

man (who may be men or women), many of whom specialize in particular kinds of spirits. But Winti is a strongly participatory religion, in which every individual plays an active role, and specialization or special knowledge is widely distributed among the population.

Winti deals with everyday concerns. Typically, an illness, minor misfortune, bad dream, or portent suggests divination by a *lukuman*. Using any of a variety of techniques, he suggests the cause—for example, a particular ancestor feels neglected, a jealous neighbor has attempted sorcery, a relative's snake spirit disapproves of a proposed marriage, the person's "soul" requires a special ritual—and then prescribes an appropriate rite. During the course of a single case of illness or misfortune, large numbers of relatives and friends may need to be mobilized and considerable financial resources expended. *Bonuman* and *lukuman* are always compensated.

MAROON RELIGIONS. There are six Maroon (or "Bush Negro") groups living along rivers in the interior of the country: the Djuka and Saramaka (each numbering about twenty thousand people), the Matawai, Aluku, and Paramaka (each about two thousand people), and the Kwinti (fewer than five hundred people). Their religions, like their languages and other aspects of culture, are related to one another, with the sharpest division being between the eastern groups (Djuka, Paramaka, Aluku) and the central groups (Saramaka, Matawai, Kwinti). Descended from slaves who escaped from coastal plantations during Surinam's first century of colonization, they have lived in relative isolation from the world of the coast.

Maroons have always enjoyed an extremely rich ritual life, which is totally integrated into their matrilineally based tribal social organization. Christian missions have had differential impact on the Maroon groups: for example, the Matawai and several thousand of the Saramaka are nominally Moravians, but the great majority of Maroons continue to participate fully in religions that were forged by their ancestors, from many different African traditions, into a vibrant new synthesis. Resembling Winti in terms of many of the particular gods and spirits invoked, the Maroon religions stand apart in their more absolute integration of belief and ritual into all aspects of life. New World creations drawing on Old World ideas, these Maroon religions remain today the most "African" of all religions in the Americas.

Rituals of many kinds form a central part of everyday Maroon life. Such decisions as where to clear a garden or build a house, whether to make a trip, or how to deal with theft or adultery are made in consultation with village deities, ancestors, forest spirits, snake gods, and other such powers. Human misfortune is directly linked to other people's anti-social acts, through complex chains of causation involving gods and spirits. Any illness or other misfortune requires immediate divination and ritual action in collaboration with these spirits and others, such as warrior gods. The means of communicating with these entities vary from spirit posses-

sion and the consultation of oracle bundles carried on men's heads to the interpretation of dreams. Gods, spirits, and ancestors, who are a constant presence in daily life, are also honored and placated through frequent prayers, libations, and great feasts.

The rituals surrounding birth and other life crises are extensive, as are those relating to more mundane activities, from hunting a tapir to planting a rice field. Among Maroons, funerals constitute the single most complex ritual event, spanning a period of many months, directly involving many hundreds of people, and uniting the world of the dead with that of the living through specialized ritual action such as coffin divination, and extensive singing, dancing, and drumming. Specialized cults—such as those devoted to twins, or to finding someone lost in the forest, or to making rain—are the possessions of particular matrilineal clans, and individual Maroons may also specialize in the treatment of particular types of spiritual problems, or in particular ritual activities, such as drumming for snake-god rites. But most Maroon ritual knowledge is broadly spread; these are highly participatory religions.

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RICHARD PRICE (1987)

AFTERLIFE

This entry consists of the following articles:

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- GEOGRAPHIES OF DEATH
- AFRICAN CONCEPTS
- AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS CONCEPTS

OCEANIC CONCEPTS
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AFTERLIFE: AN OVERVIEW

Views of the afterlife, of expectations concerning some form of human survival after death, cannot be isolated from the totality of the understanding of the nature of the divine, the nature of humankind, time and history, and the structure of reality. Not all religious persons have addressed the same kinds of questions, nor have ideas always been formulated in a uniform way by those nurtured within any one of the many religious traditions of the world. Nonetheless, there is a certain commonality in the kinds of basic questions that have been addressed. This article is organized topically in terms of the ways in which peoples from a range of theological perspectives in different ages and religions have seen fit to respond to these questions.

THE NATURE OF THE DIVINE. The basic issue concerning the nature of the divine is whether God is to be considered a personal being with and to whom one can relate or is held to be reality itself, the source and ground of being in impersonal or nonpersonal form. Between these absolutes lie a myriad of possibilities, compounded and enriched by a variety of experiences that can be termed mystical. Monotheists have struggled through the ages with questions concerning the corporeality of God, including shape and dimension, and, correspondingly, whether humankind can actually come to gaze in the hereafter on the visage of God. Others have concluded not only that the divine being is not to be conceived in any anthropomorphic form but also that the divine being, in the most absolute sense, is removed from the realm of interaction and rests as the essence of nonmanifestation. Determinations about the nature of the divine have direct ramifications, as will be seen, for human understanding of life after death.

The tension between the two concepts (the God of form and God without form) has arisen in a multitude of ways for faithful persons of various traditions. Those who depersonalize the divine to the extent that they see it as pure reality in which the essence of all things participates must ultimately sacrifice the relationship of deity and devotee, whether this be understood on the model of master and servant, parent and child, or lover and beloved. This was the problem for the philosopher Rāmānuja in twelfth-century India, whose qualified nondualism was the logically problematic attempt to reconcile a philosophical monism with the overwhelming need to respond to God in loving devotion. The Andalusian Muslim mystic Muḥy al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī, writing about the same time, posited a series of descending levels of the godhead through which the absolute, nonmanifest divine

gradually actualizes itself to the form of a Lord with whom humans can interact.

The vision of God. Those religious traditions that have articulated an understanding of the divine in polytheistic form have tended to envision the particular gods in a concrete manner, often with the implication that the dead, or at least some of the dead, will be able to see the gods visually in the afterlife. Pictorial representations from the Middle and New Kingdoms in Egypt portray the dead person being lifted out of the sarcophagus by the jackal Anubis, taken to the Hall of Double Justice and judged, and then brought into the presence of Osiris, to be led by him to the Elysian Fields.

From the earliest times, Indian thinkers have tended to conceptualize their gods in quite specifically graphic ways. In the Vedic literature, Yama, who is at once the first mortal and the god of the dead, is portrayed as sitting under a leafy bower with his two four-eyed dogs in the presence of gods and ancestors to welcome the dead into a life that is a blissful version of earthly existence. In theistic Hinduism, the devotee expects to gaze on the face of the Beloved as Rādhā beheld Kṛṣṇa in their moments of most intense passion. The faithful Buddhist to whom access to Sukhāvātī, the Pure Land, is granted will enjoy the bliss of contemplating Amitābha Buddha himself.

Vision of the divine in the afterlife is not limited to polytheistic traditions. The sight of God in the gardens of Paradise is cherished by Muslims as the culmination of a life of piety; similar expectations have been part of the hopes of many Christians. Nor is it the case that in all polytheistic traditions there is the assumption that the dead will see those gods whom they concretely portray or conceptualize. Among the ancient Mesopotamians, the gods of the lower world were viewed as cruel and vindictive and those of the upper regions as arbitrary, with humans doomed to exist as shades in the nether regions. Thus no amount of individual effort in this life could assure one of a blissful existence in the hereafter, let alone a vision of the gods.

Divine justice and judgment. Never in the Mesopotamian consideration did there seem to be any understanding that the individual who lived the good life on earth might come to an end better than that found in the cheerless underground pit of Arallu. Justice as a function of divinity never came to bear, and the hero-king Gilgamesh, in a work attributed to the second millennium BCE, could rail against the arbitrary way in which the gods meted out death to humankind while keeping life and immortality for themselves.

It is, of course, not true that justice need be a less significant factor in the consideration of the afterlife by a society that is professedly polytheistic. What often has been the case is that the concept of ethical responsibility on the part of the individual (with concomitant judgment by the deity in some form) blends with an emphasis on magic and ritual as assurance of a felicitous state in the hereafter. The ancient Egyptian view is particularly interesting in this connection. *Maat*,

the conceptual form of justice, order, and stability, became personified in the Hall of Double Justice and was understood as the means by which Osiris, the lord of the kingdom of the living dead, was finally apprised of the moral character of the one brought before him in judgment. Justice was seen as an extension of a concept of order that characterized the Egyptian worldview and that, as an essential of the eschatological reality, was in direct relationship to the establishment of stability over chaos at the time of creation. And yet it is clear from the texts that as significant as were concepts of order and justice to their view of life and death, the Egyptians never completely abandoned the feeling that the gods might not really (be able to) exercise absolute justice. Thus it was necessary to rely on ritual and magical formulas, in this way assuring that the dead would always have at their fingertips the necessary knowledge and information to answer any questions that might be posed in the final court of arbitration.

Justice, as an abstract principle of order for many ancient societies, came in monotheistic communities to be translated into a quality of the godhead itself, with the immediate ramification of justice as an ethical imperative for human beings in recognition of the nature and being of God. Thus in Islam there is a clear understanding that because God is just, he requires that a person live justly, and the quality of the individual life is actually the determining factor in the final judgment.

One of the earliest perceptions of the god who embodies this kind of justice in his very being is found in the thought of Zarathushtra (Zoroaster), the Persian prophet of the first millennium BCE. He saw in Ahura Mazdā the principles of truth, righteousness, and order upheld in much the same way as the Egyptians saw them upheld and embodied by Maat. Ahura Mazdā, however, was not for Zarathushtra the personification of truth but the great advocate of it, the divine lord into whose presence the righteous are allowed to enter at the end of time. There was never in the development of Zoroastrian orthodoxy any indication that the just could expect to see the person of Ahura Mazdā in human form, but rather there was the understanding that the soul who has lived a life of justice will be given the privilege of beholding a form of pure light.

In the development of Old Testament thought, divine justice became a particularly significant issue. In the earlier conceptions, the dark and dusty She'ol as an abode for the dead seems to have been understood much as was the Mesopotamian Arallu. There Yahveh had no jurisdiction, and gloom was assured for the righteous and wicked alike. The beginnings of hope for a more felicitous end for humankind came through reflections concerning the question of God's power and justice. If God is truly almighty, his dominion must extend to all parts of the earth and to all portions of time. And if he is truly just, then it is inconsistent that the righteous as well as the wicked should be doomed to the bitter existence of She'ol. It was with regard to God's power and

justice that the seeds of an idea of resurrection to an eternal reward began to grow in the Jewish consciousness, laying the ground for the later Christian understanding of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In Hindu and Buddhist thought, the notion of *karman* presupposes a conception of justice and judgment different from that prevailing in monotheistic traditions. Rather than the subjectivity of a judging being, there is the objective and automatic working out of cause and effect. Justice in this understanding is not so much a divine quality as an inexorable law of the universe. In its simplest form the doctrine of *karman* states that what one is now is a direct result of what one has done and been in past existences, and what one does in this lifetime will, with the accumulation of past karmic debt, be the direct determinant of the state of one's future existence. Lifetime follows lifetime in whatever form of life each successive existence takes, and liberation from the round of existences is achieved not by the intervening grace of a god but through knowledge of the truth of the realization of self. In the Vedantic understanding of the Upaniṣads, the content of this knowledge is that the self (*ātman*) is indeed identical with the Self (*brahman*), the underlying reality of all that is.

The complex of religious responses that makes up the fabric of Hinduism and Buddhism, however, includes as a major component the understanding on the part of many that the godhead must be conceptualized in a personal way. In terms of sheer numbers, far more Hindus have placed their faith in the saving grace of Lord Kṛṣṇa than have ever held to a doctrine of absolute monism. And despite the automatic character of *karman* in determining rebirth, divine or quasi-divine figures do continue to play a judicative role in the religious imagination. In Mahāyāna Buddhism there are ten judges of the dead, one of whom is a holdover from the Vedic Yama, despite the fact that in strict philosophical or ontological terms it is a Buddhist tenet that there is no such thing as a god who can judge or even a soul that can be the object of judgment.

Intercession. Issues of justice give rise to questions about the possibility of intercession for the deceased on the part of human or superhuman agency. The forms of intercession are many, from the role played by the living in providing a proper burial and maintaining the mechanical artifices of the tomb to the specific intervention in the judgment process by a figure who can plead for the well-being of the soul whose fate is in the balance. Muslims traditionally have taken great comfort in the thought that the Prophet himself will be on hand to intercede for each individual believer when he comes before the awesome throne of judgment, and through the centuries Christians have relied on the assurance that Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of God to intercede. The Buddhist concept of the *bodhisattva* is, in one sense, an extension of the idea of intercession: through the dedication or transference of merit, the saving being, who needs no more merit himself, can directly pass it on to individuals who have not reached the state of enlightenment.

The role of living persons in helping to determine the fate of the dead has ranged from giving the deceased a fitting and proper interment and celebrating a communal feast in memory of the departed (often to ensure that he or she actually stays “departed” and does not return to haunt the living) to maintaining for all time, as was the Egyptian intention, the physical apparatuses of the tomb. Sometimes it is held that these responsibilities are carried out primarily for the support of the living or out of respect for the dead. Often, however, there is a conviction that the living may actually be able to influence or help determine the future condition and existence of the souls in question. Some have challenged the supposition that the fate of the soul of the deceased must rest, even in part, on the continued ministrations of those fallible individuals with whom it had a relationship while on earth. Responsibility for the dead on the part of the living has often been seen as incompatible with a belief in the justice and mercy of God. Nonetheless, some form of prayer for the deceased on the part of the living continues to be an important responsibility of pious persons in all religious traditions.

THE NATURE OF HUMANKIND. If it is essential to a vision of the afterlife to have some understanding of the nature of that divine being or reality to whom humankind returns at death, it is no less important to have some conception of what element in the human makeup is considered to do the returning. In every religious tradition, the way in which an individual is conceived to be constituted in this life directly determines the way in which he or she is thought to survive in an existence after death.

The human constitution. Conceptions of the constitution of the human being differ not only among different religious traditions but among different schools of thought within the traditions. Nevertheless, for the purpose of a comparative typology, it is possible to generalize and speak of some of the most significant of these conceptions.

The most immediately obvious distinction, and one that has been drawn in most conceptions of the afterlife, is between the physical and the nonphysical aspects of the human person. This can be understood as the body-spirit dichotomy, with a difference sometimes drawn in the latter between spirit and soul. In the Hebrew view, a person was not understood so much as having a body, something essentially different and apart from the nonphysical side of one’s being, as being a body, which implies the totality of the individual and the inseparability of the life principle from the fleshly form. Spirit was said to be blown into the flesh, making it a soul, a whole person. In itself spirit was understood as a manifestation of the divine. This way of distinguishing between soul and spirit was adopted by some Islamic and Christian theologians and philosophers, although in common usage the two terms are essentially interchangeable in both traditions. When an individual is felt to be renewed in a new body in Christ, the experience is often described as spiritual; the body of the resurrection is sometimes thought

of as a spiritual body different from the earthly body of flesh and soul.

The notion that an individual is, rather than has, a body is quite foreign to most Eastern thought. In Hindu Sāṃkhya, for example, the body is part of the world of nature or matter (*prakṛti*) but is absolutely distinct from the life principle or self (*puruṣa*) from which it is separated by the process of yoga. It is the very realization of the separation of these two that amounts to liberation for the individual. Advaita Vedānta, while different from the dualistic Sāṃkhya in saying that the body is only part of the world of illusion, would agree that the key to liberation from the round of rebirths is exactly the realization that the soul or self has no lasting bond with anything physical and that the soul is associated with a particular body, human or nonhuman, only temporarily, for the fleeting moments of earthly existence.

The relationship of the human to the divine. The question of what it is that lives on after death must be seen in relation to the basic issue of whether that which is real or lasting in the human person is identical with the divine reality or is essentially different from it. A position of monism is one end of a spectrum of possible responses. In Advaita Vedānta liberation from successive existences comes only with the realization of the identity of *ātman* (the individual soul) and *brahman* (the Absolute). In some of its Sūfī manifestations, esoteric Islam comes very close to identifying the eternal in humans with the eternal essence (*ḥaqq*), with the further understanding that death and resurrection come in the moment-by-moment realization of that identity.

A very different kind of conceptualization is that characteristic of some traditional societies in which not only is humanity seen to be totally separate from the gods but one exists after death only as a shade or a shadow of one’s former self. That which divides the human and the divine in this context is the fact that the gods are immortal and humans are not. In between such alternatives is a range of possibilities suggesting that humans manifest some element of the divine enlivening principle. In most traditions, however, a felicitous hereafter means not the realization of identity of self and absolute, but rather some circumstance in which that which survives death comes to dwell in proximity to the divine.

A number of traditions have held that certain elements that make up an individual actually become manifested and real only at the time of death. The ancient Egyptian, for instance, was said to have come into his or her own only when after death the *ba*, or continuing personality, was fully realized through the joining with its counterpart, *ka*, which acted as a kind of guardian angel. The dead did not become *kas* but were joined to and guided by them on the journey into the afterlife. Classical Zoroastrian texts describe the soul at death sitting on the headstone of the grave for three days, after which it is led through some good or bad circumstances (depending on one’s character) and finally is met by a maiden who takes the form of the actions committed by that person while on earth. The good will thus meet a beautiful

creature, while the unrighteous will confront an incredibly ugly hag.

Certain similarities can be seen here with Buddhist conceptions, such as the peaceful and wrathful deities met by the deceased in the after-death visions described in the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*. The great difference is that in the Tibetan understanding one does not meet the alternatives of good or bad but experiences a whole range of deities that represent both the most sublime of human feelings and the personification of one's powers of reason. The wrathful deities are actually only a different aspect of the peaceful ones. The point is that, in some sense, as in the Egyptian and Zoroastrian cases, one comes into contact in an apparently externalized form with aspects of one's own personality, thought, and consequent past action.

RESURRECTION OF THE BODY. The significance of the body as a continuing entity in the afterlife has been attested to in many traditions. The resuscitation of the corpse expected after the elaborate processes of mummification in ancient Egypt implied the hope of permanent physical survival as well as survival of the personality. In Zoroastrian eschatology, one of the clearest statements of physical resurrection comes in the description of the Frashokereti, or ultimate rehabilitation of the world under the dominion of Ahura Mazda. The savior Saoshyant will raise the bones of the first ancestors and then those of all humankind, and Ahura Mazda will invest the bones with life and clothe them with flesh for all time.

In Jewish thought, the soul was first believed to be released from the body at death, but with the development of the idea of resurrection came the belief in the continued importance of the physical body. This belief is carried over to early Christianity: Augustine in the *City of God* says that the resurrected bodies, perfect amalgamations of flesh and spirit, are free to enjoy the satisfactions of food and drink should they so desire. He finds proof for this in the example of Christ consuming a meal after his own resurrection. Proceeding from the original assurance of Jesus that not a hair on the heads of those who are granted eternal life shall perish, Augustine concludes that at the time of the resurrection of the flesh, the body will appear in that size and physical condition in which it appeared at the time of youthful maturity, or would have appeared had it had time to mature. The arguments marshaled by the philosophers of Islam have done little to shake the common faith that the reward for a life of virtue will be the experience of the pleasures of the gardens of paradise in a physical as well as a spiritual way. The kinds of proofs offered by some in the Islamic community against the resurrection of the physical form have been countered rationally, and ignored emotionally, by those for whom a purely spiritual revival seems somehow to fall short of the promises of God and the world-affirming nature of Islam itself.

Continued existence as spirit. From the earliest times, characteristic of primitive societies but certainly not exclusive to them, humankind has had a seemingly natural fear of the

dead. To some extent this can be explained in terms of one's own apprehension about the meaning of death for one personally, but to a much greater extent, it seems to derive from a stated or unstated feeling that the dead have some power over the living and can actually interfere with the processes of life on earth. In more extreme cases, this has led to a kind of worship of the dead, in which those who have passed into another existence have sometimes assumed the status of gods. This has been evidenced particularly in China and Japan in the long history of ancestor worship. More generally it takes the form of concern for the proper disposal and continued remembrance of the dead, in the hope that the deceased will in no way return to "haunt" or interfere with life here on earth.

Commonly held is the assumption that because a being has undergone the experience of death, it is privy to information not held by those still in the mortal condition. Echoed in much of the great religious literature of the world is the theme that if only the dead could or would return in some form, they would have much to tell the living. The vanity of this wish for information from the departed is denied by those who are convinced that the dead can and do return and have a great deal to tell about the road that everyone, sooner or later, comes to travel. In many traditions, especially the prophetic, orthodoxy has disdained talk about the reality of ghosts and spirits functioning on earth, and it has fallen to the mythology of folklore to speculate on the best ways to propitiate the spirits of the dead and to ward off those spirits who, for a variety of reasons, are felt to be evil or malicious.

The role of community. Consideration only of the destiny of the individual results in a very unbalanced picture of conceptions of the afterlife. Important to the theologies of many of the religions of the world is the relationship of each individual to other individuals, or the idea of community, whether seen from the perspective of this world (is it necessary to be a member of a community in order to reach a blessed hereafter?) or the next (is there a community of the saved, or perhaps of the damned, in a future existence?). Common to prophetic religions is the expectation that the eschaton will result in reuniting or making whole both the individual and some portion (often the totality) of the human community. It is part of Islamic eschatological tradition that on the Day of Resurrection the specific communities of all the prophets, including that of Muḥammad, will be assembled, each at its own pond, awaiting the judgment.

The notion of community, or the importance of membership in a particular group, takes on a different kind of significance when viewed from the perspective of this world. In the Hindu tradition, liberating knowledge is limited to the twice-born, although this belief is greatly modified by those to whom a devotional relationship to some aspect of the godhead implies salvation rather than liberation. The question of whether one must be a Christian to be saved has engendered among scholars and theologians of Christianity heated arguments that still have not been resolved. *Ummah*, com-

munity in the Muslim sense of a religio-political unity, is a tremendously significant element in the understanding of Islam; some contemporary Muslims still insist that one cannot be saved if one is not a Muslim, and that one cannot be Muslim outside of community.

There are some obvious instances in the history of religions in which the community of the saved is the community of the victorious in the sense of realized eschatology, that is, the establishment of a kingdom of righteousness for a specific people here on earth. This is implicit in the theme of Zionism in Jewish thought (although it is only one interpretation, or aspect, of the Zionist ideal as it has developed historically). Even Zarathushtra, if one can correctly interpret the *Gathas*, seems at first to have envisioned the victory of *asha* ("truth, righteousness") over *druj* ("falsehood, evil") as taking place in the pastoral setting of eastern Persia within the context of this-worldly time. Realized eschatology in Christian thought refers to the understanding that Christ's life and death have, in fact, established the kingdom of God on earth for those who, in faith, are part of the body of Christ; in the mysticism of the *Gospel of John*, the Parousia, or second coming of Jesus, has already taken place. Such considerations lead directly to questions of time and history as a further category for reflection on conceptions of the afterlife.

TIME AND HISTORY. The way in which time, its passage and its purpose, is understood in different worldviews has a direct bearing on conceptions of the afterlife. Eastern religions and philosophies generally have conceived time as revolving in cycles, within each of which are periods of creation and destruction, with each "final" cataclysm to be followed again by the entire process of generation. In the elaborate Hindu schema of the epics and Purāṇas, there are moments of creation and destruction, eschatons when the entire universe is obliterated and reabsorbed into the body of the deity, but with the implication that this very process is endless. At the other pole are those "historical" (usually prophetic) religions that postulate a creation when time is said to have begun and a final eschaton when time as humans know it will reach its conclusion. Here history is a given, a once-and-for-all process that begins with the divine initiation and is often understood as depending at each moment on the sustaining, re-creating act of the maker. Implicit is the belief that there is a plan to history, although humans may not be able to comprehend it, and that in some sense the end, when all creation will be glorified and time will give way to eternity, is already cast and determined.

Ideal time. Many religious traditions envision a certain period that can be described as ideal time. This may be an epoch that existed before the beginning of time and will be actualized again when time itself ceases, or it may be conceptualized as having occurred within the framework of history and, thus, having the potential to be realized again in time. In the ancient Egyptian view of the universe as static, ideal time was that continuing time established by the original creation, when order replaced chaos and *maat* was the stability

of society as well as the individual ethic of justice and right. A similar understanding is expressed in the Australian Aboriginal concept of a sacred period during which the mythical ancestors lived, an epoch that is removed from any linear understanding of time. In that culture, in which language has no term for time in the abstract, the infinitely remote past is related to the present through the mythology of what has been called "the Dreaming."

For those traditions that emphasize a cyclical view of history, no time can be considered ideal. In one sense, time is not ultimately real, although, in another sense, its constant repetition means that it is perceived to be more plentiful than for people of historical traditions. Insofar as one has to deal with the illusions of reality in Indian thought, the best of times might be that represented by the beginning of each of the great cosmic cycles. From that point until the terrible *kaliyuga*, time (or rather the series of events and characteristics of the periods) degenerates and finally culminates in the awesome destruction of flood and fire that concludes the cycle and initiates a new beginning. For the theistic Hindu, the perfect moment is actually that eternity in which he or she is able to abide in the presence of the Lord.

