

Spring 5-2022

## Plague and Devastation in Ancient Greece: Why Mourning Matters

Hannah Kallin  
hannah.kallin@uconn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://opencommons.uconn.edu/srhonors\\_theses](https://opencommons.uconn.edu/srhonors_theses)



Part of the [Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Kallin, Hannah, "Plague and Devastation in Ancient Greece: Why Mourning Matters" (2022). *Honors Scholar Theses*. 883.  
[https://opencommons.uconn.edu/srhonors\\_theses/883](https://opencommons.uconn.edu/srhonors_theses/883)

**Plague and Devastation in Ancient Greece: Why Mourning Matters**

By

Hannah Kallin

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Department of History  
University of Connecticut  
For the Degree of Bachelor of History  
May 2022

### Contents:

- **Section 1 :Ritual importance and Established Norms**
  - *1: Introduction*
  - *2: Burial and the Understanding of Death in Greek Society*
  - *3: Specifics of Mycenaean and Homeric Practice*
- **Section 2: Disruption of Tradition and Interrupted Mourning**
  - *1: Classical Sumptuary Laws*
  - *2: The Supplices and Antigone*
- **Section 3: Bad to Worse, Plague and Devastation**
  - *1: Account and Identification*
  - *2: Societal Consequences, Unrest to Collapse*
- **Conclusion and Synthesis**
  - *1: Synthesis of Consequences and the Ideal role of Mourning in Society*

***Abstract:***

In 430 BC, The Plague of Athens swept through the city and left tens of thousands dead. Ancient historian Thucydides gives his account of the plague, detailing the consequent breakdown of order in the capital. Bodies could not be buried or mourned in the ideal traditional ceremonies, leaving surviving citizens unmoored and terrified. This paper explores the impact of interrupted mourning on ancient Greek society. These interruptions range from war and changing laws to periods of plague and widespread devastation. The emotional wellbeing of individual citizens depends on their ability to process death and associated grief with freedom and support from the community at large. Disruption to either physical burial or mourning rituals causes significant emotional disturbance that manifests in a less cohesive society. As demonstrated by the Ancient Greeks, a healthy society prioritizes a complete mourning process among its citizens, even in times of crisis.

## Section 1 :Ritual importance and Established Norms

### *1: Introduction*

Ancient Greeks feared death. But, as an inevitable force of nature, it demanded honor and respect. There is a distinct difference between a cultural worship of death itself and the physical act of mourning-where some ancient societies worshiped death by personifying the natural process as a deity, Greeks distinguished between worshiping death and honoring the dead. Death itself was not glorified. Ancient Greeks did have death gods, but mortals engaged with them on a limited basis and often through euphemism<sup>1</sup>. Instead, ancient Greeks placed more emphasis on celebrating their dead. In the place of temples dedicated to a given god of death, they constructed impressive tombs to house the remains of their loved ones. They also developed funerary traditions including games and lamentation. Both burials and funerals varied widely through Greek history, but their function remains the same. Death rituals are a vital litmus test for the health and safety of a given society. Plague, for example, creates social unrest and fear of personal safety, which upsets burial and mourning norms. Upset burial norms worsen the feeling of societal breakdown and worsens the community's relationship with one another and the overall health of the society. This feedback loop is indicative of an upset in the balance of life and death in which death has become too ubiquitous to carry a sense of gravity. This lack of gravity can hurt the survivors of difficult periods; the dead are not treated with traditional respect and so, as the plague wears on, neither are the sick who are still alive.

Greeks may have expressed a reluctance to worship death directly through deification, but their celebration of deceased loved ones was very important to healthy life. My intention is to analyze ancient Greek society to divide the human experience of mourning into two vital

---

<sup>1</sup> Dimakis, Nikolas. "Ancient Greek Deathscapes." *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology & Heritage Studies* 3, no. 1 (2015): 27–41.

processes. The first is the physical and logistical challenge of death. This is resolved in burial practices and the disposal of remains. The second process is the emotional and social practice of funerary rituals. These rituals serve as a method of closure, remembrance, and eventual return to normalcy. Successful mourning involves both essential processes being fulfilled. Without either physical burial or funeral rites, mourning is left incomplete and can even be evidence of societal collapse. Instances of plague and other sources of devastation can affect both the physical and emotional mourning processes, limiting a society's ability to mourn effectively. Complete mourning is indicative of a healthy society with time and resources to process loss and death appropriately for closure and social cohesion.

