
Memory and Mourning: Studies on Roman Death. Valerie M. Hope and Janet Huskinson (eds.). Oxford/Oakville, CT: Oxbow Books, 2011. ISBN 9781842179901. Pp. xxiv + 200.
Reviewed by Nicola Hayward, McGill University.

Memory and Mourning: Studies in Roman Death is an edited volume that developed from the collective efforts of two one-day conferences the Department of Classical Studies of the Open University held between November 2007 and February 2008. In her introduction Valerie Hope notes that while recent studies have enhanced our understanding of Roman death and its practices and rituals, many of these studies have focused on specific aspects of Roman death, which are rarely united. This volume too follows in the same tradition; however, it differs in that it has brought together a variety of evidence and approaches from literary genres, and material and archaeological evidence. It is through this interdisciplinary lens that this book outlines the progression of Roman death from the act of dying to the funeral and to the final performance of commemoration.

The opening chapter by David Noy focuses on what it means to have a “good death” in a domestic setting. Using literary, material, and archaeological evidence, Noy sites three necessary aspects of death at home: the final requests of the dying, the creation of death masks, and the correct disposal of the body. A “good death” meant the deceased would be remembered and the mourners would be able to carry out their obligations, which was a consolation for them. Death away from home meant the deceased did not receive the proper burial, nor would their tomb be maintained, leading to eventual obscurity.

In Chapter Two, Graham examines both the social and biological aspects of death, noting that scholarship concerned with memory lacks the study of a corpse and its role in Roman death. Graham’s contribution focuses on the role of the corpse amongst the living, both family members and funeral workers, as they interacted with the deceased through different rites of mourning. The variety of rites performed by different groups such as the washing, anointing, and dressing of the corpse by women helped shape competing memories and forms of distinct identities through sensory perceptions such as touch and smell. The formation of identity was not limited to the individual, but also included a communal identity.

Using textual and material evidence, Erker, in Chapter Three, focuses on the roles of men and women in funerary rites; however, her approach is more attentive to the specific ways in which gender and social stratification functioned

in Roman funerals. Erker argues that although there were diverging expressions of grief between men and women, they did at times overlap. Primarily, however, women mourned and prepared the body, while men offered eulogies and performed purification rites enabling the participants to leave the funeral.

In Chapter Four, Houghton uses evidence from Latin love poetry in order to better understand the Roman funeral. He argues that funerary ritual and its practices embodied the proper characteristics of *Romanitas*, which ultimately provided the ideal target for the elegists who diverged from traditional attitudes and values. While he cautions against using the elegists' descriptions of funeral practices as historical reality, since they often wrote to express their own distorted reality, he does note that buried within their poetry are reflections of contemporary Roman funerals.

Schultze's contribution focuses on Dionysius of Halicarnassus's role as a historian who believed it was the writer's "prime function" (79) to report on the events of the deceased, thus making sure the glory of those now gone lived on forever. Dionysius believed that, although Rome inherited many of the Greek customs, funeral orations originated at Rome and were far superior to those practiced in Athens. Schultze notes that, for Dionysius, this superiority is attributed to the Roman ritual of commemorating all noble men and women, an act that brings them nearer to the divine, while the Greeks only honoured men who died during war. None of this was possible, however, unless the historian and the subject were both of sound minds.

The use of literary representation is taken up once again in Brooke's contribution in Chapter Six. Here, Brooke focuses on one of Cicero's more unusual speeches, *Pro Rabirio Perduellionis Reo*, in which he defends Rabirius on the charge of *perduellio*. She argues that funerary language, which included ancestor masks and dead statesmen who have been summoned into the courtroom, dominated Cicero's speech. These rhetorical strategies served to influence memory and create public identity.

In Chapter Seven, Janet Huskinsion uses material evidence from one particular monument, a funerary altar dedicated by Secundus to his wife and daughter, both of who drowned at sea. The altar, through its visual imagery and text, helps to "tame" the violent deaths of the two women by re-contextualizing their fate. In order to achieve this, the artist has juxtaposed the busts of the women with the goddesses Fortuna and Diana, which serves to commemorate their achievements and promote their lives as something good. This visual effect helps to "soften" the impact of their violent deaths by creating good as opposed to bad memories.

Using epigraphic and material evidence, Carroll, in Chapter Eight, focuses on the preservation of memory in funerary rituals and monuments, with particular attention paid to the role of slaves in preserving the memory of their owner. Carroll argues that the death of the master brought about a significant change in status not

only to the deceased but also to the life of the slave. For the master, the deathbed provided an opportunity to express great ostentation through the manumission of slaves laid out in his will, as well as guaranteeing the perpetuation of his memory through yearly funerary rituals carried out by the freedmen. For the slave, it meant freedom from servitude and a new social status, which included the freed slave taking the family name of their patron as well as being depicted on their master's funerary monument.

Hull, in Chapter Nine, examines a poem written by Statius addressed to Claudius Etruscus on the death of Etruscus' father. Hull argues that Statius' poem, *Silvae*, does not function simply as a work of *consolatio*, and indeed fails as a form of consolation for its addressee. Rather, a close reading of this poem demonstrates that it is more concerned with forms of memorialization, politics, and imperial behaviour.

In the final chapter of this volume, Valerie Hope looks at the importance of personal material objects for creating memory and identity. In particular, Hope focuses on a portrait and bracelet, both of which survive only as references in a fifty-line poem engraved on the epitaph of Allia Potestas. The portrait provides a stage for the male gaze to preserve an idealized vision of Allia's beauty, while the bracelet, which was inscribed with her name and worn by the patron, functioned as a piece of "remembrance jewellery" that allowed the deceased to be carried with him. Such transportable objects meant that mourning and memory of the deceased was not limited to the tomb and could occur in other places.

This book makes a significant contribution to the study of Roman death. It does so by offering a unique interaction between literary, material, and archaeological evidence that is often treated separately. The editors of this volume, however, have creatively weaved the different fields into a coherent pattern that follows the progression from the physical act of dying to the funeral to commemoration and memory. Overall, this collection of essays is a valuable source for those interested in the sociology of Roman death and how it functions as an important marker of identity for both the living and the dead.