

## Burial Practices



(Roman Mausoleum)



(Image of a person prepared for cremation)

### Body Preparation

After a person passes away, their bodies were prepared for their final rest usually by the women in the family. The body of the deceased person would be washed, laid out, dressed finely for their *Ekphora* (Greek). A coin was commonly placed under the tongue or on the eyes to pay the ferryman Charon across the river Styx.

### Funerals and Burial

At the time of Regilla, there were two types of commonly practiced way of dealing with a person after they are deceased: cremation and inhumation. Depending on how wealthy the person was they might have gotten a form of parade where the whole town mourned for them. During the funeral, people would dress up, wear wax masks and reenact deceased family members of the person who just died

### Rome

Both inhumation and cremation were practiced in Rome at this time. In both cases the bodies would be washed, laid out and dressed finely. A coin(s) would be added for the ferryman Charon under tongue or on eyes. The wealthy had funerals and also have a professional procession with professional mourners, designators, musicians, and lictors. They would also have their ancestors portrayed by people wearing wax masks accompany the body during the procession. Orations (*laudatio*) could be made in front of the rostra. The poor would sometimes join dovecotes and be buried together. The poor didn't have it as nice; they would sometimes join dovecotes and be buried together. Almost all burials and cremations took place beyond the pomerium.

### Greece

- Both inhumation and cremation practice
- The body was laid out (*Prothesis*) and mourners paid respects
- The procession (*ekphora*) took place before dawn, including professional mourners for rich
- The interment of the body would be marked with markers, of wood, marble, or stone
- Regular visits to graves were quite common

## **Books**

Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity by Ian Morris explains just about everything to do with how people of the Roman Empire dealt with death through excavations around the Euro-Asian. There are individual chapters on Greece as well as Rome, citing archaeological digs and other primary sources

## **Websites**

<http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/deathafterlife/a/RomanBurial.htm>

- Gives a compilation of sources and describes the steps taken for a proper Roman burial. Starts with the preparation of the body and completes with the final steps. Author is a Latinist and historian.

[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dbag/hd\\_dbag.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dbag/hd_dbag.htm)

- The Metropolitan museum of art's website with a slideshow of funerary artifacts. Accompanying the artifacts are fact and sources into practices of Greek burials and funerals. The site is run by the museum itself and updated along with the artifacts.

## **Questions**

- Because Regilla was so far from her family, how do you think it affected the way her body was taken care of after her death?
- Inhumation was just becoming more widely accepted in the east of the Roman Empire at this time, do you think that Herodes was excepting of this or wanted to keep with 'tradition'?
- Can you see traditions that have passed down even to this day? Explain why you think they've survived through time.

## **Bibliography**

Morris, Ian. *Death-ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992. Print.

Gill, N. S. "Roman Burial Practices." *About.com Ancient / Classical History*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Feb. 2014.

"Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History." *Death, Burial, and the Afterlife in Ancient Greece*. N.p., n.d. Web. 09 Feb. 2014.

### **Terms to know:**

*Inhumation*: Practice of burying a body after death

*Cremation*: Practice of dealing with a dead body by burning it

*Prothesis*: Greek word for the preparation of a body

*Laudatio*: Comparable to an eulogy, that was given by an orator by the Rostra in the forum

*ekphora*: funeral procession  
*epitaph*: A short text honoring the deceased person

*pomoerium*: wall around encircling the area of the city of Rome in which people lived

*Charon*: god that brought you to the underworld