

Syllabus

1. **Rite of passage:** Death and the afterlife throughout the ancient world.
2. **Archaeoethanatology** as a discipline: management & treatment of the corpse.
3. **Archaeoethanatology** as a method: how to reconstruct a burial.
4. The origins of burial ritual in the Lower and Middle Palaeolithic.
5. Burial rituals in the Upper Palaeolithic.
6. Burial rituals in the Mesolithic.
7. Burial rituals of Neolithic and Eneolithic cultures in our territory.
8. Burial rituals in the Bronze Age.
9. Burial rituals in the Iron Age.
10. Burial rituals in the 1st to 6th centuries.
11. Burial rituals in the 6th to 12th centuries.
12. Burial rituals in the 13th to 18th centuries.
13. Peculiarities of the funeral ritual.



Rite of passage:

Death & the
Afterlife
throughout the
ancient world

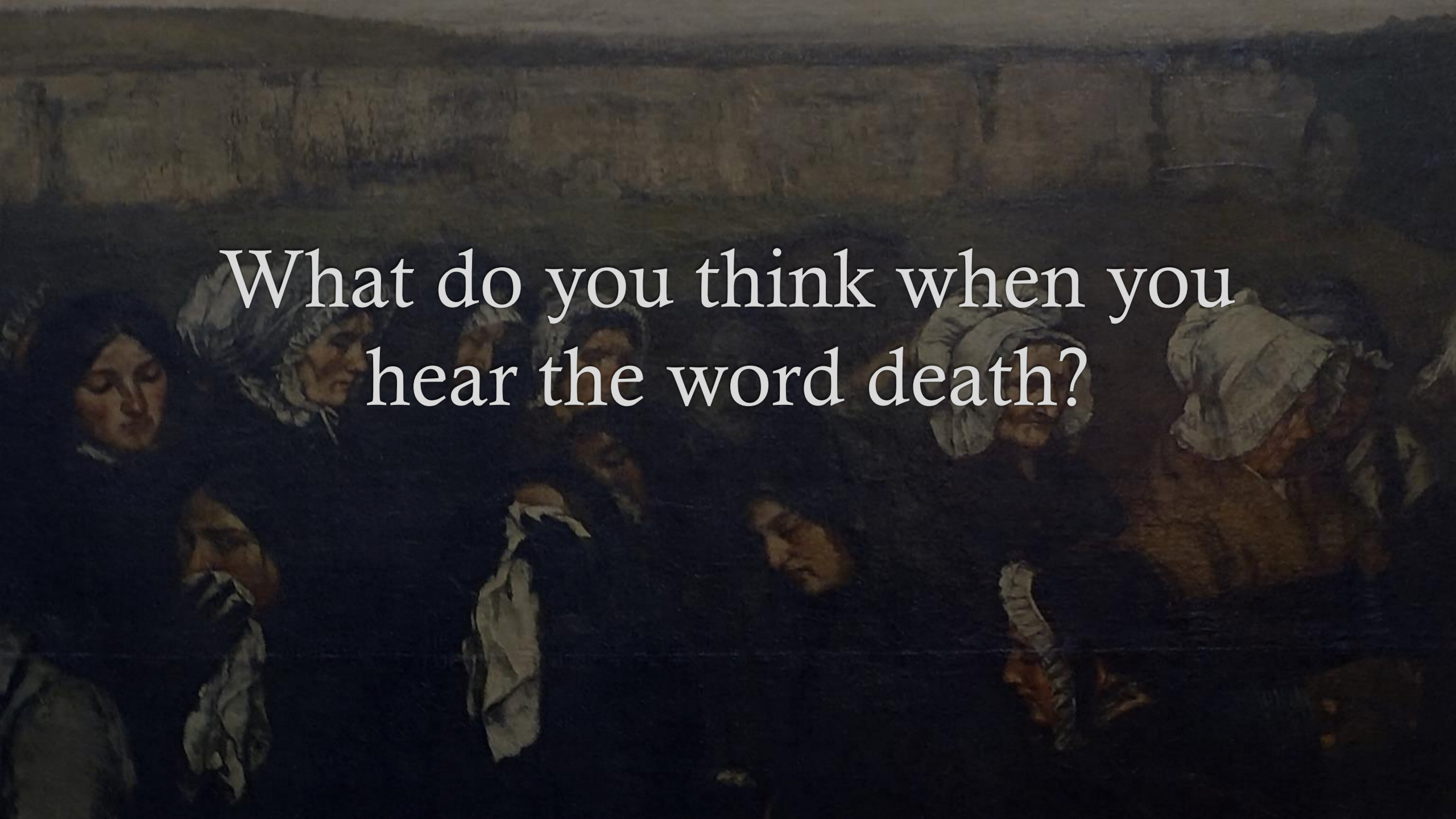
Arwa Kharobi, PhD

Assistant Professor

arwakharobi@sci.muni.cz

MUNI
SCI



A group of people, including men and women, are gathered in a dark, outdoor setting, possibly a camp or a field. They are wearing heavy, dark clothing and some have their heads covered with cloths or blankets. The background is dark and indistinct, suggesting a night scene or a very dark environment. The overall mood is somber and reflective.

What do you think when you
hear the word death?



