

The Place of the Dead
*Death and Remembrance in
Late Medieval and Early Modern
Europe*

Edited by Bruce Gordon
and Peter Marshall

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1 Introduction: placing the dead in late medieval and early modern Europe

Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall

Like the poor, the dead are always with us. Even in this increasingly postmodern world it can confidently be asserted of all human societies that the endless loss of their members to the ravages of death is not a cultural construction but a biologically determined fact. Nonetheless, as a social or historical category 'the dead' can only be approached through the expressed and recorded memories, hopes and fears of the living.¹ Throughout history, it has proved virtually impossible for the living simply to ignore the dead. At the most basic level, if only to guard against disease and contamination, their physical remains must be disposed of. Moreover, even beyond an initial period of grief and bereavement, the emotional bonds which link the survivors to the deceased have usually demanded some form of symbolic commemoration, as well as a belief in the continued existence of the dead in some afterlife place or state. If societies are to continue to function, the dead must, in a variety of senses, be put in their place. Over the last twenty years or so the social history of death, a once neglected field, has begun to interest historians, particularly for the late medieval and early modern periods. To date, however, relatively little of this scholarship has attempted to examine in any comprehensive way the role and status of the dead after the process of dying was completed.² This lacuna is a significant one. An obvious

¹ See the epigrammatic opening of J.-C. Schmitt's *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: the Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*, tr. T. L. Fagan (Chicago and London, 1998): 'the dead have no existence other than that which the living imagine for them'.

² The historiography of this subject is now too vast to deal with comprehensively here, though particular mention should be made of the pioneering (if flawed) work of P. Ariès, *The Hour of our Death*, tr. H. Weaver (London 1981), and also of a number of other French historians who have led the way in this field: P. Chaunu, *La mort à Paris: XVIe, XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1978); J. Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité de l'au-delà: les hommes*,

consequence of the punitive mortality regime prevailing in pre-modern Europe was that, relative to our own society, throughout their lives people typically experienced the deaths of far greater numbers of children, kin or acquaintance.³ In such circumstances the dead were a significant social 'presence', their importance underscored by the fact that so many did not live to share what has been called the 'disengaged social situation' (retirement, withdrawal from fully active social roles) of the dying in the Europe of today.⁴

The purpose of this collection of essays is to explore how groups of people in late medieval and early modern Europe sought to determine what the place of the dead should be, and how they managed to 'place' the dead in physical, spiritual, emotional, social and cultural terms.⁵ Presented here is a thematically linked series of case studies from a wide variety of perspectives and directions in which scholars ask broadly similar questions about the societies they study: what was the status of the dead, socially and ontologically? What obligations did the living owe to them, and how in fulfilling those obligations did the living allow the dead to shape patterns of social organisation, and religious and cultural outlooks? In what circumstances did the dead threaten the living, and in

la mort et la religion dans la région d'Avignon à la fin du moyen âge (Rome, 1980); M. Vovelle, *La mort et l'Occident de 1300 à nos jours* (Paris, 1983). The social history of death for early modern England is now also fairly generously provided for: C. Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London, 1984); D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997); R. Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family in England 1480–1750* (Oxford, 1998). Historians who have most explicitly tackled an agenda similar to the one envisaged here have tended to be medievalists. See P. J. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London, 1994); O. G. Oexele, 'Die Gegenwart der Toten', in H. Braet and W. Verbeke (eds.), *Death in the Middle Ages* (Louvain, 1983), pp. 19–77; Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*.

³ Even outside of crisis years of plague or famine, death rates were strikingly high. In early modern England, for example, they were often three times those of modern developed countries, while average life expectancy was about half: Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family*, pp. 7–10.

⁴ R. Blauner, 'Death and Social Structure', *Psychiatry* 29 (1966), cited in K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 723.

⁵ The collection thus poses a set of questions of the type which have particularly interested social anthropologists. See, for example, J. Goody, *Death, Property, and the Ancestors: a Study of the Mortuary Customs of the Lodagaa of West Africa* (Stanford, CA, 1962); M. Bloch, *Placing the Dead: Tombs, Ancestral Villages and Kinship Organisation in Madagascar* (London, 1971); H. G. Nutini, *Todos Santos in Rural Tlaxcala: a Syncretic, Expressive, and Symbolic Analysis of the Cult of the Dead* (Princeton, NJ, 1988). It may be, however, that the theoretical and interpretative models in these works are too culturally specific to be readily transplanted to the societies of late medieval and early modern Europe.

what ways could the living exploit the dead for their own social and political purposes? If we speak, as perhaps we must, of a 'relationship' between the living and the dead, what, in specific historical contexts, were the parameters of that relationship, its successes and failures, functions and dysfunctions?

In setting out to address these and a good many other questions, the essays in this collection range broadly in their thematic focus, chronology and geographical setting, and they are informed by a variety of methodological and theoretical approaches. Common to them all, however, is the conviction not only that attitudes and behaviour towards the dead represent an important historical theme in their own right, but that 'discourses about the dead' provide particularly poignant and revealing points of entry into how these societies understood themselves, and how they articulated and negotiated religious, social and cultural developments and conflicts.

