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Museum Exhibit Proposal

Visualizing Antigone's World:

The Greek Conception of Mythology, Ritual, and Status of the Dead

Museum Exhibit Proposal

When children first learn to read, they are given picture books with illustrations to captivate their imaginations as they struggle to learn new words. When they reach the benchmark of chapter books they are deprived of the colorful representations. The same process occurs in classical studies. Visual elements of archaeology and antiquity intrigue students and spark an interest in the mysteries of mythology and the riches of the past; however, once students reach higher levels of education, they are required to read the classical plays in school, but forget that antiquity was once exciting and interesting. I believe that because art and literature were created together, the best way to ensure the continuation of classical study is to present art and literature side by side.

The story of Antigone has come down through the ages, retold and depicted by many artists, but none so famous as the retelling by Sophocles. His play *Antigone*, performed in the Great Dionysia in the spring of 443 BCE is one of the most well known plays of the Golden Age of Athens, a time when Athenian *demokratia* boasted military, political, and economic success as well as cultural flourishing and advancement in the fifth century BCE. Sophocles captured themes and human emotions relevant to the culture of Athens, his immediate audience, and pertinent to society ever since. While the events surrounding the Theban royalty are not verifiable, Sophocles' play gives many true insights into ancient Athenian customs and perspectives.

The Athenian and Greek conceptions of the import of burial, in addition to the expectations and limitations of women, are important concepts for all interested in investigating the culture of antiquity. Antigone's fight to bury her brother lends insights into the conception of the afterlife, women's roles in the funeral and mourning processes,

and the elevation of status upon death. Much of what we can learn today of past cultures comes from the circumstances of death and burial. High mortality rates and deadly battles increased the amount of deaths and burials, making death a prominent aspect of life in Classical Greece and for Antigone. An exhibit featuring funerary mythology, rituals, objects, and customs would illuminate how the ancients handled one of the few facts of life: Death. In addition, understanding the process through the eyes of Antigone would highlight the humanity of the past, making it more relatable and understandable.

For some students, memorizing the motivations behind Antigone's actions for an exam might be a simple task, but this in no way means that they are internalizing or understanding the information. Antigone's personality is very complex, but it would be useless to try to analyze her complexities in a vacuum, without looking at the society in which she interacts. The burning desire to bury her brother makes more sense if one understands that without burial, the gods will not let him into the Underworld. Antigone seems needlessly stubborn and petty, but once you realize that the only times women could go out in public and the only times they had meaningful jobs to accomplish were funerals and festivals, we begin to understand Antigone as a real person, and her culture as a living and breathing world.

First, looking at the mythological representation of death and the deities that govern the Underworld would help to understand the superstitions of Antigone and ancient mythological Thebes. While ancient Athenians may not have believed in every myth story, the deities still govern their conceptions of the world. The mythology of Persephone, Hades, Demeter, Charon, etc. are part of the ancient culture. The ancients depict stories of the deities and make literary references to their myths, but worship them through ritual.

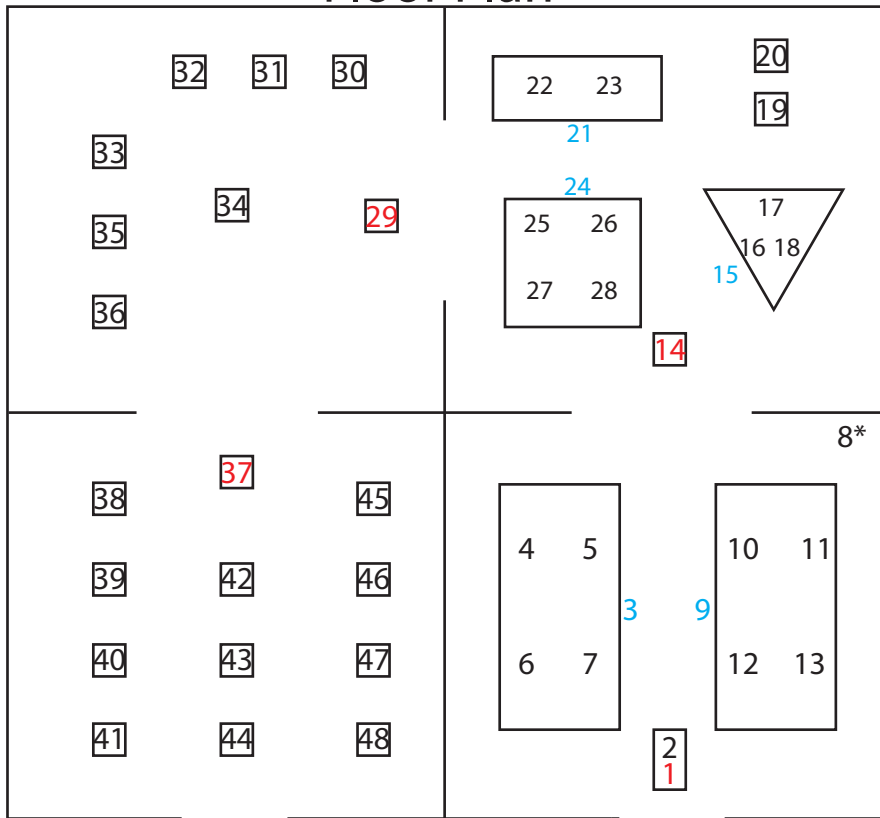
Without seeing the pictorial representations of Persephone and Hades, one would not understand the cultural reference Antigone/Sophocles makes when saying she will be a bride in Hades. Literature helps give context to painted stories, but those paintings are key to understand the cultural references made in literature.