Our dead are never dead to us, until we have forgotten them

Death – the last sleep? No, it is the final awakening

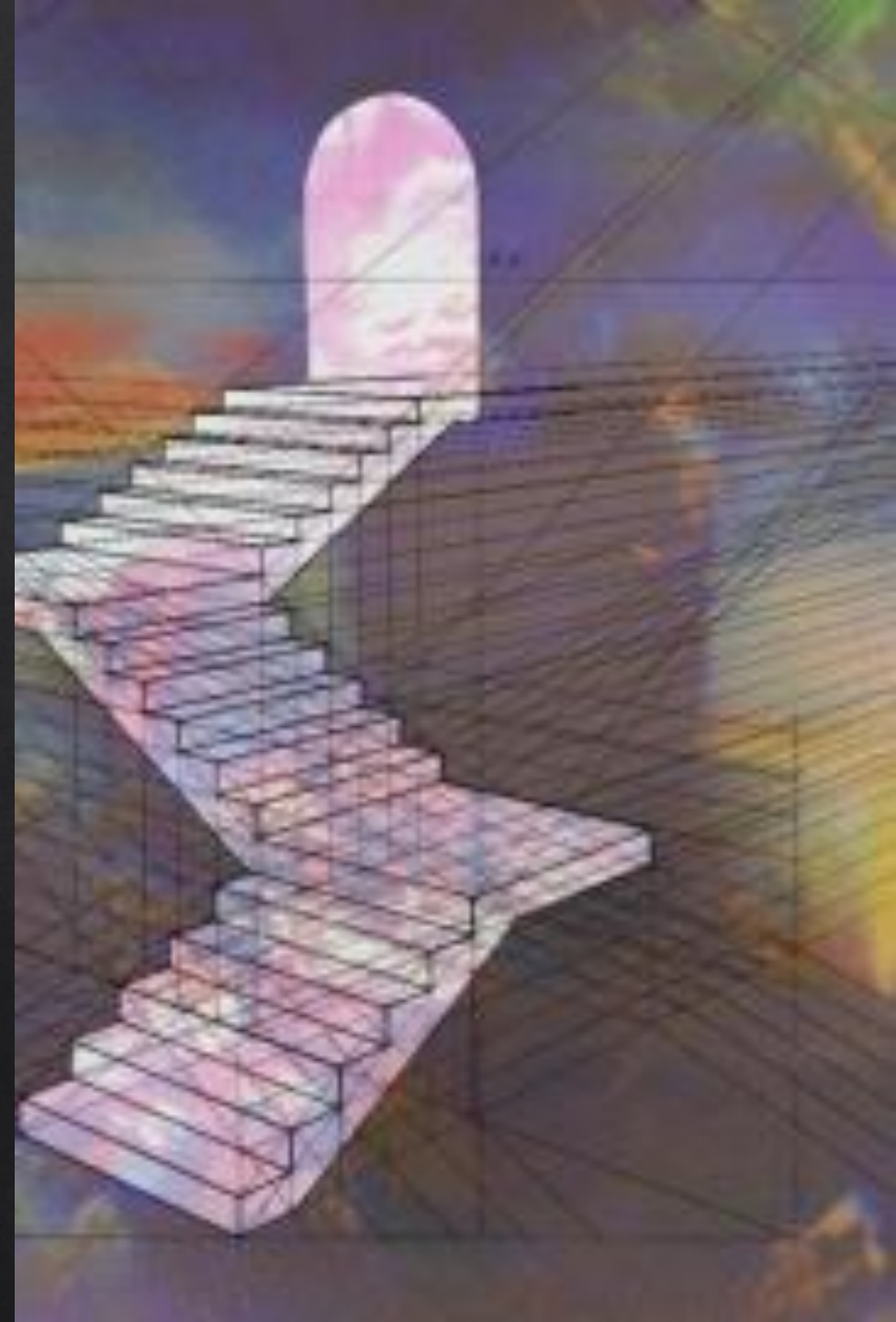


George Eliot



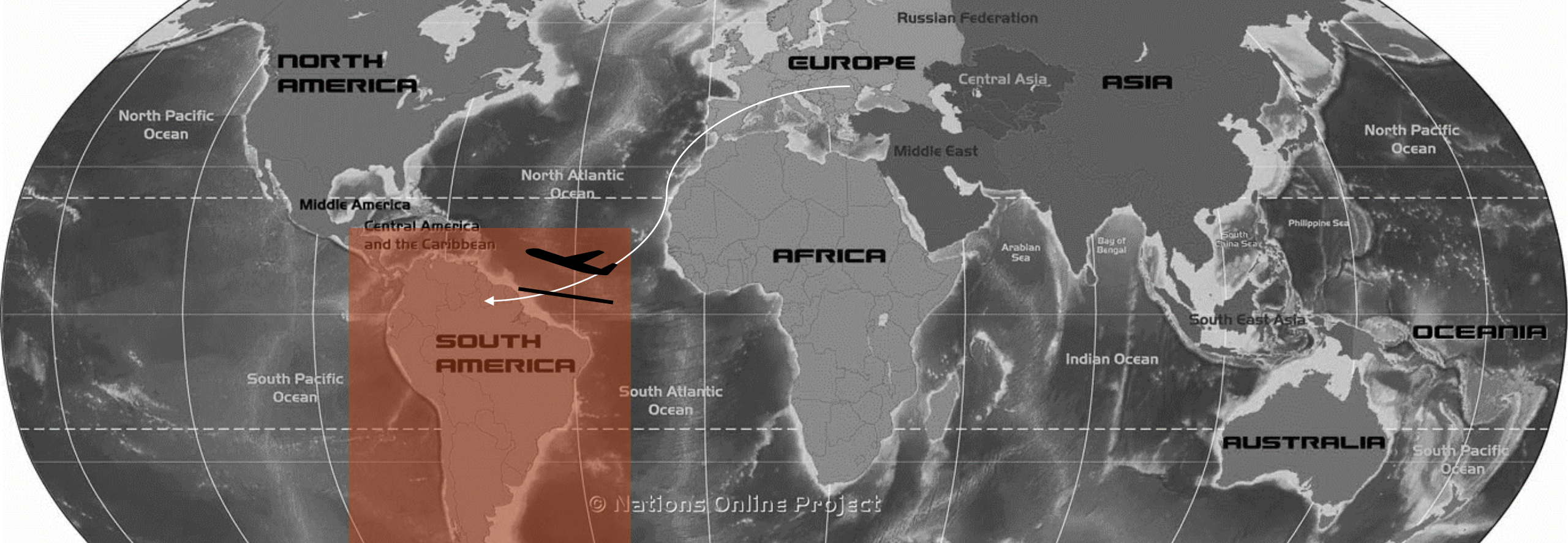
Walter Scott

- ◇ How we respond to death can be deeply affected by our culture.....
- ◇ While many of us respond to death with feelings of **grief**, some cultures choose to see death as an opportunity to **celebrate**.
- ◇ Depending on a culture's beliefs about life after death, they may choose to celebrate their loved one's rebirth or passage into the afterlife.





