

Katharina Waldner, Richard Gordon Wolfgang Spickermann, eds., *Burial Rituals, Ideas of Afterlife, and the Individual in the Hellenistic World and the Roman Empire*. Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2016 (*Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge*, 57). 264 pp., 4 b/w ill, 21 b/w photos. soft cover ISBN 978-3-515-11546-9.

There has always been a constant, and continuously increasing, flow of scholarly studies covering different aspects of ancient Near Eastern (Egypt!), Greek-Roman, and Early Christian ideas of death and afterlife. As a result, the bibliography is staggering, beyond even most industrious individual's reach. And yet, hardly any other topic in ancient history – as Academia.edu statistics, among others (*vide* plentiful translations and reprints of E. Rohde's *Psyche* and of R.B. Onians' all-encompassing *The Origins of European Thought*), convincingly testify – enjoys comparable popularity among the readers – not to mention a plethora of nonacademic, always top selling, esoteric books dealing with ancient mysteries and their doctrines of life after death. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, some of the daring PhD candidates still embark on arduous endeavours of this kind, fraught with more difficulty than they are aware.¹ The sobering reality is that few of these studies stand a chance of bringing entirely new insight and count as valid contributions.²

So, when the time comes, any new robust, academic volume that addresses this challenge and takes the reader through Greek-Roman eschatology deserves full attention. Such is the case of a post-conference (Erfurt 2012) collection of essays entitled *Burial Rituals, Ideas of Afterlife, and the Individual in the Hellenistic World and the Roman Empire*, drawn up under auspices of eminent German experts in this field of studies and honouring the late University of Erfurt professor Veit Rosenberger, who was among the participants († 2016).

The editors have arranged the papers broadly following chronological order, in three parts, starting from Early Archaic period, with part 1, *From Homer to Lucian – Poetics of the Afterlife* (it might have been appropriate to correct the title of the book accordingly). Krešimir Matijević (the author of a recent study of Early Greek concepts of the soul, *Ursprung und Charakter der homerischen Jenseitsvorstellungen*, Paderborn 2015), in his “The Evolution of the Afterlife in Archaic Greece” (15–29), tackles the

¹ *Vide e.g.* C. Cousin, *La représentation de l'espace et du paysage des enfers en Grèce jusqu'au IVe siècle av. J.-C. Étude littéraire et iconographique* (Université de Paris X, 1996); Th. Reyser, *Discours et représentations de l'au-delà dans le monde grec* (Université de Paris-Est, 2011); R. Casagrande-Kim, *The Journey to the Underworld: Topography, Landscape, and Divine Inhabitants of the Roman Hades* (Columbia University 2012).

² To name some most recent studies not listed in the general bibliography on pp. 13–14, G.A. Stilwell, *Afterlife: Post-Mortem Judgments in Ancient Egypt and Ancient Greece*, New York 2005; A. Drozdek, *Athanasia: afterlife in Greek philosophy*, Hildesheim 2011 (*Spudasmata* no. 137); F.S. Tappenden, C. Daniel-Hughes, eds., *Coming Back to Life: The Permeability of Past and Present, Mortality and Immortality, Death and Life in the Ancient Mediterranean*, Montreal 2017.

old debate on the Homeric concept of afterlife, trying to find his *via media* between opposite interpretations by Ch. Sourvinou-Inwood/J.N. Bremmer (growth of individual eschatology, especially in *Odyssey*) and by I. Morris (continuity of mainstream, traditional concepts of afterlife in Archaic age). Certainly, his conclusion – that both in Homeric epics and in later traditions two attitudes emerge and coexist, one based on the common belief in Hades, and the other based on the belief in different, privileged fate of some individuals after death – is hardly revolutionary or inspiring in itself, but has its merits. Here, as nowhere else in Classical studies, the balanced, nuanced and antidogmatic approach is highly recommendable. This is also demonstrated by a subsequent, extensive paper by Jan N. Bremmer, “The construction of an individual eschatology: The case of the Orphic gold leaves” (31-51). Bremmer advances the idea that ‘Orphic’ phenomenon – whatever its exact nature was, he takes it as a prime evidence for individual, ‘alternative’ eschatology – developed as a result of a combination of different, old elements, Oriental, specifically Egyptian (separation of heaven and earth and geography of the underworld, idea of fresh water for the dead) in the first place, Greek (ritual formulas inspired by Eleusinian mysteries), and Indo-European (symbolism of a meadow, parallel to Vedic and Hittite descriptions), fused together into something new and unique, somewhere in the innovative, melting pot of Sicily and Magna Graecia, where the traditions of *polis* religion were less established. As such, Orphism was only one of a number of other individualising trends, such as Pythagoreans and followers of Empedocles. By all means, Egyptian trace should be followed by future students of Orphism, as advised by Bremmer. I am not sure, however, whether the abstract idea of (conventional? controlling or oppressive?) *polis* religion as opposed to individual and new creations, following the pattern of Socrates’ trial, still has much explanatory value. Matylda Obryk, “Prote im Land der Negationen: Per negationem definiertes Nachleben in einer griechischen Grabinschrift” (53–66), focuses on just one, short text, which belongs to yet another category of sources for ancient ideas of death and afterlife: funerary verse-inscriptions, a goldmine of information. The beautiful epigram for Prote (Kaibel *Epigrammata* 649; Peek *Versinschriften* 1830; Moretti *IGUR* III 1146, *IG* XIV 1973) makes exceptional use of distinct method of coping with eschatological/metaphysical transcendence, *per negationem* description of afterlife. Obryk presents an interesting discussion of some literary (starting with Homer) and philosophical (Platonic) models, helping to understand intellectual background of this poem. Equally interesting, however, is its emotional, poetic appeal, for which there might have been also some literary antecedents. Prote is so very happy in the Netherworld, that she does not even remember “human [earthly] life”, that is her bereaved family. There is an interesting parallel in a funerary Greek-Latin poem from 2nd century CE Thyateira in Lydia. Here, the parents complain that their son, himself carefree in Elysian Fields, forgot them completely (*sprevisti patrem matremque miserrime nate Elysios campos habitans et prata veatum*, *CLE* I 432; *SGO* I 04/05/08). In the final chapter in the first section of the book, “Tod und Jenseits bei Lukian von Samosata und Tatian” (67–81), Wolfgang Spickermann presents a readable but not

