

**From women's laments to « sea(s) of flowers ».  
Experiences of public mourning throughout the ages**

**An international multidisciplinary workshop, Tours (France), December 5-6, 2013**

The three or so last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century seem to have invented “planetary mourning”: the deaths of JFK in 1963, De Gaulle in 1970, Elvis Presley in 1977, Princess Diana in 1997, Pope John Paul II in 2005 or Michael Jackson in 2009, have generated worldwide movements of collective mourning, with an abundance of official homage, crowds gathering and paying tribute in various forms to the person who had passed away. Anyone old enough to have fully grasped the importance of the event remembers where he/she was and what he/she was doing when he/she learnt the news of Kennedy's assassination or of Diana's car crash. But is it such a recent phenomenon? In 1901, the news of the death of Queen Victoria was received in a fashion similar in more aspects than one to that of Princess Diana 96 years later (“seas of flowers”, massive newspapers coverage, flags at half-mast even in New York City!).

Yet Antique civilizations already staged collective practices of mourning which, if they were not “global”, were nonetheless collectively perceived at their own city-states' level. The Persians defeat became the subject of Aeschylus's eponymous tragedy; the battle of Thermopylae, the Varian disaster or the death of Augustus are among the other examples worth quoting.

In such a sense, the notion of “collective mourning” is ambiguous as it applies both to the loss of a person of particular distinction among its peers, and to an event impacting brutally a community, civic or not.

In consequence, “collective mourning” is not something specific to our contemporary world, even if the media overexposure which goes along the “global village” phenomenon gives it an unprecedented nature, historically speaking. On other occasions, if the term “planetary” is clearly hyperbolic, we can still talk of collective mourning on a really large scale: the death of the Polish President in April 2010 is clearly a very recent example. But such a topic is not meaningful for contemporary historians only.

“Planetary mourning” is just one of the aspects collective grief can take, and bereavement could of course hardly be “planetary” when the relevant technology was not there. Women's laments of the Antiquity opened up a long series of mourning practices, the modalities, rituals and practicalities of which can be addressed from a historical point of view.

Although the study of death has long been of special interest to medievalists far and wide, the theme of mourning has not benefited from a similar degree of scholarly attention. The institution of All Souls by the abbot of Cluny, the development of the practice of mortuary rolls, and the procession of mourners to the tombs all provide keys to understanding the collective handling of death. And yet, a good number of practices, notably secular ones, are less clearly established, and it is our task to define their existence, their history, their elements, juxtaposing literary, iconographic, and archaeological sources. Quite recently, modern historians have addressed the question of mourning and memory after the two World Wars, but this is a more specific and consequently restricted approach. This Conference is here to redress the balance, but we will also pay special attention to submittals from other fields: sociology, media studies, religious studies..., where scholars have been more daring.

This conference covers not only a long historical continuum from Antiquity, but also a vast geographical area, hoping to include also non-European practices, and numerous rituals, such as the turning of the bones in Madagascar. Among our interests will feature patterns of mourning; the people who feel concerned, and the degree to which they feel concerned;

collective behaviours linked to mourning, spontaneous and/or ritualized ; the hows, wheres and whens of mourning crowds, in particular in urban environments; the way authorities tried to channel these crowds in order to avoid any suspicious behaviour.

Abstracts in French or English of 300 words (+ CV/resume) for a 20 minutes paper should be emailed to Christine Bousquet ([christine.bousquet@univ-tours.fr](mailto:christine.bousquet@univ-tours.fr)) and Manuel Royo ([manuel.royo@univ-tours.fr](mailto:manuel.royo@univ-tours.fr)) (copy to [cethis@univ-tours.fr](mailto:cethis@univ-tours.fr)) no later than 1<sup>st</sup> of july 2013  
Authors of accepted papers will be responsible for their own travel costs and accommodation; registration fees (50 euros, discounted rates available for PhD and post-doctoral students) cover all meals and a volume per person of pre-conference proceedings. Proceedings will be eventually published in book form.