Although the burial and mourning processes are not delved into in *Antigone*, learning about the role women played is vital to understanding Antigone's motivations and aspirations. Women have the important job of cleaning and fondling the deceased. They are the last to connect to the dead and have the privilege of performing an act of kindness for a loved one that will never be able to repay them. This is one of the few privileges women are allowed in Classical Greece, and in this context, Antigone seems justified in her perseverance. The care with which women perform the rituals surround the funeral show that relationships of relatives were very important in antiquity, and this can also be applied to Antigone.

To understand Antigone's fight until the end, we must look at the ways in which death was memorialized. Women had more privileges in death than in life. The gods and the laws demanded equal burial, and women were often given elaborate tombs or funerary offerings. The dead were often heroized, but most important to Antigone would have been the family reunions in the Underworld and the possibility of recognition once she had passed. Believing that she always acted justly and righteously, Antigone died hoping that at least the gods, if not her survivors, would see that she had been pious all along. Through *stelai* and vases we can see for ourselves how the deceased were elevated in a way that is not done today. The reliefs allow us to understand a world that no longer exists today, but was very real in literature.

The goal of juxtaposing literary and archaeological sources is to excite the imagination as well as broaden the public's understanding of the Classical world. A free exhibit in Washington, D.C., would allow for many students and others interested in antiquity to encounter a more complete picture of Classical Athenian society, enhancing preliminary studies and promoting future scholarship. The best way to encourage continued classical scholarship is to foster interest early, and such a museum would open up new paths of creativity. Greek funerary *lethythoi*, *pinakes*, *loutrophoroi*, *oinochoai*, *stelai*, and other objects help shed light on the world of Athens as Sophocles knew it. The interplay would allow antiquity and *Antigone* to become more accessible to people of a broader age and education range. Combing the two mediums of cultural information into one intellectual inquiry would be a much more optimal way of understanding a fuller picture of ancient society.

Floor Plan



*Mural around room walls

● Wall text

● Case Text

Numbers
correspond to
pages numbers

Mythology of Death Wall Text

Against the decree of her uncle King Creon, Antigone buries the corpse of her traitorous brother, claiming that Hades, the god of the Underworld, demands the same funeral rites for both the traitorous brother and the patriotic brother.¹ Belief in the wrath of the gods, and fear of the unknown of death, compelled ancient Greeks to honor the dead through elaborate ritual. The souls of the dead would wander between worlds if their bodies were not buried, and could not go to Hades, but the gods would take revenge on the living for the murdered or unburied dead.² More compelling, Athenian statesman Solon (c. 638 BCE—558 BCE), made neglect of burial rites and commemoration of ancestors punishable under Athenian law.³ For these reasons, Athenian audience watching Sophocles' play would have understood Antigone's desire to bury her brother.

Hermes, the messenger to the gods, would guide souls to the afterlife, and Charon, the ferryman, would conduct them over the river Styx into Hades, but only if the body of the deceased was given a proper burial.⁴ Antigone sacrifices her own life to ensure the safe passage of her brother's soul to Hades. For her treachery, King Creon sentences Antigone to confinement in a cave, where she may worship the god of the Underworld until she dies. Antigone declares that she is fated to marry Acheron, a river leading into Hades. A comparison is drawn between Antigone, buried alive before her marriage, and Persephone, kidnapped by Hades and married in the Underworld.⁵

¹ Sophocles, *Antigone*, line 519.

² Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 2-3.

³ *Ibid.* 8.

⁴ Charles Burton Gulick, *The Life of the Ancient Greeks*. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1973, 292-293.

⁵ Sophocles, *Antigone*, line 884-923.

**Red-figure *Nestoris*, ca, 380-390 BCE. Attributed to the Dolon Painter. Greek
Lucanian. The British Museum, Vase F175.**

Antigone, flanked by guards carrying spears, is brought before King Creon.

CREON

You there—you with your face
bent down towards the ground, what do you say?
Do you deny you did this or admit it?

ANTIGONE

I admit I did it. I won't deny that.

500

CREON [*to the Guard*]

You're dismissed—go where you want. You're free—
no serious charges made against you.

[*Exit the Guard. Creon turns to interrogate Antigone*]

Tell me briefly—not in some lengthy speech—
were you aware there was a proclamation
forbidding what you did?⁶

⁶ Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Ian Johnston. Arlington: Richer Resources Publications, 2005, lines 497-505.

