

C R A S I S

Culture, Religion And Society - Interdisciplinary Studies

in the Ancient World

CONFERENCE



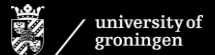
GRAVESTONES

Marking Death from Antiquity to the Modern Era

21 November 2024
09.30-18.00



Mortuary Ritual Network



PROGRAMME & ABSTRACTS

OUTLINE

The CRASIS Mortuary Ritual Network welcomes you to the conference ‘GRAVESTONES. Marking Death from Antiquity to the Modern Era’.

Stone monuments to the dead have been around for millennia and have been used in a multitude of cultures across the world. Set up above or near the burial, and often engraved with text or imagery representing the deceased, gravestones preserve the memory of those who have once lived for future generations. Furthermore, they are a focal point for rituals of mourning and commemoration.

In this one-day event, we want to explore the phenomenon of gravestones from different perspectives (practical, ritual, and emotional). In addition, we want to discuss the work being done on gravestones, including their study, documentation, and preservation. Questions include: what motivates people to commission a (stone) memorial? What themes or symbolism do people choose to shape their grief? To what extent are those choices based on conscious decisions? And how do people interact it gravestones?

We wish you all an inspiring day.

Tamara Dijkstra, Paula Kalkman, Janis Oomen & Caroline van Toor

PROGRAMME

- 09.30-10.15 Coffee and tea
- 10.15-10.30 Welcome and introduction
- 10.30-12.00 **Session 1**
- Laurens E. Tacoma – Freedom in death? Inscribing slavery in Greek epigrams
 - Ortal-Paz Saar – Unusual Death on Epitaphs
 - Jan L. de Jong – Waiting for the Resurrection, in Rome and Groningen
- 12.00-13.00 Lunch
- 13.00-14.30 **Session 2**
- Reint Wobbes – De cultuur van dood en begraven in Groningerland
 - Jaap Jansen – A made-up graveyard. The literary genre of grave poems on paper
 - Paul Haan and Bart Ramakers – De fieldapp “Noordergraf”. Naar een digitale ontsluiting van grafmonumenten
- 14.30-15.00 Coffee and tea
- 15.00-16.30 **Session 3**
- Brenda Mathijssen – Nature Burial. Unmarking the Dead
 - Johan Bos – Towards automatically annotating tombstone inscriptions
 - Leon Bok – Between hardstone and granite. When money was the issue
- 16.30-16.45 End

ABSTRACTS

Freedom in death? Inscribing slavery in Greek epigrams

Laurens E. Tacoma (Leiden University)

How did enslaved humans move through the confined space that was allotted to them? What were the boundaries of their agency? In this lecture I will present some work from a book project co-authored with Rolf Tybout on the world of the Greek funerary epigrams from the Greek East in the Hellenistic and Roman period. Although the use of versified texts was hardly confined to the local elites, they certainly displayed an upward bias. They depict a civic world in which commemorators demarcated the identity of the deceased through a display of cultural competence. Somewhat remarkably however, a number of these epigrams are made for and by slaves. In my lecture I discuss how the status ambiguities between slaves and masters were negotiated in these texts, and what that can tell us about the agency of the enslaved persons in the cities that dotted the Greek East.

Dr. Laurens E. Tacoma is a senior lecturer in ancient history at the Department of History of Leiden University. He has worked on various aspects of Roman social history, covering both the early imperial period and late antiquity. He has published monographs on local elites in Egypt (Brill 2006), migration to Rome (OUP 2016), and Roman political culture (OUP 2020). He is currently completing a monograph of Greek inscribed epigrams and he is leading an NWO Open Competition project entitled 'Roman Fake News? Documentary fictions in the Roman world'.

Unusual Death on Epitaphs

Ortal-Paz Saar (Utrecht Univeristy)

This paper will explore the topic of atypical death as recorded on epitaphs of different religious groups from the ancient and late antique periods. After analyzing some examples, the paper will discuss the motives for recording atypical deaths on epitaphs. Why have some commemorators chose to remember the deceased by describing their unusual death? To whom were these epitaphs addressed? And what sort of response were they attempting to elicit from their readers?

Dr. Ortal-Paz Saar is a cultural historian focusing on Judaic Studies, particularly during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Her research encompasses magic and rituals as well as funerary culture. Questions of identity and relations between Jews and non-Jews are prominent in her publications.

Ortal-Paz Saar has authored the volume *Jewish Love Magic: From Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (2017), has co-authored the volume *Aramaic Magic Bowls in the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin* (2018), and has co-edited the volume *Letters in the Dust: The Epigraphy and Archaeology of Medieval Jewish Cemeteries* (2023).