## ***2: Burial and the Understanding of Death in Greek Society***

Greeks did not typically construct temples or houses of worship for the gods of death as they did for other gods. Many of their cemeteries and tombs represent the extent of their architectural dedication to honoring death. Greeks associated liminal spaces with death (as death itself was seen as a transition between states of being). Such places included doorways, crossroads, gates, and any other structure that suggested transition or a movement between spaces.<sup>2</sup> Aside from the constructed environment, certain natural features represented death in Greek mythology, especially rivers and watery landscapes. Water is also a noteworthy feature of the Greek realm of the dead, represented as the supernatural River Styx. After death, Greeks believed that a person's soul entered the underworld and paid for passage across this river, making their final journey into the afterlife. Mourners constructed cemeteries or other physical landscapes dedicated entirely to the dead based on these environmental associations.

---

<sup>2</sup> Dimakis, Nikolas. "Ancient Greek Deathscapes." 27-41

“ After all, death has the power to create heterotopias—spaces assigned a multiplicity of meaning (e.g., Foucault 1984; and Soja 1996)—exerting a compulsive hold on human imagination as a reminder of the transience of human life mixed with feelings ranging from anxiety and dread to splendor and magnificence<sup>3</sup>. ”

Fear was undoubtedly a significant component of the Ancient Greek experience of death, but it was not the only emotion they felt. Ancient Greeks went out of their way to construct impressive and long-lasting structures around their deceased loved ones. The construction of these environments centered on death, from the tombs to the surrounding landscape, are physical manifestations of ancient peoples attempting to process the transition between life and death. Here, in these designated spaces, mourners could experience beauty, tranquility, and reflect on the journey into the afterlife.

As far as the tombs themselves, there were some regional differences based on which

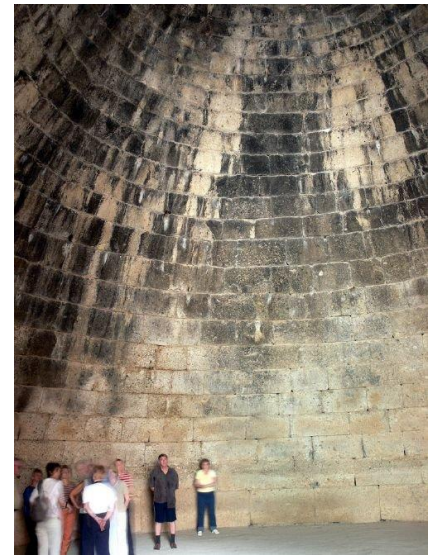
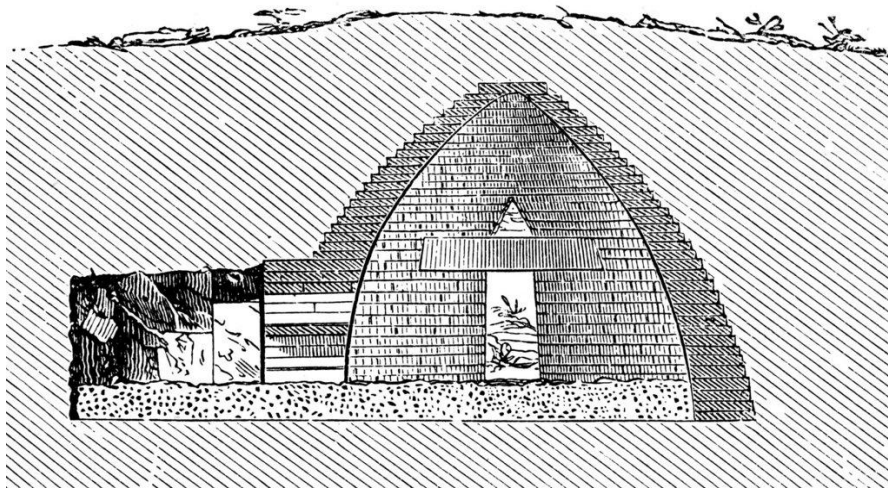


cultures and practices were common in a given area, as well as drift between practices over time periods. Both inhumation and cremation were common, and there were variations in the style of constructed graves. Chamber tombs<sup>4</sup> (cut from rock and filled with multiple bodies at a time) were common in the Bronze