Lekythoi Case Text

The white-ground *lethythoi* were oil containers used by the living and often given as gifts to the dead in Athens from the sixth century and continuing through the Classical Period. Scenes of mythology were as common as domestic imagery, prior to the fifth century domination of funerary depictions.⁷ *Lekythoi* used for funeral rites were relatively tall and slender, with narrow necks to make pouring easier. When buried with the dead as gifts, they would occasionally have false bottoms so that the survivors of the departed would not have to dispose of so much valuable oil.⁸ Literature and paintings indicate that *lekythoi* were placed around the corpse during mourning procedures, possibly to purify the body and the visitors from the pollution of death.⁹ Eventually, before the practice of giving *lekythoi* went out of fashion, stone *lekythoi* were placed as grave markers on top of tombs simply as representational gifts, and were not used to pour ritual libations (*choai*).¹⁰ Ritual tomb depictions are very enlightening about the ancient Greek procedures surrounding death.

⁷ Donna C. Kurtz, *Athenian White Lekythoi: Patterns and Painters*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, xx.

⁸ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 132.

⁹ *Ibid.* 43.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 170.

White-ground *Lekythos*, ca. 450 BCE. Attributed to the Sabouroff Painter. Greek, Attic. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 21.88.17.

Here, the god Hermes acts as the conductor of the dead, leading the spirits to Charon who will ferry them to the Underworld.¹¹ The grievers are putting the soul of the deceased in the hands of the gods.

¹¹ Donna C. Kurtz and John Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971, 103.

White-ground *Lekythos*, ca. 420 BCE. Unattributed. Greek, Attic. The National Museum of Athens, 1757. Photo: after *Antike Denkmaler*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1891), pl. 23, 2.

Charon is depicted in his ferry waiting to escort the soul of the boy leaning against a *stele* (tomb marker). The boy shown is a depiction of the dead spirit, and it is important to note the small coin in his right hand. This is most likely the first depiction of a fee required by Charon in order to be guided down the river Styx surrounding Hades, without which one would not be allowed passage to the Underworld.¹²

¹² John H. Oakley, *Picturing Death in Classical Athens: The Evidence of the White Ground Lekythoi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 123-125.

Silver Tetradrachm, ca. 480. Athens, Greece. The British Museum, CM 1906-11-3-2591.

The design of the coin symbolizes Athens, utilizing the profile of Athena on one side, and her owl on the other, along with the first letters of 'Athens'. Although vases were the main burial objects given as gifts, eventually some coins were buried with the deceased, and even cremated with them. It is likely that the coins were given as obols, coins to pay the fee for passage on Charon's ferry.¹³

¹³ Donna C. Kurtz and John Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971, 163.

Attic White *Lekythos*, ca. 420 BCE. Attributed to the Quadrate Painter. Greek, Attic. The National Museum of Athens, 12738. Photo: after *CVA, Athens I, Greece I*, pl. 18.

Brothers Hypnos (Sleep) and Thanatos (Death) are shown carrying a corpse. The corpse, while appearing feminine, must be a masculine youth as his shield lies on the ground below his body. Hermes stands to the right, ready to lead the *psyche* (soul) to the Underworld.¹⁴

¹⁴ John H. Oakley, *Picturing Death in Classical Athens: The Evidence of the White Ground Lekythoi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 127, 132.

Interior of the Tomb of Persephone at Megali Toumba, the Great Tumulus Museum, Vergina, c. 350 BCE. Attributed to Nicomachus of Thebes. Archive of the Excavation of Vergina.

The left panel of the wall painting depicts Hades in his chariot carrying hysterical Persephone from the field in which she was playing with her friend. Hermes leads the chariot to the Underworld. The central panel shows the distressed mother Demeter. The panel on the right displays three beautiful women thought to be the Fates. As the tomb had no entrance, the internment took place from above; the wall paintings were not intended to be seen again.¹⁵

¹⁵ Stella Drougou and Chryssoula Saatsoglou-Paliadeli, *Vergina: The Land and Its History*. Greece: Ephesus Publishing, 2005, 178-180.

Hades and Persephone Case Text

The myth recounted in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* explains the reason behind the fallow land during the winter season. Hades, god of the Underworld, abducts and marries the daughter of Demeter, the goddess of grain and harvest. Demeter refuses to let the crops on earth grow until her daughter Persephone is returned to her. Without crops the humans will die, so the gods strike a compromise between Hades and Demeter. For two thirds of the year, Persephone is allowed to return to her mother on earth, but must remain with her husband in the Underworld for one third of the year, at which time Demeter is sad and crops do not grow. Although his plot is partially thwarted due to the gods' recognition of the importance of crops, Hades seizure of Persephone prevails as an analogy for the violence of an early death.¹⁶

¹⁶ Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*. Second Ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002, 195.