In the prophetic traditions, ideal time can be understood in several ways. The ideal age in one sense is that ushered in by the eschaton, the end of time that is itself the realization of eternity. Yet for most of the prophetic religions there is a time within history, theoretical or actualized, that can be described as ideal. For some Christians, this has been understood as the time of the historical Jesus and his initiation of the continued kingdom of God on earth. There have been significant differences among Christians in interpretation of the meaning of a new heaven and a new earth. The restoration of Zion for the Jew has immediate implications; some have argued that ideal time is any time in which Jerusalem is actualized as the home of the Jews. For the Muslim, ideal time in its best historical sense was the period of the Prophet and the first four right-guided caliphs of the Islamic community, a time potentially realizable again at any moment.

Rebirth. Issues of time and history relate directly to the question of how an individual soul (or spirit or body) maintains continuity between this life and that that lies beyond death. Some traditions hold generally to the idea of one life on earth, death, some kind of resurrection or rebirth, and then continued existence on another plane. Others believe in reincarnation (metempsychosis or transmigration) with its possibilities of a series of lives on earth or elsewhere. Human imagination, or intuition, has resourcefully suggested many variations on these alternatives.

For the most part, traditions that see time as linear and progressive have rejected the idea of rebirth on this earth and relegated to the ranks of heresy those who have attempted to espouse such a theory or to combine it with the more traditional understanding of death and resurrection to propose an existence apart from the physical world. For those who

hold to the idea of resurrection, final life is not automatic but is granted by the specific act of a being or beings who actually bring the dead back to life. The victory over death may be seen as occurring immediately after the demise of the individual or as coming at some final *eschaton*, as when the savior Saoshyant breathes life into the lifeless bodies of all humanity in Zoroastrian thought, or, in Islamic tradition, when the individual souls are called to the final day of judgment.

Eastern mystical thought has articulated the concept of reincarnation with some consistency, although in the Buddhist case the difficult problem arises of identifying what it is that is born in another body if there is nothing that can be called an individual soul. Buddhist thinkers have developed elaborate and complex theories for reconciling the concept of *anātman* (“no soul”) with the six categories of being into which the non-soul can be reborn. Even those religions that contemplate aeons of potential rebirths, however, do project the hope of a final release from this recurring condition.

To say that one’s soul is immortal is to imply that it has always existed and that it will never for a moment cease to exist. This is the basic understanding of those who postulate recurring births in a variety of incarnations, but it need not necessarily be linked to conceptions of transmigration. A great debate took place in Islam between the philosophers, whose rational directives led them to conclude that immortality was the only possibility for humans, and the theologians, whose adherence to the word of the Qur’ān dictated the necessity of belief in the specific acts of creation and resurrection from the dead. The concepts of resurrection and immortality, however, are certainly not always seen as unambiguously antithetical. Theologians have long struggled with the determination of which term is more applicable to the Christian understanding, or whether both might in some senses pertain.

Eschatology. For those who adhere to the idea of resurrection, with the implication of some form of life eternal to follow, one of the most pressing questions concerns when that resurrection is going to occur. Millenarian expectations have taken a variety of forms in both Judaism and Christianity, with the chiliastic hope in the latter for Christ’s return. This kind of eschatological anticipation is generally seen in the context of the specifics of judgment. Here again, however, there is often no clearly formulated theological statement about precisely when judgment will take place or whether it is to be an individual or a universal adjudication. Some see it as happening soon after death, while others postulate a waiting period, perhaps of great length, before the eschatological events that herald a universal judgment.

In early Christianity, there was the expectation that the return of Jesus to usher in the new age would be so soon as to come within the lifetime of the community of those who had had fellowship with him. The passage of time moderated this expectation, and new theories had to be developed to ac-

count for the state of the soul in what came to be seen as a waiting period before the messianic age.

In the Persian case, Zarathushtra himself apparently had first felt that the kingdom of righteousness would be established on earth and then implied that eternal reward or punishment would instead come after death. Later, Sasanid orthodoxy, in developing its theories of three-thousand-year cycles, came to expect a kind of temporary reward or punishment lasting from death to the period of the Frashōkereti, at which momentous time a final purging through molten metal will purify all souls for their eternal habitation in the presence of Ahura Mazda.

Other of the prophetic religions have hesitated to interpret with such exacting clarity or to understand the particulars of reward and punishment so graphically, yet in a general way have postulated a similar period between the death of the individual and the general resurrection and ushering in of the final age. The suggestions of scriptures such as the New Testament and the Qur’ān are sufficiently unsystematic that doctrines about specific aspects of life after death have often been founded on implication rather than specification.

Savior figures. Implicit in the eschatological expectation of Judaism and Christianity is the hope for a messiah or savior. For the Jews that person has not yet come. For the Christians he has come once and will return at the Parousia. The savior concept is somewhat different in Islam; it is embodied particularly in the figure of the *mahdī* and involves a rather detailed understanding of the theological distinctions between Sunnī and Shī’ī thought as well as the relationship of the *mahdī* in its eschatological framework to the restorer and final ruler of the regenerated community of Islam.

Some variation on the idea of a savior or restorer to appear at a future time is to be found in almost all of the living religious traditions, whatever their concept of the flow and structure of time. Saoshyant of the Zoroastrian or Parsi community; the Messiah of the Old and New Testaments; Kalki, the tenth incarnation of Viṣṇu, in theistic Hinduism; and Maitreya, the future Buddha—all reflect an understanding that despite the almost universal importance placed on the necessity of individual human responsibility, it is still possible to hope for the merciful assistance of some being, divine or semidivine, in the determination of one’s future circumstances.

THE STRUCTURE OF REALITY. The interrelatedness of the kinds of themes one can develop in considering an issue such as life after death is obvious. The preceding discussion has touched on much of what falls also into the category of conceptions of the structure of reality. It therefore becomes a question not of considering new material as such, but of viewing some of the same concepts from a different perspective.

The world in time and space. The eternity of the world, and its subsequent relationship to the eternity of

heaven or the rehabilitated universe, has been postulated in a variety of ways in the history of religious thought. The ancient Egyptian expected that the static nature of the world and of society would mean their perpetuation eternally. In the materialistic Zoroastrian construct, the final rehabilitation of the earth implies its purification and its joining, with a purified hell, to the extension of heaven. Judaism presents an example of the constant tension between a hope for this world, renewed, and the kingdom of heaven as an otherworldly and eternal realm. In the Hindu and Buddhist conceptions, the world is not only not eternal but is in a constant process of degeneration. Even here, however, insofar as the world is constantly re-created within the realm of conditioned *samsāra*, it is eternal in another sense.

For many peoples, conceptions of the afterlife are directly related to the way they understand the basic divisions of the universe. The mythology of many of the ancient traditions is rich in descriptions and visual representations of the heavens, earth, and nether regions. A classic theme of religious geography has been that the heavens are located somewhere above the earth and the nether regions below, and that these have been identified to a greater or lesser extent with the location of heaven(s) and hell(s) as after-death abodes in whatever form these have been conceived. A not uncommon spatial concept is that of the land of the dead located in the west, the place of the setting sun, which is repeated in such myths as those of the jackal Anubis, lord of the Egyptian desert, and of the western kingdom of Sukhavati, the heaven of bliss of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara.

Reward and punishment. It is often in direct relation to the existing understanding of the structure of the universe that the more specific conceptions of heaven and hell arise. These parallel places of reward and punishment were not generally present in ancient thought. The Mesopotamian *Arallu* and the Hebrew *She'ol* both designated a great pit of darkness and dust under the earth that was not a hell (in the sense of any implication of judgment), but simply an abode for the unfortunate dead. Vedic thought in India, particularly as elaborated in the descriptions of Yama and the fathers of heaven in the *Rgveda*, was concerned primarily with the positive fate of those who performed sacrifices and good works, the rest passing into the oblivion of nonexistence. With the introduction of the importance of knowledge over sacrifice, of *karmayoga* (liberation through works) in place of ritual performance, the kingdom of Yama was elaborated into a series of heavens, and Yama himself was gradually transformed into a judge of the dead and then a god of the underworld hells, which were correspondingly enumerated.

The greatly elaborated heavens and hells, as they came to be developed in Hindu and Buddhist thought, with their graphic descriptions of the tortures of punishment and the raptures of reward, are by nature temporary (or, at least, one's stay in them is temporary). For the Buddhist, even these abodes are part of the conditioned world of *samsāra* and thus by definition are ultimately unreal, as all of phenomenal

existence is unreal. In any case, one is reborn from these states or conditions into another state or condition, with the understanding that not until one is reborn as a human being will final release be possible.

Quite different is the basic understanding of prophetic religions, which assumes that the eschaton and judgment result in the eternity of the final abode and resting place. The question of whether or not punishment, like reward, is eternal has long perplexed theologians. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, as well as in Islam, God's justice is always understood as tempered with mercy, and the idea of the eternity of hell has been moderated to whatever extent has seemed consistent with the prevailing theological climate.

The intermediate state. Throughout the prophetic religions it has been necessary to conceive of a kind of intermediate state or place for souls before the time of final disposition. (The very temporariness of one's stay in the Hindu and Buddhist heavens and hells suggests that they fulfill the same sort of intermediate function.) This intermediate state can be a condition of waiting, often in a specified place, for the time of final judgment. Thus, Islamic tradition developed elaborate descriptions of the *barzakh* (lit., "barrier") as a place or condition in which both good and wicked souls dwell until the day of resurrection. In later Jewish tradition, *She'ol* came to refer to a temporary place for men and women to await judgment.

In another understanding, this intermediate position is often described as being for those for whom consignment to punishment or reward is not automatic. The Qur'anic *a'raf* ("heights"), for example, has been interpreted as the temporary abode of those whose good and evil deeds more or less balance. Christianity, in some of its forms, has elaborated the distinction between Purgatory, as a place of temporary punishment and purification, and Limbo, as a waiting state where persons such as the righteous heathen and unbaptized infants are kept.

Literal and symbolic interpretations. Common to many religious traditions is continuing debate as to the nature of the future abodes of punishment and reward. Are they to be understood as places of literal recompense or as representations of states of mind? If states, are they attainable now or only in the hereafter? Are the experiences that one has in these states or places real or imaginary? Or, in a rather different dimension, are the descriptions to be seen only as allegorical and not, in fact, indicative of what is actually going to happen either objectively or subjectively?

It is in this area, perhaps, that it is most difficult to generalize within traditions. The awe- and terror-inspiring vision may well be taken with absolute literalness by one believer, while another might see that such visions are only symbolic representations of internal rather than external recompense. The Tibetan *Book of the Dead*, a set of instructions for the dying and dead that is at the same time a description of the forty-nine-day period between death and rebirth, de-

tails the experience that the soul has with karmic apparitions in the form of peaceful and wrathful deities. The great insight that comes of the *bardo*, or intermediate state experience, is that not only are the apparitions the products of one's own mind but they also assume, for the purposes of instruction, a concrete and objective reality.

Despite the variations in conceptions of what the afterlife may entail, a belief that human beings will continue to exist in some form after the experience they term death is a universal phenomenon. Skeptics have never persuaded the body of believers, whatever the specifics of their faith, that with the demise of the physical body comes the extinction of the human essence. Most people through the ages have drawn a clear connection between the quality of life lived on this earth and the expectation of what will come after death. Contemporary researchers of near-death experiences claim that they now have the beginnings of a scientific proof of the afterlife in the apparent commonality of the experiences of those proclaimed clinically dead. For most persons of faith, however, such knowledge is part of a universal mystery that by definition is veiled from the eyes of the living. They have some assurances of faith, but the details of what awaits them in "the undiscover'd country from whose bourn no traveller returns" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3.1) can only be anticipated, with the certainty that such knowledge will eventually, and inevitably, be theirs.

SEE ALSO Eschatology; Eternity; Ghosts; Golden Age; Heaven and Hell; Judgment of the Dead; Merit, article on Buddhist Concepts; Reincarnation; Resurrection; Soteriology; Soul; Transmigration.

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AFTERLIFE: GEOGRAPHIES OF DEATH

Belief in some kind of existence after death is one of the more common elements of religion, as history and anthropology show. While death is everywhere recognized as inevitable, it is seldom accepted as an absolute termination of human existence. Beliefs concerning the actual conditions of life after death, however, vary widely from culture to culture. This article will examine the variety of ways in which these afterlife conditions are represented, focusing in particular on their geography.

AFTERLIFE IN GENERAL. The different representations of life after death that we find in different religions are related to their respective conceptions of the structure of the cosmos and of life on earth, and to their different beliefs about the bodily and spiritual constitution of man. The Egyptians, for example, being agriculturalists, looked forward to a future life in the bountiful "Earu fields," whereas the Indians of the North American Plains, who were hunters, looked forward to the "eternal hunting grounds." In each case the actual economic conditions of life play an important role in determining how one will conceive of the afterlife. Similarly, the location and geography of the abode of the dead is in most cultures determined by the actual geographical conditions of their present world. Only occasionally is it determined primarily by cultural factors, as for instance by the traditions of migration among a number of Polynesian religions.

The conception of the soul is also an important factor. A soul that is conceived to be eternal and spiritual leads a different type of afterlife than one that is conceived as the double of the earthly body, or as something that gradually dwindles into nothingness after death, such as we find among certain northern Eurasian religions. A belief in multiple souls within a single individual makes possible a belief in the multiple destinations of these souls. Of the five souls of the Shipape (South America), for instance, only one goes to the hereafter.

There are also marked differences in the degree of interest that particular religions display in the afterlife. While central in one religion, it may be peripheral in another. Christianity, for example, along with a small number of other religions, has made the immortality of the individual central to its system of beliefs. But this centrality of the individual is by no means universally recognized. In many other religions the continuity of life after the death of the individual is of slight interest, because the stress falls firmly on life on earth. The continued existence of man after death may not be wholly denied, but neither is it considered to be of any importance. Thoughts about the conditions of the afterlife remain vague. Thus Godfrey Lienhardt quotes an Anuak man (Upper Nile) as saying simply that no one knows where the dead are, since no one has ever seen them. The inhabitants of Bellona Island (near the Solomons) seem equally unconcerned with what might happen to them after death. In accordance with this lack of interest we find cultures that not only allow the conditions of existence in the land of the dead

to remain unclear, but even leave the question of its location unanswered. Rupert M. Downes has found this to be the case among the Tiv of Nigeria, for instance, where ideas about a future state remain nebulous. By contrast, some cultures develop extremely detailed descriptions of the realm of the dead. Here one thinks in particular of medieval Christianity.

Although today we tend to be conditioned to see life after death as an eternal state befitting an immortal soul, it is of some importance to make clear that there are also cultures in which the afterlife is considered to be a temporary prolongation of the present life, to be brought to an end by a second and final death. The Pangwe (southern Cameroon) believe that after death a man lives on for a long time in heaven, but in the end he dies and his corpse is thrown out with no hope of any further existence. The Egyptians too knew the fear of dying for a second time in the hereafter.

The manner of life after death is also closely related to the moral principles of selection for entrance into the country of the dead. In some cases such special principles of selection may be absent. In such a case, the implicit criteria are essentially social, all duly initiated adult members of a community sharing the same destiny. Children and slaves (where these exist) are often excluded. Exceptions exist of course. Among the Apapocúva-Guaraní (South America) dead children go to the "country without evil." About women the opinions vary. Islam, for example, originally excluded women from the heavenly paradise, arguing that women had no immortal soul. In fact, the idea of moral retribution after death is absent from a great number of religions.

Where the conception of reward or punishment according to ethical principles does occur, it is necessary to divide the abode of the dead into two or more sections that may be localized in different places: heaven(s) and hell(s), and in some instances a place in between where souls are purified before they are allowed to enter heaven: purgatory. This may be combined with the belief in reincarnation, as in Buddhism, such that neither heaven nor hell is eternal, the latter becoming a kind of purgatory and the former only a temporary state of conditioned bliss. In cultures where a belief in reincarnation is accepted, the question of the place of a soul's rebirth is understandably of no great importance and the ideas concerning it often remain vague or contradictory.

The distance between the world of the living and the abode of the dead may give rise to the conception of a journey from the one to the other. The Inuit (Eskimo) speak of the road the dead must follow, which seems to be identical with the Milky Way. The Tibetan *Book of the Dead* serves as a guide for the soul on the difficult and dangerous journey to the hereafter and offers detailed "geographical" instructions. The world of the departed may be separated from that of the living by a river (like the Styx in Greece), which must be traversed by boat, or may be crossed by means of a bridge, as the Parsis believe.

Generally the country of the dead is represented more or less as a copy of the world of the living, and life there fol-

lows in the main the same lines as life on earth. In these cases it is difficult to speak of a “geography” of death, which would be distinct from the geography of the living. An extreme example of this is the idea which the Admiralty Islanders on Manus (near New Guinea) have developed. In Manus, personality survives death in all respects, at least for a time. A man’s property remains his own and even his profession, if he has one, remains unchanged. Reo F. Fortune reports in his book *Manus Religion* that if the deceased was a member of the native constabulary appointed by the Australian administration, he remains a policeman among the ghosts after death. There he receives the periodic visits of a ghostly white district officer of a ghostly white administration and collects the ghostly taxes paid by his fellow ghosts. It is clear that in this case the conception of the country of the dead is an exact double of the land of the living. The living and the dead co-exist in space, having only different modes of being. Here it is hardly possible to speak of a distinct geography of death. Although this is perhaps an extreme example, many cases exist in which the dwelling places of the dead are considered to be in the immediate neighborhood of those of the living.

The Greek settlers in southern Italy considered some wild and eerie regions as parts of the underworld existing on the surface of the earth. “Lake without birds” was an appellation of the underworld, Avernus. The *facilis descensus Averno* of which the Roman poet Vergil speaks could be located next to one’s own home. Even when the hereafter is conceived as a mirror image of the world of the living, the difference is not as great as it may seem. Things may be reversed, left and right, up and down, the cycle of the seasons may have changed places, but the general principles remain the same.

Where the dead are thought to remain present in the place where they are buried (the conception of the “living corpse”), a special country of the dead may be absent, or at least unimportant. The same is true when the dead are thought to change into animals living in their natural habitat. Nevertheless, the dead always remain separated from the living, at least by their different mode of being, whether or not they are further separated by the location of the realm of which they have become inhabitants. When we find the belief that human beings after death will be reunited again with the cosmos—often considered as divine—there is a transformation in the mode of being, but the question of a geography of the dead does not properly arise. This is the case, for instance, in the Indian concept of *ātman*, the self, which returns after death to *brahman*. Where the final destination of man is conceived negatively, as in the Buddhist nirvana, any attempt to “locate” this final state falls under the same negative strictures.

GEOGRAPHIES OF DEATH. In those cases where there is the elaboration of a distinct geography of death, there appear to be three main possibilities, each with minor variations. The world of the dead may be on earth, under the earth, or in heaven. Numerous examples can be given of each.

In the first case, the world of the dead is situated on earth, but at a lesser or greater distance away from the dwellings of the living. The Trobriand Islanders (New Guinea) situate the village of the dead in the direct neighborhood of their own villages. The Celtic Tirnanog is an island in the far west on the other side of the immense ocean. According to the Tasmanians (Australia) the dead travel to an island nearby where they continue their existence; in parts of the Northern Territory (Australia) the island of the dead is situated far off in the direction of the Morning Star. According to the Ewe (Togo) the country of the dead lies a long way off from that of the living on the far side of a river, and the journey to arrive there is difficult and dangerous. We also frequently find peoples having traditions of migration, and here in many cases the abode of the departed is identified with the people’s original home, described in myth. Starting from Southeast Asia, we find all over the Pacific variations of the name *Java*, not only as the actual island of the living, but also as the mythic island of the dead. This “principle of return,” as it has been called, often appears in the orientation of the corpse at burial that is based on the idea of the return to the country of origin.

In the second case, the realm of the dead is situated beneath the earth or under the water. The idea of an underworld as the dwelling place of the departed is probably the commonest of all concepts in this sphere. The idea of an entrance to this region through a deep hole in the ground or a cave is also widespread. The Hopi (North America) locate the village of the dead, Kotluwalawa, in the depth of a lake called “Whispering Water.” When located beneath the earth, the world of the dead is usually conceived as either a realm of shadowy figures or shades, as in the case of the Israelite She’ol and the Greek Hades, or as a place of punishment. On Bellona Island, for instance, the dead are believed to live in darkness under the ground, whereas the living inhabit the world of light on the earth. The Babylonian realm of the dead, the “country of no return,” is pictured in the myth of Ishtar’s descent to hell in similar terms:

The house of darkness,
The house the inhabitants of which lack light,
The place where dust is their food
and excrements their nourishments,
Where they see no light and live in darkness.

The specification of the underworld as a place of punishment is closely connected with the more general phenomenon of the differentiation of destinies after death. As noted briefly above, a number of cultures believe in such a differentiation. We may distinguish two main types: one based on the principle of social or ritual status, and one according to ethical principles. Where the main criterion at first appears to be a kind of knowledge, closer inspection reveals that this type is best understood as a subdivision of the first social or ritual one. In the first type, illustrated for instance by the Delaware and Algonquin (North America), there exists a concept of a different destiny after death for different social or ritual

groups. The fate of those lacking such status remains open. They are simply excluded from the regular abode of the dead without further thought being given to the problem of where and how they continue their existence.

The most common type of differentiation, however, is based upon ethical principles, which are employed to separate those who are to be rewarded after death from those who are to be punished. Along with this notion of postmortem punishment comes the notion of hell and purgatory as the locations where such punishments take place. While it is true that not all subterranean abodes of the dead are hells, it does seem to be the case that all hells are understood to be subterranean. Realms of darkness beneath the earth beyond the reach of sun and moon, they are illuminated solely by the flames that punish the damned.

In the final case, the world of the dead may be situated in heavenly spheres. This concept is also a very common one. We find it, for instance, in Egypt as one of several ideas concerning the location of the hereafter. The belief that this country is to be sought somewhere high in the mountains is only a variation, since in many religions mountaintops symbolize heaven and the dwelling place of the gods, as, for example, Olympus did in Greece. The Dusun (North Kalimantan, Borneo) situate the abode of the dead on a high mountain. Another variation is the belief that the dead continue their existence on or among the stars.

The heavenly country of the dead is often represented as a more or less idealized replica of that of the living. The Ngaju Dayak (South Kalimantan, Borneo), for example, go to Lewu Liau after death, a village of spirits situated in a lovely and fertile country, near a river full of fish and with woods filled with game nearby. Everything that is found on earth is found there too, but it is a better world where such things as criminality are unknown. We also encounter profane versions of such heavenly paradises, such as the land of Cocagne, mentioned in fairy tales and usually located in heavenly spheres.

MULTIPLE GEOGRAPHIES: THE EXAMPLE OF ANCIENT EGYPT. Ancient Egypt offers us an example of a multiple geography of death, combining in a single religion many of the different types we have mentioned above. Although there is no reason to think that the culture of Egypt was an especially somber one, it is true that its preoccupation with death and afterlife was great. Although the Egyptians believed in a judgment of the dead by Osiris, the god of the underworld, there seems to have been no concept of hell. Those souls that could not pass the divine judgment were destined to be eaten by Ammit, "she who devours." Egypt also knew the idea of a second and definitive death in the hereafter. The *Book of Going Forth by Day* in fact relates a myth according to which the entire world will in the end return to its primal state prior to creation, to a state of chaos or nothingness.

Egyptian religion is of particular interest because of the multiple ways in which it conceived of the hereafter, called

in Egyptian Duat, the zone of twilight, or heaven by night. Five distinct conceptions may be mentioned.

First, the Egyptians recognized a country of the dead, named Amentet, the West. More exactly, this term applies to the western frontier of the fertile land, the edge of the desert where the necropolises were located. The idea of the dead who live on in the grave and graveyard was also known. The realm of the dead is at times situated beneath the earth, which it more or less duplicates, and at other times it is pictured as a system of caves and passages. In both of these cases, the dead living there are believed to be visited by the sun at night. Then there are the "Earu fields," conceived as a heavenly copy of the land of Egypt, complete with a heavenly Nile, yet superior to earth in every way. Finally, the country of the dead may be located in heaven among the stars, especially in the north among the circumpolar stars, which the Egyptians called the "stars that never die."

SEE ALSO Heaven and Hell; Otherworld; Underworld.

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AFTERLIFE: AFRICAN CONCEPTS

Discussing African notions of afterlife necessitates several preliminary and pertinent observations.

