

WORKBOOK

1.7

Death & Burial Rome

Preparation of the body, the funerary procession, burial outside the city, the cult of the Manes, the festivals Parentalia and Lemuria – and the key comparisons with Greek practice.

NAME

SET / FORM

TOPIC 1.7 · ROME

What's in this booklet?

Roman death and burial practices, with comparisons to Greek practice woven throughout.

- A** **Key vocabulary** — the Latin terms you must know.
- B** **Funeral clubs and wealth** — how the less wealthy ensured a proper burial.
- C** **Preparation of the body** — the last breath, eight days in the atrium.
- D** **Funerary procession and burial** — masks of ancestors, tombs along the road.
- E** **Festivals for the dead** — the Parentalia and the Lemuria.
- F** **The process** — seven stages from death to remembrance, as a timeline.
- G** **Source: tombs at Pompeii** — visual source annotation.
- H** **Source: the Persephone sarcophagus** — mythological scene on a Roman coffin.
- I** **Source: Pliny on the ghost** — text source on Roman attitudes to burial.
- J** **Comparing Greece and Rome** — the key similarities and differences.
- K** **Topic check** — ten questions covering Rome and the comparison.
- L** **Exam-style practice** — warm-up plus exam-style questions from 1-mark identify to 4-mark compare.

COMPARE AS YOU GO

Look out for the **Compare** sidebars on each teach page — these flag the key differences and similarities with Greek practice. The exam often asks you to compare directly.

AT A GLANCE

TOPIC

1.7 Rome

SPEC AREA

Myth & Religion

KEY TERMS

8 terms

SOURCES

3 sources

SECTIONS

12 sections

CULMINATES IN

Exam-style practice

EXAM QUESTION LADDER

1 mark — State / give a term**2 marks** — Identify / name**3 marks** — Describe / explain**4 marks** — Compare / longer explain

SECTION A

Key vocabulary

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

atrium	The main reception room of a Roman house, where the body of the deceased was laid out for friends and family.	funeral club	A social club paid into by less wealthy Romans; on a member's death, the club paid for their funeral and provided mourners.
funerary mask	A wax mask made from the deceased's face; stored in the family shrine and worn by family members during funeral processions.	sarcophagus	An elaborately carved stone coffin used by wealthy Romans; often decorated with reliefs of mythological scenes.
Manes	The deified spirits of the dead in Roman religion. They needed to be fed and honoured with offerings at their tomb.	Charon	The ferryman of the dead. As in Greece, a coin was placed on the deceased's mouth as his payment.
Parentalia	A nine-day festival in February honouring the family's deceased ancestors; a domestic festival, focused on the family.	Lemuria	A festival held on three days in May to ward off evil spirits of the dead from the home.

Exercise A.1 – Match the term

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

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> atrium | A. The deified spirits of dead ancestors. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Manes | B. The main reception room where the body was laid out. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parentalia | C. A social club ensuring a proper funeral for its members. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> funeral club | D. A nine-day domestic festival in February. |

Exercise A.2 – Quick recall

Answer each in one sentence.

- What is a funerary mask, and what was it made of?
 [2]

- Name the two Roman festivals of the dead.
 [2]

SECTION B

Wealth, status, and funeral clubs

How could every Roman, rich or poor, ensure a proper burial?

As in many aspects of Roman life, status and wealth mattered in death. Wealthy families would invest heavily in their funerals, and almost all of our evidence for Roman burial practice comes from the rich. But the majority of Romans were working citizens, freedmen, and slaves — people without the cash or social connections for elaborate funerals.

Funeral clubs

The main option for less wealthy Romans was a *funeral club*. Members paid a monthly fee, and in return the club met for shared meals and social gatherings — useful for making business connections. Many clubs were trade-based: the bakers' guild, the blacksmiths' guild, and so on.

When a member died, the club paid for their funeral and provided mourners to ensure they were properly remembered. Larger clubs even maintained shared tombs or burial grounds for their members.