One of the volume's recurring themes is how the relations of the living with the dead were profoundly embedded in religious cultures, and, further, how those relations were not only shaped by, but themselves helped to shape the processes of religious change. Historians of the late Middle Ages have for some time reflected on A. N. Galpern's striking observation that pre-Reformation Catholicism was in large measure 'a cult of the living in the service of the dead'.⁶ The prominence of the dead in late medieval Latin Christianity was pre-eminently the result of the conjunction of two compelling ideas. The first was the gradual evolution and eventual formalisation of the belief that the majority of the faithful dead did not proceed immediately to the beatific vision, but underwent a painful purgation of the debt due for their sins in the intermediary state (and place) of Purgatory.⁷ The second was the conviction, predicated upon the theory that all faithful Christians in this world and the next were incorporated in a single 'communion of saints', that the living had the ability (and the duty) to ease the dead's sufferings in Purgatory. Masses, prayers, alms-giving and fasting were all held to be beneficial to

⁶ A. N. Galpern, 'The Legacy of Late Medieval Religion in Sixteenth-Century Champagne', in C. Trinkaus and H. O. Oberman (eds.), *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion* (Leiden, 1974), p. 149.

⁷ Jacques Le Goff's deservedly influential *The Birth of Purgatory*, tr. A. Goldhammer (Aldershot, 1984) argues that the idea of Purgatory took hold in the late twelfth century. A number of scholars have questioned this chronology, without, however, contesting the importance of the development itself: R. W. Southern, 'Between Heaven and Hell', *Times Literary Supplement* (18 June 1982), pp. 651–2; P. Ariès, 'Le purgatoire et la cosmologie de l'au-delà', *Annales* 38 (1983), pp. 151–7; B. P. McGuire, 'Purgatory, the Communion of Saints, and Medieval Change', *Viator* 20 (1989), pp. 61–84.

the dead, as increasingly in the later Middle Ages were indulgences.⁸ As it was virtually universally accepted that it was more efficacious to pray for the dead individually than collectively, the naming of the dead in a liturgical context (*memoria*) played a crucial part in preserving the memory of dead individuals in the minds of the communities charged with praying for them, perhaps also in the formation of medieval consciousness of the past more generally.⁹

However, to characterise the relationship between the living and the dead in late medieval society merely in terms of the former's service of the latter may be to misconstrue the interiority of pre-Reformation religious attitudes. Much of the recent writing on medieval 'popular religion' has emphasised the themes of reciprocity, exchange and mutual gift-giving between the living and the dead.¹⁰ The saints in heaven interceded for the living, as the living interceded for the dead in Purgatory.¹¹ In praying for the souls of the departed, Christians performed a quintessential good-work for which in due course benefits would accrue to themselves; as Thomas More put it in 1529, when good people give alms to priests to pray for souls, 'then ryseth there myche more good and profyt uppon all sydys'.¹² Moreover, by bestowing benefactions on the community through their

⁸ The quadripartite schema of intercession was variously attributed to Augustine and Gregory the Great: see S. Powell and A. Fletcher, "'In die Sepulture seu Trigintali": the Late Medieval Funeral and Memorial Sermon', *Leeds Studies in English* 12 (1981), p. 197. On indulgences, see R. W. Schaffern, 'Learned Discussions of Indulgences for the Dead in the Middle Ages', *Church History* 61 (1992), pp. 367–81.

⁹ On *memoria*, see Geary, *Living with the Dead*, pp. 87–91; P. J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, NJ, 1994), pp. 15–19, 54, 131; D. L. d'Avray, *Death and the Prince: Memorial Preaching before 1350* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 60, 69–70; Oexle, 'Die Gegenwart der Toten'; K. Schmid and J. Wollasch (eds.), *Memoria. Der geschichtliche Zeugniswert des liturgischen Gedenkens im Mittelalter* (Munich, 1984); J. Wollasch, 'Les moines et la mémoire des morts', in D. Iogna-Prat and J. Ch. Picard (eds.), *Religion et culture autour de l'an mil. Royaume Capétien et Lotharingie* (Paris, 1990), pp. 47–54.

¹⁰ P. J. Geary, 'Exchange and Interaction between the Living and the Dead in Early Medieval Society', in Geary, *Living with the Dead*, pp. 77–94; R. N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe c. 1215–c. 1515* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 212–15; P. Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London, 1996), pp. 24–5, 93; Peter Dinzelbacher, *Angst im Mittelalter: Teufel-, Todes- und Gotteserfahrung: Mentalitätsgeschichte und Ikonographie* (Paderborn, 1996); M. Tetel, *Life and Death in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (Durham, NC, 1989); N. Ohler, *Sterben und Tod im Mittelalter* (Munich, 1990); P. Jezler (ed.), *Himmel, Hölle, Fegefeuer. Das Jenseits im Mittelalter* (Exhibition catalogue, Zurich, 1994); A. Borst (ed.), *Tod im Mittelalter* (Constance, 1993); C. Blum, *La représentation de la mort dans la Littérature française de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1989); Chiffolleau, *La Comptabilité*.

