informed of the changes.

## **Course Schedule**

**Recommended Historical Readings**

If you don’t have any background in the study of the ancient Middle East, you may want to familiarize yourself with the history using the readings on Canvas under the Recommended Historical Readings module.

**Required Readings and Assignments**

### **Week 1: Introduction**

27 Mar Introduction to the course and the ancient Middle East

 *Required readings*: none

29 Mar Life, death and afterlife

*Required readings*: “Definitions of Death,” “Afterlife in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” “Grief and Mourning in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” all short articles from *MEDD,* and Reading Questions 1

*Grad students:* Read also John Robb, “Burial Treatment as Transformations of Bodily Ideology,” from *Performing Death*

**Week 2: Death in ancient Egypt I**

3 Apr The story of death in ancient Egypt

 *Required readings*: Darnell & Darnell *Netherworld Books* “Introduction,” pages 4-15, 36-48; Darnell & Darnell *Netherworld Books* “Book of Gates,” pages 286-295; Faulkner et al. *Book of the Dead: Papyrus of Ani* Chapter 125, and Reading Questions 2

5 Apr Pyramids and Pyramid Texts, \*Hierakonpolis

 *Required readings*: Allen, *AEPT*, pp. 1-41, and Reading Questions 3

**Week 3: Death in ancient Egypt II**

10 Apr Making mummies, \*Avaris

 *Required readings*: Ikram, *DBAE* pages 47-76, and Reading Questions 4

12 Apr You can take it with you, \*Napata/Meroe

 *Required readings*:

 If your last name begins with…

 A- C Grajetzki, *BCAE* pages 7-26, and Reading Questions 5

 D- K Grajetzki, *BCAE* pages 27-53, and Reading Questions 5

 L- N Grajetzki, *BCAE* pages 54-83, and Reading Questions 5

 O- R Grajetzki, *BCAE* pages 84-108, and Reading Questions 5

 S- Z Grajetzki, *BCAE* pages 109-132, and Reading Questions 5

**Week 4: Death in ancient Egypt III**

17 Apr Remembering the (elite) dead, \*Memphis/Saqqara

 *Required readings*: “Autobiography of Harkhuf” (Lichtheim I: 23-27), “Stela of Sehetep-Ib-Re” (Lichtheim I: 125-129), “Stela of Amenhotep III” (Lichtheim II: 43-47), “Sarcophagus Inscription of Wennofer” (Lichtheim III: 54-57) , and Reading Questions 6

19 Apr Abydos

*Required readings*: Wegner and Cahail, “Tomb of King Woseribre Senebkay,” pages 1-137 (Just get as far as you can), and Reading Questions 7

*Grad students*: Reading Review 1 due today

**Week 5: Death in ancient Mesopotamia I**

24 Apr Death and the Underworld in Mesopotamian Myths, \*Titris Hoyuk

 *Required reading*: “The Descent of Ishtar,” “Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld,” “The Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince,” “Elegies for Tammuz,” and Reading Questions 8

26 Apr Four funerals and another funeral, \*Kish/Nippur

 *Required reading*: Hays, “Death and Dying in Mesopotamia during Iron Age II,” pages 34-56, and Reading Questions 9

 *All students*: A Day (and Night) in the Life of a Ba due today

**Week 6: Death in ancient Mesopotamia II**

1 May The Royal Cemetary of Ur, \*Mari

 *Required reading*: Baadsgaard et al., “Bludgeoned”, and Reading Questions 10

3 May Dealing with the dead, \*Babylon

*Required reading*: Scurlock, “Ghosts,” van der Toorn, “The Cult of the Ancestors”, and Reading Questions 11

*Grad students*: Reading Review 2 due today

**Week 7: Death in ancient Syria and Canaan I**

8 May Death and the underworld in Syro-Canaanite myth and ritual, \*Gre Virike

 *Required reading*: “Baal versus Mot” and “The Banquet of the Rapiuma” (from *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*), “Ritual for an Abi Pit,” and “A Hittite Royal Funeral”, and Reading Questions 12

10 May Remembering the (elite) dead, \*Tel Banat/Deir el Balah

 *Required reading*: “Hadad and Panamuwa Inscriptions” (CoS II), “Nerab Inscriptions,” “Eshmunazor Inscription,” “Katamuwa Inscription,” and Reading Questions 13

 *All students*: The Life of a Ghost due today

**Week 8: Death in ancient Syria and Canaan II**

15 May Umm el-Marra, \*Megiddo

*Required reading*: Schwartz, “Memory and its Demolition” , and Reading Questions 14

17 May Bury me again, \*Khirbet el-Qom

 *Required reading*: Pfalzner, “How did they bury the kings of Qatna?”, and Reading Questions 15

**Week 9: Death in ancient Syria and Canaan III**

22 May Death in ancient Israel and Judah, \*Jerusalem

 *Required reading*: Hays’ “Death and the Dead in Iron II Israel and Judah” pages 147-168, 176-192, and Reading Questions 16

*Grad students*: Reading Review 3 due today

24 May Burial Presentations – 8 students

**Week 10: Conclusions**

29 May [no class, Memorial Day]

31 May Burial Presentations – 9 students

**Finals Week**

8 June, Thursday 2:30-4:20 Burial Presentations – 11 students

 *Grad students*: Final Paper due

**Selected Bibliography**

Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*

Baadsgaard, Monge, and Zettler, “Bludgeoned, Burned, and Beautified”

Darnell and Darnell, *The Ancient Egyptian Netherworld Books*

Faulkner et al., *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: Complete Papyrus of Ani with Integrated Text and Pictures*

Grajetzki, *Burial Customs in Ancient Egypt*

Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II*

Ikram, *Death and Burial in Ancient Egypt*

Laneri, ed., *Performing Death*

Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3 volumes

*Macmillan Encyclopedia of Death and Dying* (*MEDD*)

Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*

Pfalzner, “How did they bury the kings of Qatna?”

Schwartz, “Memory and its Demolition”

Scurlock, “Ghosts in the Ancient Near East: Weak or Powerful?”

Sonia, *Caring for the Dead in Ancient Israel*

Van der Toorn, “Cult of the Ancestors” from *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel*

Wegner and Cahail, “Tomb of King Woseribre Senebkay”