***Pinax* Abduction of Persephone, ca. 500-450 BCE. Unattributed. Locri, Greece, Sanctuary of Persephone. Museo Nazionale Archeologico at Reggio Di Calabria.**

From a sanctuary dedicated to Persephone, this plaque depicts her abduction from here earth to the Underworld by Hades. The marriage of Persephone to Hades is often used as a metaphor for death, and is used by Antigone in Sophocles' play.¹⁷

¹⁷ Sophocles, *Antigone*, line 917-923.

The Return of Persephone. Red-figure Bell-krater (bowl for mixing wine and water), ca. 440 BCE. Attributed to the Persephone Painter. Greek, Attic. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 28.57.23.

This scene depicts Hermes leading Persephone from the Underworld to return to her mother on earth at night (torches are lit). The myth of Persephone rising from the Underworld was prevalent in everyday life, as shown by its presence on everyday objects such as this mixing bowl, and its relevance to the cycling seasons.

Pinax with Persephone and Hades Enthroned, ca. 500-450 BCE. Unattributed. Locri, Greece, Sanctuary of Persephone. Museo Nazionale Archeologico at Reggio Di Calabria.

From the sanctuary of Persephone at Locri, this plaque shows Persephone holding grain and seated on a throne next to Hades. She is both daughter of Demeter, the goddess of the harvest, and wife of Hades, the god of the Underworld.

Stater: Head of Koré, Ear of Corn, ca. 375-340 BCE. Metapontum, Greece. Cleveland Museum of Art, 1916.991.

The importance of crops to the ancient Greeks is pronounced by the fact that it is one of the images on their currency. While metals are valuable, they are worthless without crops for sustenance. Kore, the Greek corn-maiden, was another name for Persephone.¹⁸ Her face on the obverse of this coin shows the strong connection between mythology and everyday valuables in life.

¹⁸ Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*. Second Ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002, 195.

Women in Burial Process Wall Text

Although it was believed that Hermes and Charon led the souls to the Underworld, and *lekythoi* depict Thanatos and Hypnos taking up the bodies of the deceased, in reality, preparing the body was women's work. In the fifth century, mythological iconography of death became the standard for white-ground *lekythoi*,¹⁹ but many older funeral scenes showed detailed steps of the preparations and rituals after death. After the body had been cleansed, clothed, and laid out on a *kline* (bier), the three main parts of the funerary proceedings would commence. First the *prothesis*, formal lamentation period in the courtyard or home of the deceased; then the *ekphora*, the procession from to the cemetery; and finally the internment. Women had main roles as mourners and caretakers in the funerary proceedings. In the opening scene of Sophocles' *Antigone*, Antigone declares her right to bury her deceased sibling:

ANTIGONE

Yes. I'll do my duty to my brother—
and yours as well, if you're not prepared to.
I won't be caught betraying him.

ISMENE

You're too rash.

Has Creon not expressly banned that act?

60

ANTIGONE

Yes. But he's no right to keep me from what's mine.²⁰

Antigone is referring to the act of burial as her own. As women were given such little freedom in Athens, the funeral proceeding were especially important for women as a chance to act on behalf of their loved ones, as well as an opportunity to go out in public.

¹⁹ Donna C. Kurtz, *Athenian White Lekythoi: Patterns and Painters*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, xx.

²⁰ Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Ian Johnston. Arlington: Richer Resources Publications, 2005, lines 57-61.

Pinakes Case Text

Prior to the sixth century BCE, earth mounds were often used to cover over graves dug into the ground in the Kerameikos, the main cemetery outside of the ancient city of Athens. A trend began early in sixth century of building tombs of mud-brick rather than earth mounds to mark the cremation graves. Clay plaques, or *pinakes*, were affixed to these structures as markers and decorations, and some were painted by elite painters of the time, including Exekias. They were used as grave markers but also as decorations in sanctuaries. A *pinax* could either stand alone or as part of a series, and would usually depict grieverers or the mourning process in some way.²¹

²¹ Donna C. Kurtz and John Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971, 82-83.

Attic black-figure Pinax (funerary plaque), ca. 560–550 BCE. Burgon Group. Athens, Greece. Louvre CA 255. Photo: Jastrow, 2006.

Women are shown surrounding and preparing the body for the *prothesis* (wake), while men are off to the sides raising their hands in lament. Before the body can be laid out on the *kline* (bed, couch, bier, etc.), the eyes must be closed, the body bathed and the jaw secured. The closing of the mouth and eyes is meant to ensure the departure of the spirit from the body.²²

²² Joan R. Mertens, *How to Read Greek Vases*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010, 29-30.

Attic black-figure *pinax* (funerary plaque), c. 500 BCE. Sappho Painter. Athens, Greece. Louvre MNB905. Photo: Jastrow, 2006.

This grave monument depicts the family and mourners surrounding a corpse, simultaneously laying out the body for the *prothesis* (wake), and performing the rituals of the *prothesis*.²³ The labeling shows that the mother is the one lovingly fastening a chinstrap, *othonai*, to the youth.²⁴ The women are shown in white and in the foreground, actively lamenting and attending the body, whereas the men stand on the sides of the corpse grieving. The raised arms as a sign of lamentation.

