An archaeology of the afterlife

Start date 14th May 2017  End date 14th May 2017

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge

Tutor Dr Isabelle Vella Gregory  Course code 1617NDX046

Director of Programmes Emma Jennings

For further information on this course, please contact Public Programme Coordinator, Clare Kerr clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk or 01223 746237

To book See: www.ice.cam.ac.uk or telephone 01223 746262

Tutor biography

Isabelle Vella Gregory is an archaeologist, formerly a Junior Research Fellow at Christ's College and now an affiliate scholar at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.

Born in Malta, where she first studied archaeology, she moved to Cambridge to pursue her Master's and doctoral studies. She teaches undergraduates at the University of Cambridge, focusing on prehistory, methodology and an inter-disciplinary approach to archaeology. Her expertise lies in central Mediterranean prehistory, from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age, and archaeological method and theory. Isabelle has conducted fieldwork in Malta and Italy and museum studies in Sardinia.

Isabelle's teaching style is aimed at enabling participants to develop their critical thinking skills and encouraging group discussion. She finds that heavy use of mixed media, particularly vision and sound, stimulates thought and discourse and enables participants to really take a close look at the many fascinating things under discussion. Her approach is very much multi-disciplinary- after all an understanding of humanity requires many tools and approaches. Interacting with adult students is, for Isabelle, always a pleasure- participants bring with them a wealth of experience and perspectives and they are always willing to engage in lively debate.
Course programme

09:30 Terrace bar open for pre-course tea/coffee

10:00 – 11:15 What is death?
This lecture explores death in this lecture we will explore
how archaeology, anthropology and history approach death and how we
need an integrated approach to understand the phenomenon. We will
look at how people define death, how they choose to deal with it and
how we can decipher the archaeological record. The growing public
fascination with forensics has led to a wider awareness of what the dead
can tell us. This lecture explores what we can learn from the dead about
their life. Unlike TV shows, we will not merely look at skeletal remains
but also at the wider context in which these are found.

11:15 Coffee

11:45 – 13:00 The dead and their domains.
This lecture will explore what a mortuary landscape looks like. We will
explore some of the world’s major cemeteries and places for the dead,
from pyramids to burials in the desert, stone monuments in Britain and
burying the dead underneath the living room floor. We will explore how
feasting is an integral part of many death rituals, from Britain to Africa
and we will discover what happens when people try to extend the life
cycle.

13:00 Lunch

14:00 – 15:15 The good and evil dead
Are the dead our friends? Do they help or hinder society? Is a dead hero
the same as a dead villain? What does archaeology have to say about
ghosts and zombies? What is a good death? This lecture is designed to
be thought provoking. We will explore a territory ranging from ancient
Mesoptamia and modern rural Greece and Haiti.

15:15 Tea

15:30 – 16:45 The dead in everyday life
Do the dead ever really leave us? How have death rituals changed? Do
we think death rituals are obsolete? This lecture promises a fresh look at
what people think is familiar (with a focus on modern Britain) and
modern death rituals that are not known to many. There will be plenty of
audio-visual material and a couple of surprises. I am conscious that
reflecting about death can give rise to many thoughts. The final lecture is
designed to end on a good note. Afterwards, if participants feel the need
to honour the memory of loved ones we can raise a glass (or cup of tea)
at the bar.

16:45 Day-school ends
Course syllabus

Aims:

1. To enable participants to acquire an understanding of the diversity in how people and societies have dealt with death: how death has been conceptualized, explained and celebrated. Participants will be guided towards using a broad knowledge base.
2. To understand how to analyse a diversity of evidence in order to understand the different approaches to death using rigorous research methods, with particular emphasis on context.
3. Pursue further independent study using the tools acquired in this course. This is not exclusively related to the topic but will also be helpful to other research pursuits.

Content:

What happens when we die? While in today’s world death is often seen as the end of the human journey, many exciting things happen after people die. This course examines the diversity of the afterlife and the many ways in which people deal with life and death. Themes explored include how to identify the dead and interpret the remains, people’s beliefs on death across time and space, what happens when dead people become evil and troublesome and how to die a good death.

The course will begin by asking what death is and challenging assumptions that death marks the end of life. Participants will then explore the dead and their domains, which sometimes are clearly demarcated and away from the living and at other times they intersect with the worlds of the living in various complex ways. In discussing whether death is the end, we will also explore what happens after death – how does one die a good death? What happens when one dies a bad death, and most of all, what happens when the dead return to the domain of the living? Finally, we will look at the dead in everyday life, using a very wide range of archaeological, anthropological and historical examples. This part of the course is highly illustrated and comprises numerous videos. We will explore traditions that may be part of the participants’ daily lives and see them in a new light (for example commemorating war), feasting and the culturally and historically complex examples from modern-day Malta.

Presentation of the course:

Lectures, class discussions, audio-visual material. I always encourage class participation there will be plenty of time for focused discussion. The audio-visual material enhances this endeavour. I have prepared carefully curated slides and videos for this purpose.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

1. The ability to evaluate evidence relating to death and the afterlife. This includes but is not limited to material participants are likely to encounter in museums or on television and other media, for example funerary remains, human remains, art, ceramics and other objects.
2. The ability to understand death on a much broader level, beyond the immediate domain of archaeology. This course adopts a multi-disciplinary approach to archaeology which also incorporates anthropology and history because the main focus remains the understanding of human behaviour.
3. A better understanding of the human life cycle, particularly its endpoint, and a desire to pursue knowledge of other parts of the life cycle.
Reading and resources list

Listed below are a number of texts that might be of interest for future reference, but do not need to be bought (or consulted) for the course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher and date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barley, Nigel</td>
<td><em>Dancing on the grave: Encounters with death</em></td>
<td>1995, Abacus</td>
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<td>Huntington, R.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parker Pearson, M</td>
<td><em>The archaeology of death and burial</em></td>
<td>1999, Sutton</td>
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<td>Tarlow, Sarah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nilsson Stutz, Liv (eds)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Waldron, T.</td>
<td><em>Shadows in the soil: Human bones and archaeology</em></td>
<td>2001, Tempus</td>
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Website addresses

1. Death in Ancient Egypt, from the Chicago Oriental Institute: [http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/RA/ABZU/DEATH.HTML](http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/RA/ABZU/DEATH.HTML)
2. A photo scan of Otzi the Ice Man [http://iceman.eurac.edu/](http://iceman.eurac.edu/) A full scan of the Ice Man

**Note:** Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

*Information correct as of: 27 March 2017*