Funerary Inscriptions in Early Modern Europe

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In this volume of Intersections, we want to bring together studies that consider funerary inscriptions in Early Modern Europe within the context of a culture of commemoration and remembrance. Depending on funding, a 2 day conference to prepare the volume is planned to take place in Frankfurt am Main in late August or early September 2021. Applicants will be notified before June 30, 2020.

Although funerary inscriptions from the period 1400-1800 have been collected and studied widely, they have usually been considered with a focus on their axiomatic character or the person they commemorate, or in relation to inscriptions from the same area or time period they were made in. Studies of a more analytical and comparative nature are limited, just as studies that consider funerary inscriptions for their literary components, or analyze them in a wider cultural context, questioning for instance what they reveal about belief in an afterlife and how this relates to contemporary theological notions about life after death and/or a resurrection of the dead. Also open to study are questions how funerary inscriptions for people from similar social classes or professional groups relate to each other, and how the qualities the deceased are praised for correspond to contemporary social values.

The central issue in this volume of Intersections will be the question, how funerary inscriptions were used to shape the memory of a deceased person in a specific way. How were they used to create a specific image that would determine how a deceased person would be remembered and what (s)he would be commemorated for? How would this image fit in the contemporary collective culture of remembrance or in narrower spheres, as for instance specific religious groups or denominations? Or was this image meant to function within a sphere of private commemoration?

With these questions as the central issue, funerary inscriptions in Europe from the period between ca. 1400 to 1800 may be approached from various angles: their material dimension, their literary character, the content of what they are stating, their relation to portraits and (sculpted and other) decorations, and the wider cultural context in which they were created and functioned. Topics to be addressed may include:

Material aspects:

• How did the persons cutting the text into the stone work together with the writers of the inscriptions, in determining such things as the length of the texts and the individual sentences, dividing lines and breaking off words, using abbreviations etc.
• How do incised funerary inscriptions relate to versions printed in (more or less) contemporary books (differences, mistakes, reductions, etc.)
• Is there a common pattern of the arrangement of inscriptions on a monument/sarcophagus or does the arrangement of inscriptions have a symbolic character?

Literary aspects:
• Epitaphs that were actually carved in the tomb stone vs. epitaphs that were written as literary exercises, never meant to be put on a grave
• Collecting, exchanging and publishing (collections of) funerary inscriptions from Antiquity and/or Christian times
• Funerary inscriptions written by the future deceased themselves as a way to secure their memory
• Funerary inscriptions written in the first person singular ('the deceased speaking from the grave' or the tombstone addressing the passer-by): by whom were they written, how common were they on actual tombs or were they mainly created as literary exercises?
• Mock epitaphs and funerary inscriptions for animals
• Style and language: the impact of antique formulations and traditions
• The repetition of axiomatic sayings, motto's, texts from the Bible
• The use of example books (Ars moriendi) and/or contemporary anthologies of rhetoric and poetry
• The use of Latin, Greek or Hebrew vs. vernacular language.

Content:
• What are the qualities and characteristics for which the deceased were praised and deserved to be remembered? How do they correspond to contemporary social values?
• 'Naming and faming': which names of well-known people or places are included in funerary inscriptions so as to make the deceased seem (more) important?
• Pride and (false?) humility
• Self-presentation of the dedicators
• Notions about an afterlife and resurrection of the dead; predictions of (the moment or way of) having died come true (vaticinium ex eventu)
• Use of symbols or allegorical structures in the textual parts of the epitaph.

Context:
• In what respects are funerary inscriptions for women different from those for men?
• Do funerary inscriptions for specific social classes or professional groups have common characteristics?
• How do funerary inscriptions relate to portraits and to (sculpted and other) decorations of a tomb?
• Symbolism, pictorial program, emblematic structures.

Please submit a one-page abstract (ca. 300 words) and a short curriculum vitae (max. two pages) to one of the editors, before May 15, 2020.

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Reference:

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