

CLAS 333/HIST 303

CULT OF THE DEAD: ANCIENT CORPSES, TOMBS, AND MORTUARY RITUAL

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M/W 1:00-2:15 PM



Geometric-style Greek funerary krater with mourners surrounding the deceased. 8th c. BCE, Athens. Now at the MET.

Death is an inescapable fact of life for every human being. Death's universality has led to both remarkable continuities and striking differences in how the living interact with the dead across cultures. This course will examine rites surrounding death and corpses in antiquity from the Bronze Age to the Early Middle Ages, with units on Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Persian, Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Christian interactions with the dead. Topics will include tombs, cemeteries, and burial; funerary rites and meals; eulogy and lament; mythologies of the afterlife; and the preservation, veneration, and utilization of corpses. We will explore how religion, social structures, politics, and environment impact the cult of the dead in the ancient world.