WHY THIS MATTERS

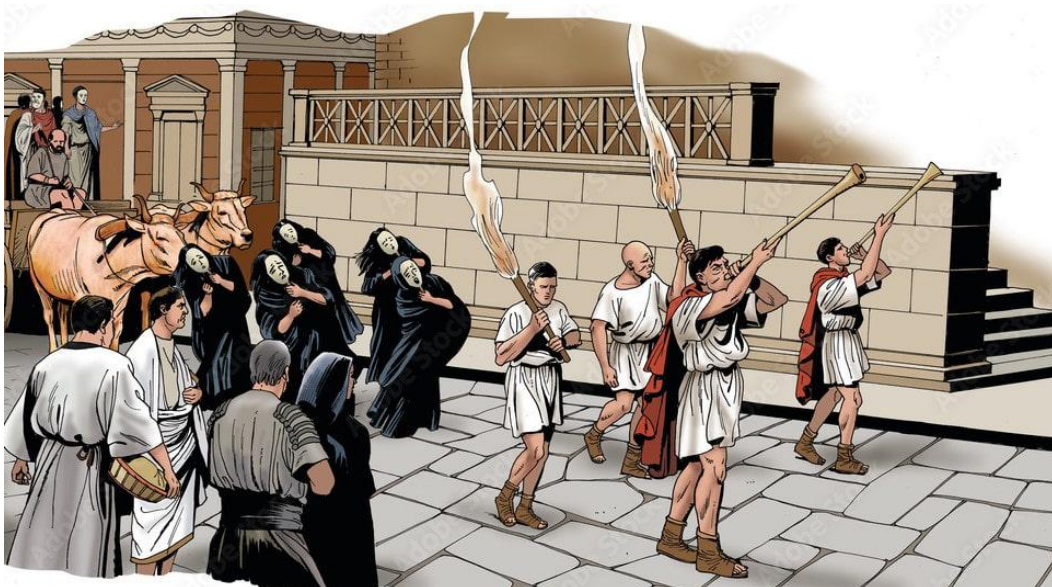
Funeral clubs show that respect for the dead was not just an individual family duty — the wider Roman community had structures to ensure no one went without a proper burial. The principle was equality of burial; the reality was stratified.

KNOW THIS · WEALTH AND BURIAL

- Wealthy — expensive funerals, family tombs, sarcophagi
- Poor — funeral clubs paid monthly fees
- Clubs often based on trade (bakers, blacksmiths)
- Clubs paid for funerals and mourners
- Large clubs had shared tombs

COMPARE · GREEK PRACTICE

Greek practice had no direct equivalent of funeral clubs. The Greek obligation rested on the family alone — failing to bury the dead dishonoured the family. Funeral clubs reflect a more communal Roman approach to ensuring proper burial.



SECTION C

Preparation of the body

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

As with the Greeks, it was vital that the deceased was treated with respect and given a proper burial.

The last breath

Just before the moment of death, a relative would capture the last breath of the dying person with a kiss. Those present would then call out the deceased's name. If the person died alone, this naming ritual would be carried out ceremonially afterwards.

Washing and dressing

The body was then washed and perfumed, and dressed in the deceased's finest clothes — a chance to display status one final time. A coin was placed on the mouth as payment for Charon, the ferryman of the dead.

Eight days in the atrium

If the family was wealthy, the body was laid out in the *atrium* — the main reception room of the Roman house — for *eight days*. Friends and relatives would visit to pay their respects. During this time the women of the family lamented the deceased, beating their chests.

KNOW THIS · PREPARATION

- Last breath captured with a kiss
- Deceased's name called out
- Body washed and perfumed
- Dressed in finest clothes
- Coin placed on the mouth (Charon)
- Laid out in the atrium for 8 days
- Women perform the lament

COMPARE · GREEK VS ROMAN

Same: body washed, perfumed, coin on mouth, women lament.

Different: Greeks laid out the body for *two* days (prothesis); Romans laid it out for *eight* days in the atrium. The Romans also captured the last breath with a kiss — a detail unique to Roman practice.

SECTION D

Funerary procession and burial

The procession

The funeral took place *eight days* after death. The procession was a public event involving the family, slaves and freedmen of the household, and *flute and horn players* — a deliberately loud and showy display.

Members of the family wore *wax funerary masks* of the family ancestors. These masks, kept normally in the family shrine, were brought out for funerals to symbolise the dead person being welcomed into the afterlife by their ancestors. Wealthy but small families would hire *professional mourners* to swell the procession, and even *actors* to mimic the deceased as they were in life.

