

WORKBOOK

1.7

Death & Burial Greece

Preparation of the body, the funeral procession, burial and cremation, grave stelai, and the festivals of the dead – everything from death to remembrance in ancient Greece.

NAME

SET / FORM

TOPIC 1.7 · GREECE

What's in this booklet?

Greek death and burial practices, from the moment of death through to the annual festivals of remembrance.

- A Key vocabulary** — the eight Greek terms you must know.

- B Preparation of the body** — washing, shrouding, and the prothesis.

- C The ekphora** — the funeral procession before dawn on day three.

- D Burial and stelai** — cremation, burial gifts, and grave monuments.

- E Festivals for the dead** — the Anthesteria and the Genesia.

- F The process** — eight stages from death to remembrance, as a timeline.

- G Source: the stele of Hegeso** — annotation exercise.

- H Source: the stele of Dexileos** — a second source for comparison.

- I Topic check** — ten questions across the whole Greece section.

- J Extended question** — working up to the 6-mark response.

NO PRESCRIBED SOURCES

This topic has no set texts. Draw on visual sources and your knowledge of practices and beliefs in exam answers.

AT A GLANCE

TOPIC

1.7 Greece

SPEC AREA

Myth & Religion

KEY TERMS

8 terms

SOURCES

2 stelai

SECTIONS

10 sections

CULMINATES IN

6-mark question

EXAM QUESTION LADDER

2 marks — Identify / state**3 marks** — Describe**6 marks** — Explain / how far

SECTION A

Key vocabulary

Eight terms you must know. Learn the word, its meaning, and what it refers to in practice.

prothesis	The laying out of the body; lasted two days so friends and family could pay their respects.	ekphora	The funeral procession from the house to the burial ground, before dawn on day three.
lament	A passionate expression of grief; performed by the women of the family during the prothesis.	Kerameikos	The main Athenian burial ground, just outside the northwest city walls.
stele (pl. stelai)	A stone slab carved with a relief showing the deceased in life; the Greek equivalent of a gravestone.	Charon	The ferryman of the dead. A coin on the deceased's mouth was his payment for the crossing to the underworld.
Anthesteria	A three-day festival in late January honouring Dionysus; the dead were believed to return to earth on day one.	Genesia	A festival in late September in which graves were decorated and food and sacrifice offered to dead ancestors.

Exercise A.1 – Match the term

Match each term to its definition. Write the correct letter in the box.

- prothesis**
- ekphora**
- stele**
- Kerameikos**

- A. The funeral procession before dawn on day three.
- B. A carved stone grave marker.
- C. The laying out of the body for two days.
- D. Athens' main burial ground outside the city walls.

Exercise A.2 – Quick recall

Answer each in one sentence.

1. Why was a coin placed on the deceased's mouth?

[1]

2. Name the two festivals of the dead covered in this topic.

[2]

SECTION B

Preparation of the body

What happened in the Greek world immediately after a person died?

Death was taken very seriously. It was essential that everyone — regardless of wealth or social standing — received a proper burial. Failure to bury the dead was regarded as deeply impious and dishonoured the family.

Immediately after death

Once a person died, their eyes and mouth were closed by a family member. The body was then washed, perfumed, and wrapped in a long white shroud. A coin was placed on the deceased's mouth as payment for Charon, the ferryman who would carry them to the underworld.

The prothesis

The *prothesis* (laying out) then took place. The body was laid out in the home for two days to allow friends and family to pay their respects. Because death automatically polluted the house, a bowl of water was placed outside so that visitors could purify themselves as they left.

During the prothesis the women of the family performed the *lament*: they cut their hair, dressed in black, and wailed beside the body, beating their chests and flailing their arms.

RELIGIOUS POLLUTION

Death made a house ritually impure. The water bowl at the door was a religious necessity — pollution (*miasma*) spread through contact with the dead.