²³ Donna C. Kurtz and John Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971, 120.

²⁴ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 23.

Archaic Terracotta Funerary Plaque, c. late 7th century BCE. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 14.146.3a.

The moment after death, the eyes of the corpse would be closed, and women would cleanse the body before laying it out on a *kline* (bier). Here, women would pull their hair as they lamented with planned dirges. As this *pinax* was created before the Solon's restrictions on the burial processes in the sixth and fifth centuries, the scene depicted was a public *prothesis* likely held outdoors.²⁵ This was one of the few times women could go out in public.

²⁵ Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*. Second Ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002, 4-5.

***Prothesis*. Attic-white monumental *lekythos* belonging to the “Group of the Huge *Lekythoi*”, ca. 400 BCE. Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Antikensammlung F 2684. Photo: after Riezler, 67, fig. 42. Scenographic, polychrome drawing.**

Prior to this *prothesis* scene, women have laid out the body. A block prevents the jaw from opening. The *epiblema*, loose covering or clothing, covers the body and characteristically drapes over the *kline*. The *lekythos* under the bed shows its use during the *prothesis* ritual to hold the oil that anointed the corpse and to act as an offering surrounding the bier.²⁶ This intimate scene emphasizes the gentle care of the survivors and the importance of their relationship to the deceased.

²⁶ John H. Oakley, *Picturing Death in Classical Athens: The Evidence of the White Ground Lekythoi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 86.

Terracotta *Lekythos*, ca. 450 BCE. Classical Greek, Attic. Attributed to the Sabouroff Painter. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 07.286.40.

During the period of painting white-ground *lekythoi*, it was unpopular to paint *prothesis*.²⁷ However, clearly demonstrated here is the tearing of hair during the wake practiced especially by female mourners, not as a sign of uncontrollable grief, but as a specific part of the mourning ritual.²⁸

²⁷ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 28.

²⁸ Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*. Second Ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002, 6.

Loutrophoroi Case Text

Loutrophoroi, a name given by archaeologists, were tall vases with skinny necks and wide brims, most likely used to carry *loutra*, ritual water for washing.²⁹ They were often used for the ritual cleansing of a bride before marriage, and later used to mark the graves of those who died right before or after marriage, the unmarried dead.³⁰ Betrothed to the king's son, Antigone is sentenced to death before she can marry. Locked in a cave alive, Antigone is a prime example of an unmarried dead whose grave should have been marked with a *loutrophoros*.

ANTIGONE

Look at me, my native citizens,
as I go on my final journey,
as I gaze upon the sunlight one last time,
which I'll never see again—for Hades,
who brings all people to their final sleep,
leads me on, while I'm still living,
down to the shores of Acheron.
I've not yet had my bridal chant,
nor has any wedding song been sung—
for my marriage is to Acheron.³¹

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²⁹ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 87.

³⁰ Ibid. 131.

³¹ Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Ian Johnston. Arlington: Richer Resources Publications, 2005, lines 914-923.

Terracotta *Loutrophoros* (ceremonial vase for water), ca. late 6th century BCE. Archaic, Greek, Attic. Unattributed. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 27.228.

This *loutrophoros* with no bottom was likely placed on the grave of an unmarried dead and used for libations, which were poured into the vessel and would reach the deceased through the ground. The mourners' mouths are specifically left open to show the significance of the formal dirge during the *prothesis*, which rivaled the burial itself in importance.³² The depiction of the mourner carrying a *loutrophoros* shows that the vessel was part of the iconography of the burial rituals.

³² Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 30.

**Terracotta *Loutrophoros* (ceremonial vase for water), ca. late 6th century BCE.
Archaic, Greek, Attic. Unattributed. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 25.70.1.**

The raising of ones arms was more likely to lead the women in formal lament rather than an indication of grief, and may have been done by “leaders of the dirge” (*threnon exarchoi*) as hired mourners were allowed before the restrictions of Solon.³³ The pedestal and pillow are possibly to prevent the mouth from gaping. The chariots may reference the wealth of the dead in life, as horses were very expensive, death in battle, or the funerary games of the Homeric heroes.

³³ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 29-30.

Ekphora, Cremation, Interment Case Text

On the morning after the *prothesis*, the body was transported to the cemetery for cremation or interment in a processional called the *ekphora*. The corpse was considered to be contaminated, so the processional took place before sunrise, and by Classical Athens the cremation and interment took place outside of the city.³⁴ Through various funeral rites such as cremation or interment the corpse was made sacred, but Antigone's desperate act of sprinkling dirt over her brother was also considered satisfactory to the gods.³⁵ From the Geometric period we know that the body was transported on a wheeled hearse drawn by horses, but was often carried on the bier from the *prothesis*.³⁶ Men led the procession and women followed singing lamentations. The high cost of wood led funeral pyres to be a practice restricted primarily to the wealthy. An urn with ashes or a coffin containing the corpse would be lowered into a grave and surrounded by grave gifts such as vases with food and drink.³⁷

³⁴ Charles Burton Gulick, *The Life of the Ancient Greeks*. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1973, 295.