First, Africa is characterized by a tremendous ethnic and cultural diversity. There are about three thousand African ethnic groups, each boasting a distinctive common history, culture, language, and recognizable belief system. Thus, it is possible to speak of the Yoruba notions of afterlife and compare these, say, to the Igbo or Zulu concepts, noting distinctions and similarities. This article will factor in this palpable ethnic diversity in order to avoid sweeping generalizations.

Across the many ethnic groupings and cultural expressions, however, one can discern commonalities in worldviews that make it possible to speak of an "African" worldview as compared, say, to a "Hindu" one. Summarizing distinctive markers of this African worldview, Sambuli Moshia isolates four key ideas, namely: (1) the centrality of belief in God, (2) an acknowledgment of the intrinsic unity between individuals and communities, (3) viewing the universe as an interconnected, interdependent whole, (4) embracing life as a process of spiritual formation and transformation (Moshia, 2000). All these markers shape the way Africans conceptualize both this life and the hereafter. These commonalities in worldview despite cultural ethnic differences will be assumed in this article.

Secondly, African beliefs are *dynamic* rather than static. They are shaped and influenced by other belief systems that they encounter in history. While this dynamism is manifest in all aspects of belief, here we focus on concepts of the hereafter. In this regard, we note for example that ancient Egyptians held very clear eschatological ideas featuring notions of heaven and hell and a final judgment. Thus, in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, a text designed to be a guide for the soul as it journeyed on beyond physical death, Osiris determines the destiny of the dead. Having measured their moral worth against the feather of Maat (symbolizing truth and justice), he sends them "west," to the "abode of the righteous," or to "hell." Today, the pyramids where the pharaohs, ancient Egyptian kings believed to be immortal, were entombed remain an enduring testimony of the ancient Egyptians' preoccupation with life after death.

Two thousand years later, these Egyptian ideas of the hereafter were part of the repertoire of beliefs in circulation

in the Mediterranean world as Christianity was taking shape. Later still, in the nineteenth century, through Christian missionaries these ideas found their way into sub-Saharan Africa. Here, they reinforced prior indigenous concepts of the afterlife where these already incorporated notions of a final judgment, as in the case of the Yoruba of Nigeria and LoDagaa of Ghana (Ray, 1976, pp. 143ff). Elsewhere, for example among the Agikuyu of Kenya, ideas of heaven and hell were introduced *de novo*, since this community's prior concepts of the hereafter had no such notions. Among the Gikuyu, as was typical in most indigenous African communities, though one's moral misconduct could provoke divine anger and punishment, such punishment was this-worldly rather than delayed and otherworldly. The impact of historical encounters between cultures, and the ensuing dynamism, transformation, and fluidity of ideas will be recognized and factored in this analysis.

Against this background then, and drawing examples from the vast pool of diverse African cultures, this article discusses the topic under several interrelated headings, namely:

- Afro-theism, Cosmogonies, and African Notions of Afterlife
- Concepts of the Human Person and Implications for Life After Death
- Notions of Afterlife: Clues from Mortuary and Funerary Rituals
- The Living-Dead: Corporate Identity and the Destiny of the Individual
- The Living and the Dead: The Status and Role of Ancestors
- Change, Continuity, and Contestation: The Impact of Christianity and Other Religions

AFRO-THEISM, COSMOGONIES, AND AFRICAN NOTIONS OF AFTERLIFE. The African worldview is decidedly theistic. God (named differently by various ethnic groups) is the creative force behind the origins of the universe and human beings within it, a belief that appears in many African cosmogonic myths. These myths also indicate that in God's original intentions, the world was orderly, and human beings led a happy life in a state of immortality as long as they were close to God, their creator. Somehow, this state was interrupted, and death entered the world. Ray (1976, p. 24) reports that according to a myth of original "paradise lost" held by the Tutsi of Rwanda, in the beginning, Imana, God, created two worlds, the one above and the one below. The world below was the opposite of the world above, since it lacked in beauty and prosperity. Initially, human beings lived close to the sky and were therefore near enough to the world above to enjoy its benefits without struggle and labor. Sickness was not known, and when people died, Imana brought them back to life after three days. Perhaps because of human disobedience or greed, this relationship was lost. The promise of happiness brought by proximity to God was severed and remains only

a vague future possibility. According to the myth, humans continue to suffer hardships in this world, until one day when, their expiation over, they will return to the sky. It seems from this myth that the Tutsi understand happiness and immortality to be dependent on how well they maintain the link between themselves and God.

Quite different to the Tutsi myth with its promise of at least a rudimentary eschatological hope, the Nuer myth of paradise lost stipulates that in the beginning all was happiness, since the heavens, God's abode, and earth were linked by a rope, the pathway to access divine favors and bounty. According to this myth, upon death people ascended to the sky via the rope for a short period and came back rejuvenated to earth. When the rope was severed, death became a permanent feature of the human condition. The myth suggests that this group believes that immortality is gone forever and only life and death within this world remain (Ray, 1976).

CONCEPTS OF THE HUMAN PERSON AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LIFE AFTER DEATH. More clues regarding African notions of afterlife can be gleaned from an examination of African concepts of the person. Now, in some belief systems, say Hinduism, the person is defined as the soul that is contained or even imprisoned in the body. Indeed, within Hinduism, one goal of religious activity is to facilitate the ultimate separation or liberation (*moksha*) of the soul (*ātman*) breaking out of once and for all the unending and tragic cycle of reimpediment (*samsāra*).

In general, within the African context, such a rigid dualism between body and soul is not found. Instead of conceiving the person as a soul that is *contained* in a body, Africans define the person as an integral whole constituting the "outer person" (the body) and the "inner self." The Yoruba call this inner person *ori-inu* (Idowu, 1994, p. 170). Symbolized by the physical head, *ori* is also connected with God, Olódùmarè, who is the source of all being and before whom one's *ori* kneels to receive one's destiny prior to being born into this world. One's *ori*, therefore, is the *essence* of one's personality as it controls and guides one's life according to the destiny received prior to birth. At the end of one's physical life, one will give an account of one's earthly conduct before Olódùmarè (God) who will determine one's postmortem existence either in the "*Orun rere*" (Paradise or good orun) or "*Orun apadi*" (hell or Orun of the Potsherds), where one suffers a wretched afterlife. According to Bolaji Idowu, life in the "good *Orun*" is but a larger and freer copy of this worldly life, minus earthly pains and tribulations. The best postmortem reward is a reunion with one's relatives who have died before, particularly ancestors, the *Ara Orun* (Idowu, 1994, p. 177). Although Idowu presented this idea of afterlife in the context of traditional Yoruba society, it is important to note that some scholars have questioned this apparently theological explication of the Yoruba notion of afterlife. The notion may be due to the strong influence of Islam and Christianity on Yoruba culture at the time Idowu collected his materials.

That a person is considered a composite and integral whole is also evident in that often, when people claim to encounter the dead through visions and dreams or when they communicate with them through ritual, they claim to have met or spoken with "so and so," a person identifiable by name, rather than the "ghost" of so and so. Given this integral relationship between the outer and inner person, then, it would seem that at death it is the person that dies rather than "the soul" leaving the body and flying away, as some Christian popular hymns indicate.

NOTIONS OF AFTERLIFE: CLUES FROM MORTUARY AND FUNERARY RITUALS. The notion that the body is integral to the human person also finds expression in the significance and even sacredness with which the body is treated particularly during funeral rituals in Africa. Such rituals and related "oratures" (myths, stories, and songs) constitute a commentary by humans on their experiences in this world and its beyond and offer significant clues regarding concepts of the afterlife.

In the oratures, the fact of dying is often described using the metaphor of a journey. Death is depicted as "saying goodbye" to the living or "saying yes" (*gwiitika* in Gikuyu) to a summons by God. Many people describe death as "a going home" (in Gikuyu, *kuinuka*) or simply, a departure (Gikuyu, *guthie*). Death is also described as "sleeping" or "resting."

This use of the metaphor of a journey is related to the fact that in general, as indicated earlier, Africans view life itself as a journey. Life is an unfolding, a process of "formation and transformation" that starts before birth and does not end at physical death. During crucial moments of this life journey, special rituals (rites of passage) designed to mark, celebrate, and help the individual successfully negotiate the key turning points, including death, are performed. Thus, for example, among the Swazi, burial of the dead is only done after three days. It is said that going through the physical death process is exhausting to the sojourner and therefore the deceased needs a few days to recuperate before continuing in the next phase of the life journey. The Swazi also bury their dead with all their vital earthly belongings, thus equipping them for the next phase of their life journey, beyond physical death. (M'passou in Cox, 1998, p. 28). Furthermore, during the period between death and burial, the Swazi, as do other communities, observe a vigil both to console the bereaved and to keep the deceased person company as they transit between this world and the next (M'passou in Cox, 1998).

Rituals are also performed to prepare and equip the deceased for the journey ahead and also to "inform" those on the other side that the deceased is on the way and they should expect him or her. The Chagga of Tanzania believe that this journey to the world of ancestors takes nine days. To make the journey easier, the corpse is anointed with fat, fed with milk, and covered with a hide to protect it from the elements. A bull is also killed specifically for the deceased's grandfather to alert him so that he can await the deceased (Mbiti, 1969, p. 155).

Mortuary rituals also emphasize the integral connection between the “inner and outer person.” Since the body is integral to the person, a deceased’s body is treated with utmost respect. Appropriate burial and “disposal” of the body is therefore important; otherwise, the person cannot make the transition into the other world. For this reason, even when a wild beast devours a body, leaving only a few shreds or pieces, these are carefully collected and accorded a full and respectful burial. In situations where a corpse is not retrievable, say because of drowning, a burial must still be performed, and so in some societies, a surrogate is used. The Luo of Kenya, for example, use the yago fruit, which is several feet in length and is laid in the grave to represent the dead. It is also for this reason that cremation is not a preferred method of disposal of the dead in the African context.

Failure to perform burial rites properly makes the deceased unable to negotiate the postmortem phase of the life journey successfully. Such frustrated persons may have to “come back,” looking for help or for some vital equipment necessary of the journey. The Luo call such restless, deceased persons *jochiende*, while the Shona call them *mashave*. Such restless and wondering spirits are said to haunt and afflict the living as they try to gain their attention.

THE LIVING DEAD: CORPORATE IDENTITY AND THE DESTINY OF THE INDIVIDUAL. Mortuary rituals also reveal that Africans consider death a paradox. On the one hand, death and burial signifies an end to one’s physical life. Meticulous and proper burial signifies that Africans understand the finality of death as a marker of the end of physical life. Death is therefore frustrating because it takes away a loved one and robs people of the companionship and other gifts that such a relationship brings. This frustration is expressed through funeral dirges. For this reason, too, death is also vigorously, collectively, and publicly mourned.

Simultaneously, however, death is not an annihilation of the person. Though the deceased may be physically gone, they are still here as persons and the living can still communicate with them. Paradoxically, then, the dead are not dead, a paradox that led Mbiti to coin the phrase “the Living-Dead” (1969, p. 81).

The belief that the dead are not dead is expressed and dramatized through rituals designed to welcome and install the deceased back into the world of the living. The Luo of Kenya call this ritual *Duogo* (Ongonga in Cox, 1998, p. 236), while the Xhosa of South Africa call it *Ukubuyisa* (Pato, in Oosthuizen and Irving, 1992, p. 134). For the Shona of Zimbabwe, the ritual is called *Kurova Guva* and is performed by every member of the family, who must explicitly through ritual offerings and libations indicate willingness to welcome the deceased as a continuing member of the family despite physical death. The deceased is also ritually consulted to indicate his or her acceptance thus to be reintegrated into the family (Gundani in Cox, 1998, p. 201).

According to Mbiti (1969, p. 158), this continued remembrance of the Living-Dead and their sustained interac-

tion with the living constitutes the individual’s “personal immortality.” One enjoys this status so long as there are people left behind to remember him or her. As a Living-Dead one continues to be involved in matters of the corporate group of family and clan and retains one’s personal name and corporate identity in this context. Thus, this is a status clearly linked or even dependent on one’s place in and relationship to the corporate group, particularly the family. When after a long time such individuals are no longer remembered by name, they enter a state of what Mbiti calls collective immortality as they blend into the general world of those who have gone before (Mbiti, 1969). The Swahili call this community of the dead *Mizimu*, while their abode is referred to as *Kuzimu*.

THE LIVING AND THE DEAD: THE STATUS AND ROLE OF ANCESTORS. The installation of the deceased back into family simultaneously marks the induction of the deceased into the world of ancestors. Henceforth, the deceased person can be honored in family rituals alongside other ancestors and enjoy a privileged position both among the living and the dead. This status, however, is not automatic. Rather, it depends on how well one conducted oneself in this life as a member of the corporate group. Those who have fulfilled their corporate duties and obligations as the community defines them are honored as “ancestors,” a status analogous to but not identical to that of sainthood in Christianity. Being moral exemplars, the ancestors are also considered custodians and enforcers of justice and morality among the living, and because they are considered ontologically closer to God, they function as intermediaries between God and the people. Thus, petitionary prayer is often said through them.

Ancestorhood is therefore a status of honor reserved for the exemplary dead. The Gikuyu refer to such a persons as *mwendo ni iri* (the people’s beloved). Conversely, those who fail in their worldly obligations, or those whose actions are subversive to rather than nurturing of life, are quickly forgotten and “excommunicated” after death. The Gikuyu call such persons *muimwo ni iri* (rejected by the people). To be thus rejected, excommunicated and forgotten, is truly to die in the African understanding.

CHANGE, CONTINUITY, AND CONTESTATION: THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER RELIGIONS. Historically, Africa is heir to a triple heritage of religion and culture: namely African traditional religions, Islam, and Christianity. As early as the first century CE, most of North Africa was part of the Roman Empire and therefore part of Christendom. Later on, the region came under Islamic influence, and today much of North Africa is Islamic and culturally Arabic. Meanwhile, communities like those of the Swahili of East Africa present a religio-cultural hybridity a result of years of blending indigenous African cultures with Islamic ones. Needless to say, Africans who have come into contact with Islam and Christianity have been influenced by the rather sharply defined eschatological notions featuring a final judgment, heaven and hell, and final resurrection as destinies of the soul. Mus-

lims, for example, are encouraged to persevere through earthly tribulations in view of the “day of the Resurrection” when a judgment will be made in their favor, assuming they live a righteous this-worldly life (see Qur’ān, *sūrah* III:185).

African belief systems have been most palpably influenced and shaped by the encounter with nineteenth-century missionary Christianity. This Christianity was articulated in terms of Western culture, and its introduction coincided with the colonization of Africa. Moreover, for the most part assuming a radical difference between themselves and their worldviews and the Africans and their worldviews, and convinced of the need to convert Africans from their allegedly “primitive” and therefore “inadequate” or even “wrong” beliefs, missionaries deliberately tried to erase African beliefs and practices and to replace these with ostensibly Christian ones. This process had a tremendous impact on all aspects of African beliefs, including notions of the afterlife, our immediate concern here.

For one thing, there seems in Christian discourse and practice, a literal demotion or even demonization of ancestors. Whereas in indigenous African thought ancestors were moral exemplars, enjoying a status of honor to which the living could aspire, today, ancestors are in Christian discourse depicted as evil forces of the same character with the devil. Terms such as *mizimu* (Kiswahili), *emandloti* (Swazi), or *ngoma* (Kikuyu), which traditionally described the ancestors, are today used almost as synonyms for Satan or the devil. Furthermore, the deliberate invocation of *ngoma* or *mizimu* and fellowship with them through libations and prayer (Gikuyu, *kurongoreria*) is in official Christian teaching outlawed because it is considered a breach of the First Commandment. Ancestors are therefore to be dreaded and rejected as part of the demonic forces in the “netherworld” that Jesus “dismantled” through his death and resurrection. Instead of celebrating their exemplary dead, then, many Christianized Africans have seemingly adopted the Christian afterlife discourse and now celebrate angels and saints that are said to populate the heavenly sphere and with whom those who die in good standing with God will live happily after death. Thus, for example, one Gikuyu Christian funeral song bids the deceased farewell and expresses the hope that the person will be met at the gates of heaven by “multitudes of God’s angels” (*Kikuyu Catholic Hymnal*, 1992, hymn 101). Whereas in the past the hope was to attain personal immortality as a Living-Dead and to enjoy a status of honor among the ancestors, Christianized Africans look forward instead to joining an otherworldly/heavenly community of God and angels as defined in the Christian discourse.

A redefinition of the human person also seems to be indicated in the Christian discourse. While traditionally one’s body was considered integral to one’s person and was therefore considered important even after death, today Christian funeral songs depict the body as incidental if not detrimental to one’s positive destiny after death. One such song exhorts the listeners to remember that “our bodies are like flowers

that wither and die” and that “We shall leave our bodies right here on earth and go to heaven in/with our souls/spirits” (*mioyo*) (*Kikuyu Catholic Hymnal*, 1992, hymn 108). People are therefore encouraged to treat the body with suspicion because fleshly desires might derail their souls from the journey to heaven. The denigration of the body implicit in these songs is quite alien to indigenous understandings of the human person and the person’s destiny after death.

The songs also indicate that Christianized Africans have embraced Christian eschatological ideas of heaven and hell and even a postmortem judgment. Thus, while Africans continue to see death as a “saying yes” to God’s summons, this summons is a prelude to God’s judgment, which determines one’s final postmortem destiny in heaven or hell. Thus, as another song reminds the listener, the issue that one should worry about is not death itself, since death is inevitable. The issue of concern is whether at death one will be in a state of readiness to meet God in the final judgment (*Kikuyu Catholic Hymnal*, 1992, hymn 100).

Simultaneously, however, while many seem to have embraced these Christianized notions of the afterlife, there is evidence, even among Christianized Africans, of a marked resistance to the seeming demonization of African beliefs, particularly beliefs in ancestors. Many Christians, albeit in camouflaged or covert ways, continue to honor and remember their dead through ritual in spite of the formal doctrinal ban. The traditional rituals of reinstating the dead into the world of the living, for example, seem to reappear camouflaged in the quite prevalent Christian rituals of “unveiling the tombstone” or “unveiling the cross.” Such rituals, usually performed a year after death and burial, are reminiscent of *Kurova Gwa*, *Ukubuyisa*, or *Duogo* rituals mentioned earlier. In Catholic circles, Christianized Africans also ritually connect with deceased family members through requesting a Mass for the dead, a doctrinally legitimate practice. This is reminiscent of rituals of communion with the deceased through shared meals and libations. Such Masses for the dead are routinely “bought,” particularly around November 2, the Feast of All Souls in the Catholic liturgical calendar.

Recently, recognizing that rituals to honor the dead are carried out despite the ban, and conceding that ancestors hold a key position in African traditional religions the Catholic Synod of African Bishops recommended that attempts be made to harmonize African beliefs in ancestors with Christian beliefs regarding saints (Schotte, 1992, p. 55). This recommendation finds significant support in the thought of a growing number of African theologians such as Jean Marc Ela, a Cameroonian priest, who find the demotion and demonization of African beliefs problematic. Such theologians assert the compatibility of African beliefs with Christian ones if only the latter can shed their Western garb and be clothed afresh in terms of African culture, a process called “inculturation.” In this discourse of “inculturation theology” ancestors still emerge as moral exemplars, and instead of Jesus dismantling the ancestors, he is portrayed in this theology as the “ancestor par excellence.”

These theologians also argue that beyond the question of the status of ancestors in the hereafter, the ban on African beliefs in ancestors has far reaching implications in the here and now. As Ela, for example, argues in his book *My Faith as An African* (1990), ancestral veneration is simultaneously an affirmation about life after death but also an affirmation of African notions of family, which includes the living, the dead, as well as the not yet born. Doctrinally, to ban ancestral veneration, then, is to demand that Africans abandon this quite viable notion of family (Ela, 1990, p. 17). Furthermore, the ban is seemingly based on Christian notions of afterlife that define salvation as a matter of the individual's disembodied soul getting to an "otherworldly heaven." These individualistic, otherworldly, and disembodied notions of salvation seem contrary to the indigenous sensibilities that focus on "embodied" and "corporate" destiny of the person both in this life and beyond.

For this reason, and in view of the many negative social ramifications of radical individualism in Africa, Ela claims that a reclamation of African beliefs in ancestors is simultaneously a reclamation of the more viable African notion of human destiny, which focus on interconnectedness and interdependence between the individual and the community. For Ela, such a reclamation is not only doctrinally valid and acceptable but would serve as one possible antidote to "this worldly" problems that thrive on radical individualism (Ela, 1990, pp. 24ff).

It would seem, then, that contemporary debates about the afterlife in Africa are simultaneously discussions about this world and this life. It would seem also that the emphasis by Africans on a this-worldly and corporate approach to salvation resonates significantly with the prior key affirmations about God and the world in the African worldview. As we recall, Africans believe that the destiny of the individual and the community are interdependent, interconnected, and intertwined. Africans also believe in a universe that is in process of formation and transformation, and therefore life means being involved in a process of becoming, together. Moreover, in the African view, to be is to participate in an ongoing dance of life propelled by God's creative and sustaining power. This dance is only interrupted, not ended, by physical death. In the African worldview, then, notions about the "afterlife" and notions of "this life" complement and flow into one another.

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TERESIA MBARI HINGA (2005)

AFTERLIFE: AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS CONCEPTS

There are no easy generalizations to be made when dealing with issues associated with ritual particular beliefs in indigenous Australia pertaining to the question of what happens to the spirits of individuals after death. This article will focus on one region of Australia to illustrate concepts involving what may loosely be called afterlife. The particular group is the Yanyuwa people of the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria in Australia's Northern Territory.

For the Yanyuwa, the body possesses two spirits: the first, *ardirri*, comes from the land of one's paternal ancestors,

and begins the process of pregnancy. Upon birth, this spirit inhabits the bones of an individual, as they are considered the least corruptible body parts. The second spirit is the *na-ngawulu*, which is often translated as the "shade" or "shadow" of an individual, also the Yanyuwa word for an actual shadow. This spirit is represented in the body by the pulse or the heartbeat. There is also the *wuwarr* spirit, which upon death manifests itself as a ghost of a person. Certain ritual actions take place in the community to remove the presence of the *wuwarr* spirit, potentially dangerous and malevolent, described as jealous of its living kin. The *na-ngawulu* is said to travel east to the spirit world, where it will live in contentment in a rich environment, but speaking a new language and "having new ears so it can no longer hear its living relatives" (Dinah Norman Marrngawi, personal communication, 2004). In more recent times—since contact with Christianity—this is the spirit that is said to travel to heaven or hell.

In the past, the piercing of the nasal septum was a common practice in Yanyuwa society. This was said to open the nose so that upon death, the spirit of the deceased would be able to smell the spirit world. The body was placed on a platform until the flesh decayed, and then the bones were gathered for further ritual to take place one to two years later. Today, internment takes place in a cemetery, but the post-funeral rituals occur as in the past. These rituals are said to join the *wuwarr* spirit to the *ardirri* (creating a spirit called the *kuyara*), and to send the spirit back to its own spiritual source on the land, where it can await rebirth as another human being. In the past, this return to country was actual, with the bones of the deceased interred in a hollow log coffin decorated with powerful designs relating to the deceased individual and country of origin. Contemporary Yanyuwa people see no conflict with new systems relating to death and dealing with various spirits, and indigenous Australians are able to construct relevant understandings of what happens after death.

However, the spirits of deceased individuals are also said to remain in the country they once inhabited, constituting a community that parallels the living Yanyuwa community. These spirits of the deceased continue to hunt and travel all over the country and sea, watching the actions of their living relatives. The spirits are said to be jealous of their living kin, and to have the ability, if they choose, to cause harm and hardship. Conversely, they can help the living, appearing in dreams and assisting their relatives with the retention of information such as place names and song cycle verses.

There are times when the inhabitants of this spirit world and the land itself are seen to be one and the same. In speaking about the land and these deceased kin, people interchange the terms for land (*awara*) and spirits (*li-ngabangaku*) often colloquially as the old people (*li-wankala*), so that one can talk about how the country has become poor and then say that the spirits of the deceased are jealous or cheeky. Both of these comments mean the same thing. One way of dealing

with a land that has spirits residing within it is by actively speaking to the land, or “talking to country.” This may involve long speeches in high oratory, or may consist of a simple statement that says no more than “here I am.” Senior men and women may do no more than shout to announce their presence. This is especially so if people are still often in touch with the locality they are visiting; the land and the spirits of the deceased residing there will be familiar with them. There are times when nothing needs to be said, because people are still moving through the location. When people have not visited a locality for a long period of time, or the actions of the deceased kin are said to be working against the living, speaking to country becomes one way in which a consensus is reached between the living and the dead. By the use of oratory, order is created whereby the speaker draws on the past, reaching out to the deceased kin through genealogy and relationship, and identifying a person or group of people with a locality. It also states by what authority the person is coming to the country, and in what way the person is related. This authority is conveyed by the calling of place names and the names of people who were once associated with the country. The use of names provides a key by which an understanding is given to the event as it unfolds, but the names are also echoes from the past and links with the present generation, and are important for the negotiation of entry to place. A common phrase used in these orations translates as “do not be ignorant towards me.” They are also rhetorical statements of an individual’s position in relation to significant others. The presentation of self and negotiation with such orations are not beyond dispute and are also the topic of conversations where they will be evaluated against the status of the individual. People can also still often have accidental interaction with these spirits; some of these interactions are seen to be alarming and potentially dangerous while others are seen to be humorous and to be expected. Either way, they become an important source of storytelling.

