RES HISTORICA 59, 2025

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.59.301-322

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Belief in the Afterlife and Religious Consciousness in Roman Society (I BC – AD II)

Wiara w życie pozagrobowe i świadomość religijna w społeczeństwie rzymskim (I p.n.e. – II n.e.)

ABSTRACT

This article explores the belief of Roman society in the afterlife. It is well-established that Roman society lacked a single consensus on the nature of life and death, the soul's existence in the afterlife, and related matters. For instance, some believed that the soul perished alongside the body. However, the everyday religious consciousness of Roman society embraced the idea of an afterlife as a physical realm that provided shelter for the souls of the dead and could, under certain circumstances, be accessed by the living. Evil deeds committed during life were believed to be repaid with punishment in the afterlife. Properly conducted funeral rites were thought to aid the soul of the deceased in its journey from the world of the living to the realm of the dead, ensuring its peace in

PUBLICATION INFO

e-ISSN: 2449-8467
ISSN: 2082-6060

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SOURCE OF FUNDING: Statutory Research of Drohobych Ivan Franko State Pedagogical University

SUBMITTED:	ACCEPTED:	PUBLISHED ONLINE:
2025.01.07	2025.07.31	2025.10.31

WEBSITE OF THE JOURNAL: https://journals.umcs.pl/rh

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE e-mail: reshistorica@umcs.pl

the afterlife. The widespread belief in the soul's continued existence paved the way for Roman society to embrace the ideas of Christianity.

Key words: afterlife, soul, religious consciousness, funeral rites, Roman society

STRESZCZENIE

W tym artykule zbadano wiarę w życie pozagrobowe w społeczeństwie rzymskim. Przedstawiono brak jednolitego konsensusu co do natury życia i śmierci, istnienia duszy w życiu pozagrobowym oraz związanych z tym kwestii w społeczeństwie rzymskim. Na przykład, niektórzy wierzyli, że dusza umiera wraz z ciałem, jednak codzienna świadomość religijna społeczeństwa rzymskiego przyjmowała ideę życia pozagrobowego jako fizycznego świata, który zapewniał schronienie duszom zmarłych i do którego, w pewnych okolicznościach, mogli mieć dostęp żywi. Wierzono, że złe uczynki popełnione za życia były okupione karą w życiu pozagrobowym. Uważano, że prawidłowo przeprowadzone obrzędy pogrzebowe pomagały duszy zmarłego w jej podróży ze świata żywych do świata zmarłych, zapewniając jej spokój w życiu pozagrobowym. Powszechne przekonanie o ciągłym istnieniu duszy utorowało drogę społeczeństwu rzymskiemu do przyjęcia idei chrześcijaństwa.

Słowa kluczowe: życie pozagrobowe, dusza, świadomość religijna, obrzędy pogrzebowe, społeczeństwo rzymskie

Belief in the supernatural has been an integral aspect of the human experience since the dawn of civilization. The burial practice provides tangible evidence of human conceptions of existence beyond death. The concept of an afterlife, a belief that the soul persists beyond physical death, is deeply ingrained in human history. Ancient civilizations, including the Egyptians, Jews, Greeks, and Romans, incorporated this idea into their religious frameworks. These beliefs inevitably led to profound contemplation on the soul's fate in the afterlife, its ultimate destination, and the prospects that awaited it. The study of afterlife beliefs provides crucial insights into the religious worldview of a society[1].

The problem of death has been a central concern for thinkers across all eras and civilizations. Seneca observed that while people approach the end of life in various ways, the conclusion is the same for everyone:

[1] Franz Cumont extensively explored Roman conceptions of the afterlife in his numerous works. The Belgian scholar delved into a wide array of topics, ranging from the Hellenization of Roman religious thought to the enduring influence of Roman afterlife beliefs on Christianity. Cumont notably highlighted the distinct Roman understanding of immortality within the context of the Roman Empire and its subsequent reflection in contemporary thought: F. Cumont, *After life in Roman paganism: Lectures delivered at Yale University on the Silliman Foundation*, New Haven 1922, p. 110.

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'the end of life'[2]. The ancient Greeks and Romans contemplated what lies ahead for a human being – or more specifically, the human soul – after death. Homer, in narrating the adventures of Odysseus, vividly depicts the hero's journey to the realm of Hades. Circe reveals to Odysseus that the kingdom of the dead lies beyond the Ocean, where its low shores are adorned with Persephone's sacred grove and the tall poplars and willows that shed their fruit[3]. The souls of the dead wander there powerless, like shadows[4]. They still possess the ability to communicate in a coherent language, but the sounds they produce are mere echoes of their former voices. The souls of the Danaans, whom Aeneas encountered in the underworld, were unable to summon a worthy cry from their throats. If the body was mutilated in the world of the living, these physical deformities continue to haunt the soul in the realm of the dead, as demonstrated by the example of Deiphobus[5]. This likely explains why the Romans placed such importance on the appearance of the deceased. Even as Emperor Augustus lay dying in the Campanian town of Nola, his thoughts were preoccupied not only with maintaining public order but also with the grooming of his hairstyle[6]. Circe speaks of the soul of the prophetic blind old man Teiresias, who, by the grace of Persephone, the wife of Hades, retained not only his mental clarity but also his gift of foresight[7]. However, this is a rare exception. The soul of Odysseus' mother recognized her son only after drinking the blood of sacrificial animals. Similarly, the soul of Agamemnon identified Odysseus only after

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[2] Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, ed. Richard M. Gummere, vol. 2, London–New York 1920 [hereinafter: Sen. *Ep*.], 66.43: 'Mors nulla maior aut minor est ; habet enim eundem in omnibus modum, finisse vitam'.

[3] Homer, *Odyssey*, ed. A.T. Murray, revised by G.E. Dimock, books 1– 12, Cambridge–Mass. 1995 [hereinafter: Hom. *Od*.], 10.508–510: 'ἀλλ᾽ ὁπότ᾽ ἂν δὴ νηὶ δι᾽ Ὠκεανοῖο περήσῃς, ἔνθ᾽ ἀκτή τε λάχεια καὶ ἄλσεα Περσεφονείης, μακραί τ᾽ αἴγειροι καὶ ἰτέαι ὠλεσίκαρποι...'.

[4] Hom. *Od*. 10.495; 11.49.