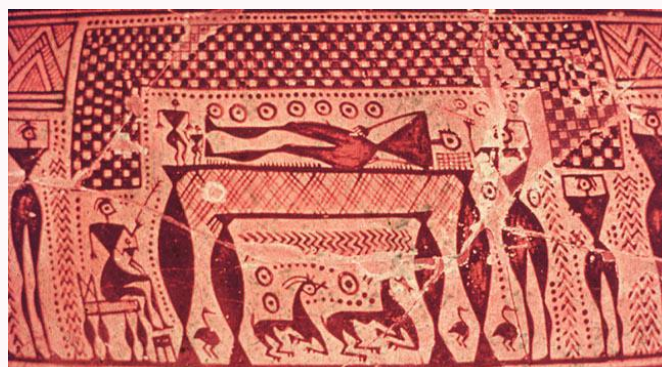
KNOW THIS · PREPARATION SEQUENCE

- Eyes and mouth closed
- Body washed and perfumed
- Wrapped in white shroud
- Coin placed on mouth (for Charon)
- Prothesis — two days of laying out
- Women perform the lament
- Water bowl outside the house

WORTH KNOWING

Leading the mourning was one of the few formal public roles open to women in ancient Athens.

SOURCE IMAGE · PROTHESIS SCENE



SECTIONS C & D

The ekphora and burial

The ekphora

Before dawn on the third day, the *ekphora* (funeral procession) took place. The body was carried from the home to the burial ground, either on a wagon or by pallbearers. Women, children, and men all took part, accompanied by an *aulos* (double-flute) player.

Burial outside the city

All burials had to take place outside the city walls — to prevent religious pollution entering the city, and to reduce the risk of disease. In Athens, the main burial ground was at the Kerameikos, just outside the northwest walls.

Burial or cremation

Once the procession reached the burial ground, the body was either buried or cremated. In cremation, the body was placed on a pyre; the ashes were collected in an urn and placed in a shrine or grave. Burial gifts were added — items important to the deceased, or food for their journey.

Stelai and remembrance

Wealthier families commissioned a sculptor to carve a *stele*. The relief typically showed the deceased as they were in life, acting as a lasting monument. Neglecting a grave stele was a serious dishonour to the family.

A thirty-day period of mourning followed. The family visited the grave on days three, nine, and thirteen, and annually after that. At burial, a sacrifice took place: the victim's blood was released into the earth as an offering to Hades and Persephone.

KNOW THIS · EKPHORA AND BURIAL

- Before dawn, day three
- Wagon or pallbearers; aulos player
- Burial *outside* the city walls
- Kerameikos in Athens
- Burial or cremation; gifts in grave
- Stele for wealthier families
- 30 days mourning
- Sacrifice to Hades and Persephone

SOURCE IMAGE · FIG. 1.68 · EKPHORA SCENE

SECTION E

Festivals for the dead

Beyond private funerals, Athens held public festivals to maintain the memory of the dead.

The Anthesteria

The Anthesteria was a three-day festival in late January, held in honour of Dionysus and strongly connected to the dead.

- **Day one:** The dead were believed to rise from the underworld and roam the earth. Wine from the previous year was opened and libations poured to Dionysus.
- **Day two:** Drinking contests were held, and families poured libations on the graves of their ancestors.
- **Day three:** Dedicated entirely to the dead. Offerings were made to Hermes — one of only two gods able to travel between the living and the dead. The living were *not* permitted to eat any of the food offered. The day ended as the dead returned to the underworld.

The Genesia

The Genesia, held in late September, was Athens' second major festival of the dead. The name comes from the Greek *genos* meaning *family* or *lineage* — it was a festival of *ancestors*, not just the recently deceased.

On this day, Athenian families travelled to the burial grounds outside the city. Graves were decorated with woollen ribbons (tied around the stele), and the family offered food and a blood sacrifice in honour of *all* their dead ancestors, going back generations. The offerings reinforced the bond between the living family and the line of their dead.

ANTHESTERIA VS GENESIA

Two festivals, two different roles. The Anthesteria was about the *recent* dead returning briefly to the world of the living; the Genesia was about *all* ancestors being honoured collectively, generation after generation. Both reinforced the duty to remember.