While there are formal means by which the spirits of deceased are to be dealt with, there is no clear-cut understanding about the ultimate nature of the spirit in Yanyuwa society and what happens at death. What is clear, however, is that a portion of a deceased person will still reside on the land and it is this spirit that involves constant negotiation. While generalizations can be misleading in relation to indigenous understanding of death and afterlife, this belief in spirits of the deceased on the land is widespread across much of Australia.

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JOHN BRADLEY (2005)

AFTERLIFE: OCEANIC CONCEPTS

The idea of the temporal continuance of some aspect of the deceased is widespread, if not universal, in Oceanic cultures. In some cases, as with the Dreaming of Australia, or the redoubled “Sky World” of the Enga people of the New Guinea highlands, the condition of the dead is coeval with the life they had lived, though on a different plane of existence. More commonly, the “place” of the dead is identified with some remote or inaccessible location, beneath the ground, under the sea, or, as with the people of the Trobriand Islands, a haunted and little-visited island (Tuma).

Because death betokens an inevitable separation, never mind the “communication” that may follow, the answer to “what happens to the human essence after the body dies?” may run away with the question. It is often coincident with a more comprehensive cosmological vision. If the best one could do to describe *this present life*, here on earth, would be a matter of metaphors and analogies, then what difference if the condition of the dead were described in that way also? For many Oceanic peoples the condition of dying itself is considered to be a long, protracted process, intermingled with grieving and mortuary practices, and the bodies of the deceased, as well as their possessions, become highly charged social objects. For many Austronesian-speaking Melanesian societies, death has great power, and a highly articulated mortuary feasting complex serves as the focus for all social life.

It would be fair to say that for many Oceanic peoples the terminal condition of the deceased is coincident with social dismissal, postponed long after the body ceases to function, and that the “afterlife” is really a sort of “half-life,” analogous to the radioactive decay of an element. Living persons encounter the deceased in quasi-human form, or vice-versa, and there may be as much uncertainty and doubt among the indigenous folk as to what is actually going on as among those who study them. Death “takes prisoners,” as it were, and may take a long time letting them go. There are a great many peoples in Oceania who would rather not believe in ghosts.

Those who meet their deaths through violent means, in warfare or accident, belong, in many Oceanic cultures, to a

special category of after-death experience. They are conceived as restless, mobile, angry spirits, eager to avenge their unfortunate plight back upon the living, and so very dangerous and threatening. The concept is similar to that of the *preta* in the Sanskrit tradition, and to other, analogous precepts found in India and Southeast Asia. It has a widespread distribution in the Pacific, in one form or another, from the divination for “happy” as against “unhappy” ghosts on the islands of Yap, in Micronesia, to the fabled (and often surprisingly real) “Night Marchers” of Hawai’i. One New Irelander, from the Bismarck archipelago, put it this way: “Just how many American and Japanese servicemen died out there in the Pacific? Some days you can see them fishing, in gigantic waterspouts, and you can see them up in the coconut trees during a thunderstorm, with fire flashing from their eyes and armpits. When the wind scoops up moisture from the sea, *bring your children into the house!*”

Found occasionally among non-Austronesian speakers as well, the idea is analogous to another, described among coastal Papuan and Torres Strait peoples and encountered by Captain Bligh in the Tahiti area. This is that those who are shipwrecked at sea become automatically strangers to the land, demons, no longer human, who *must be killed*, for reasons of safety, by anyone encountering them.

In *Beyond the Kubea* (1940) explorer Jack Hides recounted the feeling of an unidentified interior Papuan people that the spirits of the deceased become visible as “cloud-shadows on the mountains,” meaning perhaps that their afterlives, or at least our inability to make sense of them, are as evanescent as the darkness playing upon the distant expanses of montane rain forest. The idea at least captures something of the feeling of the Japanese notion of “the Floating World.” But it is also emblematic of the problem faced by any inquiry into the particulars of an afterlife concept, for it excludes an explicit denial.

Denial, when met with in this context, has a power of its own. A classic instance of this, easily misunderstood, is the tenet of the Daribi people of interior Papua New Guinea: “When people die, they just go into the ground; their faces disappear, and there is no such thing as a spirit or soul that survives the death.” When asked what they might call such a soul or spirit, the Daribi reply, “It is called the *izibidi*.” A key to what this may mean is given by a literal translation of the term: it means “die person” and not “dead person” (which would be *bidi-iziare*). More properly, then, the action of dying itself, though terminal, has a tenacious after-effect in the potentially dangerous *izibidi*, an anomalous and paradoxical condition that most people would rather deny than think about. Daribi are afraid of *izibidi* for the very fact that they ought not to exist.

Though the Daribi expression of this point (others might call it “agnostic”) is somewhat unusual for the region, its practical implications are not. The expression gives a necessary deniability (as well as considerable power) to the words and actions of the spirit mediums and shamans (*sogoyezibidi*),

the main spiritual agencies in Daribi life. A more general evocation of the paradox was given to the French missionary Maurice Leenhardt (1979) in New Caledonia: “We have always had the *spirit*; what you Westerners brought to us was the *body*.” All the problems and paradoxes regarding afterlife in the Pacific may be said to begin from that point.

For many Melanesian peoples, at least, “afterlife” may be an aberrant approximation, based on the continuing resonance, in memory and in *habitus*, among the survivors, of a striking or powerful *personality* removed from their midst. Thomas Maschio (1994) translates this as “memory” among the Rauto of south New Britain, and the work of Steven Feld (1982) among the Kaluli, of Mount Bosavi in Papua, reveals their *Gisaro* rite as an awesome synchronicity, uniting the worlds of the living and dead through the reverberation of sound. The Gizra folk, of the Papuan south coast, trace the mythic beginnings of our world to “the Woman Kumaz, Originator of Death and Musical Instruments.”

Music may or may not be the voice of the soul, but it is surely our most eloquent evocation of resonance. At all events, it would seem to be the *closeness* or near proximity of death that predominates in many of the Papuan conceptions of afterlife, whereas other Oceanic peoples emphasize the separation. It begins as a journey for many Polynesian peoples. For the New Zealand Maori, one of the most significant shades of the deceased embarks on a long journey after dying and finally comes to reside in a world beneath the sea, very much like our own. On Tahiti the ultimate destination of the deceased depends on choices made, or trials encountered, en route. A kind of paradise, identified as “Fragrant Rohutu,” represents the best of these, whereas the others, according to Christian analogies developed by the missionaries who first described them, correspond to a kind of limbo and a purgatory.

Death implies a journey, as well, for the Afek religion of the Mountain Ok peoples in the Star Mountains, the geographic center of New Guinea. One of the edifices of their Telefopit ritual complex covers the entrance to the bad road into death, called “the Road of Dogs Tearing Flesh.” Another, presided over by the woman Bitsanip, a near reincarnation of the creatress, guards the entrance to the good road into death, and Bitsanip advises those who die to take it.

There is, however, the danger of a false dichotomy in some of these examples, for the journey of the deceased resonates the life values left behind in death, whereas the verses of the Kaluli *Gisaro*, a most piquant instance of death-related resonance, trace the progression of an imaginary traveler across a real landscape. Kaluli call this “singing the garden-names.”

What is missed most in accounts of Oceanic afterlife concepts is neither the fault of those who tell them nor of those who write them down, but most often a glitch in the art of explanation itself, which has a certain afterlife quality of its own. We tend to favor linear, cause-and-effect strate-

gies and vivid depictions of a scenario that is hardly more than guesswork. The best we might hope for would be the kind of pragmatic understanding that combines the afterlife concepts of the peoples in question with those of our own explanatory overtures.

What happens to the *sense* of things after the *senses* have ceased to function? Is the concept of an afterlife something reserved for the living alone, or does it correspond to something that is asymbolic, existing independently of the analogies used for its recognizance? Even our commonplace words and phrases have their resonances, and a sentence is, of course, a journey. But for a number of Melanesian peoples, and perhaps others in Oceania, the question of analogy's correspondence to reality is a moot one. For those gifted with what some scholars have called a "holographic worldview," the differences between symbolic analogy and reality, and perforce between life and death, are summed together automatically and canceled, in the very thinking of them. This means that what might be considered as "afterlife" is fully coterminous with life as it is lived, that what might be called "the symbolic debt" of the living is revoked, that every person becomes a completed being when the holography is engaged on their behalf.

In formal terms, holography amounts to the complete mutual occlusion of part and whole (*any* part and *any* whole) in any contingency. When properly applied, holography obviates the stepwise patterning of logical explanation, or reasoning by analogy, by the simple virtue of being its own analogy for itself. In more familiar terms, a hologram depicts a three-dimensional imagery in a two-dimensional format and obviates the sense that would guess at its depth or spatial placement. In the terms of the mortuary feasting complex of the Barok people of New Ireland, death's hologram is life, and life's hologram is death. "The child in the womb and the corpse in the ground are one and the same thing and the same conception, the ultimate containment called *Kolumé*. In everything we know and do and touch, *Kolumé* is intersected by *Gala*, the ultimate severance, or the cutting-that-nurtures." What would appear to be a mortuary feasting complex is simply a highly formalized and participatory confirmation, performed on behalf of every person who dies, of the elemental oneness of *Gala* and *Kolumé*. Death takes no prisoners, here, and afterlife would be anticlimactic.

We have ample evidence that something of this sort, the holographic death, was the real object of ancient Egyptian mortuary practice, belief, and ritual, though we have not escaped its purely secular afterlife. But we have better evidence, historical contingencies aside, that the Barok version of it is by no means unique in the Oceanic world. Barok themselves point out that something very similar takes place on the offshore islands of Tangga, as perhaps elsewhere in the island arcs of Austronesian-speaking Melanesia. Fine examples have been found on the islands of Sabarl and Vanatinai, in the Massim area, and on the large island of New Guinea. Effective holographic imageries, or in other words asymbolic men-

tal models, have been discovered, usually inadvertently, by ethnographers in a number of places in Oceania.

Closely allied to these is the conception of afterlife that might be called "reflectional," often based on a radical and *highly* articulated form of duality. Among the Enga and a number of other interior New Guinea peoples, each person has a "double," a mirror duplicate that pursues a parallel existence in the sky or in a land beneath the rivers and lakes. A South Angan speaker put it this way: "The one you see in a mirror, or in a pool of water, is not you, and it is not human." For many of these peoples the idea of an afterlife is merely contingent to what amounts to a much stronger principle, that of the self-separate identity as a manifest aspect of a bifurcate cosmos. Thus, the Kaluli, mentioned above, experience afterlife in the form of an animal double living in the forest, the water, or the air. When that creature, in its turn, dies, its spiritual essence reenters the human world.

Duality and holography are neatly combined in the afterlife concepts of many Australian Aboriginal peoples, particularly those of the central desert regions. On the one hand, the everyday world of landscape or "country" is organized according to intricate permutations and combinations of the powers of two—the marriage sections and ritual moieties. On the other hand, the dreaming ("dreamtime"), an eternally creative epoch, is purely holographic and permeates the world of the living on a separate spiritual plane. One enters the dreaming in sleep, in ritual, and necessarily in death. But, because a *part* of one's existence is always fixed in dreaming, "afterlife" describes only one aspect of something with a vast potential scope, and that would have to include such things as "forelife" as well.

Concepts such as that of "reincarnation"—reported more frequently among Australian Aboriginal cultures than elsewhere in the Oceanic region—participate in this potential as well. If the psychology of the dreaming operates in the way that the Aboriginal peoples have described it, then the daily journey of the human soul—waking and sleeping, as well as the ritual cycles of the collective multitude—amount to a complete social encompassment of the reincarnation principle that has no peer anywhere else in the world of human cultures. Asking whether such a thing as reincarnation exists, or why or how it may operate, would be completely beside the point of what these peoples know of it.

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ROY WAGNER (2005)

AFTERLIFE: MESOAMERICAN CONCEPTS

The term *Mesoamerica* defines a broad cultural area of great sociopolitical complexity mediated by many shared religious concepts, cosmological ideas, and ritual practices related to death and the afterlife. Researchers of the Mesoamerican region have divided its history into four periods: Preclassic (2500 BCE–200 CE), Classic (200–650 CE), Epiclassic (650–900 CE) and Postclassic (900–1521 CE). The archaeological evidence and historical record combine to yield a remarkably rich array of pre-Columbian notions of death and their vital role in the daily lives of people.

DEATH, SEED OF LIFE. In the midst of great cultural and regional diversity throughout Mesoamerican history, one clear notion was shared by many if not all peoples: death was more than an occasion for fear, mourning and ritual response; rather, death was perceived as a vital, generative, and creative moment in a cosmic process. In this vision of the world, the cosmos and the human body were perceived in a very particular manner: everything in the universe, in one way or another, had supernatural implications. The gods, who traveled in a helicoidal motion, could manifest themselves anywhere

and in any shape. The sacred powers of the cosmos reached everywhere and the belief in a complementary dualism pervaded all beings, objects, and places as well as the symbolic systems that expressed their roles and meanings.

Death occupies a vital place in this dichotomous universe, an element that, far from fatal, possesses a renewing quality. The sacred books show that death and all beings connected to it are associated with the creation of individuals, of peoples, and of humanity as a whole. Its name was given to one of the days of the Maya calendar, *Cimi*, and had its Mexica counterpart in *Miquiztli*. Furthermore, death was closely associated with maize, which was the sustenance of the Mesoamerican peoples. Death received ritual blood offerings because it was believed that—like the sun in the sky—death, wherever it resided or manifested itself, ensured the continuity of life. Death also played a fundamental role that related it to the earth: like the soil, it received seeds and made the harvests possible. It also housed funerary bundles and, at the end of the day, it devoured the sun, causing the night to fall.

Also associated with this life-generating notion of death was the concept that life could emerge from the world of the dead, as exemplified in the myth that relates how Quetzalcoatl, god of the wind, stole from the nether region the bones with which he created the human race. Similarly, the *Popol Vuh* narrates how the "Twin Heroes" were conceived in that region, where it was possible to die and be resurrected. Despite the peculiarities of each culture, there is enough evidence from the Mesoamerican region to suggest that death was a state closely associated to life, and not a lethal element. A chronological review shows several coincidences in the development of notions of death and life in the netherworld.

DEATH IN MOTION: EARLY AGRICULTURAL SOCIETIES. The regenerative powers of death are shown through different kinds of motion or dynamics. First, death is part of an oscillation between death and life, in that death is a permanent partner of life. This can be traced through the archaeological record. During the middle Preclassic period (1200–400 BCE), the duality of life and death is emphasized, as exemplified in what is considered an extraordinary clay mask found in the archaeological discoveries at the village of Tlatilco, in the Central Highlands. It represents a human face, half of it corresponding to a living being, the other in skeletal form. In this geographical area the motions of the dead in the afterlife are symbolized by the burial of companions for dead humans—companions in the forms of not only funeral offerings and various goods like vessels, jewels, or tools, but the skeletal remains of dogs. We know from late ethnohistorical sources that these dogs were believed to accompany individuals, gods, and the sun in their journeys to the underworld. With time, the presence of dogs in Mesoamerican tombs becomes a trait. As for the offerings, they might correspond to materials deemed to be needed by the soul in its journey to the netherworld.

In the western regions of Mesoamerica, a broad variety of funeral rites associated with shaft tombs suggest a kind of social continuity and movement in the afterlife. Archaeologists have learned that these tombs reveal not only distinctive ways of treating the dead body, but also a strong commitment to family ties and ethnic relations. Typically, several individuals were laid to rest in each of these shaft tombs, and in some instances blood ties have been established between the individuals in one grave. The offerings of tools, which would be used by the deceased to perform his or her job in the afterlife, were common in the later periods—in the netherworld the deceased continued with the work performed while they were alive.

An important finding of the late Preclassic period (400 BCE–200 CE) is a stele found in Izapa, Chiapas, a work considered to be of unparalleled craftsmanship that depicts a seated skeleton wearing a mask on its face. It is one of the earliest representations of death as an element in motion.

DEATH IN THE EARLY CITIES. There are many archaeological examples of the funerals of dignitaries and the importance of lineage during the exequies, and of the relationship of lineage with monumental architecture. For the rest of the population, however, funeral rites seem to be associated with domestic spaces.

In Teotihuacan, the most cosmopolitan of the region's urban centers, numerous sculptural and painted images show that rain, fertility and the commitment to sustaining agricultural resources have been found. A fundamental notion of pre-Columbian thought developed in this imposing city—the ritual significance of caves and their association with life and death. These openings, whether natural or man-made, were associated with the netherworld because of their symbolic relation to a uterus, a tomb, and the jaws of the mythic “earth monster.” As confirmed by some late narratives, the life of the ancestors is thought to originate in the cave and, in serving as tombs, caves are also the final destination for some individuals. In Teotihuacan, which is a sacred recreation of the cosmos, caves were a crucial element—from them came the raw material to build the city, and rituals took place inside them that were closely associated with death.

Teotihuacan's sophisticated agricultural cosmivision and technology is evident in the astonishing colorful murals found in palaces and apartment compounds. In the eastern quadrant of the great capital, archaeologists uncovered what is known as the Tepantitla complex, and they were able to restore a series of colorful murals depicting something like a terrestrial paradise. This paradise or sacred afterlife shows richly bejeweled characters in different postures and actions, a great blooming tree with a dynamic, twisted trunk and a richly costumed deity presiding over the scene. This image has been interpreted as Tláloc's paradise, or the Tlalocan.

During this period (c. 200 CE) death by sacrifice became a common practice as evidenced by numerous stunning discoveries in the great ceremonial compound known today as

the Ciudadela. At the heart of the Ciudadela stands a majestic pyramid-temple decorated with alternating images of Quetzalcoatl and, possibly, Tláloc. Recent archaeological work found 134 human skeletons with their hands tied in the back. Exceptional offerings were placed near the individuals, such as luxurious necklaces made of shell (representing human mandibles). Often, with these immolations, the people returned the sacrifices the gods had made in the original times. Thus, death became fundamental to the operation of the cosmos.

The evidence from other sites is often considered surprising. Iconographic representations engraved in walls and pottery of the Maya region depict skeletons in motion, participating in rituals or presiding over scenes. Examples from the more lavish and complex funerals, such as the tomb of Pacal, the ruler of Palenque, date to this time. The elaboration of a monolithic sarcophagus, the carving of a tombstone, and the construction of the pyramid to function as a sepulcher, are all examples of extensive planning. Together with the sacrifice of companions and the lavish offering, this evidence demonstrates the importance of the notion of an afterlife and, probably, of the journey the ruler had to undergo to reach his destination. In this imposing tomb there is also an exultation of life and death: An image of the deceased was carved on the cover of the sarcophagus, a maize plant emerging from his chest. Such magnificent royal sepulchers are common throughout the Maya region.

Oaxaca is another region where the dual notion of life and death is apparent. The evidence from mural paintings, the clay masks that show skeletal facial features, and the location of Zapotec tombs (placed under rooms, patios, and temples) all point to the importance of death in everyday life. The area of the Gulf of Mexico is not an exception. The clay figurines from Zapotal, Veracruz, are one example, as they represent skeletons that are associated with the god of the underworld.

URBAN REORGANIZATION: SYMBOLS OF SACRIFICIAL DEATH. Different notions of death and sacrifice were consolidated during the Epiclassic period. Among these, the importance of the notion of glorious death in times of war becomes common in the archaeological record. In the city of Tajín, references to sacrifice and decapitation associated with ball games are grandly carved in stone. In the Mayan region, Chichén Itzá is another clear example of the increasing importance of such rituals. Towards the end of the period, the record shows an increase in the artistic representation of death, as is the case in Tula, where a snake carved on the side wall of a temple devours a row of skeletal people. The existence of a *Tzompantli*, or wall of skulls, near the ball court is further evidence of such expanded representation, which also appears at Chichén Itzá.

THE BODY AND LIFE AFTER DEATH. During the Postclassic period, the Mexicas and other contemporary peoples of the Central Highlands believed the body held three souls. Each soul was believed to reside in a specific region that served a

function in the body and, upon death, had a specific fate. The *teyolia* resided in the heart, and was indispensable for the preservation of life. The *tonalli* was located in the head; it could exit the body and, were it not to return after a certain time, its proprietor would die. The *ihiyotl* resided in the liver. It was associated with the human passions, and it, too, could exit the body. Upon the death of the individual, these souls would dissipate, and the *teyolia* would travel to the world of the dead (López Austin, 1980, 360–370). Apparently, the Maya also believed in a kind of soul that traveled to the netherworld. This can be interpreted from the colonial records that tell of the placing of a stone in the mouth of the deceased that would receive the soul at the last breath.

The destinations of the dead are true funeral geographies, as evidenced in the three more powerful groups: Mexica, Tarascan, and Maya. It was believed that these locations could be in the heavens, the water, or under the earth, and that their entrances were caves, lagoons, or nebulous places located somewhere in the earth. Dangerous locations associated with the landscape had to be traversed in order to gain access to them. In other instances, these territories combined environmental elements with supernatural traits. The three above-mentioned groups coincided in perceiving the underworld as the main realm of the deceased. Among the Mexica, this region was known as Mictlan. Friar Bernardino de Sahagún (1997) writes that it was the destination of those who died of old age or common illness, regardless of their origin.

Nine areas had to be crossed in order to reach this region, which was located under the earth. The deceased was left all necessary items for his or her journey. The route is described in the *Codice Vaticano Latino 3738* (Vatican Latin Codex 3738). The first stop was the Chiconahuapan River, where a brownish dog awaited his master to help him across. After the crossing, the deceased ascend through a region where mountains crashed into each other. Later, he or she would face the Obsidian Mountain, and then a place where the wind was so cold that it cut like a knife. The blankets given to the dead during the funeral would help in this stage. The deceased next had to cross a place where flags wave in order to reach the place where people are pierced by arrows. More dangers awaited upon his or her arrival in the place where wild animals eat human hearts. After four years, the journey was completed with the arrival at Mictlan, a dark, windowless place ruled by Mictlantecuhtli and his wife Mictecacihuatl. The god of the underworld was a semi-skeletal being, with curly hair and a nose made of a flint knife.

Those who died of a reason related to water faced a different fate, since they traveled to Tlalocan, a place of abundance and fertility ruled by Tláloc, god of the rain. The descent into the paradise of Tláloc could be caused by an illness associated with the powers of deity. For instance, it was believed that death by drowning or a lightning strike was more than an accidental occurrence; it was the god taking possession of the person through that force. It was believed that the god chose those who died that way.

Once they reached Tlalocan, they would help the deity, who granted water for harvests and storms. These victims were buried directly into the ground, as if they were seeds. Another special place, probably located in Tlalocan, is Chichihauhcuahco, a nursing tree that was the destination of the souls of suckling children.

It was believed that those who died in war would travel to the “House of the Sun.” These deceased were considered illustrious, and their job in the netherworld would be to fight for the preservation of the universe, insuring the transit of the sun from dawn to noon. At that point, it was handed over to women who had died in childbirth, who would accompany it until dusk, before handing it over to the lords of Mictlan.

The Maya also believed in souls having different fates. Among inhabitants of the Yucatan peninsula, the underworld was known as Mitnal. The Quiché Maya called it Xibalbá, “the region of those who vanish,” the lowest stratum of the underworld, which was reached by descending a road full of dangers. Such notions were recorded in the *Popol Vuh*, a sacred book written during the early colonial period.

The content of this book was broadly diffused throughout the Maya region. It was believed that the entrance to Xibalbá was in Guatemala, and that in order to reach it one had to descend a steep staircase before crossing a river with a strong current that flowed between thorny calabash trees. Along the way, the deceased encountered another river, the river of pus, and then moved toward a river of blood and another one of water. The latter was located between two steep cliffs. Soon afterward the traveler would be at the junction of four roads, and only the black one would lead to Xibalbá, where the council chamber of the lords of the underworld was located. It was also the site of a garden with birds and flowers, and of a ball court. There was also a spring that was the source of a river and six houses that were torture chambers. Hun Camé and Vucub Camé were the supreme gods of this region, although there were other lords who caused illness and death.