[5] Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I – VI*, ed. H. Rushton Fairclough, vol. I, Cambridge–Massachusetts–London 1938 [hereinafter: Verg. *Aen*.], 6.489–497: 'At Danaum proceres Agamemnoniaeque phalanges ut videre virum fulgentiaque arma per umbras, ingenti trepidare metu; pars vertere terga, ceu quondam petiere rates; pars tollere vocem exiguam, inceptus clamor frustratur hiantes. Atque hic Priamiden laniatum corpore toto Deiphobum videt et lacerum crudeliter ora, ora manusque ambas, populataque tempora raptis auribus, et truncas inhonesto volnere nares'.

[6] Suetonius, *Augustus*, in: Suetonius, ed. J.C. Rolfe, vol. I, Cambridge–Massachusetts–London 1979 [hereinafter: Suet. *Aug*.], 99.1.

[7] Hom. *Od*. 10.492–495.

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consuming the 'black blood'[8]. Thus, the souls of the dead are not entirely free from needs. Notably, they yearn for the blood of sacrificial animals, which, when consumed, restores their cognitive functions.

The souls of the dead may find solace not only in blood but also in the offering of wine. It is known that wine could be used in rituals of ancient magic. Circe transformed Odysseus' companions into pigs through a magical ritual that prominently featured wine, among other elements[9]. Ovid also describes another ritual with wine[10]. There is evidence to suggest that wine may have been used as a substitute for blood in ancient magical rituals[11]. One Roman epitaph urges a passerby to mix wine, taste it, and pour it out, declaring: 'Stranger... mix, drink, and offer it to me'[12].

It is evident that not all Greeks and Romans embraced Homer's depictions of the afterlife. In Plato, we encounter the notion that the myths of Homer and other poets about the afterlife are untrue and ought to be rejected[13]. Juvenal satirizes these ideas with biting wit and scathing irony[14]. But how did the ancient Romans understand the transition from life to death? Even today, despite the advancements of modern science, debates continue about the nature of death, its criteria etc.[15] In one of his dialogues, Plato describes death in a way that aligns with contemporary religious doctrines: to die means for both the body and soul to be separated from one another, to exist on its own[16]. Seneca explains that the separation of the soul from the body occurs at the moment the

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[8] *Ibidem*, 11.152–154; 387–391.

[9] *Ibidem*, 10.233–240.

[10] Ovid's *Fasti*, ed. J.G. Frazer, London–Cambridge–Mass. 1959 [hereinafter: Ov. *Fast*.], 2.571–580.

[11] C.A. Faraone, *Molten Wax, Spilt Wine and Mutilated Animals: Sympathetic Magic in near Eastern and Early Greek Oath Ceremonies*, "The Journal of Hellenic Studies" 1993, 113, p. 73, note 53.

[12] H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae (1892–1916)*, vol. 1–3, Berolini 1892–1916 [hereinafter: ILS], 8204: 'Hospes... misce bibe da mi'.

[13] Plato, *The Republic*, ed. P. Shorey, vol. I, Cambridge–Massachusetts–London 1937 [hereinafter: Pl. *Resp*.], 3.387b.

[14] Juvenal, in: Juvenal and Persius, ed. G.G. Ramsay, London–New York 1928 [hereinafter: Juv.], 2.149–152.

[15] e.g.: J.L Bernat, C.M. Culver, B. Gert, *On the definition and criterion of death*, "Annals of Internal Medicine" 1981, 94, 3, pp. 389–394.

[16] Plato, *Phaedo*, in: Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, ed. H.N. Fowler, Cambridge–Massachusetts 1914 [hereinafter: Pl. *Phd*.], 64c: 'ἆρα μὴ ἄλλο τι ἢ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγήν; καὶ εἶναι τοῦτο τὸ τεθνάναι, χωρὶς μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπαλλαγὲν αὐτὸ καθ᾽ αὑτὸ τὸ σῶμα γεγονέναι, χωρὶς δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγεῖσαν αὐτὴν καθ᾽ αὑτὴν εἶναι; ἆρα μὴ ἄλλο τι ἢ ὁ θάνατος ἢ τοῦτο;'.

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dying person takes their final breath[17]. Some thinkers, however, denied the separation of the soul from the body, asserting that the soul perishes along with the body.

Cicero shared Plato's ideas about life and death[18]. He discusses various philosophical perspectives on the fate of the soul after death: some believe the soul disperses immediately after death, others that it endures for a long time, and still others that it exists eternally[19]. Some people were uncertain about this matter. Tacitus, when discussing the idea that 'great souls' do not perish with the body, uses the conjunction 'if'. thereby revealing his doubt[20]. Such uncertainties are also reflected in the writings of Seneca the Younger, who suggested that death either annihilates us or liberates us from the burdens of earthly existence: 'Death either destroys us or frees us'[21].

Odysseus was not alone among figures in ancient tradition to journey to the underworld during his lifetime. Orpheus, the legendary singer and musician, descended into the realm of the dead in a futile attempt to bring his wife, Eurydice, back to life[22]. The story of Er, a Greek warrior who visited the realm of the dead, is recounted in Plato's Republic. This account, featuring Er's descent and subsequent return to the world of the living, was subsequently referenced by notable figures such as Plutarch, Macrobius, and Origen in their own philosophical and theological works[23]. Er died in the war but miraculously revived during his funeral ceremony, just before cremation. Upon returning to life, he recounted a profound experience: his soul had departed his body and been transported to a divine court. There, the souls of the righteous were separated from those of the unjust. According to the court's verdict, Er was tasked with observing the events of the afterlife and returning to share

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[17] Sen. *Ep*. 30.14: 'Non dubitare autem se, quin senilis anima in primis labris esset nec magna vi distraheretur a corpore'.

[18] Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, ed. J.E. King, Cambridge–Mass.–London 1966 [hereinafter: Cic. *Tusc*.], 1.49.

[19] *Ibidem*, 1.18.

[20] Tacitus, *Agricola*, in: Tacitus, Dialogus, Agricola, Germania, ed. M. Hutton, London–New York 1914 [hereinafter: Tac. *Ag*.], 46.1: 'si, ut sapientibus placet, non cum corpore extinguuntur magnae animae'.

[21] Sen. *Ep*. 30.14: 'Mors nos aut consumit aut exuit'.

[22] Ov. *Met*. 10.13–63.