¹¹ On this the most important recent work is André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, tr. Jean Birrell (Cambridge, 1997).

¹² Thomas More, *The Supplication of Souls*, ed. F. Manley et al., Yale edn of the *Complete Works of St Thomas More*, vol. VII (New Haven and London, 1990), p. 205.

testaments, the dead established a claim on the memory of the living, and, explicitly or implicitly, and in a virtually contractual manner, required the 'counter-gift' of prayers for their souls in Purgatory.

These issues have in recent years been explored in the context of fifteenth-century England, most notably in the writing of Eamon Duffy and Clive Burgess.¹³ Burgess's contribution to the present volume elaborates these broad themes within the context of one late medieval English community (All Saints', Bristol), demonstrating how the dead 'perpetuated their identities' through a remarkably successful series of strategies for remembrance, weaving their names and images into the fabric of the liturgy and into the material paraphernalia of parish worship. Perhaps most striking in this account is its emphasis on the corporate and communal character of commemorating the dead. The obligation of remembering extended well beyond the immediate kin-group. The involvement of wider forms of association, particularly confraternities, in the perpetuation of the memory of the dead has also been stressed by historians of late medieval Italy.¹⁴ For the humble this could provide the assurance of a standard of burial and intercessory prayer the immediate family could not guarantee; for those of higher status it could involve the representation of social power. Sharon Strocchia has suggested how the lavish intercession Piero de'Medici arranged for his father (involving some 12,000 masses, at fifty-three different ecclesiastical institutions) was

¹³ E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven and London, 1992), chaps. 9–10; C. Burgess, 'A Fond Thing Vainly Invented': an Essay on Purgatory and Pious Motive in Later Medieval England', in S. J. Wright (ed.), *Parish, Church and People. Local Studies in Lay Religion, 1350–1750* (London, 1988), pp. 56–84; C. Burgess, 'Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention: Testamentary Evidence Reconsidered', in M. A. Hicks (ed.), *Profit, Piety and the Professions* (Gloucester, 1990), pp. 14–33; C. Burgess, 'The Benefactions of Mortality: the Lay Response in the Late Medieval Parish', in D. M. Smith (ed.), *Studies in Clergy and Ministry in Medieval England* (Borthwick Studies in History, 1, 1991), pp. 65–86. See also C. Burgess and B. Kümin, 'Penitential Bequests and Parish Regimes in Late Medieval England', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44 (1993), pp. 610–30; V. Bainbridge, 'The Medieval Way of Death: Commemoration and the Afterlife in Pre-Reformation Cambridgeshire', in M. Wilks (ed.), *Prophecy and Eschatology*, Studies in Church History Subsidia, 10 (Oxford, 1994), pp. 183–204; A. D. Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England: the Diocese of Salisbury 1250–1550* (Oxford, 1995), chap. 4; B. Kümin, *The Shaping of a Community: the Rise and Reformation of the English Parish, c. 1400–1560* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 109–20.

¹⁴ J. Henderson, 'Religious Confraternities and Death in Early Renaissance Florence', in P. Denley and C. Elam (eds.), *Florence and Italy: Renaissance Studies in Honour of Nicolai Rubinstein* (London, 1988), pp. 383–94; J. R. Banker, *Death in the Community. Memorialisation and Confraternities in an Italian Commune in the Late Middle Ages* (Athens, GA and London, 1988); Sharon T. Strocchia, *Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore and London, 1992).

the primary means whereby Piero ‘helped multiply the family’s capital as institutional patrons’.¹⁵ The chapter in this book by Samuel Cohn addresses similar issues about the scope and meaning of commemoration in the late Middle Ages. In this case, a comparison of wills from Florence and the Flemish cloth town of Douai is used to explore the nature of that emergent ‘individualism’ which a number of historians, from Burckhardt through Huizinga to Chiffolleau and Ariès, have seen reflected in the death-culture of late medieval Europe. While Cohn detects in the aftermath of the Black Death a distinct movement towards the ‘individuation’ of graves and burial places, he finds in Florence (*pace* Burckhardt) a growing tendency to associate the individual with the ancestral lineage, and in Douai an impulse to commemorate the deceased within the context of the family, which is far from the ‘narcissism and egoism of a “fragile” urban bourgeoisie stripped from its familial moorings’ evoked by Huizinga.