Celebrating death around the world



Celebrating death around the world



1. **Mexico:** *Dia de Los Muertos*

- Day of the dead: families welcome back the souls of their departed loved ones
- At midnight on Oct 31st: gates of heaven are supposedly opened for the souls of children to reunite with their families
- On Nov 2nd: souls of adults reunite with their families for 24 hours.
- It is believed that the border between the living and the dead disappears during this holiday.





The celebration is alive with music, dancing, decadent food & drinks.

Deceased loved ones as guests → **families** prepare their loved ones' favorite foods for the reunion.



Parades & People dressed in costume

Symbols: The Day of the Dead's

The most common symbol



sugar skeleton

The symbolic flower

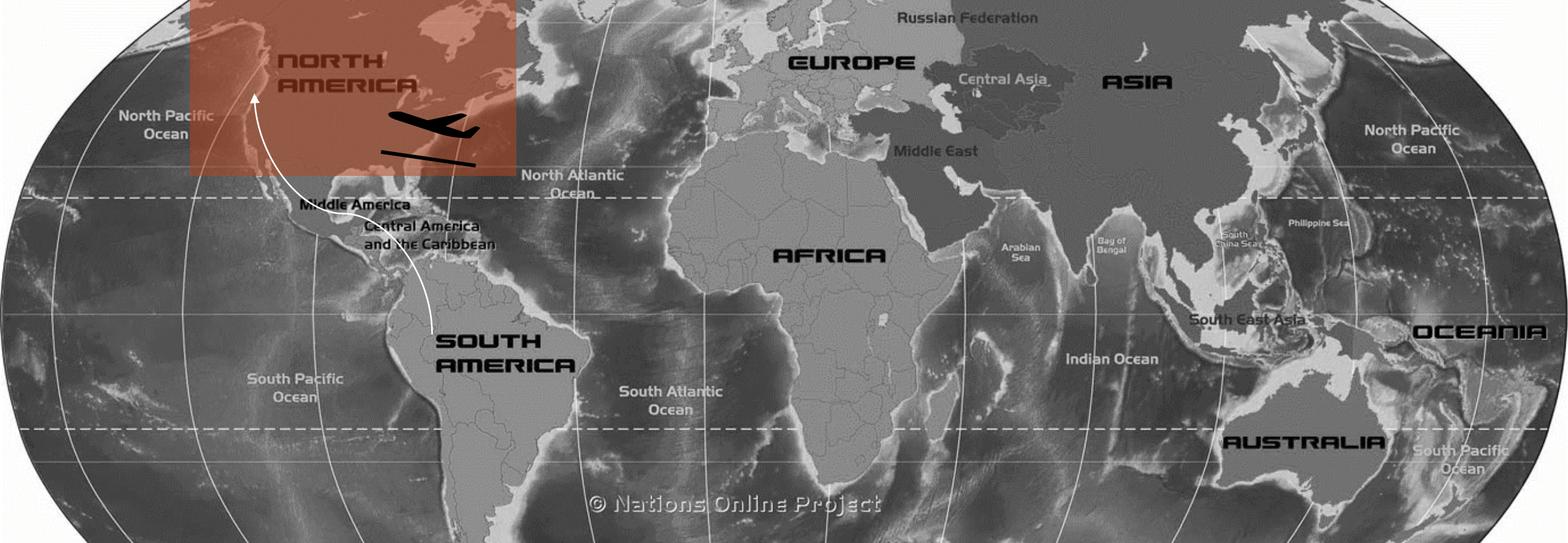


Ofrendas are often garnished with marigolds

Decorating the ofrenda with pictures of deceased family members is believed to

guide the ancestors' souls back to their families.





Celebrating death around the world



2. New Orleans: *Jazz Funeral*

'When people die in New Orleans, we like to fill the streets with music – a celebration of the person's life as much as a mourning of his or her death'

- Not only for musicians 'anyone can request one'

How does it go?

A typical jazz funeral begins

- ◇ at a church or funeral home
- ◇ leads the way to the cemetery
- ◇ Heavy, sad & somber music



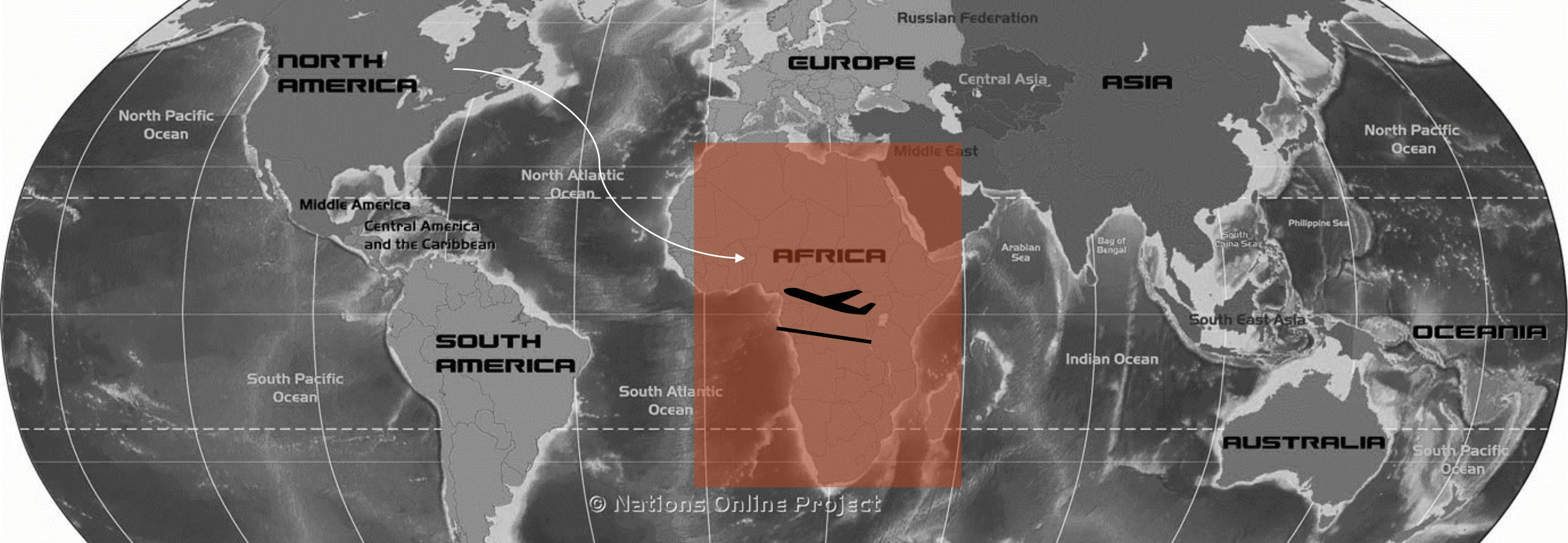
After the ceremony

- Music must change for happy & upbeat jazz one
- The upbeat music at the close of the ceremony is an intentional celebration of the person's life

These ceremonies encapsulate the conflicting emotions of losing our loved one.