[23] Plutarch, *Quaestiones convivales*, in: Plutarch's *Moralia*, ed. E.L. Minar, F.H. Sandbach, W.C. Helmbold, Cambridge–Mass.–London 1961 [hereinafter: Plut. *Quaest. Conv*.], 740b; Macrobius, *Commentarii ex Cicerone in Somnium Scipionis*, in: Macrobius, ed. J. Willis, v. 2, Lipsiae 1963 [hereinafter: Macrob. *In Somn*.], 1.1.9; Origen, Contra Celsum: libri VIII, ed. M. Marcovich, Boston 2001 [hereinafter: Origen. *Cels*.], 2.16.

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his knowledge with the living. The central message of his story was stark: evil deeds committed during life would be repaid in the afterlife with tenfold punishment. Er emphasized the importance of honoring the gods, respecting one's parents, and avoiding suicide. He also described how the souls of the gravest sinners, beyond redemption, faced prolonged torture before being cast into Tartarus. Meanwhile, the souls of the repentant, along with the righteous who had enjoyed bliss in heaven, were given the opportunity to choose a new life from various possible models. This process of reincarnation was not tied to one's previous life. A soul could choose to change gender or even inhabit the body of an animal. The souls of animals could be reincarnated as humans in a new life[24].

Thus, Plato vividly depicts the soul's experience in the afterlife, emphasizing that the soul retains its ability to think. Virtuous individuals have no reason to fear the afterlife. Immediately after death, the deceased's daemon escorts the soul to a designated place for judgment[25]. By the judges' decision, each soul is assigned a guide and sent to Hades. Righteous souls are settled in a place appropriate to their virtue, while the especially pious ones are granted residence in the 'pure land'. The souls of those whose lives are deemed neither wholly good nor bad are directed to Acheron, one of the many rivers of the afterlife. Traveling by boat, they arrive at Acherusian Lake, into which Acheron flows. There, they live, cleansing themselves of defilements, atoning for the offences committed during life, and bearing their punishments, while receiving due rewards for their good deeds. The souls of those guilty of particularly heinous crimes, such as unlawful murder, are cast into Tartarus, from which there is no return. However, when a serious crime has been committed in a moment of passion], and the perpetrator repents, their soul may hope for salvation – provided the souls of those they wronged grant them forgiveness[26]. Some souls of wicked individuals, dreading Hades, linger among graves and crypts, enduring punishment for their past sins[27].

Plato's ideas are echoed in one of Cicero's works, which underscores service to the Fatherland as a prerequisite for eternal bliss in heaven, as nothing brings greater delight to the supreme god who governs the universe[28]. Cicero subsequently discusses the body as a prison for the

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[24] Pl. *Resp*. 10.614b–620c.

[25] *Ibidem*, 10.614c; Pl. *Phd*. 107d-e.

[26] Pl. *Phd*. 112–114.

[27] *Ibidem*, 81d-e.

[28] Cicero, *De republica*, in: Cicero, *De Re Publica, De Legibus*, ed. C.W. Keyes, Cambridge–Massachusetts–London 1970 [hereinafter: Cic. *Rep*.], 6.13: 'omnibus, qui patriam conservaverint, adiuverint, auxerint, certum esse in caelo definitum locum, ubi beati aevo

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soul, the inadmissibility of suicide, the mortality of the body, and the immortality of the soul[29]. Despite the strong influence of Plato, Cicero's concluding tone is distinctly Roman and patriotic[30].

Aeneas, the renowned Roman hero, also visited the underworld. In Virgil's depiction of the underworld, souls are divided into specific categories, each occupying its own designated region. During his journey, Aeneas encounters the souls of infants, followed by those unjustly executed, and finally, the souls of suicides. Further on, in the so-called 'Fields of Mourning', within a myrtle forest, wander those who succumbed to the despair of unrequited or ill-fated love[31]. Finally, Aeneas arrives at the Farther Fields, where the souls of heroic warriors dwell[32], reflecting some influence of Homer[33]. From there, the road splits into two paths. One path, to the right, leads to the so-called Elysium, where heroes dwell in happiness[34], while the other, to the left, descends to Tartarus, the realm of the sinners[35]. Aeneas beheld a fortress encircled by a triple wall, with the fiery, turbulent river Phlegethon flowing around it. From within came the groans of sinful souls, the dreadful crack of whips, and the ominous clanging of iron[36]. No truly pious individual can be condemned to Tartarus[37]. However, no soul can escape the consequences of their earthly sins and must ultimately face judgment. Here, in this realm of eternal torment, resides the soul of Salmoneus, the king of Thessaly and Elis, who impiously sought to emulate Jupiter and demanded divine worship. He now suffers for his hubris. This abyss also holds those who committed grave offences: those slain for adultery, betrayers of trust, those who inflicted violence upon their parents, and others who violated the moral order. Among these sinners, Virgil also includes those who betrayed the trust of their clients, demonstrating the severity

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sempiterno fruantur; nihil est enim illi principi deo, qui omnem mundum regit, quod quidem in terris fiat, acceptius...'.

[29] *Ibidem*, 6.13–26.

[30] S.M. Braund, *Virgil and the cosmos: religious and philosophical ideas*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, ed. C. Martindale, Cambridge 1997, p. 217.

[31] Verg. *Aen*. 6.426–444.

[32] *Ibidem*, 6.477–478.

[33] J.N. Bremmer, *Initiation into the mysteries of the ancient world*, Berlin 2014, p. 187.

[34] For Virgil's conception of paradise, see: G. Clark, *Paradise for Pagans? Augustine on Virgil, Cicero, and Plato*, in: *Paradise in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Views*, eds. M. Bockmuehl, G.G. Stroumsa, Cambridge 2010, pp. 172–177.

[35] The preference for the right-hand path is a recurring feature in Plato's eschatological myths. See: J.N. Bremmer, *Initiation*, Berlin 2014, p. 187.

[36] Verg. *Aen*. 6.540–558.

[37] *Ibidem*, 6.563.

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of such treachery[38]. It can be argued that Virgil's concept of the afterlife is influenced not only by Plato's ideas but also by those of Cicero[39]. Virgil presents a Roman vision of the afterlife that highlights the concept of *clientela* as being comparable to, if not more significant than, familial relationships. This view appears in Aulus Gellius[40], a Roman author of the 2nd century AD; however, Ernst Badian argues that even in Virgil's time, this conception of *clientela* was already an anachronism[41].

