

Cluster 3 “Body and Death. Concepts – Practices – Media”

Call for Papers for the Annual Conference 2023

“Death in Three Acts: Practices of Dealing with Body and Death”
October 17-19, 2023, DAI Athens

The 2023 annual conference of the DAI research cluster “Body and Death” will be dedicated to **practices of dealing with body and death**. ‘Practices’ as a concept refers to recurring actions that are physically performed on and with material objects in specific spatial or social contexts. Practices are based on social knowledge and reflect cultural meaning and social order systems, which they also bring forth through their performance – especially when practices relate to the dying and dead body. Death needs to be understood as both a biological and social process. The body-related practices associated with this process can be divided into phases, especially **premortals, perimortals, and postmortals practices**, which deal with the necessity of coping with the deteriorating body.

With the help of numerous archaeological, anthropological, bioarchaeological, etc. data and the analysis of features and written as well as iconographical representations, a variety of actions can be reconstructed. Contributions to the conference can focus on individual phases or practices, or encompass various practices. They can focus on both the actors and those who have been acted upon and ask about underlying concepts of the individual and of death.

Possible questions related to the phases are:

- **Premortal:** How are still living bodies prepared for, shaped by, and integrated into practices of death? To what extent do body-related practices, such as clothing, adornment, and physical manipulation, resemble or differ when they are directed towards living or biologically and/or socially dead bodies?



- **Perimortal:** What practices of burial, dismemberment, or cremation – and the various shades between these categories – do communities and groups maintain? What other practices of removal and deposition or preservation and use are possible and socially legitimate in certain contexts? To what extent do such practices mediate and shape mourning and memory or establish, transform, or negate connections between the living and the dead? What role does the growing temporal distance from biological death play in dealing with the dead body? How does the interplay between dead bodies, living actors, technologies, and artefacts generally unfold?
- **Postmortal:** How are bodies, their remains, and body-related objects handled as the time gap between burial or deposition increases, for example, in the case of grave openings, grave reuse, and grave manipulation? How do the natural transformation of the body, taphonomic processes in the grave, and post-funerary practices each play a role? To what extent can graves, collective burials, or finds with disarticulated bones be reconstructed as spaces and assemblages of sensory experiences, and what agency do the “older” dead have from the emic perspective of their respective communities and groups?

Another way of accessing the topic is to ask to what extent control over the physical transformation of the body also sought control over the transformation of social identity and social relations. The focus can also be on age, gender, social affiliation, etc. as potential parameters for differentiation in dealing with death and the body.

We welcome contributions from interdisciplinary research involving (bio)archaeological approaches, social and cultural anthropology, the sociology of the body, and others. The aim of the conference is to present, contextualize and comparatively discuss the wealth of sources, research questions and potential interpretations within a global and diachronic framework in order to better grasp defining parameters, structural similarities as well as differences, and ultimately the diversity of thanatological practices.

Abstract submission

Abstracts (max. 300 words) can be submitted in German or English until May 15, 2023 to koerperundtod.sprecher@dainst.de. The decision on acceptance or rejection will be communicated by June 5. If you wish to participate without presenting a paper, please register by June 5 using the same email address.



Guideline

The conference will last two days, followed by a day of excursion. Papers should not exceed 20 minutes, followed by a 10-minute discussion. Presentations can be held in-person or online. No conference fees.

Organisational background

The DAI Research Cluster “Body and Death” was founded in 2021 with the aim of promoting exchange between the various disciplines dealing with the human body and establishing the body as an archaeological research topic. The “Body and Death” cluster is dedicated to explore questions and sources related to the body, through which the handling of both the living and the dead body can be reconstructed and interpreted.

Authors

Alexander Gramsch, Norbert Zimmermann, Julia Gresky, Jutta Stroszeck (Speakers Cluster 3); Marion Benz, Julia Hahn, Matthias Hoernes, Lukas Kerk, Eleonore Pape, Julienne Schrauder, Stefan Schreiber, Tamara Ziemer

Further information

<https://www.dainst.org/forschung/netzwerke/forschungscluster/cluster-3/konzept>

<https://www.dainst.blog/crossing-borders/2021/10/12/aufakttagung-des-dai-clusters-koerper-und-tod-konzepte-medi-en-praktiken/>