Recent scholarship on the *Popol Vuh* has reiterated one of the main points made here—namely, that Mesoamerican peoples understand death to be one crucial stage in a creative, regenerative process. Several mythic episodes in the *Popol Vuh* reveal that this underworld of Xibalbá was also a region closely associated with life. It was there that the mythic heroes were conceived during one of the cosmic creations. And it was in the threatening regions of Xibalbá that each mythic hero was brought back to life in order to become the Sun and the Moon. Another deity associated with death is called *God A* in the classification of Paul Schellhas (1904). This god is also known as the skeleton (*ah Puch*) or the flatulent one (*kisín*). He was represented as being a skeleton, with body blotches caused by putrefaction, emaciated arms, and a protruding abdomen. He was associated with violent sacrifices and decapitations and is depicted on a throne of bones with

his eyes closed and mouth agape—or sometimes as a feminine form.

Another world of the dead mentioned by the Maya was the *Paradise of the Ceiba*, or Coral Tree, a land of plenty that was the destination of the souls of those who hanged themselves. Like Tlalocan, in this place there was a large tree under whose shade one could rest.

In Michoacán, the Tarascan believed that the underworld was under the earth and called it Cumiechúcuaro (place where one is with the moles). It was a region inhabited by deities that looked like people and animals, and it was divided in four directions, with its entrance facing the East, where the sun rises. Cumiechúcuaro was ruled by a mole named Uhcumo.

Another world of the dead was Pátzcuaro, the entrance to which was in the lake of the same name. Associated with blackness, this place was the destination of those who died by drowning and was ruled by Chupi Tiripeme, a deity of water.

As was the case in the Central Highlands, Uarichao was the “place of women” and was to the west. It was for those who had died giving birth to their first child. Thiuime (Black Squirrel) was the deity who inhabited this region. Unlike the emaciated characters of the Maya and Mexica, these gods had the shape of animals commonly associated with the fields.

Other areas show a certain unity of beliefs about life after death, although they have not been as well documented as the above cases. In Oaxaca, the Mixtec worshiped Pitao Pecelao as the god of the underworld, and they made offerings to him during times of illness or death and to counteract the effects of omens. He was associated with wealth and luck, as well as the cultivation of the nopal, or prickly pear, again showing the unavoidable relationship between life and death.

THE ENCOUNTER OF TWO VISIONS OF DEATH. The quick and violent social transformations that took place after 1521 had an immediate impact on perceptions of life and death. The imposition of Christian mores and the death toll caused by war resulted in a transformation of funerary customs. The Western concept of life in the netherworld was based on the idea of resurrection, and the allocation of the dead in the afterlife was dependent on their behavior in life, thus becoming a reward or a punishment. This view contrasts with that of Mesoamerican religions, where the immaterial element of the body played a cosmic role in the netherworld that contributed to the functioning of the universe. Death in pre-Columbian times was related to life, and the journey to the netherworld was associated with the type of death, not with behavior.

Change in the new Spanish society was gradual. The adoption of saints, the ability of some friars to indoctrinate, and the passage of time all led to Christianity's dominance. Nevertheless, it is easy today to observe beliefs and practices that reflect syncretism and cultural wealth. In some contemporary communities it is still possible to record the continu-

ance of pre-Columbian elements mixed with the Christian religion. The offering of dogs in contemporary Lacandon Maya tombs or the Totonac belief in the underworld—with a region for those who have drowned, one for women who died giving birth, and another one for suckling children—are very clear examples.

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XIMENA CHÁVEZ BALDERAS (2005)
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AFTERLIFE: JEWISH CONCEPTS

The concept of an afterlife in Judaism took shape gradually and was rarely cast into dogmatic or systematic form. The Jewish idea of the afterlife has focused upon belief in either corporeal resurrection or the immortality of the soul. While one or the other of these conceptions, and occasionally both together, has been present in every period in the history of Judaism, it can safely be said that these ideas underwent their most significant development during the rabbinic and medieval periods.

THE BIBLICAL PERIOD. The notion of the afterlife in the Bible is decidedly vague. After death, the individual is described as going to She'ol, a kind of netherworld, from which he "will not ascend" (*Jb.* 7:9). God, however, is attributed with the power to revive the dead (*Dt.* 32:39, *1 Sm.* 2:6), and the language of resurrection is several times used in a figurative sense, as in Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones (*Ez.* 37:1–4) and in the apocalypse of Isaiah (*Is.* 26:17–19) to describe the national restoration of the people of Israel. The earliest description of an eschatological resurrection of the dead is in *Daniel* 12:1–2, an apocalyptic text composed in the midst of the Antiochian persecutions (167–164 BCE):

There shall be a time of trouble . . . ; and at that time your people shall be delivered, every one whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

These verses probably do not imply a universal resurrection for all men but only for the righteous and the wicked of Israel. As some modern scholars have proposed, it is likely that the prominence the idea of resurrection began to assume in this period was a result of political and religious crises in which significant numbers of Jews suffered martyrdom. In order to maintain belief in God's justice and in his promises to the righteous that they would enjoy the restoration of Israel, it became necessary to extend the doctrine of reward and punishment beyond this life to the hereafter. (For an explicit statement of this rationale, see *2 Maccabees* 12:42–45.)

THE HELLENISTIC AGE. The term 'olam ha-ba' ("the world to come"), in contrast to 'olam ha-zeh ("this world"), first appears in the Hebrew *Apocalypse of Enoch* (71:15), a work composed between 164 and 105 BCE, and throughout the Hellenistic period notions of an eschatological judgment and resurrection in the apocalyptic tradition begun with the *Book*

of Daniel continued to develop in Palestinian Jewish literature. To be distinguished from this eschatological tradition is the conception of the immortality of the soul that was introduced into Diaspora Judaism under the influence of Greco-Roman culture. George Foot Moore succinctly characterized the difference between the two ideas of the afterlife:

on the one side [i.e., immortality] the dualism of body and soul, on the other [i.e., resurrection] the unity of man, soul and body. To the one the final liberation of the soul from the body, its prison-house or sepulchre, was the very meaning and worth of immortality; to the other the reunion of soul and body to live again in the completeness of man's nature. (Moore, 1927, p. 295)

The idea of immortality initially appears in Hellenistic Jewish literature in the *Wisdom of Solomon* (3:1–10, 5:15–16) and is more extensively developed in the writings of Philo Judaeus (d. 45–50 CE), who describes how the souls of the righteous return after death to their native home in heaven—or, in the case of rare individuals like the patriarchs, to the intelligible world of the ideas (*Allegorical Interpretation* 1.105–108; *On Sacrifice* 2.5). Although Philo's views were immensely influential in early Christian philosophy, they had no impact upon rabbinic Jewish thought as it developed in the subsequent centuries.

RABBINIC JUDAISM. Belief in the resurrection of the dead is the cornerstone of rabbinic eschatology. Josephus Flavius (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.13–18; *The Jewish War* 2.154–165) and the *Acts of the Apostles* (23:6–9) both attribute such belief to the Pharisees, the rabbis' predecessors before 70 CE, and in one of the few dogmatic statements about the afterlife that exist in all rabbinic literature, the Mishnah explicitly states: "All Israel has a portion in the world-to-come" except "one who says, 'There is no resurrection of the dead'" (*San.* 10.1).

Rabbinic doctrine concerning reward and punishment in the hereafter is based upon belief in the reunion of the body and the soul before judgment. Although rabbinic thought was eventually influenced by Greco-Roman ideas about the existence of the soul as an independent entity, and although there exist some relatively late rabbinic opinions that attach greater culpability to the soul than to the body for a person's sins, there are no rabbinic sources that testify to belief in the immortality of the soul independent of the notion of corporeal resurrection. The unqualified importance that the latter article of faith held for the rabbis is reflected in the great exegetical efforts they made to find sources for it in the Torah (cf. *Sifrei Dt.*, ed. L. Finkelstein, Berlin, 1939, no. 306, p. 341) and in the many references to resurrection that are found in the Targums. As testimony to God's faithfulness, the rabbis also made his power to revive the dead the subject of the second benediction in the 'Amidah, the centerpiece of the Jewish liturgy, and they included several references to the resurrection in other prayers in the liturgy.

Aside from the dogma of resurrection, however, the rabbis held differing opinions about nearly every matter con-

nected to the afterlife. In regard to retribution in the hereafter, the first-century houses of Hillel and Shammai agreed about the reward the righteous will receive and the punishment the wicked will suffer, but they disagreed about the fate of most men who are neither wholly righteous nor utterly wicked. According to the house of Shammai, the souls of these men will be immersed in purgatorial fires until they are purified; according to the house of Hillel, God in his mercy will spare them all punishment (Tosefta, *San.* 13.3). In a lengthy Talmudic discussion, some authorities propose that upon death the souls of the righteous are gathered in “a treasury beneath the throne of glory” or, alternatively, are given habitation in paradise, while the souls of the wicked are imprisoned and cast back and forth from the slings of destructive angels until they are cleansed of their sins. Still another opinion states that the soul lingers with the body even after death, “lamenting all seven days of mourning,” and for the following year it ascends and descends, unable to relinquish completely its ties with the body (B.T., *Shab.* 152a–b). Other sources attribute varying degrees of consciousness to the dead (B.T., *Ber.* 18b–19a).

On such questions as whether Gentiles or the children of wicked Gentiles can enjoy a place in the world to come, second- and third-century rabbis disagreed (Tosefta, *San.* 13.1); the law was decided in the affirmative (see Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*, Repentance 3.5).

Some rabbinic views about the afterlife reflect beliefs commonly held in the ancient world. While the rabbis stated unequivocally that every Israelite has a place in the world to come, they also believed that persons who suffered violent or otherwise untimely deaths might not be permitted to enjoy the afterlife. The rabbis did not, however, accept the pagan belief that the unburied are refused entrance to the hereafter. While there exist a number of cases in rabbinic literature in which life after death is promised in return for a pious deed, these are relatively exceptional. A statement like the one attributed to the tanna Me’ir (second century), in which he is reported to have vouchsafed a place in the world to come to any person who lives in the Land of Israel, speaks Hebrew, and recites the Shema’ prayer daily (*Sifrei Dt.*, no. 333, p. 383), should be understood partly as a rhetorical expression meant to emphasize the importance of the deeds Me’ir encourages.

In general, the subject of the future world does not appear to have obsessed the rabbis or especially to have exercised their imaginations. While there must have existed among Jews many folk beliefs concerning life after death (some of which can be extrapolated from burial customs), few have been explicitly recorded. A striking exception is the view that the body will be resurrected from the *luz*, an almond-shaped bone at the top of the spine that otherwise will turn into a snake (*Gn. Rab.* 28.3). About the ecstatic pleasures or harrowing tortures awaiting the dead, rabbinic speculations were decidedly restrained. Gan ‘Eden (the Garden of Eden), the rabbinic equivalent of paradise, is sometimes

described as an earthly garden; at other times, as a heavenly one. Geihinnom (Gehenna), the equivalent of hell, derives its name from the valley of Ben Hinnom south of Jerusalem in which, during the time of the biblical monarchy, a pagan cult of child sacrifice was conducted, thus endowing the valley with everlasting infamy. The exact location of the eschatological Geihinnom, however, was the subject of differing opinions: some rabbis locate it in the depths of the earth (B.T., ‘*Eruv.* 19a), others in the heavens or beyond the “mountains of darkness” (B.T., *Tam.* 32b); and there is even an isolated opinion that altogether denies the existence of Geihinnom as a place, defining it instead as a self-consuming fire that emerges from the bodies of the wicked and destroys them.

The reticence of rabbinic tradition about these subjects is summed up in a statement of the third-century Palestinian sage Yoḥanan bar Nappaha’: “All the prophets prophesied only about the days of the Messiah; but of the world to come, ‘eye hath not seen it, O God’ [*Is.* 64:4]” (B.T., *San.* 99a, *Ber.* 34b). Yoḥanan’s Babylonian contemporary Rav (Abba’ bar Ayyvu) gives a more detailed description of what, at the least, will not be in the hereafter: “In the world to come, there is no eating, no drinking, no begetting of children, no bargaining or hatred or jealousy or strife; rather, the righteous will sit with crowns on their heads and enjoy the effulgence of the *shekhinah*, God’s presence” (B.T., *Ber.* 17a). The rabbis usually imagined the world to come as the complete realization of all the ideals they valued most in this world. Thus, the Sabbath is once characterized as one-sixtieth of the world to come (B.T., *Ber.* 57b), and the late rabbinic *midrash Seder Eliyyahu Rabbah* records the opinion that in the hereafter there will be no sin or transgression, and all will occupy themselves with the study of Torah. The *Midrash Eleh Ezkerah* (Legend of the ten martyrs) concludes with a vivid description of the future world in which the purified souls of all the righteous are said to sit in the heavenly academy on golden thrones and to listen to ‘Aqiva’ ben Yosef preach on the matters of the day.

THE MIDDLE AGES. Between the eighth century and the fifteenth, Jewish views about the afterlife embraced virtually every position on the spectrum of conceivable beliefs, including extreme philosophical interpretations that altogether deny the existence of corporeal resurrection. The Spanish-Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides (Mosheh ben Maimon, 1135/8–1204), in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, criticizes several popular views of the world to come, all of which conceive of the eschatological bliss purely in material and sensual terms. German-Jewish pietistic literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries records numerous accounts of encounters with dead souls, visits to the otherworld, *danses macabres*, and other folk beliefs that were, to some degree, Judaized or otherwise rationalized. It is, however, in the literature of Jewish philosophy and Qabbalah (mysticism) that the most significant developments in Jewish eschatological thinking in the Middle Ages are to be found.

Philosophical approaches. Most medieval Jewish philosophers conceived of the afterlife in terms of the immortality of the soul, which they then defined according to their individual philosophical views. For many of these philosophers, the notion of physical resurrection in the future world is clearly problematic, and although few dared to deny its status as a fundamental dogma of Jewish faith, they sometimes had to go to extreme lengths to reconcile it with their other ideas about existence in the hereafter.

Probably the most successful in doing this was the early medieval Babylonian philosopher and sage Sa'adyah Gaon (882–942), who, in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, emphasizes the unity of body and soul. Sa'adyah foresees two resurrections, the first for the righteous alone at the beginning of the messianic age (when the wicked would be sufficiently punished by being left unresurrected) and the second for everyone else at the advent of the world to come. At this latter time, the wicked will be resurrected in order to be condemned to eternal suffering, while the righteous will pass into the future world, where they will enjoy a purely spiritual existence, sustained in bliss by a fine, luminous substance that will simultaneously serve as the instrument by which the wicked will be burned forever in punishment (Sa'adyah, *Beliefs and Opinions* 6.1, 6.7, 7.13).

After Sa'adyah, the eschatological doctrines of most Jewish philosophers can be categorized by their orientation as either Neoplatonic or Aristotelian. For Jewish Neoplatonists—including Yitshaq Yisra'eli (d. 955/6), Shelomoh ibn Gabirol (d. 1058), Bahye ibn Paquda (eleventh century), and Yehudah ha-Levi (d. 1141)—beatitude in the world to come was understood as the climax of the soul's ascent toward the godhead and its union with Wisdom. Some writers speak of this state of bliss as a divine gift; according to certain views, it can be attained even in this world if the philosopher can free himself from the influence of the flesh in order to devote his soul entirely to the pursuit of the knowledge of God.

In contrast, Jewish Aristotelian philosophers treated the soul as the acquired intellect and therefore defined the ultimate felicity as a state of “conjunction” between the acquired intellect of the individual philosopher and the universal Active Intellect. Immortality was understood by them mainly as the intellectual contemplation of God. Like their Muslim counterparts, the Jewish Aristotelians disagreed over such issues as whether this state of conjunction can be attained in this world or solely in the next and whether the soul in its immortal state will preserve its individual identity or lose it in the collective unity of the impersonal Active Intellect.

Maimonides, the most celebrated Jewish Aristotelian, appears to adapt conflicting opinions on these questions (*Guide of the Perplexed* 1.74 and 3.54). Although he lists the dogma of resurrection as the thirteenth fundamental of Jewish faith, he also writes that “in the world to come the body and the flesh do not exist but only the souls of the righteous alone” (*Code of Law: Repentance* 3.6). In Maimonides' own lifetime, this extreme formulation elicited much criticism

and was sometimes interpreted as denying corporeal resurrection. To defend himself, Maimonides eventually wrote his *Treatise on Resurrection*, in which he distinguishes between existence in the messianic age and in the world to come. In the former, “those persons whose souls will return to their bodies will eat, drink, marry, and procreate, and then die after enjoying long lives like those characteristic of the messianic age”; in the world to come, the souls alone of the previously resurrected persons will be restored, and they will now enjoy eternal and purely spiritual existence. Maimonides' distinction between the two periods is unique, however; in fact, the notion of corporeal resurrection so poorly fits his general philosophy, with its overall emphasis upon the purely spiritual nature of true bliss, that some modern scholars have questioned whether Maimonides' repeated affirmations of dogmatic belief in resurrection were solely concessions to tradition and popular sentiment, motivated perhaps by fear of being persecuted for heresy.

A very different criticism of the Maimonidean position was put forward in the fourteenth century by the philosopher Hasdai Crescas in *The Light of the Lord*. Crescas criticizes Maimonides' intellectualism and proposes that salvation comes to the soul through love of God (2.6, 3.3). A century later, Yosef Albo (d. 1444) accepted the Maimonidean chronology for the afterlife but also argued with his predecessor's intellectualism, claiming that practice, not just knowledge, of God's service makes the soul immortal (*Book of Principles* 4.29–30). Still more revealing as to the changes in Jewish eschatology that occurred over the centuries is Albo's characterization of resurrection as a “dogma accepted by our nation,” but not “a fundamental or a derivative principle of divine law in general or of the law of Moses in particular” (1.23).

Qabbalistic views. Unlike medieval Jewish philosophers, Jewish mystics in the Middle Ages had no difficulty with the concept of resurrection or other such aspects of eschatological doctrine. Quite the opposite, these topics were among their favorites. In voluminous writings, the mystics described the fate of the resurrected souls, imagined the precise details of their existence in the afterlife, and charted its chronology in relation to the *sefirot*, or divine emanations.

The Spanish exegete Moses Nahmanides (Mosheh ben Nahman, c. 1194–1270) devotes considerable effort in the *Gate of the Reward* to reconciling a mystical view of the afterlife with Maimonidean eschatology. Nahmanides posits the existence of three distinct worlds that follow this one: (1) a world of souls, roughly equivalent to the rabbinic Gan 'Eden and Geihinnom, which the soul enters immediately after death to be rewarded or punished; (2) a future world that is synonymous with the messianic age and will culminate in a final judgment and resurrection; and (3) the world to come, in which “the body will become like the soul and the soul will be cleaving to knowledge of the Most High.”

A second stage in the history of qabbalistic eschatology began with the appearance of the *Zohar* (completed in ap-

proximately 1300), which describes the afterlife in terms of the separate fates of the three parts of the soul, the *nefesh*, the *ruah*, and the *neshamah*. Since only the first two were considered to be susceptible to sin, they alone were subject to punishment. The *neshamah* in its unsullied state was believed to be stored up after death in a special place, often called the *tesror ha-hayyim*, “the bundle of life” (a term borrowed from *1 Samuel 25:29*), which was sometimes identified with one of the *sefirot*. Because the doctrine of the preexistence of the soul was also widely accepted in these qabbalistic circles, the soul’s final sojourn among the *sefirot* could be seen as simply a return to its birthplace.

Probably the most unusual aspect of qabbalistic eschatology is the belief in *gilgul*, or metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls after death. This belief gained increasing prominence in qabbalistic thought from the thirteenth century onward. Originally considered a unique punishment for extraordinary sins (particularly of a sexual kind), *gilgul* came to be viewed, paradoxically, as an exemplary instance of God’s mercy, since the chance to be reborn gave its victims an opportunity to correct their sins and thus restore themselves as spiritual beings. As a form of punishment, however, the concept of *gilgul* conflicted with the idea of Gehinnom—a conflict that was never successfully resolved—and in later Qabalah, the notion of *gilgul* gradually became a principle wherein everything in the world, from inorganic matter to the angels, was believed to be in a state of constant flux and metamorphosis. Thus, in order to repair the damage they had done in their earlier existence, certain souls were supposed to have been reincarnated at later moments in history that were similar to those in which they had first lived; accordingly, David, Bathsheba, and Uriah were considered to be the *gilgulim* of Adam, Eve, and the serpent; Moses and Jethro, those of Cain and Abel. In the later Middle Ages, the notion of transmigration was eventually absorbed into folk belief. By the sixteenth century, the *dibbuq* (*dybbuk*), which originally was simply the name for a demon, had come to represent a soul whose sins were so enormous that they could not be repaired even through *gilgul*. The poor soul consequently wandered through the world in desperate search of refuge in helpless living persons, whom it subsequently possessed and tormented.

THE MODERN PERIOD. With the change in religious temper that occurred during the Enlightenment and has deepened since then, the problem of the afterlife has lost much of its compelling urgency for Jewish theology. Orthodox Judaism, to be sure, maintains the rabbinic dogmatic belief in resurrection as part of its conception of the messianic age, and it similarly preserves the liturgical references in their original form. In contrast, the Pittsburgh Platform (1885) of the Reform movement in America expressly rejected “as ideas not rooted in Judaism the beliefs both in bodily resurrection, and in Gehenna and Eden as abodes for eternal punishment and reward.” In general, when the afterlife is considered today, it is usually spoken about in terms of personal immortality, a heritage of the medieval philosophical temper, and as good

an indication as any of the *gilgulim* through which the concept has passed in the course of Jewish history.

SEE ALSO Ashkenazic Hasidism; Messianism, article on Jewish Messianism.

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AFTERLIFE: CHRISTIAN CONCEPTS

BIBLICAL AND ANCIENT CONCEPTS. Early Christians, including the authors of the New Testament books, were steeped in beliefs concerning the impending approach of the end of the world, which would occasion the resurrection of the dead and the beginning of a new aeon. For Jewish people suffering under the oppression of the Roman Empire, "the resurrection of the dead" became a rallying symbol, particularly for those who were led by Pharisaic teachers. This belief set them apart from other segments of contemporary Jewish society, most notably the Sadducees, but also the Gentiles. Belief in the resurrection of the dead also played a crucial role for the emerging circle of Christians, for to Jews *resurrection* meant belief in a hoped-for future occurrence, whereas to Christians it meant a conviction concerning that which had already occurred in the person of Jesus, guaranteeing the future resurrection of all the faithful.

Jesus himself seldom addressed the issue of resurrection, and when he did—usually in response to challenges from his listeners—he always answered with an emphasis on the present need for conversion to a God-oriented life and neighborly love. It was Paul who made resurrection the focal point of his message. Through his encounter with the "risen" Jesus, Paul became convinced that through the resurrection, Jesus, the Christ, conquered sin and death for all humanity. Paul perceived death as running counter to God's creation, which called life into being. Death could not be a part of God's creation; it had entered into human destiny as a result of sin. Sin was the real cause of death; human beings who sinned in and with Adam, the first human, were responsible for their own mortality. Jesus' rising from the dead accomplished the conquest of sin along with its wage, death. Jesus' rising, however, was not a return to the old mortal body (resuscitation); rather, it was a resurrection to a new "spiritual" body.

Coming from a Hebraic background, Paul was unswerving about the body's essentialness to human existence because he saw the body as an integral part of God's creation.

Paul insisted on the resurrection of Jesus into a new "body" to conquer death. Using a metaphor familiar to the Pharisaic circle from which he came, Paul explained bodily resurrection as analogous to a grain of wheat that, planted brown into the soil, rises afresh in green the next spring (*1 Cor.* 15: 42–43). Paul's dualism was not between body and soul, the two elements comprising the human being, but between one form of life governed by the flesh and another guided by the spirit. No one who remains in the former could expect salvation and eternal life. One has to be reborn, re-created into a spiritual being—dead to the old self and raised into a new self. This, Paul was convinced, was made possible by the resurrection of Christ.

In the New Testament the *Revelation* to John is the only book that provides a clear scenario of the end times. In *Revelation* the second coming of Jesus, fervently awaited by the early Christians, is presented as the signal for one thousand years of messianic rule, during which martyred Christians will all be resurrected and Satan will be kept bound. After a thousand years of peace and messianic rule, Satan will be unleashed to be permanently defeated in a final battle with the divine forces. With Satan consigned to eternal damnation, a second resurrection will take place in order for the whole of humankind to stand in final judgment. There is no question as to the important role this book played in the life of the early church. It not only provided an inexhaustible source of comfort and encouragement for those who had lost their loved ones to, or themselves suffered the ordeal of, persecution, but it also became a constant source of inspiration to Christians throughout history by giving them images of eternal bliss for the righteous and damnation in a fiery hell for the ungodly.