Family members & friends grieve the loss of those they love while celebrating their life and the ways they impacted those around them.





Celebrating death around the world



3. Madagascar: Famadihana

The turning of the bones:

- ◇ deceased are unearthed,
- ◇ their burial cloths are removed & replaced with fresh shrouds
- ◇ every five to seven years



The **Famadihana** exists so that family members can:

Meet

meet their deceased
relatives

Strengthen

strengthen familial
bonds

Share

share memories &
stories in their honor

1



Entry day:

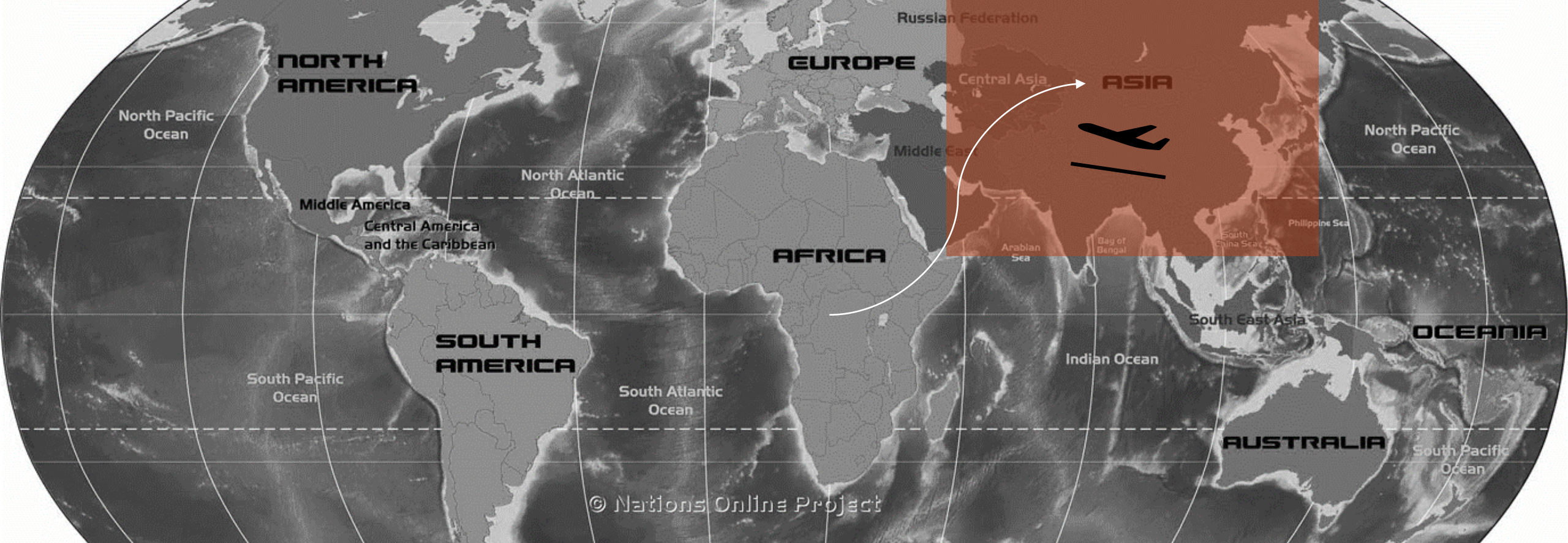
sharing a meal of rice & pork

2



Wrapping day:

visit the tomb & replace their old burial shrouds with new ones



Celebrating death around the world



4. China: Qingming

- ◆ Known as *tomb-sweeping day*
- ◆ Dedicated to ancestral worship
- ◆ Observed for over 2500 yrs: 4th April 2024



Han Chinese of mainland
China,
Hong Kong,
Macau,

ethnic Chinese
Taiwan,
Malaysia,
Singapore,
Cambodia,
Indonesia,
Philippines,
Thailand,
Vietnam
Panama



◇ Families :

1. visit the tombs of their deceased
2. bring food, drinks, and money as offerings
3. cultivate new soil for their ancestors' graves
4. sweep the tomb and remove weeds