³⁵ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 46.

³⁶ Ibid. 31.

³⁷ Charles Burton Gulick, *The Life of the Ancient Greeks*. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1973, 296-7.

Attic Geometric *Krater*, ca. 750-735 BCE. Attributed to the Hirschfeld Painter. The National Archaeological Museum of Athens, 990. Photo: University of California, San Diego.

During the *ekphora*, the body is laid on a bier in a wagon drawn by horses. The chequered *stroma* (bier-cloth) floats in the air above the body, representing the covering of the corpse. Men lead the procession and women follow lamenting.³⁸

³⁸ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 31.

Terracotta Model of a Wagon, ca. 600-650 BCE. Archaic. Vari, Greek. The National Archaeological Museum of Athens, 26747. Photo: Museum Gallery.

This ancient model of the *ekphora* cart shows the bier-cloth totally covering the corpse. A driver leads at the front and other mourners surround the cart on all sides, with their arms raised in lamentation. On top of the cart, and the corpse, is a child, who apparently does not follow the stringent rules of ritual grieving.³⁹

³⁹ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 32.

**Attic black-figure *oinochoe*, ca. 500-480 BCE. Attributed to the Sappho Painter.
Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Maine, 1984.023. Photo: The Museum.**

The first scene is a rare one, depicting the internment of the body. The body is being lowered into the grave, while around the rest of the vase the mourning procession continues. *Lekythoi*, baskets, and other vessels containing offerings are carried. In the second scene, a man carries an axe above a kneeling woman who puts out vases. All the proceedings take place before sunrise as the lamps are depicted around the vessel.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Donna C. Kurtz and John Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971, 153-154.

***Croesus on the Funeral Pyre*, Red-figure amphora, ca. 500-490 BCE. Attributed to Myson. Athenian. Musee du Louvre, G 197. Photo: Herve Lewandowski.**

This vase shows the mythological story of the cremation of the King of Lydia. Croesus pours libations while his servant lights the pyre. Wine was actually used to put out the fires after cremation, at which point the closest relative would gather the ashes and put them in a cinerary urn to be buried.⁴¹

⁴¹ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 144, 36.

Women's Role is Mourning Wall Text

While men constructed the tomb, the women oversaw the *perideipnon*, a funerary feast in honor of the dead who returned as a host for the meal. This foreshadowed the eventual reunion in the afterlife. The mourning process continued and women gave customary offerings, libations, and prayers on the third, ninth, and thirtieth days after the funeral.⁴² The spirit was conceived of as being in a transitory state until this mourning period was complete, and the *kathedra* (banquet) marked the return of the grievors to normal life. Unlike during the *perideipnon*, the relatives were no longer reunited with the deceased.⁴³

ANTIGONE

Oh my tomb and bridal chamber—
my eternal hollow dwelling place,
where I go to join my people. Most of them 1000
have perished—Persephone has welcomed them
among the dead. ...
But I go nourishing the vital hope
my father will be pleased to see me come,
and you, too, my mother, will welcome me,
as well as you, my own dear brother.
When you died, with my own hands I washed you.
I arranged your corpse and at the grave mound 1010
poured out libations. But now, Polyneices,
this is my reward for covering your corpse.⁴⁴

Although Antigone performed the minimum burial rites for her brother, she was not able to perform the mourning rites. Antigone hopes for the type of reunion with her family that is symbolized by the *perideipnon*.

⁴² Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 130.

⁴³ Ibid. 39.

⁴⁴ Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Ian Johnston. Arlington: Richer Resources Publications, 2005, lines 998-1012.

Attic White *Lekythos*, ca. 460-450 BCE. Attributed to the Inscription Painter. Athens, National Museum 1959. Photo: Museum.

A woman visits a grave with food and drink offerings in a funerary basket and *lekythos*.⁴⁵ Depending on whether it was the third, ninth, or thirtieth day after the death, on the anniversary, or on a special festival, different gifts were given, such as locks of hair, libations of wine and oil, milk, honey, first-fruits, etc. along with prayers, and prior to Solon's reforms, animal sacrifices took place as well.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ John H. Oakley, *Picturing Death in Classical Athens: The Evidence of the White Ground Lekythoi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 129.

⁴⁶ Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*. Second Ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002, 7-8.

Terracotta *lekythos* (oil flask), ca. 460-450 BCE. Attributed to the Vouni Painter. Classical Greek, Attic. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 35.11.5.

Women decorated the grave markers for tombs, often tying fat ribbons (*taeniai*) around the shafts of *stelai*. Rarely are tombs depicted without these sashes, and many, as depicted here, display a multitude. The precise significance of the *taeniai* is unknown, however they may have been used to ward off evil, to sanctify objects, or as a sign of reverence.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 116.