Thus, while the Roman vision of the afterlife was largely shaped by Greek tradition, it also reflected the realities of Roman life. Foremost, we should note that, according to the ancient Romans, there was no insurmountable boundary between the world of the living and the dead, nor between gods and humans. Roman tradition held that Venus was the mother of Aeneas, and Mars was the father of Romulus and Remus. While educated Romans were often skeptical of legends, such as Romulus ascending to the ranks of the celestials or familial ties between gods and mortals, Varro acknowledged that it was beneficial for the state if 'brave men' believed themselves to be born of the gods[42].

One visible manifestation of the Romans' belief in the intertwining of the divine and human worlds was their conviction that the souls of deceased relatives transformed into minor deities known as *manes*[43]. Charles King contends that studying the Roman afterlife should prioritize the *manes* and the deification of the dead[44]. According to Plutarch, male descendants were required to participate in their fathers' funeral ceremonies with their heads covered, symbolizing their reverence as if honoring gods[45]. Cicero states that the rights of the divine *manes* shall

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[38] *Ibidem*, 6.585–613.

[39] S.M. Braund, *op. cit.*, p. 217; For sources on Virgil's Aeneid, see: M.H. De Jáuregui, *Aeneas' Steps*, in: *Walking Through Elysium: Vergil's Underworld and the Poetics of Tradition*, eds. B. Gladhill, M.Y. Myers, "Phoenix" 2020, 59, p. 107, note 6; For sources on Virgil's underworld, see: J. Bremmer, *The Golden Bough: Orphic, Eleusinian, and Hellenistic-Jewish Sources of Virgil's Underworld in Aeneid VI*, "Kernos" 2009, 22, pp. 183–208.

[40] Aulus Gellius, Noctes Atticae, in: A. Gellii, Noctivm Atticarvm, ed. C. Hosivs, vol. 2, Stvtgardiae 1903 [hereinafter: Gell. *NA*.], 20.1.40.

[41] E. Badian, *Foreign Clientelae, 264–70 B.C.*, Oxford 1958, p. 11.

[42] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, in: Sancti Avrelii Avgvstini episcopi, *De Civitate Dei*, ed. B. Dombart et A. Kalb, vol. I, Stutgardiae–Lipsiae 1993 [hereinafter: August. *De civ. D.*], 3.4.

[43] For the meaning of the term '*manes*', see: K.P. Nielson, *Aeneas and the Demands of the Dead*, "The Classical Journal" 1984, 79, 3, p. 200; C.W. King, *The ancient Roman afterlife: di manes, belief, and the cult of the dead*, Austin 2020, pp. 2–14.

[44] C.W. King, *The ancient*, p. xxix.

[45] Plutarch, *Quaestiones Romanae*, in: Plutarch's *Moralia*, ed. F.C. Babbit, vol. IV, Cambridge–Mass.–London 1972 [hereinafter: Plut. *Quaest. Rom*.], 267a.

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be sacred, and deceased kin shall be regarded as deities[46]. Evidence suggests that some Roman parents erected altars to honor their deceased children, effectively deifying them. For example, an inscription records that Mucronia Marcia dedicated an altar to the worship of her deceased daughter, Rufia Materna[47]. This inscription is cited to illustrate the Roman custom of deifying the dead[48]. Another inscription, once described with a clear prejudice against 'feminine garrulity'[49], actually reflects the belief that the soul will find a place among the gods after death[50].

Initially, *manes* was a collective noun referring to the undifferentiated multitude of souls; subsequently, it came to designate specific individuals among the deceased. To the best of our knowledge, Cicero was the first to employ the term *manes* to refer to a distinct individual[51]. Charles King remarks on this point, stating, 'The Romans did deify their dead, worship them as individual gods, and pray to them to extend their lives. This was the cult of the *manes*, Rome's deified dead'[52]. George Heyman explains that 'At the family level... the Di Manes were worshipped, but they were more akin to the spirits of deceased ancestors than separate deities'[53]. John Kenrick persuasively argues that the ubiquitous use of epitaphs such as *Diis Manibus* or its abbreviation, *D.M.*, signifies a widespread belief in the continued existence of the human soul after death. He contends that the 'divine Manes' were perceived as the disembodied spirits of the deceased, either awaiting reincarnation, as transmigrationist beliefs held, or, more commonly, residing near their burial sites. These spirits were

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[46] Cicero, *De legibus*, in: Cicero, *De Re Publica, De Legibus*, ed. C.W. Keyes, Cambridge–Massachusetts–London 1970 [hereinafter: Cic. *Leg*.], 2.22: 'Deorum Manium iura sancta sunto, suos leto datos divos habento'.

[47] *Corpus Inscriptionvm Latinarvm*, vol. 13, Pars II, Fasc. 2, Berolini 1907 [hereinafter: CIL], 13.8706.

[48] E. Strong, N. Jolliffe, *The Stuccoes of the Underground Basilica near the Porta Maggiore*, "The Journal of Hellenic Studies" 1924, 44, 1, p. 98, note 98.

[49] F. Buecheler, *DE IDIOTISMIS QVIBVSDAM LATINIS*, "Rheinisches Museum für Philologie" 1904, 59, p. 39.

[50] ILS 7518: '...In hoc tumulo iacet corpus exanimis / cuius spiritus inter deos receptus est...'; For a translation of this inscription, see: N. Tran, *The economics of solidarity: mutual aid and reciprocal services between workers in Roman cities*, in: *The Extramercantile Economies of Greek and Roman Cities*, eds. D.B. Hollander, T.R. Blanton IV, J.T. Fitzgerald, Abingdon–New York 2019, p. 141, note 24; For a related example of such inscriptions, see: I. Cholodniak, *Carmina sepulcralia Latina*, Petropoli 1897, p. 25.

[51] K.P. Nielson, *op. cit.*, pp. 201–202.

[52] C.W. King, *The ancient*, p. xix.

[53] G. Heyman, *The power of sacrifice: Roman and Christian discourses in conflict*, Washington 2007, p. 30.

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believed to be susceptible to desecration or neglect but were appeased by demonstrations of remembrance and affection[54]. The concept of the *Di Manes* has appeared regularly on tombstones since the Imperial era[55].