An awareness of the extensiveness of reciprocity and exchanges between the living and the dead has encouraged some historians to portray the dead as integral to contemporary constructions of community, to locate the dead within the very demographic structures of late medieval society. Thus for Natalie Zemon Davis (borrowing and building upon a suggestion of André Varagnac) the dead in traditional Catholic societies should be regarded as forming an ‘age-group’, with distinct rights and responsibilities *vis-à-vis* their ‘younger’ living contemporaries.¹⁶ In John Bossy’s view, envisaging the dead as an age-group meant that ‘relations with the living could be put on a manageable collective footing’.¹⁷ These insights have done much to further a sophisticated and empathetic reading of the social and cultural nexuses of pre-Reformation religion, but such neat classifications can rest uneasily upon a functional view of the place of the dead in late medieval society in which the departed are too comfortably subsumed into a self-regulating ecosystem of mortality and social stability.

¹⁵ Strocchia, *Death and Ritual*, p. 183.

¹⁶ N. Z. Davis, ‘Some Tasks and Themes in the Study of Popular Religion’, in Trinkaus and Oberman, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, pp. 327–8. See also her ‘Ghosts, Kin and Progeny: Some Features of Family Life in Early Modern France’, *Daedalus* 106 (2) (1977), pp. 87–114. The concept of the dead as an ‘age group’ has subsequently been deployed by R. Muchembled, *Popular and Elite Culture in France 1400–1750*, tr. L. Cochrane (Baton Rouge and London, 1985), p. 55; R. Dinn, ‘Death and Rebirth in Late Medieval Bury St Edmunds’, in S. Bassett (ed.), *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100–1600* (Leicester, 1992), p. 161; Geary, *Living with the Dead*, p. 36; N. Caciola, ‘Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual in Medieval Culture’, *Past and Present* 152 (1996), p. 7.

¹⁷ J. Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985), p. 30.

In fact, as some of the essays in this collection make clear, attitudes and practices pertaining to the dead could be marked by profound ambivalence, reflecting an awareness that the interests of the living and the dead were not always as convergent as the model of reciprocity in prayer and intercession might imply. The dead might be hostile to the living; the living fearful of, or indifferent to, the dead. Moreover, late medieval perceptions of the status and place of the dead were by no means univocal; officially sanctioned exchanges with the dead operated alongside and within a 'black-market' of popular customs and beliefs. In contrast to the authorised teaching that the souls of the dead proceeded immediately to a particular judgement by God and were assigned forthwith to Heaven, Hell or Purgatory, it seems to have been widely believed across Europe in the Middle Ages (and for much longer) that for a period after death the dead remained in the vicinity of their bodies, liable to haunt the locations they had inhabited and the persons they had known when alive.¹⁸ This constituted a dangerously liminal time when the dead might seek to seize companions from the world of the living to accompany them into the abodes of the deceased. The survivors were wise to take precautions against the possibility of revenants, opening windows in the death-room to allow the soul to escape, washing the corpse to enable the dead to rest easily in the grave, or pouring water behind the coffin to create a barrier to their return. The most dangerous among potential revenants, like suicides and criminals, were sometimes buried face-down, at cross-roads, or with a stake through the corpse, or their bodies were thrown into the river.¹⁹

Underpinning such beliefs and practices were anxieties about negotiating and even identifying the boundary between life and death itself, reminding us that the categories of 'the living' and 'the dead' are themselves less fixed and more fluid than we are accustomed to expect. The attribution of some degree of sentience or 'life-force' to the corpses of the recently deceased was a very long-standing popular intuition, informing, for example, both Ruth Richardson's work on anatomy in Georgian Britain and Nancy Caciola's recent discussion of wraiths and

¹⁸ Davis, 'Some Tasks and Themes', p. 333; Muchembled, *Popular and Elite Culture*, p. 64.

¹⁹ Davis, 'Ghosts, Kin and Progeny', p. 94; R. W. Scribner, 'The Impact of the Reformation on Daily Life', in M. H. Appelt (ed.), *Mensch und Objekt im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit* (Vienna, 1990); R. W. Scribner, 'Elements of Popular Belief', in T. Brady, H. O. Oberman and J. D. Tracey (eds.), *Handbook of European History 1400–1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, vol. I: *Structures and Assertions* (Leiden, 1994), pp. 237–8; P. Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death: Folklore and Reality* (New Haven and London, 1988), *passim*.

revenants in medieval culture.²⁰ Caciola's contribution to the present volume, an analysis of late medieval understandings of the meaning of possession, suggests how the explanation found convincing in a number of Swiss and Italian urban communities (namely, that the spirits of the dead could take hold of the bodies of the living) reflected 'an intimate, immanent and amoral view of the supernatural', in which the dead remained far more tightly bound to the material world than they did in the eschatologies of the theologians. These spirits could be threatening and vengeful. For many late medieval Christians the desire to commemorate the dead and the need to propitiate them went pretty much hand in hand. Philippe Ariès's contention that after the adoption of intramural burial in the early Middle Ages, 'the dead completely ceased to inspire fear' is as implausible as Sir James Frazer's imperious claim that the fear of the spirits of the dead was a virtually universal feature of pre-modern and primitive societies, and a primary influence on the development of all religious thought.²¹

