

The Necropolis as a Reflection of the City? The Economy of Death and Burial in Ephesos

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This paper discussed the economy of death and burial in Ephesos from a diachronic perspective. The core questions were: Is the economic power of the city of the living reflected in the city of the dead? Are there direct correlations or is the picture that we obtain filtered or idealized? This talk also addressed the economic factor death with regard to the activity of building firms and developers on burial land: What kind of businesses were conducted and run in the area of the dead and how could the city profit? Finally, it was discussed how the ownership and passing on of burial places was organized.

Three aspects turned out to be of particular importance: the financing of mortuary practice and cult, the grave as real estate and income opportunities in the funerary system. Addressing these topics we talked about people that left their traces. And even though material culture and written sources are not restricted to a specific group, it showed again that we know only very little about the lower social strata.

Concerning the organization of mortuary practice and cult specific uncertainties needed to be considered, like no descendants, financial difficulties or the lack of interest of the descendants. These uncertainties could be counteracted in different ways: One could order in his will that the manumission of slaves would oblige them to show up at the burial place for offerings on a regular basis. One could offer rewards like food, oil or wine in order to have a minimum of public at one's grave. Those who could afford it left in their will capital sums of money or property, the interest from which was to be expended on the offerings at the tomb like flowers, incense and wine or ceremonial meals. The beneficiaries of such donations were frequently clubs or associations (so called *collegia*) who were supposed to be more reliable and more durable than single persons. The system of these foundations functioned smoothly in a positive economic environment that got increasingly worse starting with the 3rd century AD. With the loss of confidence in the value retention of the money in the foundation, such investments were no longer attractive.

The grave or plots of burial land turned out to be a regular trading good following market principles. Whoever was in search of a burial place had a couple of options: If he or she already owned an appropriate property or was member of a club or an association, it was a rather easy task. The clubhouses were designed to sell parts of the burial places. So they were not only attractive to the members of these clubs but also for people from outside. If this was not the preferred option, one needed to acquire a piece of land. It was probably cheaper, however, to buy into an already existing burial structure that was available on the free market. There are several indications that in the course of the selling process estate agents were active. A uniform architectural layout of tombs in the Roman imperial era that can be found in many places in Asia Minor and

also in Ephesos with walls that were constructed in a single bond like row or terraced houses indicate that building firms or developers were operating in the necropoleis. They built burial houses on a large scale and then sold them.

Income opportunities in the funerary system were manifold. Particularly the businesses of the entrepreneur firms were proverbial and a stereotype for a huge and fast profit. They ran their business with a concession that they purchased by auction with the big advantage that once you had this concession you had a monopoly position in your municipality. What were the actual income opportunities: First selective major events and second continuous and rather stable income through a high number of regular funerals. In both cases the entrepreneur carefully arranged the organization of elaborate processions. The income opportunities were good, however, also the expenses should not be underrated, particularly the material and labor costs. Therefore, the entrepreneur needed a very efficient and inexpensive apparatus of human services, mostly slaves. The entrepreneur firms disappear in the 3rd century AD as the number of slaves available got lower and lower. This goes again hand in hand with an increasingly worse economic environment starting from the 3rd century AD and a new tendency to perform more modest funerals in the early Christian communities.

So, there are a couple of aspects that show a certain economization of death. In this respect the necropolis is a reflection of the city. There was money to be made and money to be spent. For certain periods it was a rather stable industry giving income to a variety of professions: the ones I mentioned and a lot that were not the topic of this talk like stonemasons, flower sellers, professional mourners, musicians, funeral orators, the big business of the provision of sacrificial animals, and so on. The mere quantity of legal regulations concerning the topic of funerals shows how important this topic was in the real life of Roman society. Without doubt there are many aspects in the Roman funerary system that our present system is referring to.

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