Therefore, it can be said that the Romans held their deceased ancestors in high regard. This respect is evident during certain times of the year, through several holidays that were, in one way or another, connected to the world of the dead. The times of the year when the living paid special attention to the dead included *Parentalia*, which began on February 13 and concluded on February 21 with the grand festival of *Feralia*[56], as well as *Lemuria*, observed in May, and *Rosalia* in May-June. *Parentalia* was a period dedicated to remembrance and mourning[57]. During *Parentalia*, Roman magistrates refrained from wearing their insignia, temples were closed, sacred fires on altars were extinguished, and weddings were prohibited. Our primary source of information about this holiday comes from the Roman poet Ovid[58]. He vividly portrays the spirits of the deceased wandering during the holiday days, sustained by the offerings made by the living[59]. As Ovid notes, the offerings were typically modest, consisting of a tile adorned with garlands, a handful of grain, a pinch of salt, bread soaked in wine, and a few violets[60]. Fanny Dolansky points out that these offerings, particularly 'corn sprinkled with salt and garlands', are typical domestic sacrifices offered to the *Lares* and *Penates*[61].

Consequently, by making specific offerings at the graves, the Romans sought to care for the souls of their deceased relatives. This concern

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[54] J. Kenrick, *Roman sepulcral inscriptions: their relation to archaeology, language, and religion*, London–York 1858, p. 52.

[55] J. Rüpke, *Religion in republican Rome: rationalization and ritual change*, Philadelphia 2012, pp. 14–15.

[56] It remains unclear what distinguishes *Feralia* from the preceding days, as Georges Dumézil observes, see: G. Dumézil, *La religion romaine archaïque, avec un appendice sur la religion des Étrusques*, Paris 1974, p. 372. Howard Scullard highlights the close connection between three Roman holidays: *Parentalia*, *Feralia*, and *Caristia*. Celebrated on February 22, *Caristia* centered on living family members, see: H.H. Scullard, *Festivals and ceremonies of the Roman Republic*, London 1981, pp. 74–76.

[57] F. Dolansky, *Parentalia*, in: *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, eds. R.S. Bagnall et al., Malden 2013, pp. 5062–5063.

[58] Ov. *Fast*. 2.533–570.

[59] *Ibidem*, 2.565–566: 'nunc animae tenues et corpora functa sepulcris errant, nunc posito pascitur umbra cibo'.

[60] *Ibidem*, 2.537–539: 'tegula porrectis satis est velata coronis et sparsae fruges parcaque mica salis inque mero mollita Ceres violaeque solutae'.

[61] F. Dolansky, *Honouring the family dead on the Parentalia: ceremony, spectacle, and memory*, "Phoenix" 2011, 65, 1/2, p. 132.

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extended to the proper maintenance of the graves themselves. The typical Roman epitaph, in contrast to the Greek tradition, provides details not only about the individual commemorated but also about the person responsible for constructing the tomb. Such information appears in approximately 80 per cent of tomb inscriptions from the western provinces of the Roman Empire[62]. Some prudent Romans, rather than relying solely on the goodwill of their descendants, allocated specific funds in their wills to ensure their heirs maintained the graves in proper condition. Funds could be allocated through a will not only to the direct heirs of the deceased's estate but also to the local community, on the same condition that a portion of the income generated would be used to maintain the grave in proper condition. This is exactly the practice reflected in the inscription from Macedonia[63].

Before planning future memorial rites, it was essential to consider the substantial costs associated with constructing a grave monument and conducting the funeral ceremony itself. Even in antiquity, the funeral rites of affluent Greeks and Romans were marked by extraordinary splendor. Their majestic marble tombs often rivalled the grandeur of residential buildings, prompting one to exclaim, 'That is a house, a house! Who would call it a gloomy tomb'[64]. Excessive funeral expenses became a concern in antiquity, prompting legislative intervention. In Athens, Solon's laws introduced regulations on burial practices, which were later expanded at the end of the 4th century BC by Demetrius of Phalerum. The Romans, influenced by Solon's example, incorporated similar restrictions into the Twelve Tables around the mid-5th century BC. These laws limited funeral extravagance: no more than three shrouds and one purple tunic could be used, and the number of flutists was capped at ten. Additionally, they prohibited the use of an axe in grave preparations and discouraged excessive mourning rituals[65]. However, despite these prohibitions, by the time of Pliny the Younger, relatives would still occasionally lavishly spend on items such as incense, anointing oils, and other costly offerings[66].

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[62] E.A. Meyer, *Explaining the Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire: The Evidence of Epitaphs*, "The Journal of Roman Studies" 1990, 80, p. 75.

[63] CIL 3.656. For several similar inscriptions from Italy, see: F. Dolansky, *Honouring*, p. 134.

[64] Statius, *Silvae*, in: Statius, *Silvae, Thebaid I – IV*, ed. J. H. Mozley, vol. 1, London–New York 1928 [hereinafter: Stat. *Silv*.], 5.1.237–238: 'domus ista, domus! quis triste sepulcrum dixerit?'.

[65] Cic. *Leg*. 2.59–60.

[66] Pliny (the Younger), Epistulae, in: Pliny, *Letters*, ed. W. Melmoth, vol. 1, London–New York 1931 [hereinafter: Plin. *Ep*.], 5.16.7.

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At the same time, some people gave little importance to both the funeral ceremony and the upkeep of graves. Trimalchio, in Petronius's Satyricon, criticizes such behavior, stating: 'It is utterly foolish to lavish care on homes where we live briefly, yet neglect those where we must dwell for eternity'[67]. Some of those whom Trimalchio criticized may simply have lacked the means to properly arrange a grave or conduct a proper funeral. In Rome, many residents lived with very modest means of subsistence, and their situation was exacerbated by poor living conditions. Overcrowding in small living spaces, inadequate ventilation, periodic epidemics, frequent fires, and a high-crime environment contributed to significant hardships and high mortality rates. According to some estimates, during the time of Augustus, more than 80 people died daily in Rome. During epidemics, this number could rise dramatically[68]. Martial's depiction of thousands of poor bodies buried in a single grave at night, without any funeral rites, should not surprise us[69]. Perhaps it was after the careless burial of some impoverished individual that a stray dog brought a human hand to the attention of the future emperor Vespasian[70].

Many individuals could not be certain that their relatives would have the financial means to cover these expenses. One solution to this problem was the establishment of burial clubs. As Keith Hopkins observed, 'The popularity of burial clubs reflected the general Roman concern for the proper care of the dead and an anxiety that death was both unpredictable and expensive'. He further noted, 'Burial clubs were... symptomatic of an urban society, in which many people needed to rely on fellow club members, unrelated by blood or marriage, for help in performing traditional funeral rites'[71].