KNOW THIS · THE ANTHESTERIA

- Late January — three days
- Honour of Dionysus
- Day 1: dead return; wine opened; libations
- Day 2: drinking contests; libations at graves
- Day 3: offerings to Hermes; living may not eat; dead return to underworld

KNOW THIS · THE GENESIA

- Late September — one day
- Name from *genos* = family / lineage
- Honours *all* dead ancestors, not just the recently deceased
- Graves decorated with woollen ribbons
- Food and blood sacrifice offered at the grave

HERMES AND THE DEAD

Hermes was the *psychopomp* — guide of souls. Dionysus also had access to the underworld. All other Olympians were barred.

SECTION F · THE PROCESS

From death to remembrance – seven stages

Fill in the details for each stage. For each one, write *what happened*, the *key term or Greek word* (where there is one), and *who was involved*.

1	<p>Death DAY 1</p> <hr/>
2	<p>Preparation of the body DAY 1</p> <hr/>
3	<p>The laying out DAYS 1–2</p> <hr/>
4	<p>The funeral procession DAY 3 · BEFORE DAWN</p> <hr/>
5	<p>The burial DAY 3</p> <hr/>
6	<p>Mourning & grave visits DAYS 3, 9, 13 · THEN ANNUAL</p> <hr/>
7	<p>Festivals of the dead ANNUALLY</p> <hr/>

SECTION G · SOURCE STUDY

The stele of Hegeso – annotation

Study the stele carefully. Add your own written annotations around the image: identify what you can see, explain what each detail suggests about Greek attitudes to death, and note what the source can and cannot tell us.



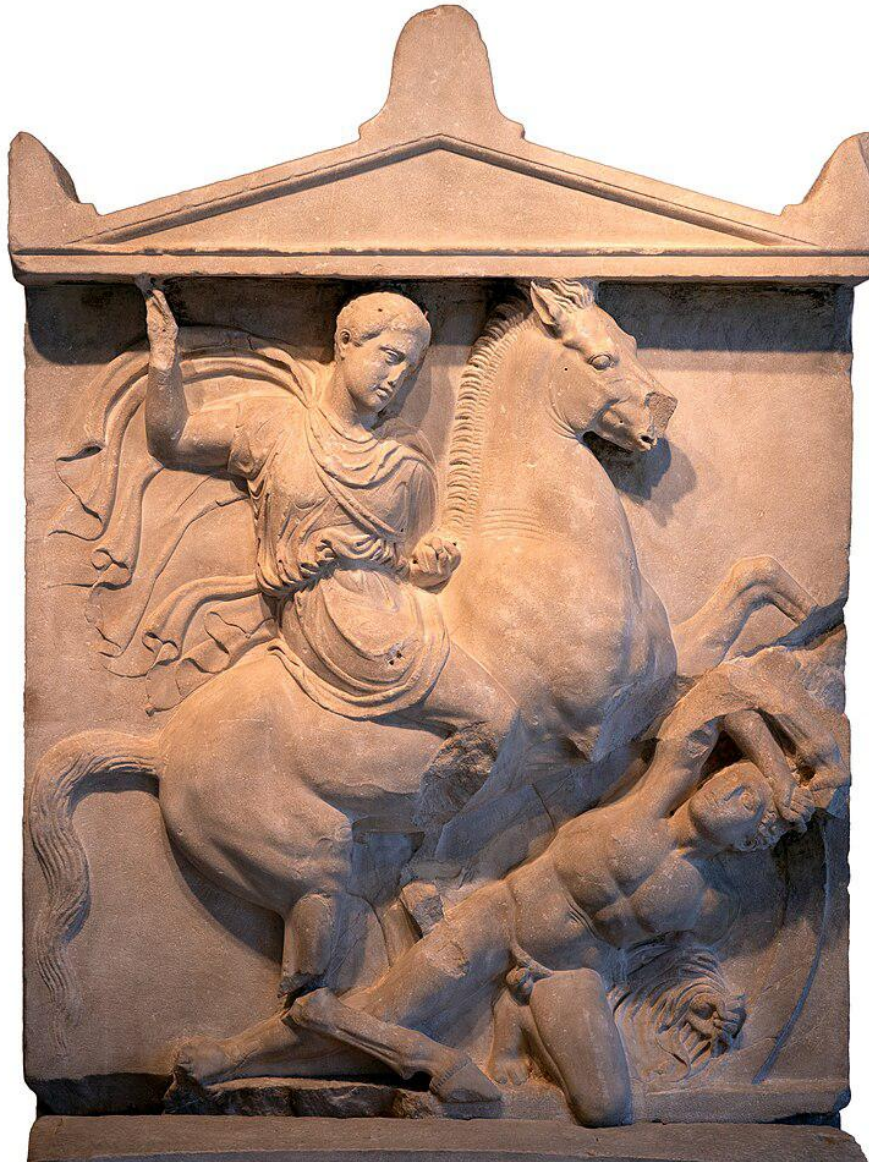
What can we **see** in this source? What details stand out?