Red-figure oinochoe-chous (jug) depicting women perfuming clothes, ca. 420-410 BCE. Attributed to the Meidias Painter. Attic, Greek. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 75.2.11.

A number of yearly festivals took place in honor of the dead, and here two festively dressed women are seen to purify and perfume their garments for such an occasion.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 129-130.

***Woman Pouring a Libation.* Detail from an Attic white-ground *lekythos*, ca. 460 BCE. The British Museum, GR 1863.7-28.188 (Cat. Vases D 47). Photo: Jastrow.**

A woman pours ritual libations from a *phiale* (libation bowl). Depictions of *lekythoi* rarely show more than two mourners bringing gifts or libations to the grave, and one is always female.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*. Second Ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002, 7-8.

**Statuette of a Seated Woman with a *Phiale* and a Bowl, ca. 4th century BCE.
Unattributed. Western Greek. Thorvaldsens Museum, H1028.**

It is natural for a woman to be depicted holding ritualistic vessels such as a *phiale* (libation bowl) and bowl, as women were often the performers of religious rituals, especially those surrounding death. Libations were poured on festivals and in honor of the gods, but they were also used to honor the dead. Seated women would also hold *phiale* in death-feast reliefs.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Donna C. Kurtz and John Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971, 234.

Bronze *Phiale* (libation bowl), ca. 4th century BCE. Unattributed. Greek, Late Classical. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978.11.7.

This is a bronze *phiale* used for libations as depicted on white-ground *lekythoi* and statues. The flattened dish with the *omphalos* (center knob) was a Greek modification of a Near Eastern concept, used for the pouring of *choai*, drinking offerings.⁵¹

⁵¹ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 113.

Terracotta *Phiale* (libation bowl), ca. 3rd century BCE. Unattributed. Greek, Hellenistic. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978.11.3.

This libation dish is decorated with ducks, birds, winged women, and other winged creatures. When pouring libations at graves, it was customary to dedicate oneself and one's offering to the deceased, and request that the deceased speak on behalf of the family and person offering the libation. In line with the imagery on the *phiale*, women were most often the ones performing libations at graves.⁵²

⁵² Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 114.

Elevated Status of the Dead Wall Text

Throughout Greece, the dead are not just appeased with ritual, but heroized in their death. Epithets on grave markers clearly show that individuals were awarded a higher status in death than they could have achieved in life. The deceased are commonly referred to as blessed (*makarites*), in Athens as 'people of Demeter' (*Demetrioï*), and in Thessaly and Boeotia as heroes (*heroi*) even when they had no special status in life. In Archaic Crete and Lakonia, the dead are depicted on pedestals, or receiving gifts from smaller worshippers. Aristotle sheds light on this phenomenon by explaining that people are considered better and stronger once they are dead.⁵³

Antigone's father Oedipus was cursed for his sins, but he was not sentenced to death because once dead, he would become venerated. When her brother Polynices is accused of treason, Antigone defends his right to proper burial, but does not defend his character in life, as it is no longer relevant. In death, all are elevated, and in the end she chooses this elevation over the restrictions imposed on her by King Creon and her society. Even the words of the dying were thought to be prophetic, memorable, and hold great meaning.⁵⁴ Simply by dying, Antigone would become more valuable than she had whilst living. Women had far fewer privileges than men in life, but after death they were given more credit than before.

⁵³ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 8-12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 20.

***Totenmahl* (Death feast) Relief, c. 4th century BCE. Unattributed. Corinth, Greece. The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, S 2632. Photograph: E. V. Milburn.**

A man reclines at a funeral feast holding a *phiale*, with his seated wife serves funerary cakes. Such *Totenhaml* were erected for both men and women, showing drinking parties and reunions in Hades.⁵⁵ While the male is dominant, it is important to note that the deceased wished to be united with his loved one for eternity. The diminutive worshipper shows that the dead are heroized. Although it is unclear whether the deceased were believed to have returned for the banquets of the survivors,⁵⁶ it was customary to praise the deceased at the funeral banquet.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 70.

⁵⁶ Donna C. Kurtz and John Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971, 234.

⁵⁷ Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*. Second Ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002, 105.

Persephone and Hades. Tondo of an Attic red-figured kylix, ca. 440-430 BC.
Unattributed. The British Museum, GR 1847.9-9.6 (Cat. Vases E82). Photo: Marie-Lan Nguyen.

Persephone and Hades are shown in very similar positions as the couples of the *Totenmahl*, enjoying their own meal in the Underworld. It is possible that the death-feast reliefs draw from the iconography of Persephone and Hades, as pomegranates are often pictured in the scenes.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 70.

Preparation for Maiden's Ritual Bath Before Wedding in the Underworld, white-ground lekythos, ca. 440 BCE. Attributed to the Achilles Painter. Greek, Attic. National Archeological Museum of Spain, 11189. Photo: Luis Garcia.