Another holiday dedicated to honoring the dead, *Lemuria*, was celebrated on three non-consecutive days: May 9, 11, and 13. Once again, our primary source for this festival is Ovid. He highlights the ancient origins of the rite of honoring deceased ancestors, a practice that dates

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[67] Petronius, Satyrica, in: Petronius, Seneca, *Apolocyntosis*, ed. M. Heseltine, W.H.D. Rouse, London–New York 1913 Petron. *Sat*. 71: 'Valde enim falsum est vivo quidem domos cultas esse, non curari eas, ubi diutius nobis habitandum est'.

[68] J. Bodel, *Dealing with the dead: undertakers, executioners and potter's fields in ancient Rome*, in: *Death and disease in the ancient city*, eds. V.M. Hope, E. Marshall, London–New York 2000, p. 129.

[69] Mart. 8.75.

[70] Suetonius, *Vespasianus*, in: Suetonius, ed. J.C. Rolfe, vol. II, London–Cambridge–Massachusetts 1959 [hereinafter: Suet. *Vesp*.], 5.4.

[71] K. Hopkins, *Death and renewal*, Cambridge–New York 1985, p. 213.

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back to antiquity and has been partially preserved up to his days[72]. The Romans believed that the spirits of the dead could be either benevolent (*lares* – guardian spirits) or malevolent (*larvae*). Malevolent spirits were thought to cause significant harm, haunting individuals and even taking possession of their bodies. To ward off such dangers, the head of the household performed a ritual in the middle of the night, which involved specific magical gestures and the recitation of prescribed verbal formulas[73]. The magical rite described by Ovid, which involved the use of black beans, may seem highly unusual. But did Romans of the Principate take such beliefs seriously? Robert Ogilvie suggests they did: 'At first sight, it is difficult to imagine Livy or Horace or Agrippa solemnly getting out of bed and going through this ritual. And yet they probably did – at least in a modified form'[74]. Superstition was deeply ingrained in Roman culture, influencing even many educated and elite individuals.

Religious beliefs concerning the afterlife are significantly reflected in burial practices. Examining Roman burial practices allows us to gain deeper insights into their beliefs about the soul's existence after death, enhancing our understanding of their religious consciousness. As Ian Morris observes in his review of the literature on this topic, 'The literature on funerals and rites of passage is immense'[75].

The belief in an afterlife led the Greeks and Romans to approach funeral rituals with great care. These rites were intended to ensure the smooth passage of the deceased's soul from the world of the living to its rightful place in the world of the dead. For Romans, the ideal death occurred at home, surrounded by friends and family, providing reassurance that proper burial practices would be observed. Funeral rituals typically involved either cremation or burial in the ground. Cicero notably distinguishes between the terms 'burying' and 'burning', highlighting their distinct meanings[76]. Both cremation and inhumation, the two options for the Roman funeral ceremony, were considered equivalent. When Socrates was asked how he would like to be buried, the philosopher replied, 'As you please', indicating that he attached no importance

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[72] Ov. *Fast*. 5.423–428: 'annus erat brevior, nec adhuc pia februa norant, nec tu dux mensum, Iane biformis, eras: iam tamen extincto cineri sua dona ferebant, compositique nepos busta piabat avi. mensis erat Maius, maiorum nomine dictus, qui partem prisci nunc quoque moris habet'.

[73] Ov. *Fast*. 5.429–444.

[74] R.M. Ogilvie, *The Romans and their gods in the age of Augustus*, New York 1970, p. 85.

[75] I. Morris, *Death-ritual and social structure in classical antiquity*, Cambridge–New York 1992, p. 10.

[76] Cic. *Leg*. 2.60: 'Et simul illud videtote, aliud habitum esse sepelire et urere'.

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to the manner of his burial[77]. However, in specific instances, cremation was expressly prohibited. Juvenal asserts that infants should not be cremated[78]. Pliny the Elder specifies that children who die before their first tooth erupts are exempt from cremation[79]. These children were interred in separate graves, known as *suggrundaria*. Some scholars suggest this practice applied to children up to 40 days old[80], while others argue that cremation was avoided for newborns less than six months of age, as their remains would not endure the flames[81]. Infants were not the only group excluded from cremation; individuals who died from lightning strikes were also ineligible for this practice[82].

Ancient authors suggest that inhumation was likely the earliest funerary rite in Italy[83]. However, archaeological evidence indicates that both inhumation and cremation were practiced in ancient times[84]. Cremation gained prominence during the late Republic and early Imperial periods. Some elements of the cremation procedure resemble inhumation. After the body is cremated, some bones are collected in an urn for later burial. For example, Nero's ashes were collected after his cremation and interred in the family tomb of the *Domitii*[85]. Cicero also mentions the custom of *os*

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[77] Pl. *Phd*. 115c.

[78] Juv. 5.15.139–140.

[79] Pliny (the Elder), *Naturalis historia*, in: Pliny, *Natural History*, ed. H. Rackham, vol. 2, Cambridge–Massachusetts–London 1961 [hereinafter: Plin. *HN*.], 7.16.72: 'Hominem prius quam genito dente cremari mos gentium non est'.

[80] F. Granger, W.W. Fowler, *Roman Burial*, "The Classical Review" 1987, 11, 1, pp. 32–35.

[81] S. Gaio, *"Quid sint suggrundaria": La sepoltura infantile a enchytrismos di Loppio – Sant'Andrea*, in: B. Maurina, *Ricerche archeologiche a Sant'Andrea di Loppio (Trento, Italia): il castrum Tardoantico-Altomedievale*, Oxford 2016, p. 300. It is worth noting that infant mortality in ancient Rome was remarkably high. According to some estimates, 200 to 300 out of every 1,000 newborns died each year, see: M. King, *Commemoration of Infants on Roman Funerary*, in: *The epigraphy of death: studies in the history and society of Greece and Rome*, ed. G.J. Oliver, Liverpool 2000, p. 123.

[82] Plin. *HN*. 2.55.145: 'hominem ita exanimatum cremari fas non est, condi terra religio tradidit', see: T.W. Hillard, *Death by lightning, Pompeius Strabo and the people*, "Rheinisches Museum für Philologie" 1996, 139, 2, p. 142, note 26; for more details on the representation of cremation in Latin literature, see: T. Habinek, *At the Threshold of Representation: Cremation and Cremated Remains in Classical Latin Literature*, "Classical Antiquity" 2016, 35, 1, pp. 1–44.

[83] Cic. *Leg*. 2.56: 'At mihi quidem antiquissimum sepulturae genus illud fuisse videtur, quo apud Xenophontem Cyrus utitur: redditur enim terrae corpus et ita locatum ac situm quasi operimento matris obducitur'; Plin. HN. 7.54.187: 'Ipsum cremare apud Romanos non fuit vetcris instituti; terra condebantur'.