Apocalyptically conceived Christianity was a movement announcing the quick end of history, and hence, necessarily, its own end. Therefore, when the Christian movement survived beyond the first century it was forced to reevaluate its own stance. It was John's gospel that formed a bridge beyond the initial apocalyptic stage for the enduring presence of Christianity in the ensuing centuries. As the final judgment began to be seen as a distant reality, Christians began thinking about salvation as attainable in the present life. The present moment in life, rather than the end of time, became the crucial point for human existence. Jesus Christ as the Logos of the universe embodies the true meaning of the world, including human life. Turning from the ungodly to a regenerated life by believing in the divine intent embodied in the Logos is the message of the *Gospel of John*, which was written around the turn of the second century CE. The eternal life that is offered by God through Christ can be attained here and now when one's life is turned to God. Eternal life in this context is not endlessness of life but the fullness of life as God had intended in creation. Life lived with God, in itself, would constitute salvation without waiting for the final judgment. In the same way, life lived without God constitutes damnation quite apart from damnation in hell. "Those who

believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (*Jn.* 3:18).

Though Paul wrestled with the conquest of death, Christians from the outset accepted the mortality of the human being. One must fight spiritual deadness; physical death is unavoidable. Any attempt to see human beings as immortal is rebuffed by God, who alone is eternal. Created beings possess no "natural" immortality of their own. Natural immortality would be an endless life without God's blessing, as seen in a demon that does not have to die the way humans do. During the second century CE Tatian unequivocally rejected such immortality, which he believed could be nothing but a curse. Living endlessly in itself contains no delight; it is living in communion with God that makes life desirable. For this reason, according to Jaroslav Pelikan's interpretation, Christians prefer to use the expression *eternal life* in the sense of being alive in God, both now and always (Pelikan, 1961, p. 23), to avoid the vitiated implication of immortality as a meaningless prolongation of life without God. Thus, Christian faith does not preach the circumvention of death, but rather the acceptance and overcoming of death as exemplified by the cross of Jesus.

A shift in emphasis from the remote eschatological future to the present life became more pronounced on the theological level. The futuristic kingdom of God of the New Testament came increasingly to imply a sphere of influence already present and spreading, a sphere that manifested itself in the visible institution of the earthly church, though it was not identical with it. This is the manner in which Augustine of Hippo (354–430) conceived his "City of God." The City of God was the domain of influence where love of God (*amor dei*) prevailed, whereas the earthly city (*civitas terrena*) was the domain of self-love (*amore sui*). The Roman Empire was the embodiment of the latter, but of course it was not identical with it. Augustine saw the history of humankind as the process through which a drama was unfolding in the struggle between these two forces for ultimate victory. Augustine interpreted early Christian teaching according to the dictates of the changing historical situations in which Christianity had survived. He had little to say about "heaven." It was the City of God transcendent—which manifested itself in the historical unfolding of the power of God—in which Augustine invested his entire theological energy, leaving heaven and hell mostly to the popular imagination.

MEDIEVAL AND ROMAN CATHOLIC CONCEPTS. The New Testament addresses the issue of salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ, rather than heaven and hell. Through the centuries, Christian theology has developed along similar lines. It was popular piety, however, which is no less important to Christian life, that fostered and kept alive beliefs about heaven, hell, and purgatory (with increasingly vivid imagery) through the Middle Ages. With the final judgment pushed considerably into the future, people's concern became sharply focused on the fate of the individual im-

mediately after death. The dualism of the soul and the body was firmly established by the Middle Ages, and death was seen as the separation of the soul from the body.

The postmortem journey to heaven or hell became the most widely accepted pattern of understanding the destiny of departed souls. Relying heavily upon pictorial imagery, the soul was often depicted as traveling to or residing in a heaven or hell that was conceptually integrated, and often even physically located, within a three-tiered medieval universe, with heaven always up above and hell down below. For Christians the distinctive accomplishment of Christ was the conquest of death, by which he liberated all the faithful from the yoke of death for entry into heaven, where they might know and enjoy the state for which God had created them in his own image—that is, God-centered and totally free of moral imperfections. Inestimable spiritual rewards would await those who suffered unjustly in this world or toiled for justice's sake; the final truth would be revealed to those who had sought it. In heaven, souls were to be reunited with all the loved ones who had preceded them, even though, apparently, earthly relationships, such as that between husband and wife, were not supposed to be carried over into heaven. In short, ultimate blissfulness characterized this community of all souls who were in fellowship among themselves and with God. This heavenly fellowship was the model for fellowship among Christians (*communio sanctorum*) in this world.

No longer corporeal, citizens of heaven were allowed to "see" God face to face or to "know" him immediately. In this beatific vision, the knowing of God transcended the earthly epistemological gulf between the knower and the known. The blessed would know God in contemplative interpenetration with God's knowing of himself. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), the monumental theologian of scholasticism, was the most eloquent proponent of the theology that made this beatific vision the ultimate goal of human beings. Faced with the infinite fullness of God, the created intellect of human beings would never cease to wonder and enjoy the inexhaustible source of knowledge, God himself.

In contrast, hell, evolving from the archaic concept of the underworld called She'ol in the Hebrew scriptures, was initially the place of all the dead, regardless of their earthly deeds. Only later in Jewish history, and then in Christianity, did it become bifurcated into the realm of punishment (hell, *Gehenna*) as distinguished from heaven. Hell came to denote the underworld to which unrepentant sinners were to be consigned. Sinners were to be cast into "outer darkness," with weeping and gnashing of teeth (see *Mt.* 25:30), or they were to be thrown into "eternal" (*Mt.* 25:41) or "unquenchable fire" (*Mk.* 9:43), or even into "a lake that burns with fire and sulfur" (*Rev.* 21:8). It was not so much the New Testament as the teaching of the later church that solidified the concept of hell as a place of punitive torture in which sinners suffer unending pain. Dante's fourteenth-century masterpiece, *Divine Comedy*, is the definitive literary representation

of these widespread beliefs about hell, which were established enough to find their way into the teachings of the church.

As heaven and hell were firmly established in the medieval Christian mind into two postmortem realms with such graphic details of celestial blissfulness and ghastly underworld pain, some unresolved practical problems arose in popular piety. The idea of purgatory addressed these problems.

The great majority of Christians believe that they die in a state of moral and religious imperfection, and thus not ready for heaven. For this reason, a belief has come to prevail in popular piety that there should be an intermediate realm between this world and heaven. This realm, called *purgatory*, has no direct references in the Bible, and it only gradually found its way into Christian piety. It was not until the councils of Lyons (1274) and Florence (1439) that the Roman Catholic Church gave it an official definition. In purgatory a process of cleansing and purifying was to take place through the pain of fire. Though the capital (mortal) sins led one directly to hell, venial (minor) sins were to be expurgated in purgatory so that one might be purified enough for admission to heaven.

The idea of *indulgence*, the remission of punishment for venial sins, developed concurrently with purgatory. It was punishment for venial sins that took place in purgatory, from which sinners were expected to emerge cleansed for final beatitude. The indulgence, then, was the remission of this limited punishment in purgatory, or a shortening of the stay therein. As developed by the church, the practice of indulgence involved praying, doing penance, and merit-making in preparation for death and the consequent journey through purgatory. For hundreds of years during the Middle Ages, this practice remained important for Christians in Europe. Further extending the practice, praying and merit-making by the living, not only for themselves but also on behalf of their deceased relatives, developed into a major religious practice, enough for the church to consider it an adequate basis for the institution of the “sale” of indulgences.

Purgatory and the attendant practice of indulgence presupposed several other beliefs: first, the belief in sin that called for retribution even after Christ has accomplished reconciliation (redemption and forgiveness); second, the practice of indulgence, especially the sale of it, being based on the belief in a “treasury of merit” accumulated over time from the surplus merit bequeathed to the church by all the saints throughout history, as well as by Christ himself; and finally, the belief that the church possessed the authority to administer the said treasury and dispense merits as deemed fit, with the pope holding, as it were, the key.

PROTESTANT CONCEPTS. It is well known that financial abuse of the belief in purgatory and indulgences and the manner in which the church raised funds using them ignited the Protestant Reformation. The sale of indulgences provoked Martin Luther (1483–1546) into uttering diatribes

such as, “No doubt the majority [of the papacy] would starve to death if purgatory did not exist.” “How can you,” he continued, “bear on your conscience the blasphemous fraud of purgatory, by which treacherous deception they have made fools of all the world and have falsely frightened it and stolen practically all their possessions and splendor?” (Plass, 1959, vol. 1, p. 388). Luther’s ninety-five theses of 1517 were a direct assault upon the sale of indulgences. Luther considered the need for sin to be further punished after redemption as undermining the meaning of the death of Jesus. Following Luther’s lead, Protestant Christians rejected all teachings concerning purgatory and indulgence.

Important in all of this is the medieval Catholic frame of reference in which things were viewed in terms of “substance,” with “quantity” as the predicate. This was largely due to the influence of Aristotelian philosophy during the scholastic period. In the context of indulgences, sin and grace were considered in quantitative terms. The distinction between mortal and venial sins was as much a quantitative distinction as it was a qualitative one. Thus, even within venial sins, degrees of offense were differentiated and expurgated accordingly.

For Protestants, sin amounted to consciously ignoring or distrusting God. There were no degrees of offense once one turned one’s back on God. Likewise, grace, for Protestants, was God’s loving acceptance of sinners, through his sacrifice and forgiveness. There were no gradations of grace. When Luther declared that salvation could be attained by grace alone (*sola gratia*), he meant that grace is the universal act of God reconciling humankind to himself, whether sinners acknowledge it or not. The Roman Catholic conception of grace, on the other hand, was thoroughly substantial, permitting the linguistic habit of referring to it as an entity capable of being, as it were, injected into sinners. Thomas Aquinas made frequent reference to this “infusion of grace.” Thus, substantialized grace could be further quantified into something measurable, just as sin was measured and expiated accordingly.

Even though at the close of the sixteenth century the Council of Trent rectified, by officially condemning, the abuse of the sale of indulgences, the Roman Catholic Church did not alter its basic posture toward the belief in purgatory and indulgence. With renewed vigor the council reaffirmed the fundamental structure of Roman Catholic soteriology, along with the worldview that sustains it. The quantitative and substantial ways of viewing sin and grace were maintained as valid, and indulgence and purgatory continued to be accepted beliefs within Roman Catholic piety and theology.

Luther, who was largely responsible for the pattern of subsequent Protestant attitudes toward salvation and eternal life, considered the Pauline interpretation of salvation as “justification by faith” to be the single most important teaching of the Bible. No one devoted more energy to bringing this Pauline teaching to the center of Christian religion than

Luther, who believed that salvation lies not so much in the context of the final judgment, the bodily resurrection, and the messianic rule, as in Christian life, lived in faith, consequent to “justification.” Like Augustine, Luther rebuked millenarians by arguing that “this false notion is lodged not only in the apostles (*Acts* 1:6), but also in the chiliasts, Valentini-ans, the Tertullians, who played the fool with the idea that before Judgment Day the Christians alone will possess the earth and that there will be no ungodly” (Plass, 1959, vol. 1, p. 284). Luther brushed aside ideas about the imminent approach of the end, particularly the way the advent—that is, the physical establishment of messianic rule on earth—was anticipated by some millenarians. Though Luther did not dismiss the last judgment, he did not lend the full weight of his theological articulation to the eschatological concept of the general resurrection. For Luther, it was the justified life that counts. Justification carries the entire weight of soteriological and eschatological significance when Luther says that “the article of justification, which is our only protection, not only against all the powers and plottings of men but also against the gates of hell, is this: by faith alone (*sola fide*) in Christ, without works, are we declared just (*pronuntiari justos*) and saved” (Plass, 1959, vol. 2, p. 701).

It is thus clear that “eternal life” was to be experienced in the reality of the justified life here and now. For Luther the ideas of immortality and heavenly blissfulness, which played such an important part in popular Christian piety, were absorbed into the significance of eternity invested in the justified life of a Christian. This remains the predominant pattern of the Protestant understanding of eternal life, at least in its normative theological sense.

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HIROSHI OBAYASHI (2005)

AFTERLIFE: ISLAMIC CONCEPTS

The doctrine of an afterlife is not only a frequent theme within the Qur’anic revelation, it is also central to the way in which Muslims have understood and explained the reasons for humankind’s existence in this world. In Muslim thought, the notion of an afterlife is not only seen as giving meaning to what is a short-lived stay on this earth—with all that it entails of seemingly inexplicable human suffering, loss, and death—but it also places humankind within a divine plan, which endows them with a sense of purpose and an ultimate destiny. The knowledge of a future life beyond death, the quality of which will be determined by the moral quality of one’s life on earth, has served to instill in Muslims a constant awareness of both the precarious nature of this existence and the urgent need to prepare for that future one. This urgency had manifested itself from the outset, both in the revealed text of the Qur’ān, the foundation stone of all Muslim dogma and ritual, and in the formative intellectual history of the community.

AFTERLIFE IN THE QUR’ĀN. According to Muslim tradition, the revelations of the Qur’ān—that is, the verses (*āyāt*) that make up the chapters (*sūrah*s)—are ascribed to one of two periods of Muḥammad’s prophetic career, the earlier Meccan period and the later Medinan one. The apocalyptic passages and images in the Qur’ān that herald the coming of the next life belong primarily to the former. Indeed, they constitute one of the most salient features of the earlier phase of Muḥammad’s preaching, testifying to the importance of the notion of an afterlife within the overall framework of the Qur’anic message.

The apocalypse. The apocalypse, as the climax of history, is referred to variously as “the Day of Judgement” (*yawm al-dīn*), “the Day of Resurrection” (*yawm al-qiyāma*), “the Last Day” (*al-yawm al-ākhir*), “the Day of Decision” (*yawm al-faṣl*), or “the Promised Day” (*al-yawm al-maw‘ūd*). The eschatological scheme and its accompanying symbols that usher in the next world is one familiar enough from the Judeo-Christian, and to some extent the Zoroastrian, tradition. The basic elements are, in brief: The next world will arrive in the wake of the destruction of this one—at an unknown point in time, referred to as the “Hour” (*al-sā‘a*), unknown to all but God, the blowing of a cosmic trumpet (*ṣūr*) will annihilate all creatures and destroy the familiar universe; a second sounding of the trumpet will resurrect all humankind to face the final reckoning. Every soul (*nafs*) is called to contemplate its “book” (*kitāb*) of deeds, and its deeds will

be weighed in “scales” (*mīzān*). A light balance will dispense a soul to hell, whereas a weighty one will merit paradise. The “wretched” (*shaqī*), their faces blackened in terror and despair, are driven like animals to their final abode, and with their hands bound in fetters to their necks they are thrust violently into the fire of hell, where they are drenched in liquid pitch, their skins are consumed by the fire, and their faces are grilled by its flames. They suffer beatings with maces of iron, gulp fetid boiling water, taste festering blood and consume a bush of bitter thorn in the midst of scorching winds and thick black smoke.

The “fortunate” (*saʿīd*), are congratulated and led away in the company of angels towards the already-opened gates of paradise, the light of divine pleasure radiating from within them and all around them. They take up their paradisiacal abodes in the “Gardens of Eden” (*jannāt ʿAdan*), each one of them in an exclusive garden, wherein they recline on jewel-encrusted beds, dressed in the finest silk, arrayed in heavy brocade, and adorned with silver bracelets; surrounded by bashful and amorous virgins (*ḥūr*) resembling hidden pearls, they are waited on by stunningly beautiful youths who serve them the purest intoxicants, bring them endless varieties of fruits, and are constantly at their service.

Eternal life and the hereafter. The Qurʾānic idea of continued existence and eternal life in the hereafter functions not only as a consolation for believers, in view of the tribulations inherent in life on earth, it is also intended as an incentive for humankind to believe, to perform good deeds, and to reap the reward. For, the “other life” (*ākhirā*, lit. “final one”), as the Qurʾān tells us, is “better” and “more enduring” (Qurʾān 87:17) than this life; “the life of this world is but amusement and play; it is the life to come that is the true life” (Qurʾān 29:64). The delights of this world, according to the Qurʾān, are transient, ultimately unsatisfying, and generally adulterated in some way. The delights in the next world, however, will be eternal, endlessly enjoyed, and absolutely pure. It is the way in which the earthly quality of these familiar delights will be redefined—transformed—that is crucial. Thus, in paradise, the houris, the wide-eyed beautiful virgins, will not have been touched by either human or *jinn* (Qurʾān 55:56); the rivers will run with “water unstaling,” with “milk forever fresh,” with “the clearest honey,” and with “wine that is a delight to the drinkers” (Qurʾān 47:15); their drink therein “will not cause their heads to throb, nor will it make them lose their reason” (Qurʾān 56:19); the cup they will pass from one to another will inspire “no idle talk, no sinful urge” (Qurʾān 52:23). Muslim tradition would later add numerous narratives to the descriptions of paradise that emphasized the pure nature of one’s existence in the next world, an existence free of the vile bodily functions of this world. One early *ḥadīth* reported by ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 827) in his compilation of traditions (*Muṣannaf*) describes the first band of those entering paradise thus: “their faces shall resemble the full moon; they will excrete no mucus, neither will they salivate or ever need to defecate.”

An indication of the centrality of the afterlife within the overall Qurʾānic narrative is that almost every act forbidden or condemned by the Qurʾān, as well as every deed commended and encouraged by it, is done so with a view to the consequences of that action or behavior for a person’s fate in the next life. Thus, those who violate God’s covenants are described as having “purchased the life of this world at the price of the life to come” (Qurʾān 2:86 and 3:77). In contrast, it is written that “God has purchased from the believers their selves and their worldly possessions and in return has promised them Paradise” (Qurʾān 9:111). Indeed, the Qurʾān describes the “true losers” as “those who have forfeited their souls and their relatives on the Day of Resurrection” (Qurʾān 42:45), because, having offered nothing for their future life, they now find themselves in eternal hellfire.

But whereas the Qurʾān contains frequent references to scenes that will take place on the day of judgement, as well as graphic descriptions of the pleasures enjoyed by the “inhabitants of the Garden” (*aṣḥāb al-janna*) and the torments suffered by the “inhabitants of the Fire” (*aṣḥāb*, or *ahl al-nār*), crucial elements of eschatology, which had significant consequences for the scheme of the afterlife, were only worked out in the wake of intra-Muslim sectarian polemics; yet even these elements had not taken long, in historical terms, to crystallize. Already within little more than a hundred years of the Prophet’s death and the codification of the Qurʾān, there emerged all of the eschatological variations and modifications to the afterlife scheme, as they are known from the compositions of the classical period, and as they are familiar to Muslims today. It was at this formative stage that the second instance of “urgency,” referred to at the beginning of this article, manifested itself.

THE FORMATIVE PERIOD (C. 657–800). Two civil wars that split the community definitively within a generation of the Prophet’s death and resulted in major schisms that exist in modern times were fought over the question of the rightful leadership of the community. This was not only because the rightful leader (*imām*) was necessary for the overall guidance and well-being of the community, but, more importantly, because an illegitimate leader put the salvation of the entire community at risk by endangering the afterlife scheme (as understood by all early Muslims) in which the elect community of believers were a single guided community destined for Paradise.

What seemed like purely political disagreements went to the heart of religion, for, in early Islam political opponents were necessarily religious ones too: if the leadership of the elect community of believers was to be assumed by the wrong individual, who then led them astray from the path to salvation, the entire community ran the risk of being misled. Political offences, violating as they did the stipulations of the Qurʾān, prompted similar questions about the salvation status of grave sinners within the Muslim community and, paradoxically, forced Muslims to consider a formal definition of what constituted “belief” (*īmān*). In other words, given

that there is a single community of believers destined for paradise, how did one remain within it, and what offenses excluded one from it?

Discussion of the consequences of serious offenses had been confined, at a primary stage, to the political arena, but more and more discussions came to focus on grave violations of the Qur'anic stipulations for proper moral conduct. In time, an increasingly influential group of Muslim theologians, known as traditionalists (*ahl al-ḥadīth*), came up with a compromise to the simple afterlife scheme that had been assumed by the community at its birth. The compromise was both the result of protracted debates over the salvation status of political “sinners” (religious offenders) within the Muslim community, and the political reality that frequently saw Muslim pitted in battle against fellow Muslim. These traditionalist theologians modified certain aspects of the postmortem judgement to ensure that all those who professed Islam, even if they should die without having repented of their sins, would eventually end up in paradise: if they did go to hell, they would suffer only a purgatorial stay, one consonant with the severity of their neglect of religious duties.

It should be noted that the traditionalists believed that authoritative opinions (legal and theological) could only be found in the mass of traditions (reports containing words and deeds) ascribed to the Prophet and his Companions. This body of literature, authenticated (in the sense that it was believed to go back to the Prophet), but collected and transmitted from the late seventh and early to mid-eighth centuries CE, had grown to huge proportions. It was within this body of traditions that those eschatological variations, which were used to modify the scheme of the afterlife, began to appear. The traditionalists made such variations authoritative by weaving them into the exegetical narratives to certain key verses in the Qur'an. These verses included one that was ambiguous about the eternity of hellfire punishment (Qur'an 11:107); another that suggested that certain individuals whose evil deeds may counterbalance their good ones, and would thus merit neither paradise nor hell (Qur'an 7:46); and finally, two verses that were interpreted as proof of the widely held belief that the Prophet will intercede for his community on the day of judgement (Qur'an 17:79, 93:5).

By associating such extra-scriptural elements with these Qur'anic verses, the traditionalists were able to introduce a modified scheme of the otherworldly fate of the Muslim community. The canonical manuals of *ḥadīth*, without exception, state that no Muslim will remain in hell forever. Some will be removed from hell directly through God's intervention, whereas others will exit from it because, as the manuals inform us, the Prophet will intercede for the grave sinners of his community (minor offenses were automatically forgiven by God, so long as grave ones were avoided [Qur'an 4:31]). Neither of these two doctrines had been explicitly taught in the Qur'an. Nevertheless, they came to represent dogma for most Muslims. In so doing, the traditionalists had succeeded in retaining, at least superficially, the early ideal of the unified community destined for paradise.

Khārijite, Murji'ite, and Mu'tazilite thought. Of course, not all parties were convinced by the theological innovations of the traditionalists. Two religio-political parties that had emerged in the wake of the civil wars, namely, the Khārijites (the first sectarians in Islam) and the Murji'a (an antisectarian movement that sought to politically reunite the divided community), resisted the influx of such teachings as having no explicit foundation in the Qur'an. In addition, Mu'tazilah (a late-eighth-century theological school that propounded the use of rational methods and made God's justice—together with the idea of human free will—the founding principles of their thought) also saw no sound basis for either the idea of a temporary hell or the Prophet's intercession (*shafa'a*) on behalf of grave sinners. For these rationalists, both ideas violated their principle that God's justice ensured that every individual was free to choose his or her acts in this life and would be recompensed accordingly in the next.

Needless to say, it was the traditionalist doctrine that found popular appeal among the majority of Muslims, who took comfort in the knowledge that the Prophet would be at hand to ensure their salvation at the scene of the judgement. It is noteworthy that the Mu'tazila also denied the punishment of the tomb (*'adhāb al-qabr*) and the “vision of God” (*ru'yat Allāh*) in the next life, both of which, judging by the *ḥadīth* material, had come to form part of the popular beliefs of Muslims from the middle of the eighth century.

THE CLASSICAL PERIOD (POST-800 CE). Most of the developments in afterlife theology that took place during the formative period made their way into the major traditions of Islam. The doctrine of temporary hell and the Prophet's intercession were accepted by almost all Sunnīs and Shī'ah. The only difference was that in the case of the latter, the privilege of intercession was also extended to the *imāms* (with the understanding that no Shī'ī will remain in hell forever). With Sufism, however, it is difficult to make similar generalizations.

Early in its development, Sufism, properly mysticism, came to assume a certain “orthodoxy” from the point of view of traditionalist Islam. The principal figures associated with its development, the likes of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728), al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 857), and al-Junayd b. Muḥammad (d. 910) were all considered pious Muslims by the mainstream tradition. Classical Sufism to a large extent culminated in the works and writings of al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) himself, a bastion of traditionalist Islam. And yet Sufism would later incorporate Neoplatonic and Gnostic elements, as evidenced in the works of the great Andalusian mystic Ibn al-'Arabī (1165–1240), elements that could not be accepted by the mainstream tradition. Sufism shared with other mainstream Muslim practice an insistence on the proper observation of the law (*sharī'ah*). Indeed, it emphasized that the practice of Islam's rituals should be carried out with discipline and devotion: constant remembrance of God (*dhikr*), a quintessential Ṣūfī practice, and the awareness of

impending death and resurrection was the only way to prepare oneself for the next world.

One significant development in the classical period, in part due to the influence of Neoplatonic thought as expounded principally by Avicenna (d. 1037), but already suggested at an earlier stage by some of the rationalist theologians, the Muʿtazilah—as well as by their more orthodox counterparts, the Ashʿarīs, was the question of whether the Qurʾanic descriptions of the joys of paradise and the pains of hell should be understood literally or symbolically. The rationalists, while acknowledging the explicit scriptural references to carnal pleasures and pains, preferred to understand these as metaphors for spiritual delights and torments. The spiritual aspect became key, not just for rationalist theologians but also for philosophers and certain mystics. If, indeed, the afterlife was to be a spiritual existence of the immortal soul, then humans, through their souls, could “taste” of these joys in this world.