<sup>3</sup> Dimakis, Nikolas. “Ancient Greek Deathscapes.” 27-41 quoting Hallam and Hockey 2001: 84

<sup>4</sup> Image from Saraceni, J. E. (n.d.). *Intact mycenaean tomb discovered in Greece*. Archaeology Magazine. Retrieved April 29, 2022, from <https://www.archaeology.org/news/7013-181004-nemea-mycenaean-tomb>

Age. Beehive or tholos tombs<sup>5</sup> were constructed in the Mycenaean period that still stand today. Considerable energy and manpower was devoted to the construction of these massive graves. The collection of required resources alone would have been a monumental undertaking, requiring the work of many individuals over an extended period. Dedication and attention to detail are obvious in the construction of these impressive structures, all for the sake of mourning.



Other than inhumation, cremation was a popular method of burial throughout Greece.<sup>6</sup> Burial methods not only varied by region and period, but also on the deceased themselves. Age, sex, and manner of death all affected the associated mourning practice. Significantly challenging circumstances influenced differences in burial methods. These challenges could be logistical, as in the case of war burials. While death in battle was considered an honor and a privilege in ancient Greece, when large numbers of men died far from home their bodies could not

<sup>5</sup> Beehive Images from "Beehive Tomb." *New World Encyclopedia*, [https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Beehive\\_tomb](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Beehive_tomb).

<sup>6</sup> Ian Morris *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4 ed.)  
 Edited by Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow  
 Publisher: Oxford University Press



realistically be transported back to their families for private burial. In such cases, Greeks dug communal graves and constructed group monuments for those who celebrated individually. Only military leaders could be carried home and buried in individualized tombs. These challenging circumstances could also be emotional and personal, as in the case of infant death or death in childbirth. Examples of infant graves suggest that cremation was primarily reserved for adults while deceased children were interred in pots and urns alongside their caretakers in family plots. In Western Greece, vessel burial extended to adults as well.<sup>7</sup>

### ***3: Specifics of Mycenaean and Homeric Practice***

Records and art of the Homeric period give more detail about funerary rites themselves. These accounts offer insight into not only burial practice, but also the process through which the deceased were mourned. Cremation is associated with Homeric funerals largely because of the prominence of the *Iliad* (book XXIII), which details the death and funeral of Patroclus. During this particular funeral, Patroclus, a war hero, is cremated on a pyre constructed by his fellow soldiers. Each of his comrades cut a piece of their hair to burn alongside the body, and the ceremony is preceded by feasting and followed by funeral games.<sup>8</sup> This is a fairly realistic depiction, consistent with proposed funerary practices of the time. However, Greeks across all regions and time periods used a variety of burial practices, including mass burial (especially for war dead, when returning soldiers home and honoring each man individually was a logistical impossibility). When an individual did not die in battle, it was the responsibility of family members to bury their own dead and undertake rites and rituals at home. This obligation fell to

---

<sup>7</sup> Ian Morris *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4 ed.)

<sup>8</sup> Kline, A., 2022. *The Iliad*. [online] Griersmusings.files.wordpress.com

the children of the deceased, specifically to sons. When a son was not present to assume responsibility for organizing a funeral, another male family member gained control. Historians suggest that men supervised and dictated responsibilities while women prepared the body for burial or cremation (after seeking permission to do so first). Some historians suggest that rites and rituals surrounding death were the domain of women. However, this is a difficult claim to verify and was possibly proposed by historians actively seeking more female involvement in Homeric funerals.