[84] J.L. Heller, *Burial Customs of the Romans*, "The Classical Weekly" 1932, 25 (24), p. 196.

[85] Suetonius, *Nero*, in: Suetonius, ed. J. C. Rolfe, vol. II, London–Cambridge–Massachusetts 1959 [hereinafter: Suet. *Nero*], 50.

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resectum[86]. Before cremation, a piece of flesh – usually a finger – was cut from the deceased and buried after the body was burned[87].

Starting in the 2nd century AD, inhumation gradually re-emerged as the preferred burial practice. By the middle of the 3rd century, this shift towards inhumation had spread throughout the provinces[88]. The 5th-century AD writer Macrobius writes that in his time, the custom of burning the bodies of the dead did not exist[89].

According to ancient Greek and Roman beliefs, prayers offered to the gods were believed to facilitate the soul's transition to the afterlife. Plato recorded Socrates' words, asserting that it is surely both possible and proper to pray to the gods for a fortunate journey from here to the afterlife[90]. This reflects the fact that ancient society attached great importance to the funeral rite. In Homer, the soul of Elpenor, a companion of Odysseus who recently died and was left unburied due to haste, pleads not to be left unmourned and unburied. He asks for his body to be burned with his weapons and for a burial mound to be built over him[91]. Patroclus' soul addresses Achilles with a similar request in a dream[92]. In the Aeneid, Virgil recounts the fate of Palinurus, a companion of Aeneas. Along with the souls of other deceased individuals, he is unable to board Charon's boat and cross the sacred waters of the Styx. The core issue is that their bodies were not properly buried after death. As a result, they are condemned to wander for many years along the banks of the Styx[93].

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[86] Cic. *Leg*. 2.55.

[87] A.L. Emmerson, *Re-examining Roman Death Pollution*, "The Journal of Roman Studies" 2020, 110, pp. 12–14; E.J. Graham, *Becoming persons, becoming ancestors. Personhood, memory and the corpse in Roman rituals of social remembrance*, "Archaeological dialogues" 2009, 16, 1, pp. 55–57.

[88] J.M.C. Toynbee, *Death and burial in the Roman world*, New York–London 1971, pp. 39–40; A.D. Nock, *Cremation and Burial in the Roman Empire*, "The Harvard Theological Review" 1932, 25, 4, pp. 321–324; I. Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–69. The ratio of cremation to inhumation practices varies across provinces, and new research methods prompt us to reconsider established ideas, as shown in the example of southern Britain, see: P. Booth, *Some recent work on Romano-British cemeteries*, in: *Death as a process: the archaeology of the Roman funeral*, eds. J. Pearce, J. Weekes, Oxford 2017, pp. 174–207.

[89] Macrob. *Sat*. 7.7.5: 'deinde licet urendi corpora defunctorum usus nostro saeculo nullus sit'.

[90] Pl. *Phd*. 117c: 'ἀλλ᾽ εὔχεσθαί γέ που τοῖς θεοῖς ἔξεστί τε καὶ χρή, τὴν μετοίκησιν τὴν ἐνθένδε ἐκεῖσε εὐτυχῆ γενέσθαι'.

[91] Hom. *Od*. 11.72–76.

[92] Hom. *Il*. 23.71.

[93] Verg. *Aen*. 6.325–329.

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If a body was not properly buried, it was harmful not only to the soul of the deceased but also to those who remained in the world of the living. The unburied corpse of Misenus, Hector's trumpeter and later Aeneas' companion, defiled the entire fleet[94]. Pliny the Younger recounts a fascinating story on this subject. In one of the houses in Athens, the inhabitants were long disturbed at night by a ghost. This persisted until bones bound with chains were discovered in the house, at the spot indicated by the apparition. The remains were gathered and given a public burial. After the proper funeral rites, the ghost ceased to haunt the house[95]. After Caligula was murdered, his body was not properly buried. His ghost was said to haunt both the gardeners of the Lamian Gardens, where his half-burnt remains were interred, and the residents of the house where he was killed. Eventually, a second funeral was conducted with the proper rites, bringing an end to the hauntings[96]. It is important to note that Caligula's body was only half-burnt, as 'half-burning meant an incomplete releasing of the soul, thus dooming it to torment'[97]. It is apparently for this reason that Nero asked his most loyal servants, who remained with him in his final moments, to ensure that his body was completely burned at all costs and that no one took possession of his head[98]. Another problematic situation could arise when someone died a violent death, and the perpetrator escaped justice. In such cases, the victim's soul might remain restless. Nero himself confessed to being haunted by the ghost of his mother, Agrippina, whom he had ordered to be murdered[99]. Some claimed to hear mournful moans near her grave[100].

Circumstances sometimes prevented the proper burial of the deceased, for example, when the body could not be recovered. This occurred frequently after sea battles or shipwrecks during storms. The prospect of such an undignified death was terrifying. Ovid, while not fearing death itself, considered it a tragic fate to perish at sea and be denied a proper burial[101]. Horace recounts a poignant tale in which the soul of a drowned man pleads with a passing sailor to spare a moment to cover his remains on the

[94] Verg. *Aen*. 6.150.

[95] Plin. *Ep*. 7.27.5–11.

[96] Suet. *Calig*. 59.

[97] D.G. Kyle, *Spectacles of death in ancient Rome*, London–New York 1998, p. 222.

[98] Suet. *Nero* 50: 'Nihil prius aut magis a comitibus exegerat quam ne potestas cuiquam capitis sui fieret, sed ut quoquo modo totus cremaretur'.

[99] Suet. *Nero* 34.4. However, Suetonius described the situation as one where Nero was unable to endure the awareness of his crime: 'Neque tamen conscientiam sceleris'.

[100] Tac. *Ann*. 14.10.

[101] Ov. *Tr*. 1.2.51–52: 'nec letum timeo; genus est miserabile leti. demite naufragium, mors mihi munus erit'.

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shore by throwing at least three handfuls of sand over them[102]. It is possible that three handfuls of earth represented the minimum acceptable standard for a proper burial ceremony[103]. However, this notion remains uncertain and may not fully reflect the burial practices of the time[104].