It is in this sense that, for many mystics, elements of the eschaton and the afterlife were internalized as constituting potential experiences of the soul in the here and now. In a similar departure from the traditionalist conception of the afterlife, the philosophers saw death—and not the resurrection—as the beginning of the next life: at the point of death the soul will be freed from its bodily incarceration and able to enjoy the superior delights of the intellect. A preference for metaphorical interpretations would reemerge in twentieth-century reformist writings, such as those of Muḥammad ʿAbduh (1849–1905) and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935).

TWENTIETH-CENTURY APPROACHES. The little that is written about the afterlife in the modern day tends to be a regurgitation of ideas and narratives taken from the classical period. In this respect, many contemporary scholars adopt the traditionalist understanding of a physical resurrection together with a literalist conception of the joys and pains of the afterlife. There are exceptions, however, and these can generally be found in the interpretations of so-called liberal or progressive Muslim thinkers.

In developing a methodology that seeks to connect the revealed text and the realities of the modern world, progressive Muslim thinkers recognize the difficulty of embracing a literal conception of the Qurʾanic descriptions of the afterlife, let alone a physical resurrection of the body. One example is the Syrian thinker Mohamad Shahrour (b. 1938). In his *al-Kitāb waʾl-Qurʾān* (The book and the Qurʾān), he argues that a different physical world will come into being in the wake of the destruction of this one. This transition will also constitute a transformation of the laws governing matter. Thus, there will be a physical reconstitution of bodies in the next world. But these other laws will mean that matter will not be subject to the opposing forces inherent in the nature of matter, forces responsible for the decay and breakdown of all things: thus, in the next world, nothing will die nor will anything be born.

Another example can be seen in *Qurʾān and Woman*, the African American intellectual Amina Wadud’s (b. 1952) book that stresses, “Although the detailed and graphic depictions of the Hereafter [. . .] are sometimes quite explicit, it is obvious that these descriptions are not to be taken entirely literally, [they] are the Qurʾān’s way of making the ineffable effable, of making the Unseen phenomena conceivable” (p. 58).

And yet, the idea that there will be some sort of reconstitution of a material form—that is, a corporeal afterlife—has always maintained its hold on the imagination of believers.

POPULAR PIETY. Whereas remembrance of the transience of this world and reflection on the imminent arrival of the other constitute a central element in Muslim devotions across the confessional divide, nowhere is the concern with the reality of the afterlife more obvious than in the rites performed for the dying and the dead. An early Islamic Egyptian epitaph, dated to 796 CE, bears the following inscription, intended as a supplication for relief for the dead person in his tomb: “[O God] make spacious its [the tomb’s] entrances and spare him [the dead person] the punishment of the tomb” (*RCEA*, no. 58). Another epitaph, from near modern-day Cairo, dated to 831 CE, asks God to make the dead person’s tomb “like a garden from the gardens of Paradise” (*RCEA*, no. 204).

Awareness of the imminence of the other world, that is to say, the need to prepare for it within the brief prelude that is this life, is reflected in the symbiotic relationship that manifests itself between the living and the dead. The dying person has the Shahādah, the profession of the faith, whispered into his or her ear. At the point of burial, the dead are “instructed” (*talqīn*) by the living to give the correct answers (in the form of God’s Oneness and Muḥammad’s prophethood) to the questioning that they will face in their graves (*masʾalat al-qabr*) at the hands of the two angels Munkar and Nakīr (also a relic of popular belief from the classical period). Prayer manuals, Sunnī, Shīʿī, and Ṣūfī, are replete with invocations—usually performed before the dead—that articulate the awareness on the part of the living that they will soon share the fate of the former. Muslims have always said prayers for their dead in the hope that when their time comes others will say prayers for them. Inscriptions on tombs usually enjoin the passersby to recite the *fātiḥa*, the opening verse of the Qurʾān. Not only does this provide comfort for the dead, it also secures a double reward for the one reciting it: the reward for the action itself and the knowledge, supported by numerous *ḥadīths*, that the Qurʾān intercedes at the resurrection for whoever recites from it.

However one interpreted the depictions of the afterlife in the Qurʾān, whether literally, spiritually, or metaphorically, all Muslims, be they Sunnīs, Shīʿīs, Ṣūfīs or philosophers, agreed that the value of these scriptural narratives lay in emphasizing the importance of leading a “moral” life: the reward of the hereafter was too great to forfeit.

SEE ALSO Attributes of God, article on Islamic Concepts; Eschatology, article on Islamic Eschatology; Free Will and Predestination, article on Islamic Concepts; God, article on God in Islam; Imān and Islām; Islam, overview article.

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For more detailed information on the individual elements of the eschaton and themes of the afterlife, the reader is referred to the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (2d. ed. Leiden, 1954–2002), although these will require a familiarity with Arabic transliteration: see in particular, “adhāb al-ḳabr” (vol. I, p. 186), “a'raf” (vol. I, p. 603), “barzakh” (vol. I, p. 1071), “djanna” (vol. II, p. 447), “ḳiyāma” (vol. V, p. 235), “ma'ād” (vol. V, p. 892), “munkar wa-nakīr” (vol. VII, p. 576), “sā'a” (vol. VIII, p. 654), “shafā'a” (vol. IX, p. 177). A more accessible recent work, with the entries given in English, is the *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, edited by J. D. McAuliffe et al. (Leiden, 2000–). The work is still in progress, but the following entries may now be consulted: “Eschatology,” “Hell and Hell-fire,” “Intercession.” Other projected entries are “Last Judgment,” “Paradise,” “Resurrection.”

Unfortunately, there are to date no complete studies of the Muslim afterlife. A few translations of primary texts on this theme have appeared, most importantly al-Ghazālī's *The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife: Kitāb dhikr al-mawt wa-mā ba'dahu*, Book XL of the *Revival of the Religious Sciences, Ihya' 'Ulām al-Dīn*, translated with an introduction and notes by T. J. Winter (Cambridge, U.K., 1989). For a study of the specific contribution of sectarian polemic to the formation of Sunnī classical doctrine on the concepts of temporary hell and intercession, with specific reference to Qur'anic exegesis, see Feras Hamza, “To Hell and Back: A Study of the Concepts of Hell and Intercession in Early Islam” (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 2002).

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In addition, the bibliography provided under the entry “Eschatology (Islamic Eschatology)” complements the one given here.

FERAS Q. HAMZA (2005)

AFTERLIFE: GREEK AND ROMAN CONCEPTS

As is the case with other cultures, the Greeks and Romans entertained a variety of ideas about the afterlife, some of which were mutually exclusive; they called on different ideas as the situation required. Thus, they spoke of the dead as present and angry when ill luck and a guilty conscience suggested that the deceased might be wreaking vengeance; they spoke of them as potential benefactors when paying them cult; and on yet other occasions they spoke of them as if they were completely absent from the world of the living. Both because the attitudes varied and because our information for this, as well as most other aspects of Greek and Roman antiquity, is lacunose, any survey, including the one that follows, tends to impose an artificial order on what were actually complex matters.

GREECE. Although the Greeks and Romans shared many beliefs and practices concerning death, there were also significant differences between the two cultures and they must be treated separately. Greece will be considered first.

Funerary rituals. Children and other surviving kin were expected to ensure that the dead received proper funerary rites; if they did not, the deceased could not be considered truly dead and its soul might wander restlessly between the upper world and the underworld. What constituted

“proper rites” varied from place to place and time to time, but honorable disposal of the corpse by burial or cremation was the very least that was required, lest the corpse otherwise become prey for scavengers. Even symbolic burial, such as Antigone performed for her brother by sprinkling dust over his body, would suffice (Sophocles, *Antigone* 254–255). If a body were irretrievable, rites might be performed for the deceased anyway, in hopes that the soul would find rest (e.g., *Odyssey* 1.290–292). People who turned up alive after having had such rites performed were called “double-fated” (*deuteroptomoi*) and had to undergo a symbolic rebirth (Plutarch, *Roman Questions* 264f–265b; cf. Euripides, *Alcestis* 1144–1146).

Ideally, the deceased’s female relatives would wash the body on the same day as death had occurred and wrap it in a shroud for burial. The next day would be given over to mourning—the informal mourning of family members being supplemented with that of hired mourners when the family could afford it and the sumptuary laws of the city allowed it. Gifts would be given to the deceased, including small objects such as he or she would have used in life. On the third day, counting inclusively, the body was buried or cremated. Libations were poured into the grave where the body or ashes had been buried and were repeated periodically, usually for at least a year. Survivors might also cut their hair and lay it upon the grave; an absent survivor could dedicate hair at a later date. A marker was set up and could be decorated with ribbons and myrtle branches. Other rituals might also be performed, depending on the desires of the deceased and his or her family. People who had no family could join funerary associations that ensured all of these rites would be carried out. (On burial rites, see Kurtz and Boardman, 1971).

Ghosts. Although any soul could become a ghost—that is, return to wander among the living—the souls that lacked proper funerary rites and the souls of those who had died too early or violently were particularly likely to return in order to cause problems for people whom they blamed for their misfortunes or people whom they envied. Whole groups of people might suffer because a soul was unhappy: cities beset by famine and pestilence sometimes sought relief by paying special cult to the ghosts of local individuals whom they assumed were causing the problems. There were means of averting ghosts as well; wreaths of a thorny plant called *rhamnos* were hung on doors and windows in the belief that this would prevent ghosts from entering a house (Photius, *Lexicon* under “*rhamnos*”). In some parts of Greece, annual festivals such as the Anthesteria invited ghosts back into the world of the living and treated them well for a few days; the underlying logic seems to have been that if the ghosts were satisfied by this extra attention they would remain peaceful for the rest of the year. Even then, however, special precautions were taken to ensure that the returning ghosts did not take too many liberties while among the living, or outstay their welcome. Other festivals, such as the Genesia (a word

formed on the *gen-* root, meaning “birth” in the sense of those related to one by birth), honored dead relatives, but it is unclear whether the dead were expected to actually return at these times or simply enjoyed the festival from within the underworld.

Sometimes ghosts were useful. Specialists knew how to create small lead “curse” tablets engraved with words that compelled ghosts to return to the land of the living and do their bidding. Typically, the specialist commanded the ghost to attack someone on behalf of a paying client. The ghost might be charged with imposing insomnia on a woman whom the client loved, for example, in hopes that she would acquiesce to his demands. It was not only the ghosts’ victims who feared such activities; the ghosts themselves resented being called up from their rest in the underworld. For this reason, practitioners frequently focused on the ghosts of those who had died too early or unhappily, or whose bodies were unburied, because, as mentioned above, the souls of such unfortunates could not really enter the underworld, and thus they were more readily accessible (they were also, in their anger, probably more ready to injure the living). The specialists might also promise the ghost that, if it cooperated once, the specialist would protect it from ever being bothered again. The ghosts of dead heroes were considered stronger than ordinary ghosts and were expected to help the living with all sorts of problems: they helped women conceive, aided their native cities during war, and gave prophetic advice, for example. Heroic ghosts, however, could also be much more dangerous than other ghosts when angry. (On ghosts, see Johnston, 1999.)

The land of the dead. Souls might return to earth as ghosts, but most souls, most of the time, stayed in the underground kingdom called Hades, which was ruled over by a god who was also named Hades and by his queen, Persephone. In earliest times, the Greeks seem to have believed that everyone there was treated in the same way. The souls existed in a state that was neither pleasant nor unpleasant; literary portrayals, such as that in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, suggest that the underworld was dank and dark, and that there was little to do to pass eternal time. In the *Odyssey* and elsewhere, souls usually are portrayed as looking like their former bodies (thus women who were famous beauties while alive remained attractive, and mighty warriors still wore their armor). Souls also retained the desires and grudges they held while alive: the soul of Ajax, who felt he had been cheated by Odysseus while alive, refused to return Odysseus’s greeting when they met in the underworld. And yet, in spite of the other ways in which life after death replicated what went on before, the souls lacked one of the most important abilities they had while alive: they could not communicate with the living except under special circumstances. In the *Odyssey*, it is only after Odysseus pours out the blood of a ritually slaughtered ram for them to drink that the souls can chat with him (this probably is a reflection, although exaggerated, of normal funerary ritual, which includes pouring libations into the

grave). Physical contact is impossible, too, because souls have no substance: Odysseus cannot embrace his mother's ghost.

A few people do suffer punishment in a special part of the underworld according to the *Odyssey* and other Greek literary texts, although it is not clear whether the Greeks considered them to be truly dead or to have been transported to the underworld while still alive. Among the most famous are Tantalos, who endures eternal thirst and hunger, and Sisyphos, who is doomed to push a boulder uphill repeatedly. But these are unusual cases of people who had done unusually wicked things; there is no indication that the average person expected to be punished after death. There are also examples, in myth, of people who get extraordinary rewards at the end of their lives, due to their special relationships with the gods. Menelaus, Helen's husband and therefore Zeus's son-in-law, knew he would be carried off to the paradisiacal Elysian Fields at the end of his life, for example, instead of dying (*Odyssey* 4.561–569).

Myth also tells of judges in the underworld. Most commonly mentioned in this role are Minos, the former king of Crete, who was renowned for his fair judgments; his brother Rhadamanthys, who had been a lawgiver in Crete; and Aeacus, who had ruled Aegina. These judges are presented as settling disputes among the dead, rather than deciding the fate of a newly arrived soul; in other words, they also continue with "life" in much the same way as they had before death (e.g., *Odyssey* 11.568–571). It is only in certain mystery cults or philosophical contexts that we hear of judgments or tests that determine the fate of the soul upon its arrival (see below). Aeacus sometimes serves as the gatekeeper for Hades instead of one of its judges. Kerberos, the many-headed dog of Hades, whom the dead souls had to distract with a piece of food in order to enter the land of the dead (and who prevented the souls from ever leaving again), and Charon, who ferried souls across the river Styx, which divided the world of the dead from the world of the living, played a similar role insofar as they also helped to mark the boundary between life and death. In doing this, they made death seem more permanent and irreversible, but they also made the transition seem more familiar, more like the transitions one encountered in life. Most of these figures are mythic only; however, it is unlikely that the Greeks really "believed" in them. Charon is the possible exception: by the Hellenistic period, people began to bury coins with their dead, with which the souls could pay for their passage across the river. The god Hermes, in his role as Psychopompos (guide of souls), was also a figure of real cult. He was expected to help the soul reach the underworld safely and also to guide it back and forth to the upper world again when necessary (for example, during the Anthesteria, when the soul's family needed its help or when a specialist called on it to harm an enemy).

In contrast to the earliest Greek beliefs, the late archaic period saw the development of a system in which the common person might expect to receive either rewards or punishments after death; this concept was fairly widespread by the

classical period. In most cases, one's lot was said to depend on one's behavior while alive—things were supposed to be evened up after death. (On the underworld and punishments after death, see Johnston, 1999, and Sourvinou-Inwood, 1995.)

Preparing for the afterlife. Given this idea, preparation for death should have required nothing more than good behavior. But few people led lives of perfect virtue, and most were therefore left anxious about what awaited them. Perhaps because of this, we also find, beginning in the late archaic period, the idea that one can escape from the postmortem effects of bad behavior and even guarantee bliss after death by being initiated into one or more so-called mysteries cults while still alive (the most famous being that at Eleusis, near Athens). Initiates could expect to spend the afterlife in a meadow or other pleasant place, eating, drinking, and dancing. Non-initiates, however exemplary their conduct had been during life, would wallow in mire forever.

The flaw in this system, as its ancient critics already saw, was that once initiated, people could behave however they liked for the rest of their lives. "It would be absurd," said Diogenes the Cynic, "if Agesilaus and Epaminondas [two Spartan generals known for nobility of character] end up in the mire after death, while worthless people, simply because they have been initiated into the mysteries, dwell on the Islands of the Blest" (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 6.39). Although a few mystery cults may have required initiates to follow certain rules of ritualized purity for the rest of their lives (e.g., not wearing wool), there does not seem to have been any expectation that they would follow a moral or ethical code.

A variation on this theme suggested that all humanity was doomed to punishment in the underworld because of its connection to the death of Persephone's son, the god Dionysos. Dionysos had been dismembered and eaten by violent gods called Titans; Zeus incinerated the Titans with a thunderbolt, and humanity arose from their smoldering remains. Persephone thereafter held each human responsible for the loss of her son. All that could save one from postmortem misery was to be initiated into mysteries sponsored by Dionysos (who had been reborn following his consumption by the Titans). The Dionysiac mysteries are particularly interesting because they gave the initiates special knowledge of underworld geography: they taught initiates which path to follow and which to avoid once they went below, and also which infernal bodies of water were safe to drink from and which would inflict forgetfulness. Forgetfulness was dangerous because the initiates had to remember to declare in front of certain underworld divinities or guardians who would judge them that they were pure and that Dionysos had released them from any need to atone for his death at the Titans' hands. Reminders of what the initiates learned while alive were engraved on tiny gold tablets that were buried with them.

Reincarnation shows up in a few texts connected with Dionysiac mysteries and in some philosophical systems influenced by Pythagoras and Plato. Although the soul still won rewards or suffered punishments in the afterlife in these systems, it eventually was sent into a new bodily life. Souls that managed to conduct themselves properly for several cycles could win release from incarnation altogether.

The eschatological aspects of mystery cults represent a novel way of thinking about the afterlife that subsequently influenced many other religious and philosophical systems in later antiquity, including Christianity. But it must be stressed that, for whatever reason, most ancient Greeks were not initiated into them. The standard expectation for the afterlife was probably, at best, a rather boring existence and, at worst, retribution for earthly deeds.

ROME. Scholars face two problems in dealing with Rome: there is little evidence for Roman beliefs and practices in early periods, and, as time went on, the Romans adopted from the Greek literary texts that they admired Greek modes of expressing ideas about death—and probably Greek beliefs and practices as well. Thus, for example, Book 6 of Vergil's *Aeneid*, where Aeneas visits the underworld, models itself closely on Book 11 of the *Odyssey*. It does add some interesting variations: Vergil adds a Limbo-like realm for the souls of infants and of those who died after falsely being accused of crimes, as well as a special area for suicides; he also seems to draw on Pythagorean ideas of reincarnation in some parts of Book 6. Whether these additions reflect actual differences between Greek and Roman beliefs or, rather, Vergil's interest in them for thematic and narrative reasons is impossible to say. We also know that the Romans were influenced by the Etruscans in their religious beliefs, and that they were highly interested in death and the afterlife—but because we can say little about the Etruscans themselves with certainty, this does not help much. Moreover, some “Greek” ideas that the Romans may have borrowed are also found in Etruscan sources, making it hard to say whether the Romans got them from the Greeks or the Etruscans—or perhaps even whether the Greeks themselves borrowed them from the Etruscans early on. Charon, who seems to be related to a figure called Charu in Etruscan sources, is a case in point. The survey that follows points out a few salient ways in which the Romans differed from the Greeks, but most of what was said above about the Greeks is generally true for the Romans as well (e.g., they particularly feared the ghosts of the unburied and thereby put a high value on funerary rites).

The funeral and care of the dead. When a person was about to die, his nearest relative bent over to kiss him, so as to catch his last breath (Seneca, *To Marcia* 3.2). The same person closed the eyes of the deceased (Vergil, *Aeneid* 9.486–487), and then all the relatives began a practice called *conclamatio*, or “calling out to” the dead, which was periodically repeated until the body was cremated (Servius on Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.218). Timing of the burial differed from the Greeks as well; Romans kept the body of the deceased within the

house for up to seven days and expected family members to continue lamenting and eating only meager amounts of food during the entire period. Before cremation, a little bit of dirt was thrown on the corpse to symbolize burial, or else a small part of the body, such as a finger, was cut off to be buried. The rest of the body was burned. After the funeral pyre had consumed the corpse, survivors poured milk and wine over the ashes and bones, to feed the deceased. (Later, the bones were interred in a tomb.) For nine days following cremation, family members continued to set themselves apart from the rest of the community. During this period, a sow and a gelded ram were sacrificed and the grave was formally consecrated. (On burial rites, see Toynbee, 1971.)

As soon as a son, when sifting through the ashes of his father's funeral pyre, found a bone, he proclaimed that the father had joined the *Di Manes*, or “divine spirits”—in other words, the ancestors (Varro, in Plut., *Moralia* 267b). As in Greece, care was taken to keep these spirits happy and beneficent through funeral banquets and other graveside offerings—especially red flowers, which were offered at a festival called the “day of roses,” or at another called the “day of violets.” A nine-day festival called the *Dies Parentes* (days of the parents) was held in February and concluded with a day called the *Feralia* (the “carrying” of food and other gifts to tombs); this honored the dead as kindly beings who watched over their descendants. During another festival, the *Lemuria*, which was held for three days in May, the head of each household had to perform rituals at night to rid the family of malevolent ghosts (*lemures* or *larvae*). In particular, he had to toss black beans onto the floor with his eyes averted, while he asserted that the beans were meant to redeem himself and his family. The ghosts were expected to gather up the beans and leave contented.

The Romans asserted from an early time that certain founding fathers had become gods after their deaths—Romulus and Aeneas, for example. Starting with Julius Caesar, the Roman Senate went further, regularly deifying exceptional individuals after death, particularly emperors and members of the imperial family. The Greeks had occasionally done this as well for important rulers, starting in the Hellenistic period, but had never fully embraced the idea. (See Price, 1984.)

SEE ALSO Orphic Gold Tablets.

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SARAH ILES JOHNSTON (2005)

AFTERLIFE: GERMANIC CONCEPTS

The Old Norse accounts that supply most of the detailed information about pre-Christian Germanic religion picture several different kinds of afterlife. These can be simplified into two contrasting general concepts of life after death. In one view, the dead traveled to one of several halls depending upon how they died. In the other view, the dead remained very much on earth, either staying in their grave mound or else traveling out and disturbing their former neighborhood. In both understandings of the afterlife, how one died and the rituals surrounding death could determine how the dead person fared in the afterlife.

THE HALLS OF THE DEAD. The largest and most complete mythological narratives discussing the afterlife are contained in the *Prose Edda* and the *Poetic Edda*. The *Prose Edda* was written by Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241), a politically involved Icelandic nobleman who lived roughly two centuries after the conversion of Iceland to Christianity. Snorri presents a logical and clear description of many Norse beliefs, but this well-ordered narrative most likely reflects the influence of Christian systematic theology. His sources, mainly the group of poems called the *Poetic Edda*, present a much more fractured and inconsistent view of the afterlife. Germanic paganism apparently allowed multiple and contradictory understandings of death.

As portrayed in the *Prose Edda*, the dead dwelt in various halls. The virtuous deceased went to Gimlé, called simply the best house; to Brimir, which featured a copious supply of ale; or to Sindri, which was made of red gold. The wicked went to an unnamed hall on Nástrandir (Corpse Beach), which was reserved for oath breakers and murderers and whose walls were made of snakes that spat their poison into the center of the house; or to Hvergelmir, the worst house of all, in which the serpent Niðhoggr tormented the bodies of the dead.

The basic depictions of these halls derive from the *Poetic Edda* (*Völuspá*, sts. 37–39). In *Völuspá*, however, only the hall on Nástrandir is linked explicitly with the dead, and the halls of Sindri and Brimir (who are supernatural people, a dwarf and a giant respectively, and not just names) seem to be gathering stations for the races inimical to the Æsir gods rather than destinations for the dead. Similarly, Hvergelmir is elsewhere pictured as a spring under the roots of the world tree and not as a hall. *Völuspá* does mention a hall on Gimlé, made of gold, that will house righteous rulers once the earth has been renewed after Ragnarök (the end of this world), and *Völuspá* also notes that a monstrous wolf feeds on the flesh of the dead in Ironwood. While other accounts do not contain these named halls, a snake-filled hall does appear in the story by Saxo Grammaticus (c.1150–1204/1220) about a trip northward to a realm of the dead, and it therefore seems likely that a snake-filled hall was an image traditionally associated with death.

Another realm for the dead found in the *Eddas* is Hel. Unlike its modern cognate *hell*, Hel, while placed under-

ground, was not viewed as a place of damnation, but rather as simply the realm of the dead, similar to the Hebrew *she'ol*. Hel's connection with the halls mentioned above is unclear, and it may represent a separate and older view of the afterlife. Knowledge of Hel was certainly more widespread than any of the above halls, since it appears in stock phrases meaning "to die," such as *fara til heljar*, literally "travel to Hel." Hel was frequently personified in skaldic poetry, however, and Snorri pictured Hel as a goddess dwelling in Niflheimr (Misty Dwelling), a region consisting of nine underworlds. According to information unique to Snorri's account, it was those who died of sickness, old age, and famine who went to Hel.