Burial outside the city

As in Greece, burial had to take place outside the city walls — to prevent religious pollution and to reduce the spread of disease. In Roman towns, the wealthy were buried in tombs along the roads leading into the city, so that passers-by would see the monuments and pay their respects.

A wealthy family could expect a family tomb or individual monument. The super-rich placed their dead in elaborately carved *sarcophagi*, decorated with reliefs of mythological scenes and heroic battles.

Honouring the Manes

After burial, a marble bust of the deceased was made and placed in the house. The Romans believed the dead became *Manes* — deified ancestors who needed to be fed. Families were expected to leave food and wine offerings at the tomb on a regular basis.



KNOW THIS · PROCESSION AND BURIAL

- Procession 8 days after death
- Flute and horn players accompany
- Family wear wax funerary masks of ancestors
- Hired mourners and actors for the wealthy
- Burial outside the city, along roads
- Wealthy: family tombs, sarcophagi
- Marble bust placed in the home
- Manes fed with offerings at the tomb

COMPARE · GREEK VS ROMAN

Same: burial outside the city, instrument player accompanies the procession, wealth determined the monument's grandeur.

Different: *aulos* in Greece, flute and *horn* in Rome; Romans wore ancestor masks (no Greek equivalent); Roman tombs lined visible roads, Greek stelai stood in dedicated cemeteries.



SECTION E

Festivals for the dead

The Parentalia

The Parentalia took place over *nine days* from 13 to 21 February. During this time, marriages were forbidden, temples were closed, and no official business could be carried out. Apart from a blood sacrifice by a Vestal Virgin on the first day, the Parentalia was a *domestic* festival — centred on the family rather than the State.

For the first eight days, families brought offerings to the tombs of their ancestors. The Roman poet Ovid recorded what the dead were thought to want:

“Their shades ask little; pietas they prefer to costly offerings — a tile wreathed with garlands is enough, a scattering of meal, a few grains of salt, and bread soaked in wine, and loose violets.”

Ovid, *Fasti* 2.535–539

On the ninth day, the family gathered for a shared meal at home — a chance to settle quarrels and repair the family bond.

The Lemuria

The Lemuria was held over three days in May: the 9th, 11th, and 13th. As with the Parentalia, marriages and official business were forbidden.

Unlike the Parentalia, which honoured the family’s ancestors, the *Lemuria* was held to ward off evil spirits. The head of the household would rise at night, wash his hands in spring water, and throw black beans behind him without looking back — nine times — saying *“With these beans I redeem myself and my family.”* The unfriendly spirits were thought to gather the beans and leave the house.

**KNOW THIS · THE PARENTALIA**

- 13–21 February — nine days
- Domestic festival — family-focused
- Marriages and business forbidden
- Vestal blood sacrifice on day 1
- Offerings at tombs (days 1–8)
- Family meal on day 9

KNOW THIS · THE LEMURIA

- 9th, 11th, 13th May — three days
- To ward off evil spirits
- Head of household throws black beans
- Nine times, without looking back

COMPARE · GREEK VS ROMAN FESTIVALS

Both cultures had two festivals: Greece (Anthesteria + Genesia), Rome (Parentalia + Lemuria). All four honour or ward off the dead. The Lemuria’s *fear* of dead spirits has no Greek equivalent.

SECTION F · THE PROCESS

From death to remembrance – seven stages

Fill in the details for each stage of a Roman burial. Note how it compares with the Greek process you've already learned.

1	<p><i>Death</i> DAY 1</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #ccc;"/>
2	<p><i>Preparation of the body</i> DAY 1</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #ccc;"/>
3	<p><i>Laying out in the atrium</i> DAYS 1–8</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #ccc;"/>
4	<p><i>Funerary procession</i> DAY 8</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #ccc;"/>
5	<p><i>The burial</i> DAY 8</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #ccc;"/>
6	<p><i>Honouring the Manes</i> AFTER BURIAL</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #ccc;"/>
7	<p><i>Festivals of the dead</i> ANNUALLY</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #ccc;"/>

SECTION G · SOURCE STUDY

Tombs along the road into Pompeii

Study the image carefully. Add your own written annotations: identify what you can see, explain what each detail suggests about Roman attitudes to the dead and to status.



What can we **see**? What kinds of monument are there?

What does it **tell us** about wealth, status and remembrance?