In the absence of a body, a cenotaph, an empty tomb, was erected. Near this cenotaph, customary funeral rites were performed. Andromache arranged such a cenotaph for Hector and consecrated two altars on either side[105]. Aeneas built a cenotaph for Deiphobus, as he was unable to recover and bury his body[106]. Thucydides describes a state-sponsored burial ceremony that the Athenians performed during the Archidamian War. As part of the ceremony, a single empty bier was carried to honor those who were missing and whose bodies could not be recovered for burial[107].

Occasionally, individuals presumed dead in a foreign land returned alive. If a cenotaph had already been erected and the appropriate rites performed, they were considered symbolically buried and complicit in the 'death'. Such individuals were forbidden from entering the house through the main door. Instead, they were required to descend through the *compluvium* – a hole in the roof that directed rainwater into the *impluvium*. To restore their status among the living, a purification rite symbolizing rebirth had to be performed[108].

Consequently, the ancients believed that the proper performance of funeral rites was crucial for the soul's well-being in the afterlife. A body interred according to ritual, as dictated by custom, was thought to facilitate the soul's transition, as Sophocles wrote[109]. After the deceased's eyes were closed, a lamentation ceremony took place near the body. With occasional interruptions, this ritual continued until the moment of burial. Propertius underscored the importance of mourners' grief, suggesting it mirrored the love and affection bestowed upon the deceased during their lifetime. He further emphasized the profound impact of grief,

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[102] Hor. *Carm*. 1.28.

[103] J.J. Lennon, *Pollution and religion in ancient Rome*, New York 2014, p. 139.

[104] C. Tolsa, *Horace's Archytas Ode (1.28) and the Tomb of Archimedes in Cicero (Tusculanae Disputationes 5.64)*, "Arethusa" 2019, 52, 1, p. 67.

[105] Verg. *Aen*. 3.304–305.

[106] Verg. *Aen*. 6.505–508: 'tunc egomet tumulum Rhoeteo litore inanem constitui... te, amice, nequivi conspicere et patria decedens ponere terra'.

[107] Thuc. 2.34.3.

[108] Plut. *Quaest. Rom*. 264e–265b.

[109] Soph. *Ant*. 23–25: 'Ἐτεοκλέα μέν, ὡς λέγουσι, σὺν δίκης χρήσει δικαίᾳ καὶ νόμου κατὰ χθονὸς ἔκρυψε τοῖς ἔνερθεν ἔντιμον νεκροῖς'.

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implying its intensity might even hold sway in the afterlife[110]. During the ceremony, the deceased was addressed in raised tones. To the mournful accompaniment of a trumpet or flute, the body was washed with warm water, anointed with ointments, and dressed in a toga. Juvenal notes that in much of Italy, a toga was not worn until death[111]. Aromatic substances were used to protect the body from premature decomposition. The deceased was then placed on a high funeral bed in the atrium of the house, with their feet pointing toward the door. They were covered with an elegant blanket, which left the face exposed and was adorned with wreaths and flowers. The household hearth was extinguished, and candles and lamps were lit around the bed[112]. This scene is vividly depicted on a unique relief discovered near Rome in the mid-19th century, now housed in the Lateran Museum[113]. A coin was placed in the mouth of the deceased, intended to pay the soul's fare for crossing the Styx. A broken branch of cypress or fir, symbolizing death, was placed at the entrance of the house to warn passersby – especially priests – of the risk of ritual defilement[114]. Access to the body was typically permitted for three to seven days. The funeral itself could be simple or elaborate, often announced by a herald. The procession was accompanied by flutists and torchbearers, resembling a wedding ceremony. Propertius poetically describes life as a journey between two torches: one at the wedding and the other at the funeral[115].

When discussing cremation, it was important to provide a proper burial fire. For Misenus's burial, a funeral pyre was constructed using a variety of trees, including pine and oak[116]. Similarly, oak wood was used for the funeral pyre of Patroclus[117]. We have no reason to claim that it was fundamentally important for bodies to burn quickly during cremation. However, as we have already mentioned, the bodies had to be completely burned, which is why wood from tree species that produced a lot of heat was used. Additionally, another consideration was taken into account

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[110] Prop. 4.7.23–24: 'at mihi non oculos quisquam inclamavit euntis: unum impetrassem te revocante diem'.

[111] Juv. 3.171–172.

[112] Pers. 3.103–105; Stat. *Silv*. 5.1.213.

[113] G.McN. Rushforth, *Funeral Lights in Roman Sepulchral Monuments*, "The Journal of Roman Studies" 1915, 5, pp. 149–151, Pl. IX.

[114] Plin. *HN*. 16.60.139; Serv. *A*. 3.64: 'moris autem Romani fuerat ramum cupressi ante domum funestam poni, ne quisquam pontifex per ignorantiam pollueretur ingressus'; J.L. Heller, *op. cit*., p. 194.

[115] Prop. 4.11.46.

[116] Verg. *Aen*. 6.214–215.

[117] Hom. *Il*. 23.118.

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when arranging the funeral pyre. It was believed that female bodies contained more heat than male ones. Therefore, according to Plutarch, when constructing large funeral pyres, one female body was placed for every ten male bodies to promote better combustion of the rest[118]. The funeral pyre was surrounded by branches of mourning trees. A row of cypresses – trees of sorrow dedicated to Pluto, the god of the underworld – was placed in front of the fire. The body was washed with hot water, anointed with ointments, mourned, and covered with a crimson shroud before being carried on a bier to the pyre. A torch was raised to light the pyre, with the head turned to the right. As the body burned, offerings were made, including incense, sacrificial food, and olive oil. After the pyre was extinguished, it was doused with wine, and the bones were collected in a copper burial urn. After a cleansing ceremony, a burial mound was constructed[119]. The final stage of the funeral ceremony was the ritual cleansing of the family and home of the deceased. Following this, a funeral meal was held. Nine days after the burial, a memorial dinner was held at the deceased's home[120]. These meals symbolized communication between the world of the living and the world of the dead[121].

Roman society lacked a single consensus on the nature of life and death, the soul's existence in the afterlife, and related matters. For instance, some believed that the soul perished alongside the body. However, the everyday religious consciousness of Roman society embraced the idea of an afterlife as a physical realm that provided shelter for the souls of the dead and could, under certain circumstances, be accessed by the living. Evil deeds committed during life were believed to be repaid with punishment in the afterlife. Properly conducted funeral rites were thought to aid the soul of the deceased in its journey from the world of the living to the realm of the dead, ensuring its peace in the afterlife. The widespread belief in the soul's continued existence paved the way for Roman society to embrace the ideas of Christianity.

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DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.59.301-322