

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**

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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 Mesopotamia 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.

Author	Title	Publisher and date
Barley, Nigel	<i>Dancing on the grave: Encounters with death</i>	1995, Abacus
Chamberlain, A.	<i>Human remains</i>	1994, British Museum Press
Metcalf, P. and Huntington, R.	<i>Celebrations of death: The anthropology of mortuary ritual.</i>	1991, Cambridge University Press
Parker Pearson, M	<i>The archaeology of death and burial</i>	1999, Sutton
Tarlow, Sarah Nilsson Stutz, Liv (eds)	The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Death and Burial	2013, Oxford
Waldron, T.	<i>Shadows in the soil: Human bones and archaeology</i>	2001, Tempus

Website addresses

1. Death in Ancient Egypt, from the Chicago Oriental Institute:
<http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/RA/ABZU/DEATH.HTML>
1. A photo scan of Otzi the Ice Man <http://iceman.eurac.edu/> A full scan of the Ice Man
2. Different burial types (illustrated): <https://www.thoughtco.com/ancient-burial-types-171754>

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