Attitudes towards the dead in this period were often complex, if not contradictory, stemming from the confluence of a number of factors: official doctrine about the afterlife, folkloric ghost beliefs, natural affection for the deceased, horror of the corpse, the obligation to remember and the impulse to forget.²² Yet it is fundamental to remember that the ties between living and dead were not merely cultural and emotional ones; they were also necessarily economic, involving the disposition of property and the dedication of resources to the demands of intercession and commemoration. Over the generations, the effect was a cumulative one, leading some historians of later medieval Europe to speak of an unbearable weight of obligations, the over-burdening of the living by the dead.²³ Unsurprisingly, at times the living could show themselves inattentive to the declared wishes of the dead: bequests might remain unfulfilled, chantries unfounded and annual commemorations of the dead (particu-

²⁰ R. Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (London, 1987), chap. 1: 'The Corpse and Popular Culture'; Caciola, 'Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual'.

²¹ Ariès, *Hour of our Death*, p. 36; J. G. Frazer, *The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion* (3 vols., London, 1933–6), esp. I, pp. 10–11; III, p. 311. See also the emphasis on a 'universal fear of the dead' in E. Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, tr. C. Stewart (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 305–17.

²² For the range of emotions evoked by the spectacle of the dead body, see Vanessa Harding's chapter below. The view that, paradoxically, the prime purpose of commemoration was to enable the living to forget the dead is a recurrent theme of Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, pp. 5, 9, 35, 200.

²³ C. Platt, *King Death: the Black Death and its Aftermath in Late-Medieval England* (London, 1996), pp. 105–7; Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*, pp. 233–4.

larly the long-dead) might be amalgamated or abandoned.²⁴ In late medieval devotional literature one counterpoint to the expressions of piety towards the dead is what Margaret Aston has described as ‘the proverbial friendlessness of the dead’, the often-expressed fear that executors would prove untrustworthy, that those who ought to remember would be liable to forget.²⁵

If the dead placed burdens on the living which the latter were sometimes unwilling to fulfil, can one then argue (somewhat against the tide of recent scholarship stressing the popularity and adaptability of late medieval Catholicism) that a growing resentment of such burdens helps to explain the sixteenth-century revolt against the Church? Quite apart from Luther’s original protest against the abuse of indulgences, the propaganda of the early Reformation was eloquent on this score, simultaneously accusing the Catholic clergy of *Totenfresserei* (feeding upon the dead) and arguing the social injustice of endowing intercessions for the dead, which took their rightful property from widows and children, and from the poor.²⁶ In lands where the Reformation took hold, the place of the dead had to be fundamentally reviewed and renegotiated, and many of the chapters in this collection address themselves to one aspect or other of this momentous social and theological realignment.

It has become something of a truism to state that the Reformation fractured the community of the living and the dead; that it cast out the dead from the society of the living and abolished the dead’s status as an ‘age-group’.²⁷ Certainly, it would be difficult to overstate the importance,

²⁴ A. Kreider, *English Chantries: the Road to Dissolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), pp. 87–9; M. Hicks, ‘Chantries, Obits and Almshouses: the Hungerford Foundations 1325–1478’, in C. Barron and C. Harper-Bill (eds.), *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society* (Woodbridge, 1985), pp. 123–42; C. J. Somerville, *The Secularisation of Early Modern England: from Religious Culture to Religious Faith* (Oxford, 1992), p. 77; Brown, *Popular Piety*, pp. 96–7, 110, 168, 226–7.

²⁵ M. Aston, ‘Death’, in R. Horrox (ed.), *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes: Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 213–15; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 349–52; C. Gittings, ‘Urban Funerals in Late Medieval and Reformation England’, in Bassett, *Death in Towns*, p. 176; C. Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066–1550* (London and New York, 1997), p. 41.

²⁶ S. Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities* (New Haven and London, 1975), pp. 111–16; H. Latimer, *Sermons and Remains*, ed. G. E. Corrie, Parker Society (Cambridge, 1845), pp. 238, 363. See also L. P. Buck, ‘The Reformation, Purgatory, and Perpetual Rents in the Revolt of 1525 at Frankfurt am Main’, in K. C. Sessions and P. N. Bebb (eds.), *Pietas et Societas: New Trends in Reformation Social History* (Kirksville, MO, 1985), pp. 23–33.

²⁷ Davis, ‘Some Tasks and Themes’, p. 330; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 474–5, 494–5; C. Richmond, ‘The English Gentry and Religion, c. 1500’, in C. Harper-Bill (ed.), *Religious Belief and Ecclesiastical Careers in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 143–4; S. C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual: an Interpretation of*

in terms of formal theology, liturgy, ecclesiastical structures and ritual practice of the abrogation of Purgatory and the repudiation of any form of intercession for the dead. Peter Marshall's chapter, for example, argues that English Protestants' aversion to the Catholic 'geography' of the afterlife in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries may have played a significant role in the formation of more recognisably 'modern' constructions of life after death in general. The claim is also sometimes made that an important result of the abolition of Purgatory and prayer for the dead in Protestant states was a kind of 'secularisation', or at least 'naturalisation' of the memory of the dead. Those facing death displayed an increasing concern with the reputation and 'fame' they would leave behind them, while the survivors were encouraged to contemplate the deceased as exemplifications of virtue and achievement, rather than as persons with whom any kind of relationship could be maintained.²⁸