willow tree branches to
ward off evil spirits

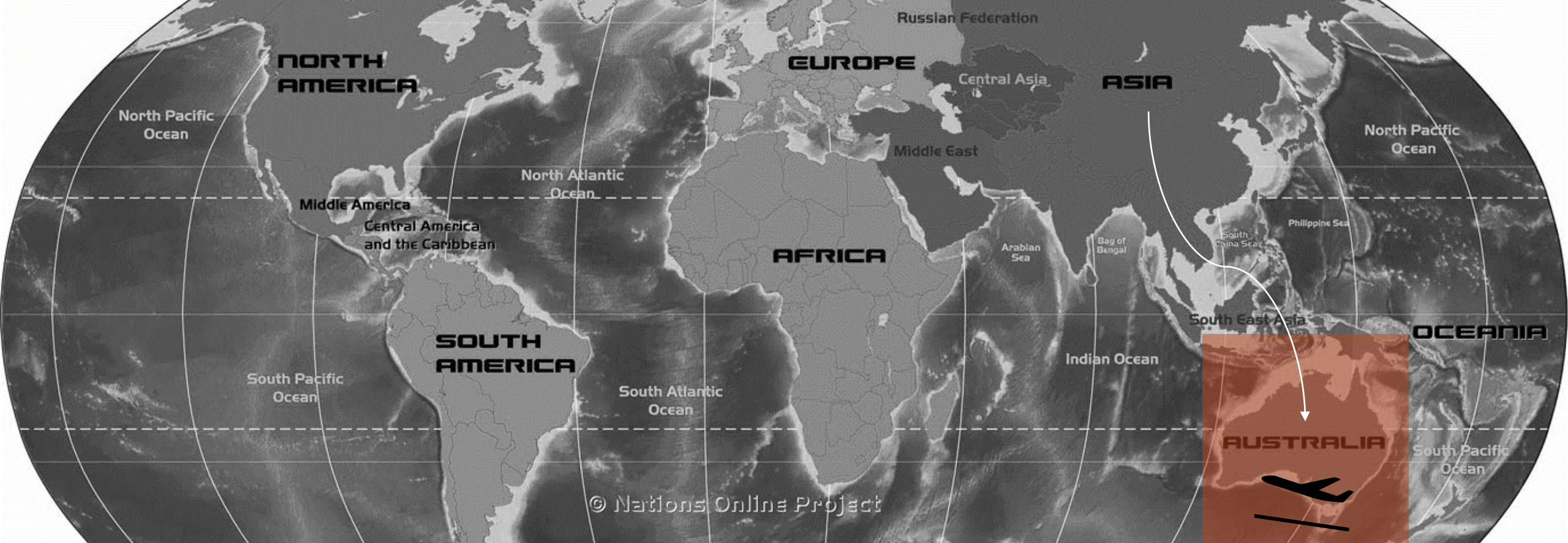


- ◇ place these branches on gates or their front doors to protect them from **spirits** they believe may be wandering during the festival
- ◇ plant willow trees by their ancestors' graves

Kite flying

- ◆ Families will fly kites during the day and into the evening with lanterns (traced back over 2,500 years ago to the Zhou Dynasty)
- ◆ Royal families would offer sacrifices to their ancestors in hopes of receiving wealth, peace, and a good harvest in return



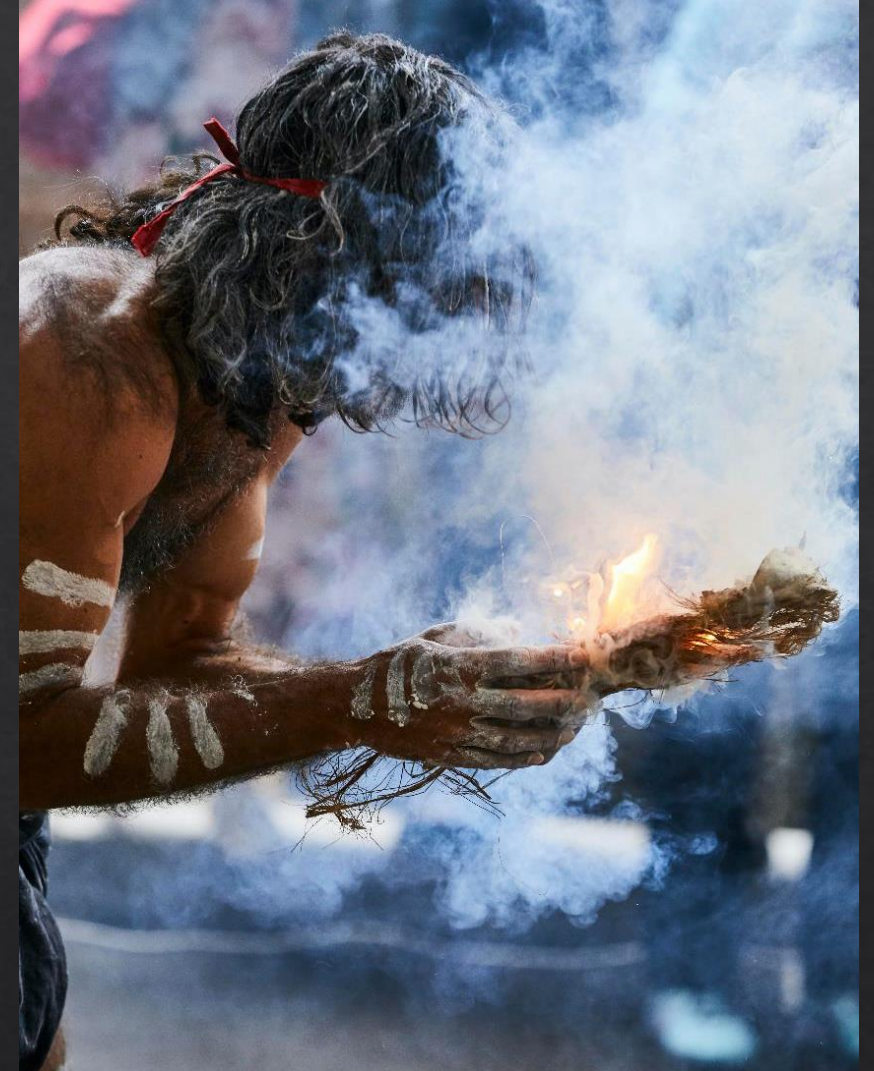


Celebrating death around the world



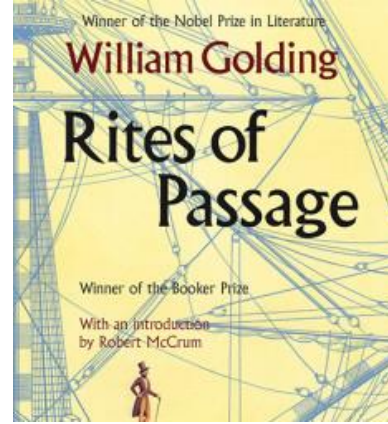
5. **Australia:** Smoking ceremony

- ◆ Aboriginal customs around spirituality after death
- ◆ Involves burning native plants to produce smoke in the home of the deceased
- ◆ To drive away the deceased's spirit in the home of the deceased