She is active in the field of digital humanities and directs an international project on funerary culture called PEACE: the Portal of Epigraphy, Archaeology, Conservation and Education on Jewish funerary culture.

Waiting for the Resurrection, in Rome and Groningen

Jan L. de Jong (Groningen University)

One of the functions of a Christian tomb monument is to serve as a place where the body will 'rest' until the resurrection at the end of time. However, the Roman Catholic and Protestant church have different views on what happens between the moment of dying and the moment the body will be resurrected. According to the Catholic church, before the soul can be admitted into Heaven, it will have to be purged of its sins in Purgatory. In order to help the deceased in this 'process', the bereaved on earth may pray for the salvation of the souls of those who have predeceased them. This means that Catholic tombs also serve to keep the memory of the deceased alive and function as incentives to pray for their souls. Protestants, however, do not believe in the existence of Purgatory, and prayers for the salvation of the soul are therefore considered futile. This view reduces Protestant tombs to a container for the body until the end of time. How did these different views of the afterlife and consequently on the function of a tomb affect the epitaphs?

In discussing epitaphs on Catholic tombs in Rome and Protestant tombs in the province of Groningen, from the period ca. 1400-1800, I hope to point out and explain their differences.

Dr. Jan L. de Jong is retired Senior Lecturer of Art History of the Early Modern Period, at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. His research focuses on the interpretation of themes from classical mythology and history in Italian Renaissance art, papal propaganda in the 15th and 16th centuries, and tomb monuments. He published *The Power and the Glorification. Papal Pretensions and the Art of Propaganda in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (University Park, PA, 2013) and *Tombs in Early Modern Rome (1400–1600). Monuments of Mourning, Memory and Meditation* (Leiden – Boston, 2023).

De cultuur van dood en begraven in Groningerland

Reint Wobbes (historicus en pleitbezorger voor behoud cultureel erfgoed in Groningen)

Het verhaal van de cultuur van dood en begraven in deze contreien begint bij de hunebedden, de grafheuvels en de wierdevondsten.

De in het vroege christendom ontstane gewoonte, in en rond de kerk te begraven, hield stand tot in de vorige eeuw en heeft ons veel fraaie en curieuze zaken gelaten, als sarcofagen, epitafen, grafmonumenten, zerken en rouwborden.

De begraafplaatsen, die vanaf het begin van de vorige eeuw werden aangelegd, waren vaak ook bedoeld als wandelparken, zijn dan ook in veel gevallen fraai aangelegd. Het zijn onmisbare elementen in het landschap ook vanwege de plantengroei en de dieren die er hun woonplaats hebben.

De rijk gedecoreerde grafstenen met symboliek en vaak met vrome, schalkse maar altijd ontroerende teksten zijn typisch vooral voor de kleistreken in deze provincie.

Voor de kennis van de historie van streek en provincie zijn de begraafplaatsen onmisbaar.

Reint Wobbes (Hoogkerk 1940) zet zich in voor het behoud van cultureel erfgoed in Groningen; o.a. voor de oude kerken en kerkhoven in deze provincie. Hij was meer dan vijftig jaar betrokken bij de Stichting Groninger Kerken.

A made-up graveyard. The literary genre of grave poems on paper

Jaap M. Jansen (Groningen University; Hanze University of Applied Sciences)

An intriguing genre in literature is the fictional epitaph: a usually short text that pretends to be on a gravestone. These texts are very varied: from earnestly praising the deceased to mocking them, from poems about real people to poems about made-up characters, and from pedagogical texts to simple language jokes. What they have in common is that they evoke the image of a gravestone (Here lies...). This presentation outlines the contours of this genre. It examines the different subtypes, charts historical trends, and describes how these texts relate to 'real' funerary culture. The examples are mainly drawn from English-language or Dutch-language literature.

Jaap M. Jansen (1992) holds degrees in Dutch literature and Dutch law. He works as a lecturer in philosophy of law at the University of Groningen and as a lecturer-researcher in the Business Administration programme at the Hanze. He previously published on the genre characteristics of tombstone poetry in the province of Groningen. His master's thesis on suspects and convicts in literary texts was awarded the Gascaria Foundation thesis prize in 2022.