In seeking comparisons between the place of the dead in pre-Reformation Catholic and post-Reformation Protestant cultures it is probably wise, however, to attempt to avoid juxtaposing sets of neatly contrasting paradigms, to present static 'before' and 'after' snapshots of a series of processes that were in reality dynamic, evolutionary and thoroughly untidy. We should note here the arresting observation of Bob Scribner that relations with the dead touched a 'neuralgic point for early modern official Protestantism'; that well into the twentieth century there survived 'a thick sub-stratum of Protestant popular belief about spirits, ghosts, poltergeists, restless souls'.²⁹ Despite the repeated insistence of Protestant theologians that there could be no commerce and exchange between the quick and the dead, that the living could do nothing to alter the condition of the deceased, and that the dead had no knowledge of the affairs of the living, a recognition of the reciprocal bonds between present and past generations was too deep-rooted in popular consciousness to be easily eradicated. Jacob Helt's chapter, an analysis of the patterns of gift-giving in women's wills in Elizabethan Essex, suggests how the designation of

Early Modern Germany (London, 1997), p. 178. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, p. 396 goes so far as to say the effect of eliminating Purgatory was to 'sever the relationship between the dead and the living'.

²⁸ Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, pp. 144–9; R. Rex, 'Monumental Brasses and the Reformation', *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society* 14 (5) (1990), pp. 376–94.

²⁹ B. Scribner, 'Introduction', in Scribner and T. Johnson (eds.), *Popular Religion in Germany and Central Europe, 1400–1800* (Basingstoke, 1996), p. 10. See also J. Beyer, 'A Lübeck Prophet in Local and Lutheran Context', in *ibid.*, pp. 172–5, and for comparable arguments for early modern England, Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, chap. 19; R. Hutton, 'The English Reformation and the Evidence of Folklore', *Past and Present* 148 (1995), pp. 89–116.

'rememberers' through the gendered social networks that women had belonged to in life served to sustain 'a sense of spiritual and material affinity between the dead and the living community' despite the theological revolution which had anathematised prayer for the dead. Bruce Gordon's examination of ghosts in the Swiss context discusses how apparitions remained an integral part of the Protestant spiritual landscape for both reformers and the common folk. Although the notion of ghosts as the dead returning from Purgatory could not be sustained, in their approaches to pastoral care, Protestant writers remained deeply influenced by the medieval culture of death and intercession. The intense interest among Protestants in angels represented the deeper need of the reformers to reclaim aspects of medieval religion in another form. Here the Reformation did not merely act attritionally upon stubborn and intractable 'popular' attitudes about the dead; to some extent at least it reacted with the concerns of the people to forge acceptable solutions to perplexing pastoral problems. Will Coster's chapter on the changing meanings of the term 'chrisom child' in Reformation England is another case in point. The mutations of this expression, originally applied to infants dying after baptism, to cover all dead infants and, latterly, those dying unbaptised, seems to represent a fusion of the baptismal theology of the reformers with the psychological needs of bereaved parents.

In much of Europe a complicating factor in the Protestant reordering of relations with the dead was the fact that links with past (Catholic) generations were both physically and symbolically preserved at the heart of urban and rural communities by the tombs and burial places that pervaded parish churches and by the graveyards that enveloped them. Recent work on the removal of cemeteries to new extramural sites in a number of sixteenth-century German Lutheran cities has seen the process as indicative of the desire of Protestant authorities to effect 'a thorough-going separation between living and dead'.³⁰ Yet well into the seventeenth century such literal relocations of the place of the dead could meet opposition from Lutheran parishioners.³¹ The issue of physical proximity between the living and the dead was resonant outside Germany, as is shown in the contributions here by Penny Roberts and Andrew Spicer. Roberts's account of burial disputes in Reformation France shows that Huguenots were often keen to be buried with their Catholic ancestors,

³⁰ Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, pp. 178–9, 187; C. Koslofsky, 'Death and Ritual in Reformation Germany' (University of Michigan PhD thesis, 1994), chap. 3, and his forthcoming monograph, *The Reformation of the Dead*. Dr Koslofsky had hoped to contribute to the current volume; unfortunately circumstances conspired to prevent this.

³¹ Beyer, 'A Lübeck Prophet', pp. 170–1.

and to take their place within the 'geography and social hierarchy of sacred burial space'. Their demands for separate burial sites came slowly, and were probably largely prompted by the ferocious determination of Catholics to keep their burial places free of heretical contamination. Spicer's discussion of kirk-burial in early modern Scotland (where the ecclesiastical authorities were bitterly opposed to the practice as a derogation of true worship and a prop to superstition) reveals an intriguing process of negotiation between the demands of doctrinal probity and the aspirations of lay elites. Through the construction of collateral burial aisles lairds and nobles were able to continue to express symbolic solidarity with their ancestors, as well as to assert their own elevated social importance. In early modern Paris, as Vanessa Harding's contribution reveals, the impulses behind choice of burial location were probably similar. The desire to be buried near a member of the family or *lignage* was prevalent, suggestive both of a claim to social status and of a continuing attribution of personal identity to the corpses rotting in the ground.