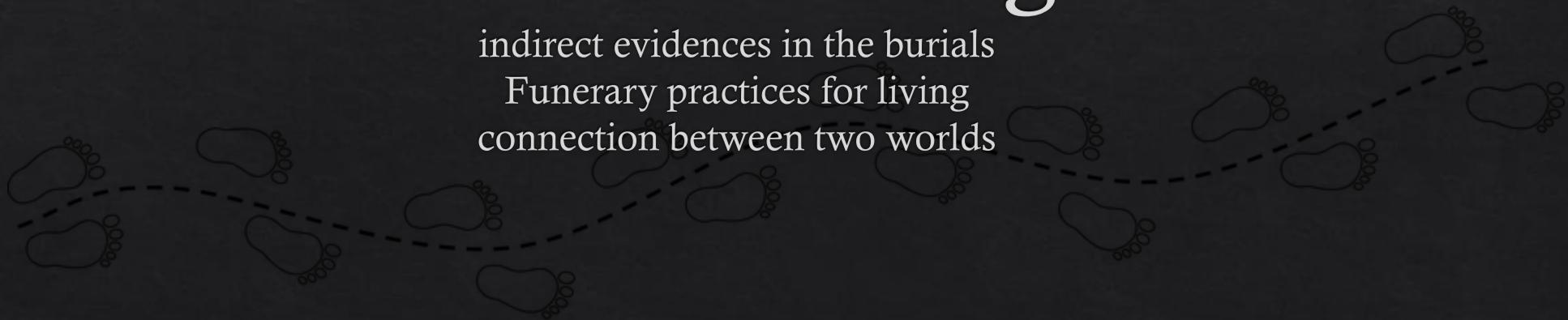


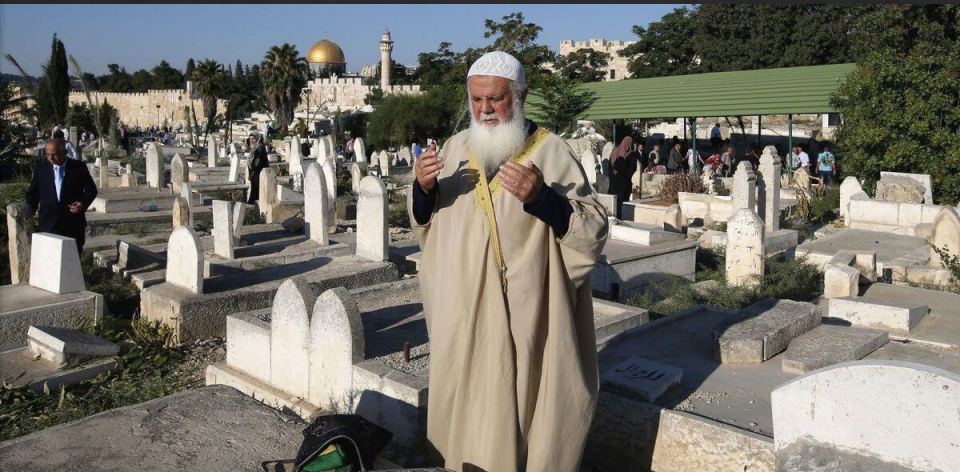
- ◇ The body stays inside the home
- ◇ Friends & family celebrate the life of the deceased during this time
- ◇ Instead of encasing the body in a tomb or casket
- ◇ It's placed on a platform where it decomposes in the air



Rites of Passage

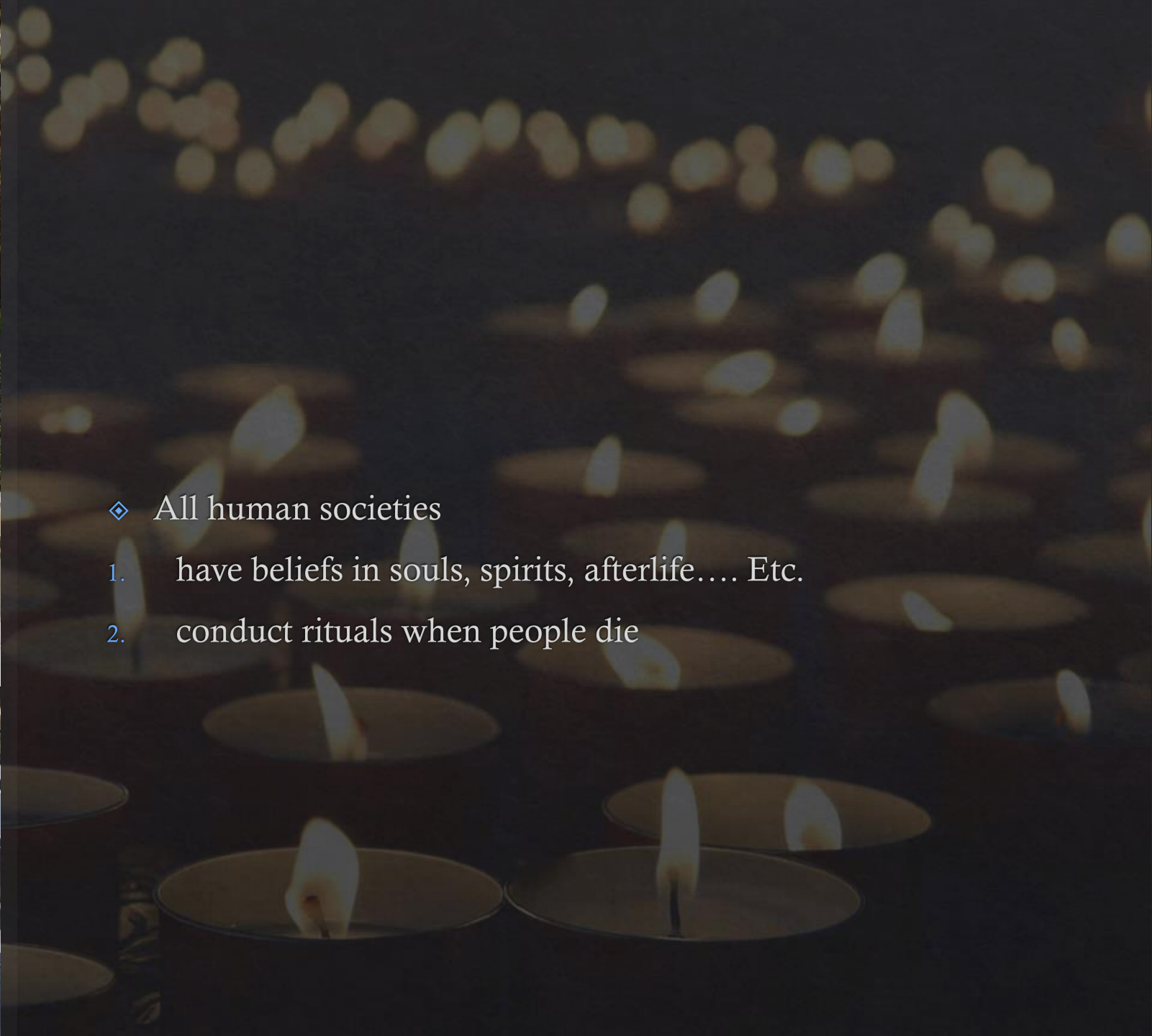
indirect evidences in the burials
Funerary practices for living
connection between two worlds