A final abode for the dead prominent in the *Eddas* is Valhøll, popularly known today as Valhalla. Valhøll, in the *Eddas* as elsewhere, is portrayed as the hall of Óðinn (Odin), where certain selected warriors slain on the battlefield are taken. The hall is decorated with armor and features 540 doors, through each of which eight hundred warriors can pass at the same time. According to the poem *Grímnismál*, these chosen warriors, called *einberjar*, enjoy a merry life of feasting while they await the day when they shall go out to fight alongside Óðinn against the all-devouring wolf. According to Snorri and other sources, the warriors daily fight each other in order to practice for the upcoming final battle. The people who choose which of the slain will partake of this life of martial feasting differ depending on the source, and Óðinn, Freyja, and the valkyries are all mentioned in this connection.

EARTHLY DOMICILE. While Eddic mythology focuses on Valhøll and the halls for the dead, other literary sources suggest that some dead remained on earth and did not travel to a separate realm. Norse sagas give several colorful accounts of *draugar* (sing. *draugr*), which are revenants, or reanimated corpses. *Grettis Saga*, for example, tells of Glámr, an irreligious farmhand who was killed on Christmas Eve by an unidentified monster. Despite a makeshift burial, Glámr returned as a revenant and haunted the old farmstead by destroying property, animals, and men until the hero Grettir defeated the *draugr* in combat, decapitated the corpse, and burned the body. Only then did the haunting end, according to the narrative.

While *draugar* actively haunted this world, other corpses remained in their grave mounds and attacked only those who dared to enter them. The corpse of Kárr the Old only came to life within his *howe*, or burial mound, when Grettir attempted to remove the treasure buried there. A fight ensued, and Grettir, as usual, finally got the upper hand. The dead in the grave mounds are not always malevolent, however. When their graves are not violated, the dead are sometimes pictured as content in their *howes*; Gunnar is described as happily gazing at the full moon from his open *howe* in *Njáls Saga*. Several *howe* dwellers were in fact believed to be gods, and their cults involved sacrifices offered at the grave mound. Certain grave mounds themselves seem to have become holy

as a result; there is mention of an Árhaugr (Plenty Howe) to which sacrifices were offered around Yule.

While some dead dwelt in grave mounds, some families believed that they would reside in a mountain after death. *Eyrbyggja saga* preserves an account of Þorsteinn Þorskabíttr, who was welcomed into Helgafell (Holy Mountain) with much rejoicing and merrymaking when he died by drowning. Other accounts also stress the celebration that ensued when the recently deceased joined their kin in the mountains. One common thread between many of these accounts is the worship of Þórr (Thor), but it is unclear if such worship itself enabled the dead person to enter the mountain.

A final way in which the dead remained on earth is through rebirth. Accounts of rebirth are not very common, though some famous personages, such as King Olaf the Holy, were alleged to have been the reincarnations of other people. Some critics have argued that the widespread practice of naming children after recently deceased kinsmen indicates that belief in reincarnation was once common, but the surviving evidence is not conclusive.

BURIAL RITES. The Germanic peoples practiced both cremation and inhumation throughout their pre-Christian history. Cremation itself was generally completed by placing the ashes in an urn and burying the urn. Inhumed corpses are often found accompanied by grave goods such as armor, food, or even other corpses. The presence of grave goods is generally thought to indicate belief in an afterlife, since the goods seem designed to aid the individual's journey to or life in the next world. Other interpretations are, of course, possible. The modern Catholic custom of burying bodies with a rosary does not reflect contemporary belief that the corpse will use it for prayer, and sentimental or symbolic readings may be more accurate than literal interpretations of the archaeological evidence.

In thirteenth-century Christian accounts, however, the earlier pagans are described as believing that grave goods would help to secure a good life after death. According to *Ynglingasaga*, the Swedish cult of Óðinn held that the dead would bring to Valhöll whatever treasures had been buried with them in the grave. The depiction of a ravenously hungry corpse in *Egils saga einbenda ok Ásmundar* further suggests that food offerings were indeed intended as provisions for the deceased. An extremely interesting and valuable account by Ahmed Ibn Fadlan (fl. 922 CE), an Arabic ambassador who spent time among the still-pagan Rus, who are thought to have been East Scandinavian traders, records that a chieftain's death rites included the sacrifice of a servant girl who would accompany him into the afterlife. A number of graves in Anglo-Saxon England in which a female corpse without grave goods has been placed over a male corpse with grave goods provides some evidence that Ibn Fadlan's account is rooted in reality and that such sacrifices were practiced across the Germanic world. In other literary narratives, it is the wife who performed this suttee-like sacrifice.

While grave goods thus helped the dead in the next life, cremation rituals could indicate how the deceased was actually received. In Ibn Fadlan's account, Viking informants explain that a quick-burning fire, driven by a stiff wind, indicated the favor of the gods and that the dead chieftain would enter paradise without delay. The strong wind presumably also carried the smoke further, and according to Snorri, the Swedes believed that the height of the smoke from a funeral pyre indicated how much honor the dead person would receive in the realm of the dead. The closing lines of *Beowulf* likewise note that "Heaven swallowed the smoke" rising from the hero's pyre.

The most famous cremations are certainly those in which the corpse was sent out to sea in a burning boat. No archaeological remains exist that can confirm this literary tradition, but several ship burials have been found in which the corpse was placed in a ship along with grave goods, with the entire ship then being buried. The very idea of a ship implies a journey, and these ship burials may be the literal reinterpretation of what was earlier merely a metaphor. This image seems to have been well rooted among the Germanic peoples, since Iron Age graves in Gotland were sometimes enclosed by upright stones in the form of a ship, although ship burials themselves were not frequent until the sixth century.

Another ceremony that may have been intended to help the fate of the departed was the funeral feast that was held either immediately after interment or a few months later. These feasts could be important for the living as well as for the dead, since an heir took possession of his father's estates by drinking a draft called *bragafull* and then ascending to his father's chair. The living also recited poems at the feast, and *Sonatorrek*, by Egill Skallagrímsson, gives an idea of what these poems may have been like. In *Sonatorrek*, Egill laments the death of his son, but he also describes his son's reception by the gods. One purpose of such poems originally may have been to ensure the departed's safe arrival in the afterlife, since *Hákonar Saga Góða* depicts men giving speeches at the king's funeral in order to direct him to Valhöll.

TRANSITION TO CHRISTIANITY. The transition to Christianity is marked in the archaeological record by the decline of cremation burials, a decrease in the number of grave goods, and an increase in Christian jewelry, such as crosses, with a concomitant decrease in pagan amulets, such as Þórr's hammers. Many non-Christian beliefs lingered on, however; one example is revenants, though such creatures were now fitted into a Christian cosmography and were often viewed as returning temporarily from purgatory to this world. A major change must have been the distinction made between body and **saiwalō*, the proto-Germanic word from which Modern English *soul* derives. Whereas pre-Christian sources do not picture any clear division between the body and the animating principle at death, Christian teaching held that the body and soul were separated, though they would rejoin at the Last Judgment. Despite this difference, the missionaries' acceptance of **saiwalō* and their decision not to use the Latin

anima as a loanword suggests that the Germanic peoples had a concept of soul sufficiently close to the Christian, though this soul does not seem to have played a distinct part in pagan conceptions of the afterlife. Interestingly, **saiwalō* did not survive into Old Norse, and the missionaries chose to use *sāla*, borrowed from West Germanic, in lieu of any native Norse term. This absence highlights the differences between the Norse and other Germanic cultures and indicates how careful one must be in stretching the Norse literary evidence about the afterlife to cover all the Germanic peoples.

SEE ALSO Eddas; Germanic Religion, overview article; Óðinn; Snorri Sturluson; Valhøll; Valkyries.

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LAWRENCE P. MORRIS (2005)

AFTERLIFE: CHINESE CONCEPTS

It is commonly accepted that conceptions of soul and afterlife must have developed among many human societies—China included—long before the appearance of written evidence. Unsparring efforts to discover traces in archaeological remains have yielded varying degrees of success. In the case of ancient China, the position of bodies buried at the Banpo Neolithic (c. 5000–4000 BCE) cemetery near present-day Xian was often interpreted as indicating the existence of an idea of an afterlife. The evidence—a unified westward head position—was explained as the expression of a belief in the west as the world of the dead. There is, however, very little further evidence, and nothing else is known of such a belief in a world after death during this period. A parallel situation in ancient Egypt indicates that burial positions varied from

cemetery to cemetery, which should be considered a warning against interpreting burial position as evidence of a concept of the netherworld.

The earliest textual evidence from China concerning an idea of an afterlife is in oracle bone inscriptions from the Shang dynasty (c. 1500–1050 BCE). Primarily divination records, the inscriptions mentioned that deceased kings dwelled in heaven together with the God on High. This was clearly a very special afterlife, available only for royalty. There is no textual evidence indicating an afterlife for commoners, though burial custom continued to develop along the model of vertical pits with wooden coffins in varying degrees of elaboration. This implies that the belief system of the society at the time was by and large homogenous. Later, during the transition from the Warring States period (c. 403–221 BCE) to the Qin (221–206 BCE) and Han (206 BCE–220 CE) dynasties, when tomb style began to change, a detectable transformation in the perception of the afterlife occurred.

Inscriptions on bronze vessels found in tombs of the Shang and Zhou (c. 1150–256 BCE) dynasties are in general commemorative in nature, and the deeds of the owners were magnified and praised. Occasionally, the “underground” is mentioned as the place where a deceased noble will serve his lord after death. This “underground” is not described in detail, but it must indicate a common conception for the destination of the dead. Evidence of human sacrifices as well as accompanying tombs of servants and concubines are found among Shang royal tombs and certain later tombs. These are corroborated by textual evidence from the *Book of Odes*, attributed to the Zhou period, which indicates that for a long time people believed that deceased kings and rulers needed their servants after death.

THE CHANGING CONCEPT OF THE NETHERWORLD: EASTERN ZHOU TO HAN. During the Eastern Zhou (770–256 BCE) and the Warring States periods, for which written documents are relatively abundant, two terms—Yellow Spring and Dark City—were used to represent the idea of a netherworld. The term *Yellow Spring* (*huangquan*) was probably a reference to underground water, which was a metaphor for the netherworld. The *Zuozhuan*, a work that relates historical events of the Eastern Zhou period, preserved a story that concerns this idea of the Yellow Spring. The duke of Zheng was angry with his unfaithful mother and vowed never to see her again in life with the expression “we shall not meet each other unless we all reach the Yellow Spring” (i.e., the netherworld). Later, when he regretted his anger, he dug an underground tunnel to meet with her, since the tunnel was supposed to have reached the Yellow Spring. The underground tunnel is clearly a substitute for a tomb or the netherworld. Exactly what there was in the Yellow Spring, however, is not specified.

The term *Dark City* (*youdu*) first appears in the *Chuci* (Songs of the south), written by the famous Chu poet Qu Yuan (c. 343–277 BCE). In a chapter titled “Summoning the Soul,” which describes the soul-recalling ritual, the poet

wrote: "O soul, Go not down to the City of Darkness, where the Lord Earth lies, nine-coiled, with dreadful horns on his forehead, and a great humped back and bloody thumbs, pursuing men, swift-footed: Three eyes he has in his tiger's head, and his body is like a bull's" (Hawkes, 1959, p. 105). Here the Dark City was ruled by Lord Earth (Tu Bo), a sinister-looking horned python. Such a description betrays a certain aversion toward the afterlife, as the Dark City was clearly not a desirable place for the soul of the dead to be. Again, little is known about this Dark City. Indeed, darkness is a quality often attributed to the world of the dead. The ancient Mesopotamians believed that the world of the dead was a dark and cold place, ruled by the deities Ereshkigal and Nergal. The Jewish She'ol, also a dark place, was intimately related to the ancient Mesopotamian concept of the netherworld. The ancient Greeks conceived of the netherworld as a gloomy place, where the souls of the dead exist in a pale and shadow-like form. The idea of the darkness of the Chinese netherworld, the Dark City, is retained well into the Eastern Han period (25–220 CE). An Eastern Han funerary text states that the deceased "joined the long night, without seeing the sun and the stars. His soul dwelled alone, returned down to the darkness."

Exactly how prevalent this concept of a Dark City was in the late Warring States period, when the *Chuci* was written, is uncertain. A slightly later text found in a Qin dynasty tomb in the present-day Gansu province mentioned that the deceased "lived" in his tomb and that he did not like to wear many clothes, nor did he like offerings of food soaked with sauce. In this case, the relationship between the tomb and the Dark City is not clear.

In the Western Han during the second century BCE, texts found in tombs referred to the world of the dead as simply "underground" (*dixia*) and ruled by a host of bureaucrats, including the Lord of Underworld, the Assistant Magistrate of the Underworld, the Assistant of the Dead, the Retinue of the Graves, the Minister and Magistrate of Grave Mounds, the Commander of Ordinance for the Mounds, the Neighborhood Head of the Gate of the Souls, the Police of the Grave Mounds, the Marquis of the Eastern Mound, the Count of the Western Mound, the Official of Underneath, and the Head of Five of Gaoli (i.e., the netherworld). Governing this bureaucratic establishment was an overlord, variously known as the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi), Yellow God (Huangshen), or Heavenly Emperor (Tiandi). It is unclear how the Heavenly Emperor could be involved in the affairs of the netherworld if heaven and the underground were separate regions. All the same, the picture of the underground shaped by these figures reflects what happened above ground. In other words, a conception of a bureaucratic netherworld only became possible when the world of the living was already bureaucratized. This evidence from the Han period, in its description of the bureaucratization of the netherworld, also reflects the signs of a unified empire.

On the other hand, at every locality there was always the issue of the incorporation of local traditions into the larger

structure. A group of wooden slips dated to 79 CE provided a wealth of information on local religious beliefs related to the conception of the afterlife. The texts were written in the form of contracts that recorded that, when a person was about to die, the family would employ a *wu* shaman to pray and make ale and meat offerings for the dying person. When the person died, the family members would pray to a variety of deities, including the Lord Hearth, the Controller of Fate, and a number of local deities. Sacrifice to the deities was also ministered by local *wu* shamans. When the prayer was finished, the content of the prayer and the offering was written on the wooden slips, which were meant to be taken by the deceased as a kind of contract to the Heavenly Sire (*tiangong*) to testify that indeed prayers and offerings had been performed on behalf of the deceased. It is unclear who this Heavenly Sire was, though he must have been one of the important deities in charge of the deceased. This, of course, is another form of the bureaucratization of the afterworld, as official documents on earth were imitated in the world of the dead. It is particularly interesting that here the deceased was referred to as ascending to heaven and descending to the Yellow Spring at the same time when death occurred.

Similar situations can be found in the use of contracts for the purchase of land. Archaeological excavations of tombs have produced a substantial number of contracts for the purpose of buying a piece of land for the deceased as the place of the burial. It is possible that such land contracts were originally copies of real contracts that the family members of the deceased placed in the tomb in order to provide a legitimate claim to the land. Gradually, the contract became symbolic; as the piece of land became an imaginary space, the sellers became deities or immortals and the price of the land became astronomical.

Finally, the bureaucratization of the afterlife was evidenced by the fact that it was thought that the deceased had to pay taxes even in the netherworld. A text found in an Eastern Han tomb includes the following:

Today is an auspicious day. It is for no other reason but the deceased Zhang Shujing, who unfortunately died prematurely, is scheduled to descend into the grave. The Yellow God, who produced the Five Mountains, is in charge of the roster of the deceased, recalling the *hun* and *po*, and in charge of the list of the dead. The living may build a high tower; the dead returns and is buried deeply underneath. Eyebrows and beards having fallen, they drop and became dirt and dust. Now therefore I (the Messenger of Heavenly Emperor) present the medicine for removing poll-tax and corvée conscription, so that the descendants will not die. Nine pieces of *renshen* from Shangdang substitute for the living. The lead man is intended to substitute for the dead. The soybeans and melon-seeds are for the dead to pay for the taxation underneath. Hereby I issue a decree to remove the earthly evil, so that no disaster will occur. When this decree arrives, restrict the officer of the Underworld, and do not disturb the Zhang family again.

Doubly urgent as prescribed by the laws and ordinances. (Poo, 1998, pp. 171–172)

Not only did the deceased have to pay tax in the netherworld, they also faced the prospect of forced labor. A small lead figurine of a man, crudely made and placed in a clay jar to be buried in the tomb, was said to be able to do all sorts of errands for the deceased, including serving as a substitute laborer. It is interesting to note a similarity between this lead man and the *ushabti* of ancient Egypt; both served as substitutes for the deceased in the performance of conscripted labor in the afterlife. Spells written on the *ushabti* engaged the double to answer (the literal meaning of *ushabti*) for all the required works.

The text quoted above was actually a protective spell aimed at securing a comfortable place for the dead in the netherworld and at the same time protecting the family members. The author of this spell is unknown but presumably belonged to the class of *fangshi* magician, an early type of Daoist priest. Thus, two categories of religious personnel were involved in mediating this world and the afterlife. The *wu* shaman was responsible for the preparation and performance of sacrificial rituals, while the *fangshi* magician was mainly involved in the manipulation of secret and sacred powers by producing spells and recipes, together with certain actions, that could control various evil spirits and ghosts.

During the Eastern Han period, Mount Tai emerged as the final destination of the dead. This place was ruled by the Lord of Mount Tai, who was in charge of the dead. This does not mean that belief in an underground netherworld, or the Yellow Spring, was completely replaced by belief in Mount Tai as the abode of the dead or that people in every corner of the empire gave up their local traditions concerning the afterlife. The process through which Mount Tai gained its importance is obscure, but it might have to do with the position of Mount Tai in the state cult. The *Shujing* (Book of history) mentions that the sage-king Shun once made sacrifice at Mount Tai. Another ancient tradition has it that the Yellow Emperor performed a sacrifice to heaven at Mount Tai and became immortal. A number of classical texts testify that mountain deities were worshipped by the rulers in order to appropriate the mandate of heaven and therefore the legitimacy to rule. The first emperor of the Qin dynasty (Qin Shihuang, r. 221–210 BCE) and Emperor Wu (r. 140–87 BCE) of the Han dynasty also performed the Grand Ceremony (*fengshan*) at Mount Tai. The sacred nature of Mount Tai was therefore well established during the early Han. One can only assume that the sacredness of Mount Tai was the basis for it to become the abode of the dead. Nonetheless, it is only in the Eastern Han period that one finds funerary texts clearly indicating that Mount Tai had become the abode of ghosts. One such text reads, “The living belong to the jurisdiction of Chang’an to the west; the dead belong to the jurisdiction of Mount Tai to the east.” This indicates that the capital of the living was Chang’an, the capital of Western Han, and the capital of the dead was Mount Tai. Thus, it

seems that it was during the Western Han that Mount Tai gained the attribute of being the abode of the dead, although the text was found in an Eastern Han tomb. Two small mounds below Mount Tai, Liangfu and Gaoli, also became associated with this world of the dead and were often mentioned in texts of the Eastern Han and later eras.

BURIAL STYLES AND THE CONCEPTION OF AFTERLIFE. The evolution of tomb styles reveals the transformation of the conception of the afterlife from another angle. The traditional burial style in China from the Neolithic period until the Warring States period was the vertical-pit wooden-casket tomb. The degree of personal status was shown in the size of the pit and the layers of caskets provided for the deceased as well as in the elaborateness of the funerary objects. The burial place, though certainly considered the abode of the dead, was constructed to reflect the personal sociopolitical status of the deceased. The number of accompanying bronze vessels and the layers of caskets, for example, were provided in a hierarchical order.

A change gradually took place during the Warring States period with the appearance of brick tombs, indicating a shift in emphasis in the perception of the function of the tomb. In its earlier form, the brick tomb was constructed with large bricks, which replaced the wooden outer casket of the vertical-pit tomb. During the early Western Han period, this burial style gradually gained acceptance among the people, and the tomb structure began to develop into more complicated forms. The brick burial chamber grew larger and often included an antechamber, some of which included further side chambers for storing funerary objects or even symbolic kitchens and stables with surrogate kitchen utensils and carriages. The tomb was more like an underground house for the deceased. It seems that with the emergence of brick tombs and funerary objects of daily use, the afterlife was conceived in a more realist fashion.

Similar trends can also be observed in the traditional form of vertical-pit wooden-casket tombs, particularly in former Chu areas. Beginning from the late Warring States period, the caskets developed from a single-level to a double-level structure with doors, windows, and stairs that connected the upper and lower levels. Some caskets even had pigpens in the lower levels, which undoubtedly were replicas of the houses of the living. Funerary objects, such as clay models of rice paddies, boats, carriages, cattle, even chicken and fish, created a sense of a well-provided household. Some elements that earlier had indicated the political status of the tomb owner, such as bronze vessels, were missing from the scenes.

The change observed in burial styles from the Warring States to the Han reveals a change of conception toward the afterlife. Corresponding to the textual evidence, which suggests a bureaucratized netherworld emerging with the establishment of the Han empire, the change in burial style indicates a more realistic imagining of the world after death—an imagining, however, based on an imitation of the world of the living. The textual and archaeological evidence clearly

suggests that by the Eastern Han period the idea that the netherworld was similar to the mundane world had become common. By making the abode after death practically identical to the normal abode, the dead (or the dying) perhaps were thought to be relieved of the dread of uncertainty.

ATTITUDES TOWARD LIFE IN THE NETHERWORLD. Attitudes toward the afterlife were ambiguous and cannot be separated from attitudes toward death and the existence of the soul after death. The early Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi (c. fourth century BCE) held a materialist and naturalist view of the essence of life, and he perceived that the physical being was merely a gathering of the *qi* ether in the universe. When a person, or indeed any life-form, died, the body decomposed and returned to the state of *qi*. There was therefore no life after death. The Confucians, on the other hand, took a conservative stand in accepting what had long existed in Chinese culture—ghosts and spirits. Yet Confucius himself did not wish to discuss the unknown world of the spirits, and he devoted little attention to the afterlife. As a consequence, the Confucian view did not reflect what was actually believed by common people regarding death and life in the netherworld. The archaeological and textual evidence described in the previous sections demonstrates that the nature of the afterlife was a constant concern of the people. The Eastern Han philosopher Wang Chong (first century CE) gave a vivid description of the popular mentality of his time:

Thus ordinary people, on the one side, have these very doubtful arguments (about whether ghosts exist or not), and on the other they hear of Duke Du and the like, and note that the dead in their tombs arise and have intercourse with sick people whose end is near. They then believe in this, and imagine that the dead are like the living. They commiserate with them, [thinking] that in their graves they are lonely, that their souls are solitary and without companions, that their tombs and mounds are closed and devoid of grain and other things. Therefore they make dummies to serve the corpses in their coffins, and fill the latter with eatables, to gratify the spirits. This custom has become so inveterate, and has gone to such lengths, that very often people will ruin their families and use up all their property for the coffins of the dead. (Forke, 1962, vol. 2, p. 369)

An ambiguous attitude toward death and the afterlife can be seen in these diverging views. On the one hand, life hereafter could be portrayed as a state of happiness. Tomb paintings and reliefs from the Han period often portray a happy afterlife: scenes of banquets, festivals, hunting, and traveling often occupy the central position. Inscriptions on bronze mirrors found in tombs often carry eulogies about a carefree life comparable to that of the immortals. One inscription reads: "There is happiness daily, and fortune monthly. There is joy without (bad) events, fit for having wine and food. Live leisurely, free from anxiety. Accompanied by flute and zither, with contentment of heart. Years of happiness are secure and lasting" (Karlgrén, 1934, no. 79). However, other texts describing taxes and corvée labor in the afterlife as well as contracts concerning prayers and offerings to the deities betray

a sense of anxiety and fear. Even the elaborate funerary paraphernalia could be seen as emerging from a sense of insecurity about an uncertain future.

SEE ALSO Alchemy, article on Chinese Alchemy; Chinese Religion, overview article, article on Mythic Themes; Daoism, overview article, article on The Daoist Religious Community; Fangshi; Huangdi; Soul, article on Chinese Concepts; Tian; Xian; Xi Wang Mu; Zhenren.

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MU-CHOU POO (2005)

AGA KHAN (Pers., Āghā Khān). First conferred in 1817 on the Ismā'īlī imam (spiritual leader) Ḥasan 'Alī Shāh (d. 1881) by the Qajar shah of Iran, this hereditary title is now applied to the imam of the Nizārī Ismā'īlī Muslims. As imams of a Shī'ī community, the Aga Khans have always based their claims to leadership on their descent from 'Alī and Fāṭimah, the son-in-law and daughter of the prophet Muḥammad. Their followers, who reside mainly in various developing countries, have traditionally looked to them for guidance on religious as well as secular matters.