Soon after their death, the deceased was washed, anointed, and wrapped in white cloth. Cleaned and shrouded, the body was laid out for several days. This ‘wake’ period allowed time for people to gather after news of the person's death had spread. During this time, the family sang and lamented for the deceased. There is evidence that some people worked as professional or ritual mourners, hired to grieve alongside family members. In the case of cremation, after allowing time for family and friends to pay their respects, mourners carried the body to the pyre in a procession called *ekphora*. The body was transported either by hand or by chariot depending on the wealth and status of the dead. After being placed on the pyre, hair was cut from the head of the mourners and dedicated to the deceased.<sup>9</sup> The body was then cremated alongside sacrifices or other ritual offerings. These sacrifices could include cows and livestock, honey, or personal possessions.<sup>10</sup> After the cremation, remains were gathered and placed into a vessel of some kind. Some evidence suggests metal urns were used for the ashes, though this practice is particular to warrior burial<sup>11</sup>.

---

<sup>9</sup> Hauser, Stefan R. and Kierdorf, Wilhelm, “Burial”, in: Brill’s New Pauly, Antiquity volumes edited by: Hubert Cancik and , Helmuth Schneider, English Edition by: Christine F. Salazar, Classical Tradition volumes edited by: Manfred Landfester, English Edition by: Francis G. Gentry.

<sup>10</sup> Hauser, Stefan R. and Kierdorf, Wilhelm, “Burial”, in: Brill’s New Pauly, Antiquity

<sup>11</sup> Ian Morris *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4 ed.)  
 Edited by Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow, Oxford University Press Print 2012

Funeral games and meals traditionally followed the pyre ceremony, contrasting the joyful experience of celebration and sport with the pain of grief and death. For the rich, funeral feasts were often an opportunity to display wealth and abundance. As a result, funeral games were a very common source of artistic inspiration, painted on several surviving vessels. One particularly noteworthy example is depicted on the François Vase, shown below, which illustrates the funeral games of the Ancient Greek hero Patroclus from the *Iliad*.<sup>12</sup>



<sup>12</sup> Bulger, M., 2022. *The François Vase: story book of Greek mythology* – Smarthistory

The legendary funeral games of Patroclus were especially popular among artists, depicted many times with varying degrees of artistic liberty. These vessels are the earliest recorded example of funerary games as part of the mourning process. Funeral games were also the origin of many Grecian Athletic contests, starting during competitions to mourn and honor local athletes.

## **Section 2: Disruption of Tradition and Interrupted Mourning**

### ***1: Classical Sumptuary Laws***

In significant contrast to decadent and heroic Homeric funerals were those of the Classical Grecian period (commonly defined as 480-323, from the Persian invasion of Athens to the death of Alexander the Great)<sup>13</sup>. Athens limited funeral traditions with sumptuary laws in the hopes of drawing in excessive spending. All citizens were expected to greatly reduce the time and money dedicated to funerals. For instance, friends and family were now only allocated a single day to gather around the body in a designated ‘house of mourning.’ The ekphora was conducted in total silence, without any lamentation or weeping. The changes greatly limited female participation in funerals; only elderly women or very close female relatives were allowed to attend. Small sacrifices were permitted, but large animals like bulls were no longer considered appropriate sacrifices. Even those killed in battle, traditionally honored above the average citizen, were limited to small ceremonies. The state only permitted larger funerals for individuals of outstanding merit.<sup>14</sup> The dramatic curtailing of funeral expenses limited tradition and familial involvement in the mourning process, potentially causing significant emotional distress to those attempting to mourn their dead family members. While they could fulfill the primary part of

---

<sup>13</sup> Sakoulas, T., 2022. *Greece Timeline*. [online] Ancient-greece.org

<sup>14</sup>Hauser, Stefan R. and Kierdorf, Wilhelm, “Burial”, in: Brill’s New Pauly, Antiquity

mourning (physical burial of the deceased), their ability to fulfill the secondary emotional part of mourning was limited. Unable to practice their traditional rituals, people can experience a sense of distress as their grief processing remains unfinished. The accompanying emotions of guilt, disappointment, and frustration exacerbate the already stressful experience of death.