SECTION H · SOURCE STUDY

The Abduction of Persephone sarcophagus

Study the sarcophagus carefully. Identify the mythological figures, the central scene, and the visual details. Then think about why a Roman family might choose this myth for their loved one's coffin.



1. Identify **two** gods shown on the sarcophagus, other than Hades and Persephone. [2]

2. Explain why a Roman family might have chosen this myth for their loved one's sarcophagus. [3]

SECTION I · TEXT SOURCE

Pliny on the haunted house

ABOUT THE SOURCE

Pliny the Younger (c. AD 61–113) was a Roman aristocrat, lawyer, and letter-writer. In this letter to a friend, he tells the story of a house that was haunted by a ghost. The matter was eventually resolved when the body was discovered — and properly buried.

The next day he went to the magistrates and advised them to order the spot to be dug up. There they found bones tangled together with chains; the body had rotted away after lying so long in the ground, leaving the bones bare and worn down by the fetters. The bones were collected and buried at the public expense; and after the ghost was thus duly laid to rest, the house was haunted no more.

Pliny, Letters, 7.27 (adapted)

Exercise I.1 – Source questions

1. According to the source, what had happened to the body before it was found? [2]

2. What happened to the bones once they were discovered? Give **two** details. [2]

3. What does this source tell us about Roman beliefs about the dead and the importance of proper burial? [3]

Think about: what the ghost wanted, the fact that the burial was paid for publicly, and the link between burial and peace.

SECTION J

Comparing Greece and Rome

Complete the comparison table below. For each aspect, write the key details of Greek and Roman practice in the appropriate box.

ASPECT	GREECE	ROME
<i>Preparation of the body</i>		
<i>Laying out (how long & where)</i>		
<i>The procession</i>		
<i>Burial location & monument</i>		
<i>Festivals of the dead</i>		

SECTION K

Topic check – ten questions

A sweep across Roman practice and the comparison with Greece. Answer each question fully in the lines provided.

1 What was a *funeral club*, and why was it important to less wealthy Romans? [3]

2 Describe what happened just before the moment of death in a Roman household. [2]

3 For how long was a wealthy Roman body laid out in the atrium? How does this compare with Greek practice? [2]

4 What were *funerary masks*, and what was their purpose during the procession? [3]

5 Why were Roman tombs built along the roads leading into towns? Give **two** reasons. [2]

6 What were the *Manes*, and how were Roman families expected to honour them? [3]

SECTION K · CONTINUED

Topic check – questions 7–10

7 Describe what happened during the Parentalia. Include *when* it took place, *where* offerings were made, and what happened on the ninth day. [3]

8 How was the Lemuria *different* from the Parentalia in its purpose? [3]

9 Give **one similarity** and **one difference** between Greek and Roman funerary processions. [2]

10 Explain how a wealthy Roman family could use a funeral to display their status. Give **three** specific ways. [4]

SECTION L

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. A relative captured the last breath of the dying person with a kiss.

2. The Roman body was laid out in the kitchen for two days.

3. Romans wore wax funerary masks of family ancestors in the procession.

4. Wealthy Roman families hired professional mourners and actors.

5. Like the Greeks, the Romans buried their dead inside the city walls.

6. A *sarcophagus* was a carved stone coffin for wealthy Romans.

7. The *Manes* were deified spirits of dead ancestors.

8. The Parentalia was a State festival focused on civic religion.

9. The Lemuria involved throwing black beans to ward off evil spirits.

10. The Parentalia ran for nine days, from 13–21 February.

SECTION L · CONTINUED

Exam-style practice questions

Practice questions in the style of the OCR exam – from 1-mark identify to 4-mark explain. Each one focuses on Roman practice and/or comparison with Greece.

1. Give the Latin term for the main reception room of a Roman house where the body was laid out. [1]

2. Name **two** Roman festivals of the dead. [2]

3. Identify **two** ways a wealthy Roman family could make their funerary procession more impressive. [2]

4. Describe what the Romans believed happened to the deceased after they were buried. Use the term *Manes* in your answer. [3]

5. Give **one similarity** and **one difference** between Greek and Roman preparation of the body. [2]

6. Explain how Greek and Roman festivals of the dead are similar to and different from each other. [4]

Refer to specific festivals (the Anthesteria, the Genesia, the Parentalia, the Lemuria) in your answer.
