



## Cluster 3 „Körper und Tod. Konzepte – Medien – Praktiken“

Abendvorträge Winter 2025  
*Evening Lectures Winter 2025*

**16. Januar 2025 – 18 Uhr**

**in Kooperation mit Challenges, JGU Mainz, TA1 „Umsorgtes Leben“ \***

**Jo Appleby**

University of Leicester

*Resilient yet vulnerable? Challenges of understanding the elderly  
in prehistoric contexts*

Later life is a relatively neglected topic in prehistoric archaeology. There is a popular conception that in the past, most people died by the age of 30, meaning that people were seen as ‘old’ at ages that today we would understand as quite young, and that the truly elderly were rare. Yet we know that this was not the case in reality. Prehistoric populations probably included a significant number of elderly individuals, meaning that understanding later life should be an aim of prehistoric (and other) archaeology.

Archaeologists, though, struggle to identify the elderly of past societies, and struggle further to understand how ageing was experienced in the prehistoric past. Methods of skeletal age estimation become less accurate with increasing age, rendering the elderly invisible in many contexts, whilst our conceptual tools for investigating past ageing are not fully developed.

In this talk I will explore the difficulties of ageing older individuals, and the consequences of treating chronological age estimates as a ‘black box’. I will explore alternative approaches to understanding the ageing process in the past, asking whether ageing and vulnerability are always interlinked, and how we can reconstruct past ageing in ways that does not simply reproduce present-day stereotypes. In order to do this, I will explore the concept of ageing itself, how it is linked with environment and behaviour and how we can consider this in archaeological contexts.



image: J. Appleby

**Online login:** <https://uni-ms.zoom-x.de/j/64207137531>

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*\*zugleich Keynote des Workshops „Altern und Sterben: Herausforderungen des vulnerablen Lebens“*