## ***2: The Suppliants and Antigone***

Several pieces of Ancient Greek art explore the sense of frustration and lack of closure from interrupted mourning. The interruption can be either physical or emotional. A common physical barrier to successful mourning was war. Soldiers often died far from home, and in many cases family members were unable to perform any funerary rites for their deceased. *The Suppliants* (sometimes referred to as *The Supplices*), by classical playwright Euripides, is about the retrieval of war dead for burial. In an emotional plea directly from the play, a chorus of bereaved mothers beg for their dead sons to be brought home for burial. Essentially, they are asking for the closure they have been denied by having nothing to bury:

“At your knees I fall, aged lady, and my old lips beseech you; [45] the lawless ones—rescue my children... You too, honored lady, once bore a son, [55] ...then share, share with me your feelings, in such measure as my sad heart grieves for my own dead sons; [60] and persuade your son, O, we implore you, to go unto the river Ismenus, and place within my arms the bodies of the dead, slain in their prime and wandering without a tomb.... in my sore distress I beseech you place in my unhappy hands my son's [70] dead body, that I may throw my arms about the hapless limbs of my child.”<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup>Coleridge, E., 2022. *Euripides, The Suppliants*. [online] Perseus Digital Library

The pain of losing a child is already a horrible emotional burden, but without the physical finality of laying a child to rest a mother is unable to move forward with any sense of peace. Death rituals make the end of a life more manageable, concrete and controlled while also restoring a sense of meaning to those who need to live on. Therefore, the collapse of death rites and rituals indicates a lack of control and a descent into disarray. As stated by Toher in his article exploring *The Suppliants*, “The significance of the public funeral in *The Suppliants* results from the fact that in general funeral ritual serves as a social function that enables traumatized survivors to recover from their grief and disorientation and resume normal social roles. Funeral ritual resolves death’s trauma by allowing the expression and alleviation of grief through mourning...”<sup>16</sup>. Toher’s thesis is noteworthy because it implies that funerary rites are not only vital on an individual level, but a societal level as well. A society that prioritizes its citizens’ abilities to mourn allows for better social cohesion overall. If there is an obstacle to the completion of mourning there must then be some form of social failure or societal breakdown.

As in the case of sumptuary laws, emotional barriers to mourning were often more abstract and political. They often came in the form of expectations or laws preventing individuals from processing grief as they would have liked. The tragedy of *Antigone* follows a young woman prevented by royal decree from mourning her brother, a political enemy of the king. She chooses to do so anyway and is condemned to death herself. When brought before the king, she stands by her decision, stating “...for me to meet this doom is a grief of no account. But if I had endured that my mother's son should in death lie an unburied corpse, that would have grieved me. ...if my present actions are foolish in your sight, [470] it may be that it is a fool who accuses

---

<sup>16</sup> Toher, Mark. “Euripides’ ‘Suppliants’ and the Social Function of Funeral Ritual.” *Hermes* 129, no. 3 (2001): 332–43

me of folly.”<sup>17</sup> After Antigone is condemned, the king’s son commits suicide out of grief. In turn, the king’s wife commits suicide out of grief for her son. In death, Antigone is vindicated and the king suffers his own tragic loss as a direct result of his cruelty. These painful dramatizations of interrupted mourning wrestle with the significance of death and the consequences of an imperfect burial. So, it is not difficult to imagine the severe emotional consequences when even limited mourning was no longer possible. That is, when it was not laws that disrupted the grieving process, but disaster.

### **Section 3: Bad to Worse, Plague and Devastation**

#### ***1: Account and Identification***

Homer and Hesiod both referred to plagues as expressions of wrath by angered gods. In ancient Greek minds, widespread illness and other ubiquitous misery was considered a heavenly recompense for human shortcomings. This cultural framing meant illness (and the death it brought with it) was something that humanity could contend with in a very limited way, mostly through attempts to appease the gods. Historians of the time recorded patterns that seemed to accompany plagues, including natural phenomena. Hesiod, specifically, observed that periods of illness and periods of hunger seemed to coincide, each worsening the consequences of the other. However, during his own experience of plague, Thucydides monitored symptoms and human behavior surrounding the hardship.