What does it **tell us** about Greek attitudes to the dead?

SECTION H · ADDITIONAL SOURCE

The stele of Dexileos

Study the stele carefully. Add your own written annotations around the image: identify what you can see, explain what each detail suggests, and note what the source tells us about Greek attitudes to soldiers who died in battle.



What can we **see** in this source?

What does it **tell us** about how the Greeks remembered soldiers?

SECTION H · CONTINUED

Comparing the stelai – questions

ABOUT DEXILEOS

Dexileos was a young Athenian cavalryman who died in 394 BC fighting against Sparta in the Corinthian War, aged 20. His family set up this stele in the Kerameikos, just as Hegeso's family had done a generation earlier. Combat scenes on stelai were unusual for this period.

THE INSCRIPTION

Unusually, the inscription gives Dexileos' exact dates of birth and death — possibly to prove he died before the rule of the Thirty Tyrants, distancing the family from that period of Athenian history.

Exercise G.1 – Comparing sources

Use both the Hegeso and Dexileos stelai to answer.

1. Identify **one** similarity between the two stelai. [1]

2. Give **two** differences in what the two stelai show. [2]

3. What does the Dexileos stele tell us about how the Greeks wished to remember soldiers who died in battle? [3]

Think about: the scene, the inscription, and what this suggests about family values.

SECTION I

Topic check – ten questions

A sweep across the whole Greece section. Answer each question fully in the lines provided.

1 What was placed on the deceased's mouth before burial, and why? [2]

2 What is the Greek term for the laying out of the body, and how long did it last? [2]

3 Describe the role of women during the preparation of the body and the prothesis. [3]

4 Why was a bowl of water placed outside the house during the prothesis? [2]

5 What is the *ekphora*? When did it take place, and who accompanied it? [3]

6 Give **two** reasons why the Greeks buried their dead outside the city. [2]

7 What was a *stèle*? What did it show, and why was it important to the family? [3]

SECTION I · CONTINUED

Topic check – questions 8–10

8 What happened on the third day of the Anthesteria? Give **two** specific details. [2]

9 What was the Genesia? When did it take place, and what happened during it? [2]

10 Explain why it was important *both* to the individual family and to Athens as a community to respect the dead. [4]

SECTION J

Warm-up – true, false, or correct it

Mark each statement T (true) or F (false). If false, write the correction on the line below.

1. Once a person died, a coin was placed on their eyes to pay Charon.

2. The prothesis lasted two days.

3. The men of the family led the lament during the prothesis.

4. A bowl of water was placed outside the house because death caused religious pollution.

5. The ekphora took place at midday on the third day after death.

6. The main Athenian burial ground was the Kerameikos, outside the city walls.

7. A stele was a bronze statue placed on top of the deceased's grave.

8. The Anthesteria was a three-day festival held in honour of Dionysus in late January.

9. On the third day of the Anthesteria, the living were permitted to eat the food offered to the dead.

10. The Genesia was held in late September and involved decorating graves and offering sacrifice.

SECTION J · CONTINUED

3-mark and extended question

3-mark question [3]

Describe what happened on the third day of the Anthesteria.

Include: to whom offerings were made, what the living could not do, and what happened at the end of the day.

Extended question [6 marks]

Explain how Greek burial practices show that the Greeks believed it was important to respect the dead.

PARAGRAPH SCAFFOLD — START EACH POINT FROM A NAMED PIECE OF EVIDENCE

One way the Greeks showed respect for the dead was...

This is further shown by the fact that...

The festivals of the dead, such as the Anthesteria, also show that...