As these examples suggest, Protestant and Catholic responses to the dead in early modern Europe could show remarkable points of similarity, in spite of radically opposing theories of salvation, death rituals and views of the afterlife. In particular, commentators from very different confessional standpoints displayed a willingness both to draw imperative moral messages from the condition of the dead and the manner and timing of their passing, and to employ (or exploit?) the dead and the occasions of their commemoration in pursuit of religious or political objectives. This theme is developed in several of the chapters below. In James Boyden's treatment of the death and afterlife of Don Rodrigo Calderón we have a striking example of how it could all go very wrong. The carefully choreographed execution was intended by the government of Philip IV as a public demonstration of its distance from a political culture perceived as execrably corrupt. Calderón's conversion, his devotion to Teresa of Avila and his conduct at the moment of execution, however, served to place his death in another sphere of meaning which clearly had a deeper hold on the Spanish imagination – the good Catholic death. Boyden demonstrates how the death and execution of one person could be read in contrasting ways; even ritualised deaths retained an unstable character, foiling human attempts to control their import.³² Exemplary deaths of a different sort are involved in Philip

³² The manner of dying and deportment on the death-bed invited equally didactic constructions in contemporary Protestant societies. See R. Houlbrooke, 'The Puritan Death-Bed, c. 1560–c. 1660', in C. Durston and J. Eales (eds.), *The Culture of English Puritanism*,

Soergel's discussion of the 'reading' of the corpses of deformed infants in Lutheran Germany. In turning to monstrous births as evidence for divine disapprobation of contemporary mores, Lutheran pamphleteers displayed an attitude that had much in common with the traditional Catholic tendency to extract messages from the miraculously preserved bodies of saints and other disruptions of the accustomed order of nature. Parallels in the ways reformers and counter-reformers could make capital out of the dead are perhaps most marked in the uses they made of an instrument of commemoration that was common to both of them throughout the early modern period, the funeral sermon.³³ This theme is developed in the chapters by Larissa Taylor and Graeme Murdock. Taylor's account of Catholic funeral sermons during the French Wars of Religion reveals how they might frequently become the occasion for unabashed religious propaganda, the castigation of heretics and the urging of Catholics to hold fast in a militant defence of the faith. In the very different, but equally unstable conditions of mid-seventeenth-century Transylvania, Murdock describes how the sermons delivered at the funerals of Reformed princes and their counsellors construed their deaths as signals of impending doom and judgement against the principality, and issued calls to collective repentance and emulation of these (idealised) godly rulers.

Such a picture of a complex layering and interweaving of continuities and discontinuities and of subtle long-term negotiations of change makes it increasingly difficult to issue simplistic generalisations about the impact of the religious reformations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on the social significance of the dead in European communities. The issue is further complicated by the suggestion in some recent work of marked regional differences in attitudes towards the dead, both before

1560–1700 (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 122–44; M. C. Cross, 'The Third Earl of Huntingdon's Death-bed: a Calvinist Example of the *Ars Moriendi*', *Northern History* 21 (1985), pp. 80–107; L. M. Beier, 'The Good Death in Seventeenth-Century England', in R. Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement* (London and New York, 1989), pp. 43–61.

³³ Protestant scruples about funeral sermons as a relic of popish intercessory practices seem to have been fairly rapidly overcome across Europe as preachers became attuned to the advantages of a captive audience, and the poignancy of the theme of mortality for framing calls to repentance and right living. See F. B. Tromly, '“Accordinge to Sounde Religion”: the Elizabethan Controversy over the Funeral Sermon', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 13 (1983), pp. 293–312; P. Collinson, '“A Magazine of Religious Patterns”: an Erasmian Topic transposed in English Protestantism', in idem, *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London, 1983), pp. 499–525; Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, pp. 156–62; on opposition to funeral sermons among the Swiss reformers, however, see Martin Illi, *Wohin die Toten gehen. Begräbnis und Kirchhof in der vorindustriellen Stadt* (Zurich, 1992).