The Plague of Athens was catastrophic, killing anywhere from a quarter to a third of the Athenian population. The disease itself has never been successfully identified. In *The History of the Peloponnesian War* (written 431 BC), he provides a description of the Plague of Athens as

---

<sup>17</sup>Jebb, S., 2022. *Sophocles, Antigone*. [online] Perseus Digital Library.

well as the resulting societal fallout. He claims that he had the disease himself, and was familiar with its effect on the body. He writes that the illness attacks otherwise healthy people, not just the elderly, children or the infirm (as had already been recognized as a consistent phenomenon across instances of illness). Symptoms of the plague included fever, inflammation, cough and chest pains. Sufferers also experienced stomach upset and threw up bile. Thucydides notes that the body was “not hot to the touch,” but an infected person often *felt* overheated to the point of removing their clothing. Some of the ‘neglected sick’ threw themselves into rain tanks to soothe their fever and thirst. The sick did not become pale but instead exhibited small reddish rashes of ulcers and sores, and their experience was painful and exhausting. Over the course of the illness they were either unable to rest or suffered nights of fitful sleep. Thucydides’ account suggests that the plague was not a wasting disease, and many who had it seemed to fight it until it reached their bowels and caused diarrhea. This eventually killed them, most likely from dehydration. Many survivors lost fingers and toes, and he describes some patients as amnesiacs after the disease passed through them. Healthy caretakers would attempt to treat the sick, but no remedy was consistently helpful across all cases. Finally he reports that he could find no instances of the same man experiencing the illness twice, indicating that you could gain immunity after surviving infection.

A number of modern historians have attempted to identify the plague. It may have been Smallpox. “We are looking for a highly contagious, febrile illness with a skin rash,” say Holladay and Poole, two researchers attempting to find out exactly what swept through Athens with such horrifying voracity. However, Thucydides describes the illness causing gangrene and affecting animals alongside people. Smallpox, as we understand it today, does neither. In addition, the death rate of the Athens Plague appears to be too high compared to other historic



smallpox plagues. Others have suggested the Bubonic plague, but there is no direct mention of the telltale swollen, pus-filled nodes that give the disease its name. Bubonic plague is also not as highly transmissible as the illness described in Thucydides' account. Some even say it could have been a variation of Measles or Typhus fever. Despite speculation, modern historians will likely never correctly identify it, as it is now a long-extinct mutation of any illness we might recognize today. Diseases are constantly evolving, affecting every host with varied success and varying symptoms. For this reason, definitively identifying Thucydides plague is not necessarily vital (or even possible) given the lack of an appropriate modern comparison. The primary historical goal of identifying the Plague of Athens is to gain empirical insight into transmission and measure how much ancient people knew about it. Their knowledge and observations informed their attempts at treatment, prevention, and eventually handling the bodies of the victims. Later historians would continue the tradition of recording the plagues and disasters of their lifetimes, as in the case of Procopius. "It is to Procopius's credit that he recorded the 'unexpected' fact that his plague (a bubonic one) did not attack the attendants of the sick or those who buried them..."<sup>18</sup> While Procopius lived almost a thousand years after Thucydides in the 500s AD, it is interesting to note that even without a modern understanding of germ theory it was still accepted fact that those who handled both the ill and the diseased dead were at greater risk of infection.

---

<sup>18</sup> Holladay, A. J., and J. C. F. Poole. "Thucydides and the Plague of Athens." *The Classical Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1979): 282–300.

## ***2: Societal Consequences, Unrest to Collapse***

Thucydides also provides a detailed description of the treatment of plague dead (and dying). The limited space in the city meant that the sick needed to be kept together in hot, tightly packed houses. So many people died in these conditions that they could not be removed expediently. Sacred places, temples, and other public places were also full of bodies. It was not uncommon for a person to die in the street, left to decay where they lay. As the plague worsened, so did the fear among the living. Bodies began to pile up. When a body lies unburied, it is generally picked apart by birds and dogs and other wild animals. Scavengers were well known to eat from fresh corpses- however, in the case of the plague dead, even wild animals could sense that the bodies were potentially hazardous to ingest and unfit for consumption. As unpleasant as it may be to imagine a body being eaten by animals, it is true that this would make them disappear faster. Instead, uneaten, bodies rotted slowly, publicly, and en masse.

