Death, in antiquity as in the present era, sat at the intersection of a wide range of discourses. Medical doctors, for example, sought to avert it, jurists to mitigate its impact upon family relations and the flow of capital, philosophers and theologians to prescribe approaches to it, and bishops and other religious professionals to create rituals by which to assist the departed's transition into the afterlife and to channel the grief of her surviving loved ones.

This seminar aims to locate death at the intersection of material and literary culture, liturgical practice and economic impact upon ancient Christian communities. After establishing the ancient demographic and medical background to understandings of death, the first half of the seminar will focus on examine, first, what late ancient writers considered "good deaths," including those of the philosopher, the martyr, and the ascetic, and, second, the "bad deaths" of the prematurely deceased, the woman in childbirth, and the stranger, dying in exile. The second half of the seminar will focus on responses to death, ranging from the practical – the economics of burial and inheritance in the later Roman Empire – to the spiritual: Christian funerary liturgies and practices of lament, as well as the envisioned transition of the individual into the afterlife.