

Classics 17B: Preparing for the Afterlife during the Early Empire

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1 Notes on burial in ancient Rome

- Both cremation and inhumation were used in ancient Roman times...
- Tombs were placed outside the city walls on the very roads that lead in and out of the city.
- Streets lined with tombs became very popular sites for graffiti, advertising, etc. Who is important in town?
- Where are the children and the slaves?
- Tomb structures range from very simple to elaborate (depended on your pocketbook).
- Religious rites would have been performed at the gravesite.
- Most of the tombs contain multiple burials with ashes placed inside the tomb in urns.
- Offerings to keep the souls alive ... in the form of food, wine, oil, blood, etc. Funerary meals at the tomb!
- Corpse had to be cleaned, purified, etc.
- Funerals were often organized by professional undertakers—there were funeral clubs too (to cover expenses).
- Tombs and tombstones were the best insurance policy against oblivion.
- Coin in the mouth for Charon, the ferryman who takes you across the river Styx in the underworld.