Ancient Greeks absolutely understood that the caretakers of the ill were more likely to become sick themselves. This understanding was likely cause for much of the panic and resulting desertion of the sick and dying. While the Athenians may not have known exactly what the plague was, they knew it was highly contagious and incredibly dangerous. As Thucydides notes, “There was the awful spectacle of men dying like sheep, through having caught the infection in nursing each other. This caused the greatest mortality.”<sup>19</sup> The healthy became less and less likely to assist in the care of the dead and dying, forced to choose self-preservation over altruism. Funerals and ceremonies were quickly abandoned in favor of hastened mass burial or cremation, seemingly out of fear of illness among the living (but also as a matter of practicality). Interaction with the sick was as limited as possible, and it followed that interaction with the dead was also

---

<sup>19</sup> Crawley, R., 2022. *The Internet Classics Archive | The History of the Peloponnesian War by Thucydides*. [online] Classics.mit.edu., Book 2 Chapter VII

kept to a minimum. Thucydides expresses disgust at the deviation from traditional funerary rites with the plague dead. From his perspective, leaving the dead and dying in such terrible conditions was a stain on Athenian society and a reflection of the worst human instincts.

”All the burial rites before in use were entirely upset, and they buried the bodies as best they could. Many from want of the proper appliances, through so many of their friends having died already, had recourse to the most shameless sepultures: sometimes getting the start of those who had raised a pile, they threw their own dead body upon the stranger's pyre and ignited it; sometimes they tossed the corpse which they were carrying on the top of another that was burning, and so went off.”<sup>20</sup>

As a result of the plague, respect for tradition and law was largely cast off. This extended past dealing with the dead and well into general lawlessness. People broke laws and did what they wanted because they knew that the law was unlikely to prosecute during such a chaotic and terrifying time. Looting, theft, violence and vandalism were widespread. These social consequences are why Thucydides expressed so much disgust at the treatment of the plague dead and dying. As summarized by Toher, this is because mourning serves a societal function. By maintaining a sense of meaning and importance around death, you give the same sense of meaning and importance to life. Respect for the dead begets respect for the living, and vice versa. The consequences of eliminating ceremony around death (either through necessity or callousness) can accordingly be severe. Disrespecting death will often lead to more of it. When the end of life holds no value, the living are not suitably cared for and more will die. Inversely, the more commonplace death becomes, the less it is respected. Either way, the result is the same: law breaking and societal disarray until the disaster eventually burns itself out.

---

<sup>20</sup> Crawley, R., 2022. *The Internet Classics Archive | The History of the Peloponnesian War by Thucydides*. [online] Classics.mit.edu.

## Conclusion

### *1: Synthesis of Consequences and the Ideal role of Mourning in Society*

So, what is ultimately at risk if we can't mourn our dead? If we can't bury bodies, if we can't perform our rituals, or if we can do neither? Ultimately, disregarding or limiting people's ability to mourn results in the lack of respect for life. These limitations could be man-made or the result of disastrous natural phenomena, like epidemics. In either case, the emotional toll of death needs to be processed in its entirety so that a given mourner can resume living, working, and peacefully contributing to their community. To complete this process a mourner requires access to both the physical and emotional tools to complete their funerary rites. First and foremost, they ideally have access to the body of their deceased. Much of the experience around death is rooted in the physical, from changing the body's form through cremation or through laying it to rest in an environment dedicated to transition and remembrance. In instances where access to the body is an impossibility, the emotional process of funeral rites becomes doubly important. Any religious rituals or ceremonies around death should not only be allowed, but encouraged. Efforts to curtail expressions of grief or make them fit a particular mold will only result in backlash. Problems at the individual level echo through society and eventually, if there is enough individual upset, social balance can be disrupted. As shown in the Plague of Athens, significant disruption to mourning leads to unrest, and unrest eventually snowballs into a host of societal problems. This negative loop can only be left through burnout and eventual rebuilding, during which a sense of gravity is returned to death. Life once again gains a ceremonial sense of importance instead of fleeting insignificance.

