



**THE MEMORY OF THE DEAD: REMEMBRANCE AND FORGETTING
OF THE DECEASED FROM PREHISTORY TO THE PRESENT**

Grenoble – 21-23 May 2025

Call for Papers

Most human societies respond to the death of their members by performing, often in the short term, separation rites designed to mark the integration of the deceased into the world of the dead. This separation, both symbolic (passage to the afterlife) and physical (distancing or even destruction of the corpse), rarely means that the link between the living and the dead has stopped. The living often preserve the memory of the deceased and, in many cases, may continue to honour their memory long after the funeral. This memory, which is expressed on various scales—that of the individual, the family, or the group—can take many forms and use a variety of media. Immaterial by nature, it can sometimes be materially anchored in a place or an object. This memory is also often fluid in time and limited in duration. Moreover, it may serve not only to remember the deceased, but also to reflect broader social contexts and issues: in some societies, rituals of remembrance are part of a search for a kind of transcendence over death, while in others they serve ideological or political purposes.

Rich in insights into past and present societies, the question of the memory of the dead and its counterpart—oblivion—will be at the heart of the 16th Gaaf Meeting. International and multidisciplinary in scope, this conference will welcome contributions from archaeologists and anthropologists working in a variety of chrono-geographical contexts, as well as participants from other social science disciplines (e.g., historians, sociologists, ethnologists). Scientific discussions will revolve around four main themes. The first two will respectively address the materiality and temporality of memory, focusing on its physical supports (monuments, epitaphs, textual sources, iconography, etc.) and the various funerary times (which differ depending on whether one considers the question from a biological, social, or ideological perspective). The third theme will look at the issue from the opposing angle, considering the depreciation, deprivation, or negation of memory, and the invisibility of certain individuals or groups. Finally, the fourth theme will explore the mechanisms and motivations behind the construction or even re-construction of memory, through syntheses and emblematic case studies.

Theme 1 – The Material Supports of Memory

In their desire to perpetuate the memory of the dead, human groups, both past and present, have frequently imbued various places or objects with a symbolic dimension associated with the dead. Among the multitude of material expressions involved, the most obvious are undoubtedly, at least from an archaeologist's perspective, the funerary monuments, some of which have survived for centuries, even millennia, and bear witness to the determination of societies to ensure the deceased a lasting place in the world of the living. Other monuments, such as commemorative structures (e.g., war memorials, chapels), also show how societies have sought to anchor the memory of the deceased

(and/or the events responsible for their deaths) in the public space, often detached from the location where their remains rest. The study of these different built structures can highlight the diversity of memorial behaviours, especially when it considers the different aspects of their use, whether individual or collective, their visibility in the landscape, their accessibility, signs of maintenance, or their re-use. This session will welcome presentations that aim to illustrate this approach and will include studies of other types of material supports for memory, whether physical (e.g., steles, offerings), written (e.g., funerary texts, epitaphs, obituaries), or iconographic (e.g., representations of mass mortality events).

Theme 2 – The Successive Phases of Memory

The memory of the deceased is a constructed process that unfolds over the long term. Regardless of their nature, the places that materialize the presence of the dead—whether physical, symbolic, or even virtual today—can periodically host commemorative acts performed by the living, who are connected to them directly or indirectly. These memorial manifestations may be directed at well-known and clearly identified ancestors, but they may also be tied to "reactivated" funerary sites, and then take place long after the original communities that established them have disappeared. And what about today? What are the new forms of memorial expressions and the new spaces or media through which they are performed? Presentations here will focus on the nature of the elements that reflect the various gestures or actions designed to maintain the memory of the deceased, from the initial funeral rites to any eventual act marking the end of the transmission of the memory, and prior to possible reappropriation by communities seeking to revive a symbolic connection with real or supposed ancestors. This session will also look at the temporality of these memorial gestures and their continuity over time, sometimes spanning across generations.

Theme 3 – Hidden Memory, Erased Memory, Devalued Memory

The construction and perpetuation of the memory of the deceased is often expressed in a positive and respectful way. And yet, it is not so uncommon to deprive some dead of the memorial honours granted to others by intentionally removing memory-related elements, or even by devaluing the deceased. And what about the denial of burial that prevent any possibility of remembrance, or the deliberate violation (e.g., exhumation and removal of the body from the consecrated place) or the destruction of the grave (e.g., destruction of monuments, clearing of the grave or even the entire cemetery) in order to erase the memory of the dead? The denial of memory that comes with these actions can sometimes be connected to specific groups, such as indigents, members of religious or ethnic minorities, with the consequence of rejecting or even prohibiting any form of commemorative expressions. Alternatively, the memory of the deceased may be preserved, but deliberately tarnished through degrading acts directed at their grave (e.g., graffiti, defacement of the funerary monument) or their image (e.g., mutilation of statues, slanderous inscriptions). These various forms of erasure and devaluation of memory, which may be illustrated by selected archaeological examples, would also benefit from examination through the lens of historical research, sociology, and ethnology.

Theme 4 – Motives and Mechanisms of the Construction and Reconstruction of the Memory of the Deceased

Although aimed at the dead, the memory is first and foremost a matter for the living. It is them who build that memory, choosing how it should be expressed and how long it should last, expressing *de facto* their own considerations. Memory is sometimes simply a factor of social cohesion, serving as the foundation for a history or even an identity (e.g., community memory, ancestor worship), but it can also be deeply shaped in response to social, cultural, political, or religious issues, and can even be manipulated to serve the interests of certain groups. Occasionally, these factors lead to an *a posteriori* reconstruction of memory, often distorted or even imagined, and with regard to individuals or groups who had been forgotten for some time. This session will welcome presentations discussing the motivations and challenges in constructing the memory of the deceased, especially in light of the previously mentioned issues. It will also invite reflections on the role that archaeology and other historical sciences play in shaping memory within our societies, the ethical considerations that should guide our practices in this regard, and the potential risks of research being misused for non-scientific purposes.

Paper and poster proposals can be sent to the organising committee by e-mail before **15 December 2024**. These should be accompanied by an abstract no longer than 300 words and an indication of the themed session in which the author(s) wish to participate.

Each oral presentation should be **20 minutes** in length. Posters will be presented as part of a dedicated session.

The scientific committee responsible for evaluating paper and poster proposals will meet in January 2025 to review contributions and establish a programme.

Please send your proposals on the attached form to: rencontre2025@gaaf-asso.fr



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