

# FUNERALS AND BURIALS

When it came to the customs and rituals surrounding funerals and burials, the ancient Greeks were careful to follow very strict rules. They believed this was essential to make sure the dead person's soul reached the Underworld. For, without a proper funeral, the soul would wander lost and forgotten forever.



Pottery figure of woman holding her head in grief

## BEFORE BURIAL

First, the dead person's body was washed, rubbed with perfumed oils, and dressed in white robes. Then, it was laid out for a day, so friends and relatives could come and pay their respects. A coin was put in its mouth, to pay the ferryman for the journey to the Underworld. Anyone buried without a coin was doomed to remain in this world as a ghost.

Mourners wore black clothes, cut their hair short, and displayed their grief very noisily. They cried and moaned and clapped their hands to show how sad they were.

*This long-necked vase, called a loutrophoros, shows mourners weeping.*

## THE PROCESSION

Before dawn the next day, the body was taken away for burial. It was carried on the shoulders of male relatives or, if the family was rich enough, transported on a horse-drawn carriage. The procession was accompanied by friends and family, crying and wailing. To amplify the sounds of grief, rich families sometimes hired professional mourners to make even more noise at the funeral.

*This illustration of a dead person being visited by relatives comes from a Greek pot.*



*Offerings to the dead were left in pots, like this one.*

## AT THE TOMB

The dead were either buried or cremated in cemeteries outside the city walls, where each family had its own plot of land. Personal belongings were usually buried with the corpse, as well as food and drink for use in the afterlife.

Even after death, the family was expected to look after its ancestors by making offerings of food. This was done at birthdays and anniversaries, and at festivals for the dead.