### **Bibliography:**

Coleridge, E., 2022. *Euripides, The Suppliants*. [online] Perseus Digital Library. Available at:  
 <<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0122%3Acard%3D63>>

Crawley, R., 2022. *The Internet Classics Archive | The History of the Peloponnesian War by Thucydides*. [online] Classics.mit.edu. Available at:  
 <<http://classics.mit.edu/Thucydides/pelopwar.2.second.html>>

Dimakis, Nikolas. “Ancient Greek Deathscapes.” *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology & Heritage Studies* 3, no. 1 (2015): 27–41.  
<https://doi.org/10.5325/jeasmedarcherstu.3.1.0027>.

Hame, Kerri J. “Female Control of Funeral Rites in Greek Tragedy: Klytaimestra, Medea, and Antigone.” *Classical Philology* 103, no. 1 (2008): 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1086/590091>.

Hauser, Stefan R. and Kierdorf, Wilhelm, “Burial”, in: Brill’s New Pauly, Antiquity volumes edited by: Hubert Cancik and , Helmuth Schneider, English Edition by: Christine F. Salazar, Classical Tradition volumes edited by: Manfred Landfester, English Edition by: Francis G. Gentry. Consulted online on 11 September 2021  
 <[http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/10.1163/1574-9347\\_bnp\\_e215970](http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e215970)> First published online: 2006

Holladay, A. J., and J. C. F. Poole. "Thucydides and the Plague of Athens." *The Classical Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1979): 282–300. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/638096>.

Jebb, S., 2022. *Sophocles, Antigone*. [online] Perseus Digital Library. Available at:  
 <<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0186%3Acard%3D441>>

Kline, A., 2022. *The Iliad*. [online] Griersmusings.files.wordpress.com. Available at:  
 <<https://griersmusings.files.wordpress.com/2018/10/the-iliad-homer-a-s-kline.pdf>>

Morris, Ian *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4 ed.) Edited by Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow Publisher: Oxford University Press Print Publication  
 Date: 2012 Print ISBN-13: 9780199545568 Published online: 2012 Current Online  
 Version: 2012 eISBN: 9780191735257

Nutton, Vivian (London), "Epidemic diseases", in: Brill's New Pauly, Antiquity volumes edited by: Hubert Cancik and , Helmuth Schneider, English Edition by: Christine F. Salazar, Classical Tradition volumes edited by: Manfred Landfester, English Edition by: Francis G. Gentry. Consulted online on 11 September 2021  
 <[http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/10.1163/1574-9347\\_bnp\\_e331910](http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e331910)> First published online: 2006

Roller, Lynn E. "Funeral Games in Greek Art." *American Journal of Archaeology* 85, no. 2 (1981): 107–19. <https://doi.org/10.2307/505030>.

Sakoulas, T., 2022. *Greece Timeline*. [online] Ancient-greece.org. Available at: <<https://ancient-greece.org/resources/timeline.html>>

Toher, Mark. "Euripides' 'Supplices' and the Social Function of Funeral Ritual." *Hermes* 129, no. 3 (2001): 332–43. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4477442>.

### **Images:**

"Beehive Tomb." *New World Encyclopedia*,  
[https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Beehive\\_tomb](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Beehive_tomb).

Bulger, M., 2022. *The François Vase: story book of Greek mythology – Smarthistory*. [online] Smarthistory.org. Available at: <<https://smarthistory.org/francois-vase/>> [Accessed 29 April 2022].

Saraceni, J. E. (n.d.). *Intact mycenaean tomb discovered in Greece*. Archaeology Magazine.  
Retrieved April 29, 2022, from  
<https://www.archaeology.org/news/7013-181004-nemea-mycenaean-tomb>