very useful, succinct survey of eschatological and thanatological themes found in Lucian.

Part 2, dedicated to Roman Empire, starts with archaeological investigation into Roman cemetery (1st century BC–2nd century CE) in the area of St. Gereon Basilica in Cologne, Germany, by Constanze Höpken, “Gefangene zwischen Diesseits und Jenseits: Außergewöhnliche Bestattungen im römischen Gräberfeld um St. Gereon in Köln” (83–108). Here, among the burials, those of prematurely dead prevail, which prompts Höpken to some rather speculative suggestions: the living tried to bind some of the dead (*os resectum*/cut-off bone and *procubitus*/ventral burials) fearing them as revenants. Veit Rosenberger, “Coping with Death: Private Deification in the Roman Empire” (109–123) tackles the phenomenon of private ‘deification’ (1–2nd century CE) as documented by a number of Latin funerary inscriptions, juxtaposed with Trimalchio’s funerary extravagancies. In his opinion such ‘deifications’ meant nothing special, really, just an intensification (with, perhaps, competitive touch, as many were produced by freedmen) of standard rites and rituals pertaining to death (as it was the case with notorious *Dis Manibus* formula) and were easily integrated into the polytheistic system (where even divine honours to humans in their lifetime were perfectly acceptable). This may well be true, but if one considers a broader picture, including Greek-style heroisation of the dead, it is tempting to point some deeper factors as well. We cannot ignore people’s sentiments towards the prematurely dead and the concern for their fate in the afterlife. This is perfectly demonstrated in the paper by Valentino Gasparini, “I will not be thirsty. My lips will not be dry”: Individual Strategies of Re-constructing the Afterlife in the Isiac Cults” (125–150), who traces Egyptian (Osiriatic, Isiac) precedents for some soteriological themes in Greek epitaphs. On the other hand, the analysis by Martin Andreas Stadler, “Dioskourides, Tanaweruow, Titus Flavius Demetrius et al. Or: How Appealing was an Egyptian Afterlife?” (151–166) shows how differentiated representations of afterlife were in the Egyptian traditions themselves. Besides positive visions of afterlife (influencing mortuary practices – and perhaps beliefs – of non-Egyptians during Hellenistic and Roman times), there are hints of contrasting, long-standing concepts, parallel to Greek and Roman pessimistic visions of Hades coupled with *carpe diem* ethos. In some individual cases, this made synthesis of these two cultures quite possible.

Part 3 of the book (*Making a Difference: Groups and their Claims*) starts with Claudia D. Bergmann, “Identity on the Menu: Imaginary Meals and Ideas of the World to Come in Jewish Apocalyptic Writings” (167–188), investigating imagery of unending, final meals served up to the righteous at the end of time in the early Jewish apocalyptic texts. Such eschatological menus, drawn from the time-honoured Biblical narratives (three categories include Leviathan, Behemoth, the Tree of Life, Manna), were intended to envision a group identity, marking the boundaries in an age of Hellenizing influences. Enjoying these foods, the law-abiding Jews were made part of an idealized, symbolic community of the faithful. It would be tempting to

follow this survey with the early Christian counterparts. Importance of Christian religious group identity seen from eschatological perspective is stressed by Andreas Merkt in his paper “A Place for My Body”: Aspects of Individualisation in Early Christian Funerary Culture and Eschatological Thought” (189–206). Taking the famous Abarcius monument as a starting point, Merkt discusses the 2nd century shift from the collective to individual eschatology, when original apocalyptic sentiments were dying away and a concept of the community of the Christian dead (“that consists of singles”) was increasingly prominent. Finally, Richard Gordon, “Den Jungstier auf den goldenen Schultern tragen’: Mythos, Ritual und Jenseitsvorstellungen im Mithraskult” (207–240) raises the tricky question of how the apparent lack of any afterlife expectations (and appropriate burials) in the Roman cult of Mithras should be explained or interpreted. The very nature of Mithraism is at stake, and Gordon strongly rejects the widespread assumption (going back to some Neoplatonic interpretations) that this was one of the ‘standard’ mystery religions and such it propagated unified set of beliefs and practices. More importantly, among the members of the cult, their families themselves were responsible for the care of the dead, rather following established traditions and concepts of afterlife. For similar *ex silentio* argument with respect to Orphic ‘movement’ see my own *Orphic Elements in Greek Funerary Verse-inscriptions*, “Littera Antiqua” 9 (2014) 119–141 (<http://www.litant.eu/Artykuly.php>).

The main body of the book is duly provided with the detailed indexes of epigraphical, papyrological and literary sources, and a general index as well. Altogether this little volume, dealing with an extraordinarily rich and complex field, offers standard conference proceedings, for good and for not so good, spun somewhere between budding ideas and new directions for scholarly work on one side, and bits and pieces derived from primary studies on the other.

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