and after the Reformation period.³⁴ Thus, while historians of late medieval England have seen popular awareness of Purgatory and its place in the penitential cycle as a crucial determinant of piety, it has been asserted that Purgatory failed to capture the popular imagination in France until the middle of the seventeenth century.³⁵ Carlos Eire regards the sums spent on the dead in the later sixteenth century as evidence of a uniquely Spanish preoccupation with post-mortem ritual and intercession, even within the remaining Catholic world.³⁶ Henry Kamen, on the other hand, remarks upon 'the impressive absence of Purgatory' in rural Catalonia before the mid-seventeenth century, and contrasts 'the haunting presence of the purgatorial dead' in the religious outlook of northern Europe with a more muted version in the south.³⁷ It has been further suggested that devotion to the dead was particularly characteristic of 'the entire Atlantic fringe from Galicia, through Brittany, Ireland, and England', areas where Catholicism can be portrayed as having 'received most reinforcement from pre-Christian religious beliefs'.³⁸ The essays in this volume provide a great deal of further nuancing and shading of the national and regional distinctiveness of mortuary and memorial cultures in late medieval and early modern Europe, and inevitably they serve to problematise some issues even as they clarify and resolve others. They make a collectively telling argument for the view that 'the social significance of death is constructed with great variety and complexity within different cultural contexts'.³⁹

Yet whatever the cultural traditions and political and socio-economic structures of the societies in which they lived, every man and woman in this

³⁴ Though note the suggestion of Samuel Cohn in his chapter below that traditional historiographies have misconstrued the differences in the commemorative cultures of late medieval Flanders and Tuscany.

³⁵ See works by Burgess and Duffy cited in note 13 above. Ariès, *Hour of our Death*, pp. 153, 201, 306, 463. For evidence of marked regional disparities within England in the patterns of intercessory foundations, see Kreider, *English Chantries*, pp. 15–19, 90–1; R. Whiting, 'Local Responses to the Henrician Reformation', in D. MacCulloch (ed.), *The Reign of Henry VIII: Politics, Policy and Piety* (Basingstoke, 1995), pp. 214, 220.

³⁶ C. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: the Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 529.

³⁷ H. Kamen, *The Phoenix and the Flame: Catalonia and the Counter-Reformation* (New Haven and London, 1993), pp. 12, 168–9, 195. Note here also Paul Binski's observation that in the late Middle Ages Northern Europe had a 'far more pronounced culture of the macabre' than did Italy: *Medieval Death*, p. 122.

³⁸ V. Turner, 'Death and the Dead in the Pilgrimage Process', in F. E. Reynolds and E. H. Waugh (eds.), *Religious Encounters with Death: Insights from History and Anthropology of Religions* (Pennsylvania and London, 1977), p. 35, citing W. A. Christian, *Person and God in a Spanish Valley* (New York and London, 1972), p. 94.

³⁹ Caciola, 'Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual', p. 7.

period knew he or she would one day die, a common denominator of palpable, but nonetheless profound significance. That death came indiscriminately for all, from prince to peasant, was a widely disseminated theme, celebrated in the iconography of the 'dance of death', and the *memento mori* message of funeral sermons, tomb imagery and inscriptions. The treatment of the dead was a powerfully poignant theme across Europe because of this universal relevance, and because of its ability to connect the private and the public, to evoke an affinity between the individual experience of memory and loss, and its significance for the community, Church or state. The placing of the dead in late medieval and early modern societies was thus integral to both daily life and the sweep of broader historical movements. The late medieval and early modern worlds had an especial concern with the past. The widespread concern for reform of the Church following the Great Schism led many to reflect upon a better age, when things had been purer. Late medieval concepts of reform were derived from the idea of restoration, a return to the past. History was integral to Renaissance thought, as humanists sought to recapture the genius of classical cultures in order to revivify the languid societies in which they found themselves. The reformations of the sixteenth century, Protestant and Catholic, self-consciously moulded the past in order to make sense of the present. Concern with the place of the dead bespeaks a fundamental need to relate past and present, whether in kinship or the continuity of the Church. English Protestant theologians of the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were generally prepared to answer in the affirmative the question of whether 'our fathers living in popish superstitions might be saved'. In doing so, they addressed sympathetically an issue of considerable pastoral sensitivity as well as making the point, against charges of 'novelty', that the doctrine and practices of the Protestant churches were not completely without historical roots.⁴⁰ Many of the essays in this volume demonstrate that there were impulses in the religious cultures which ran deeper than confessional divides. Catholics (pre-Reformation and Tridentine) and Protestants alike wrestled with many of the same questions. Perhaps the most profound question of all was that of how the community should understand and articulate its relationship with those who had gone before it. Their answers to that question reveal much about how pre-industrial European peoples understood themselves.

⁴⁰ R. Hooker, 'A Learned Discourse of Justification', in *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. C. Morris (2 vols., London, 1907), I, p. 39; A. Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: the Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought 1600–1640* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 285–95.

The theme of 'the place of the dead' is a highly multivalent one, and provides a means of gaining new and unexpected access to a wide range of themes and problems current in a number of apparently discrete historiographies. Yet this is far from implying that we can approach it merely as a shorthand method of expressing and exposing fixed and underlying societal 'structures'. The contributions to this book make clear that in the societies under consideration, the cultural significance of the dead was never a 'given', something taken for granted and unimpeachable. Rather it was the product of a matrix of social, religious and economic relations that had to be enacted and articulated anew with each generation that passed away. That most reflective and past-minded of activities, the remembrance and commemoration of the dead, is in every age a remarkably contemporary testimony.