



Death: Antiquity and Its Legacy (Ancients & Moderns)

Mario Erasmo

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Personal and yet universal, inevitable and unknowable, death has been a dominant theme in all cultures since earliest times. Remarkably, across the span of several millennia and despite the myriad of cultural profusions since antiquity, we can recognize in the customs of ancient Greece and Rome ceremonies and rituals that have lasting resonance today in both the East and West. For example, preparing the corpse of the deceased, holding a memorial service, the practice of cremation and of burial in "resting places" are all processes that can trace their origin to ancient practices. Such rites--described by Cicero and Herodotus, among others--have defined traditional modern funerals. Yet of late there has been a shift away from classical ritual and somber memorialization as the dead are transformed into spectacles. Impromptu roadside shrines, "virtual" memorials, the embalmmnt of the deceased in the attitude of daily activity, and even firework displays have come to the fore as new modes of marking, even celebrating, bereavement. What is causing this change, and how do urbanization, economic factors, and the rise of individualism play a part? Mario Erasmo creatively explicates and explores the nexus between classical and contemporary approaches to death and interment. From theme funerals in St. Louis to Etruscan sarcophagi, he offers a rich and insightful discussion of the end of life across the ages.

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