

Session #260

COPING WITH DEATH AT ALL AGES: (POST-)FUNERARY PRACTICES, MOURNING AND RESILIENCE

Theme: theories_and_methods_in_archaeology_interactions_between_disciplines

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In the past, the archeology of death has primarily focused on identities, social roles and statuses of the deceased individuals; less effort has been put into examining funerary practices in their emotional context, and exploring the mechanisms of coping with death.

Inspired by the concept of resilience, which has gained traction in environmental and socio-ecological archaeology, we approach death as a stressor to relatives and the communities of the survivors, who try to cope with the ambivalence of presence and absence of the dead. For this purpose, various resources are employed. In psychology, one speaks of resilience factors, but how can such abstract concepts as active coping, optimism, religiousness and social support be related to (post)funerary practices documented on burial grounds? How long should mourning, commemoration and taking care of the grave last? What does death look like from the perspective of a grieving parent or child?

Psychological and social responses to death appear to depend, to a large degree, on the age of the deceased and if death was expected. Deaths of fetuses, peri-nates and very old people may have invited different responses to persons who died unexpectedly in the prime of their lives.

We invite papers that interpret (post)funerary practices as coping strategies in the widest sense, and advance our understanding of resilience. On the individual level, these may concern dealing with the dead body and the things a person left behind, funerary practices, re-visiting and care of graves, as well as re-use of graves.

On the communal level, we aim to understand changes in belief systems about death and the afterlife as well as mortuary traditions, how funerary spaces are founded and abandoned, and explore the tension between leaving the dead in peace and continuous engagement with them.