It was believed that girls who died before marriage would be like Persephone, abducted from the world to marry Hades.⁵⁹ Anticipating her own marriage in the Underworld, the deceased prepares a ritual bridal bath depicted on this funeral marker. Occasionally, some people ritually cleansed themselves in preparation for their own death when they knew it was imminent. Both cleansing rituals mark a rite of passage from one stage of existence to another and an elevation of status.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*. Second Ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002, 195.

⁶⁰ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 14, 24.

Grave Lekythos of Theophante, ca. 350-340 BCE. National Archaeological Museum of Athens, 1055. Photo: Archaeological Photographic Collection, AP 0256.

During the Classical period, regulations on burials were not unique to Athens. In Sparta, only if a person died on the battlefield or in childbirth were they granted full funerary rituals.⁶¹ The Greeks recognized that childbirth was as dangerous as battle, and as seen here, women were recognized for their bravery and labor after death. Although slumped and dying in childbirth, Theopante is shown on a slightly larger scale than her survivors, showing her elevated status.⁶²

⁶¹ Morris, Ioan. *Burial and Ancient Society: The Rise of the Greek City State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 50.

⁶² Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 12.

Archaic Terracotta black-figure Pinax (funerary plaque), ca. 520–510 BCE. Greek, Attic. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 54.11.5.

The chariots beneath the *prothesis* could denote death in war, and would also hearken back to the legendary funeral games described by Homer. In Athens, war-dead received state burial and more elaborate funeral rites, including a three-day *prothesis* and the allowance of any female relative's attendance. Every year funeral games (*agon epitaphios*) were held in honor of the war-heroes.⁶³

⁶³ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 90.

Detail from Attic red-figure *loutrophoros*, ca. 470-460 BCE. Attributed to the Bologna 228 Painter. Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 1170.

Crowns were often placed on the body of the deceased, despite their ordinary standings in life, either as a sign of respect or possibly because they had made it through the struggles of life.⁶⁴ The *loutrophoros* is the symbol of the unmarried dead, and it is possible that the crown is a bridal coronet as the unmarried dead could be buried in bridal attire, including dress and crown.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 26.

⁶⁵ Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*. Second Ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002, 5.

White-ground *Lekythos*, ca. 430-420 BCE. Unattributed. Greek, Attic. The National Museum of Athens, 1830. Photo: after Buschor (1925), pl. 5.

Hypnos (Sleep) and Thanatos (Death) carry the woman's body to the *stèle* marking her grave, where Hermes waits to lead the soul to Charon who is waiting in his ferry with a child.⁶⁶ This artist hearkens back to the Euphronios' famous Attic red-figure vase painting of the death of Sarpedon a century prior, which was the first to depict Hypnos and Thanatos in this manner.⁶⁷ In death, she is treated as an equal to Sarpendon, the son of Zeus, when in life women are never equals.

⁶⁶ John H. Oakley, *Picturing Death in Classical Athens: The Evidence of the White Ground Lekythoi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 129.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 125.

**Calyx-krater (bowl for mixing wine and water), "Death of Sarpedon," ca. 515 BCE.
Signed by Euphronios, painter; Euxitheos, potter. The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
1972.11.10.**

[For comparison.]

***Chrysapha Relief*, ca. 540 BCE. Greek Archaic. Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, SK 731. Photo: Ingrid Geske.**

This is an example of the Lakonian hero-reliefs beginning in the sixth century. Two deceased sit on a throne while diminutive living worshipers bring offerings, such as a pomegranate.⁶⁸ The pomegranate has a special connection to death as it symbolizes Persephone, as it was the chance eating of one pomegranate seed in Hades that solidified her fate in the Underworld for one third of every year.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 10.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 158.

Grave stele of Damasistrate, showing “dexiosis” (farewell handclasp), ca. first half of 4th century BCE. Classical Athens. National Archeological Museum of Athens, 734. Photo: Allan T. Kohl.

Damasistrate wife of Polykeides is listed in the inscription on the architrave of the *stèle*. She sits on a throne, holding her husband's hand in a typical scene of family reunion of fourth century grave *stelai*. Most likely the *dexiosis*, handshake, represents a farewell to Damasistrate, or a reunion in the Underworld.⁷⁰ The *Totenmahl* reliefs show similar classical beliefs of reunions in Hades, like the one Antigone hopes for with her parents and brothers.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Glenys Davies, “The Significance of the Handshake Motif in Classical Funerary Art,” *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 89, no. 4. Boston: Archaeological Institute of America, 1985, 628-629.

⁷¹ Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 67.

***Polyxena Stele*, ca. 460 BCE. Found in Larissa, Thessaly. Unattributed. National Archeological Museum of Athens, 733. Photo: Allan T. Kohl.**

The inscription denotes that the veiled deceased is Polyxena. She holds a pomegranate, connecting her to the queen of the Underworld, Persephone, who was abducted from the world at a young age.⁷² Polyxena's connection to Persephone may be built on the metaphor of the unmarried dead marrying Hades, or like Antigone, it may be a hope that Persephone will welcome her.⁷³

⁷² Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1985, 158.

⁷³ Sophocles, *Antigone*, line 1,000-1,001.

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