De fieldapp “Noordergraf”. Naar een digitale ontsluiting van grafmonumenten

Paul Haan en Bart Ramakers (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen)

Noordergraf is een samenwerkingsverband van steuninstellingen voor erfgoed en landschap in de provincies Fryslân, Drenthe en Groningen. Samen met de RUG hebben zij een benadering ontwikkeld voor het verantwoord omgaan met kerkhoven en begraafplaatsen in de drie noordelijke provincies. Voor dit consortium ontwikkelt de Geodienst van het Centrum voor Informatie Technologie (CIT) van de RUG, in samenspraak met Johan Bos (Informatiekunde), Lidewijde de Jong (Archeologie) en Bart Ramakers (Nederlands), momenteel een fieldapp waarmee foto's en gegevens van graven en grafmonumenten kunnen worden ingevoerd in een database. De database moet onderzoek stimuleren naar grafcultuur, maar krijgt ook een beheers- en publieksfunctie.

Paul Haan is GIS Specialist en Geodata Manager bij De Geodienst van het Centrum voor Informatietechnologie (CIT) van de Universiteit van Groningen.

Prof. Dr. Bart Ramakers is hoogleraar Oudere Nederlandse Letterkunde aan de Universiteit van Groningen.

Nature Burial. Unmarking the Dead

Brenda Mathijssen (Groningen University)

Marking burial sites has been a longstanding tradition, serving as a means of remembrance and providing a space for the bereaved to connect with the deceased. Recently, nature burial—an eco-friendly interment approach—has gained popularity, particularly in Northwestern countries. Nature burials forgo traditional tombstones for a more organic return to the earth, with limited markers that quickly dissolve. This practice signifies a shift from conventional memorialization to a more unobtrusive, naturalistic commemoration, emphasizing collective reverence for nature's cycle over individual remembrance. By not marking individual graves, nature burial promotes a sustainable, egalitarian ethos, highlighting the continuity of life rather than the permanence of legacy. However, research indicates that the bereaved often struggle with the absence of markers. This paper explores the implications of unmarking graves in nature burial and seeks to understand the impact on those left behind.

Dr. Brenda Mathijssen is Associate professor in psychology and geography of religion at the University of Groningen. Her expertise concerns the human engagement with dying, death and bereavement in contemporary Europe. She conducts empirical research into various death practices, beliefs and places, such as funerals, bereavement rituals and natural burial grounds.

Towards automatically annotating tombstone inscriptions

Johan Bos (Groningen University)

In this talk I present two related results on automatic tombstone processing: first a manually annotated corpus of Dutch tombstone inscriptions, and second an AI system that uses this corpus to interpret tombstone inscriptions automatically. The corpus is based on more than a thousand images of tombstones gathered on various graveyards in the north of the Netherlands. The semantic annotation scheme is set up in a systematic way and goes beyond the name of the deceased and dates/location of birth and death, as it also includes symbols, relationships between persons, occupations, biblical references, and more. Automatically interpreting tombstones is extremely challenging, dealing with a large variety of characters (size, font, colour) and linguistic phenomena (abbreviations, coordination, ambiguity). The aim of this research is to develop algorithms that assist researchers in annotating tombstone inscriptions on a large scale, and making the gathered information available to anyone interested in tombstone research.

Prof. Dr. Johan Bos is Professor of Computational Semantics at the University of Groningen. He received his doctorate from the Computational Linguistics Department at the University of the Saarland in 2001. Since then, he held post-doc positions at the University of Edinburgh, working on spoken dialogue systems, and the La Sapienza University of Rome, conducting research on automated question answering. In 2010 he moved to his current position in Groningen, leading the computational semantics group. Johan Bos is an amateur ornithologist and during birdwatching trips he discovered that tombstone inscriptions are extremely interesting from a natural language processing point of view.

Between hardstone and granite. When money was the issue

Leon Bok (Bureau Funeraire Adviezen, Amsterdam; Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands)

We can hardly imagine today that wood, once the most commonly used material in Dutch cemeteries, has almost disappeared. When we think of gravestones, hardstone and especially granite seem to be the most used materials. However, there was a time when there was extensive experimentation with other, particularly inexpensive materials. Both imitation and durability were issues. Not all experiments succeeded, and many materials disappeared. Whether this was due to the material itself or the maintenance of it is not always clear, as other factors also played a role. In his presentation, Bok will focus on materials for gravestones that have fallen out of favour, as well as why they appeared and disappeared. It seems almost self-evident that cost played a role in this.

Leon Bok (1965) graduated from the University of Groningen in 1993 with a study on the preservation of funerary heritage in the Netherlands. He has served on various boards and committees dedicated to this cause, published numerous articles and books, and lectured both in the Netherlands and internationally. Since 2008, he has managed his own agency focused on funerary heritage and as of 2018 he is also the funerary expert of the Dutch Heritage Agency.