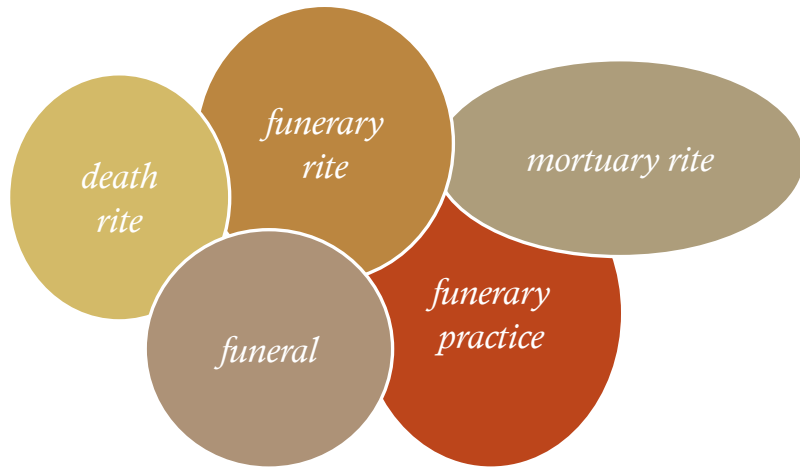
◇ All human societies

1. have beliefs in souls, spirits, afterlife.... Etc.
2. conduct rituals when people die





Burial Rite

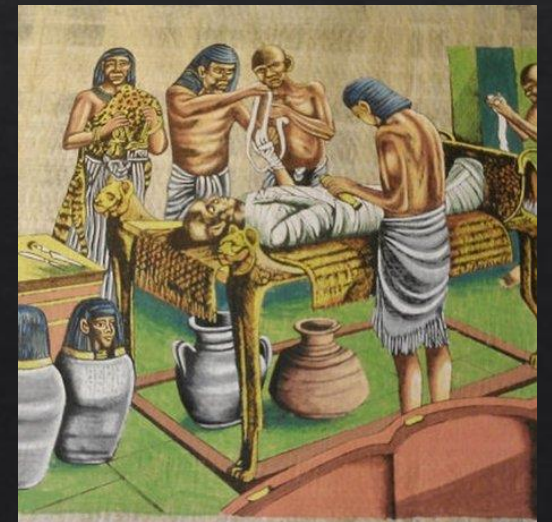
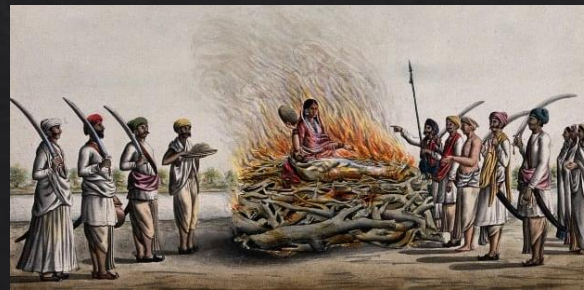



The complex of beliefs & practices used to remember and respect the dead, from interment, to various monuments, prayers, and rituals undertaken in their honor



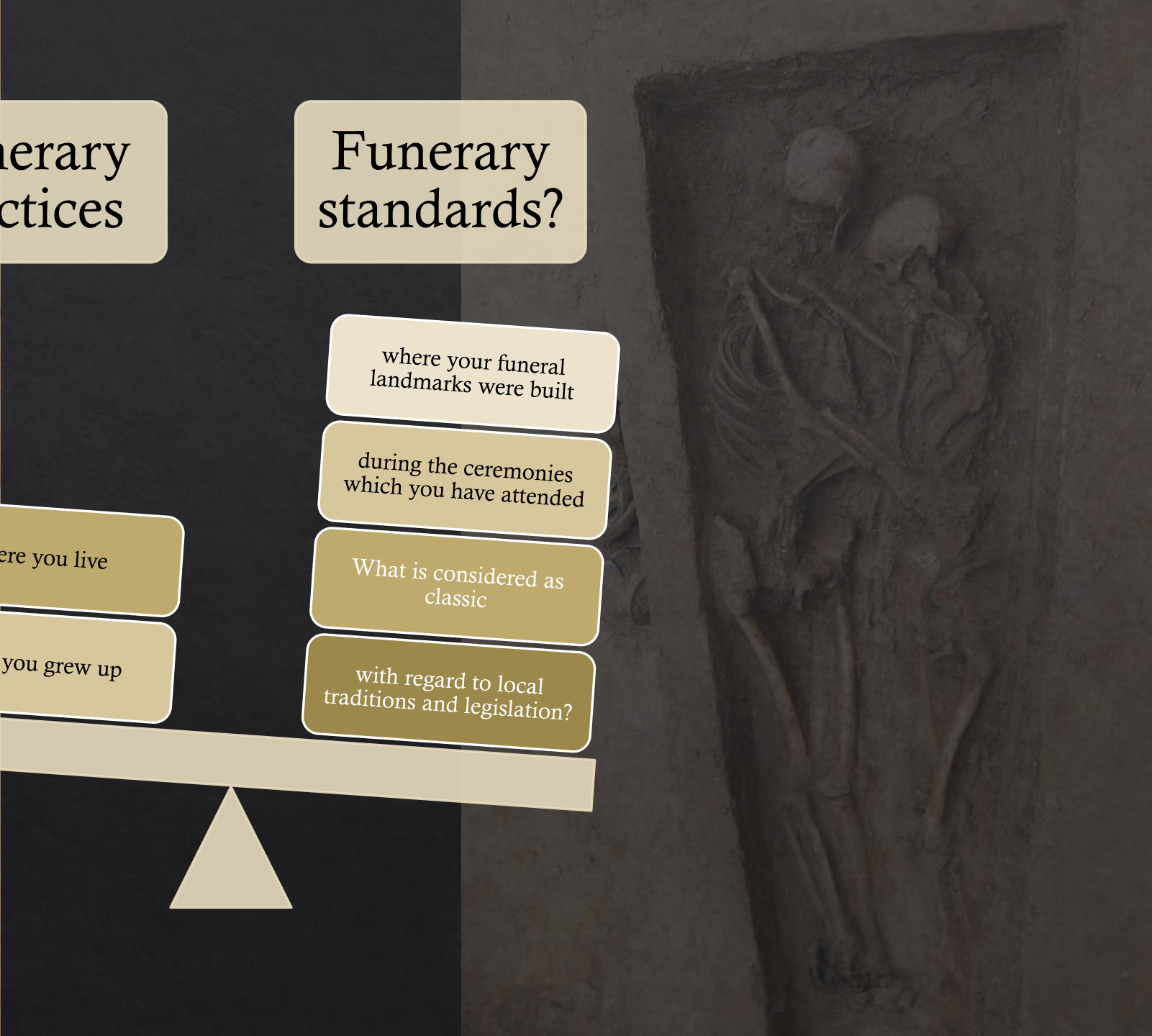
- ◆ The study of funerary practices is crucial to understand the beliefs of each population:

a set of data can be drawn to determine the social rank of a man, but also the circumstances of its death (sacrifice, illness, accidental death).





Funerary practices



Funerary standards?

where you live

where you grew up

where your funeral landmarks were built

during the ceremonies which you have attended

What is considered as classic

with regard to local traditions and legislation?

But as
anthropologists

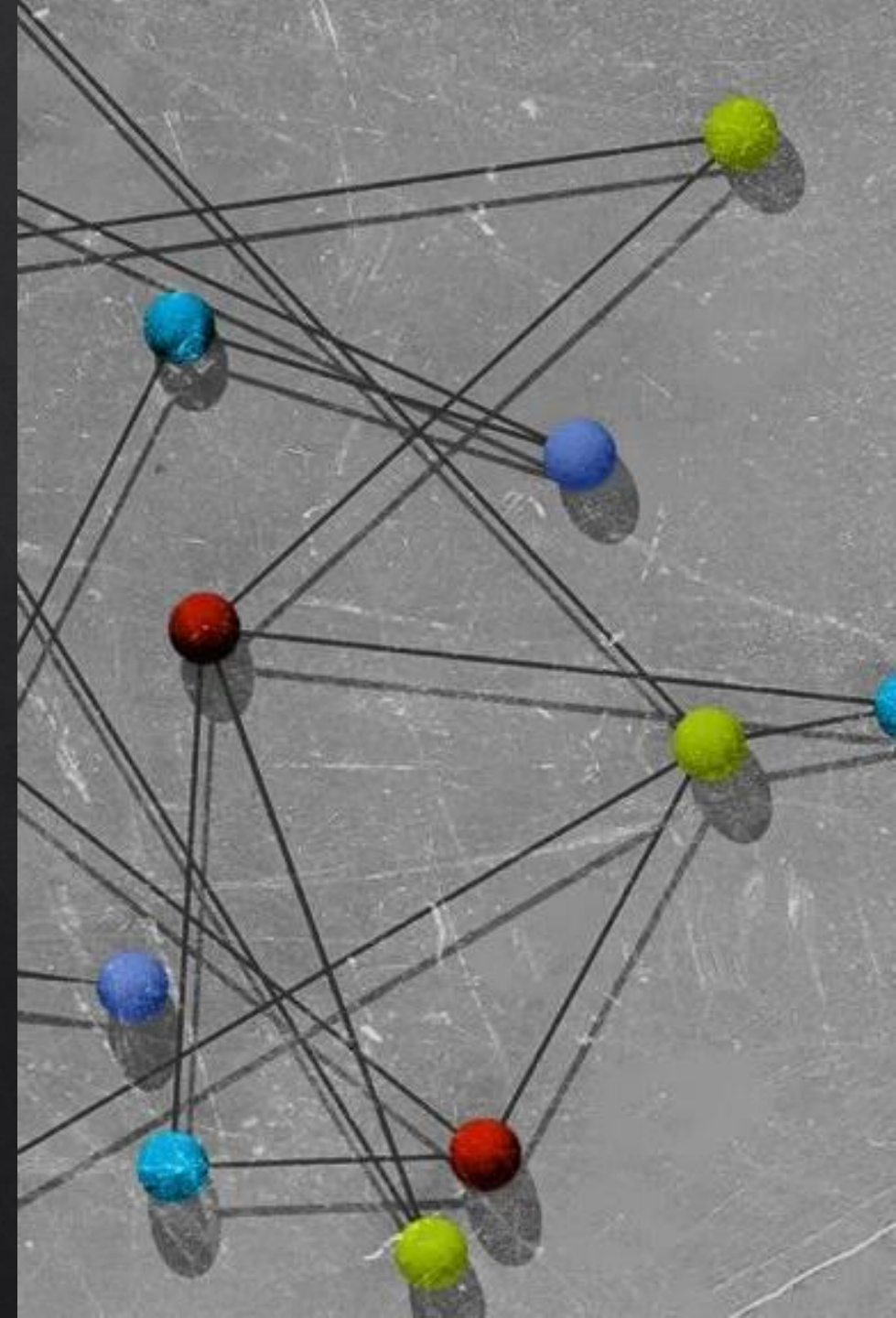


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The space according to Leclerc 1997:

- ◆ **Sepulchral** space = assigned to the deceased
- ◆ **Ceremonial** space = where the living stop
- ◆ **Reserved** space = not belonging to anyone
 - e.g. cemetery boundary walls delimit this space
- ◆ **Technical** space = for the operation of the necropolis
 - e.g. traffic lanes in a cemetery

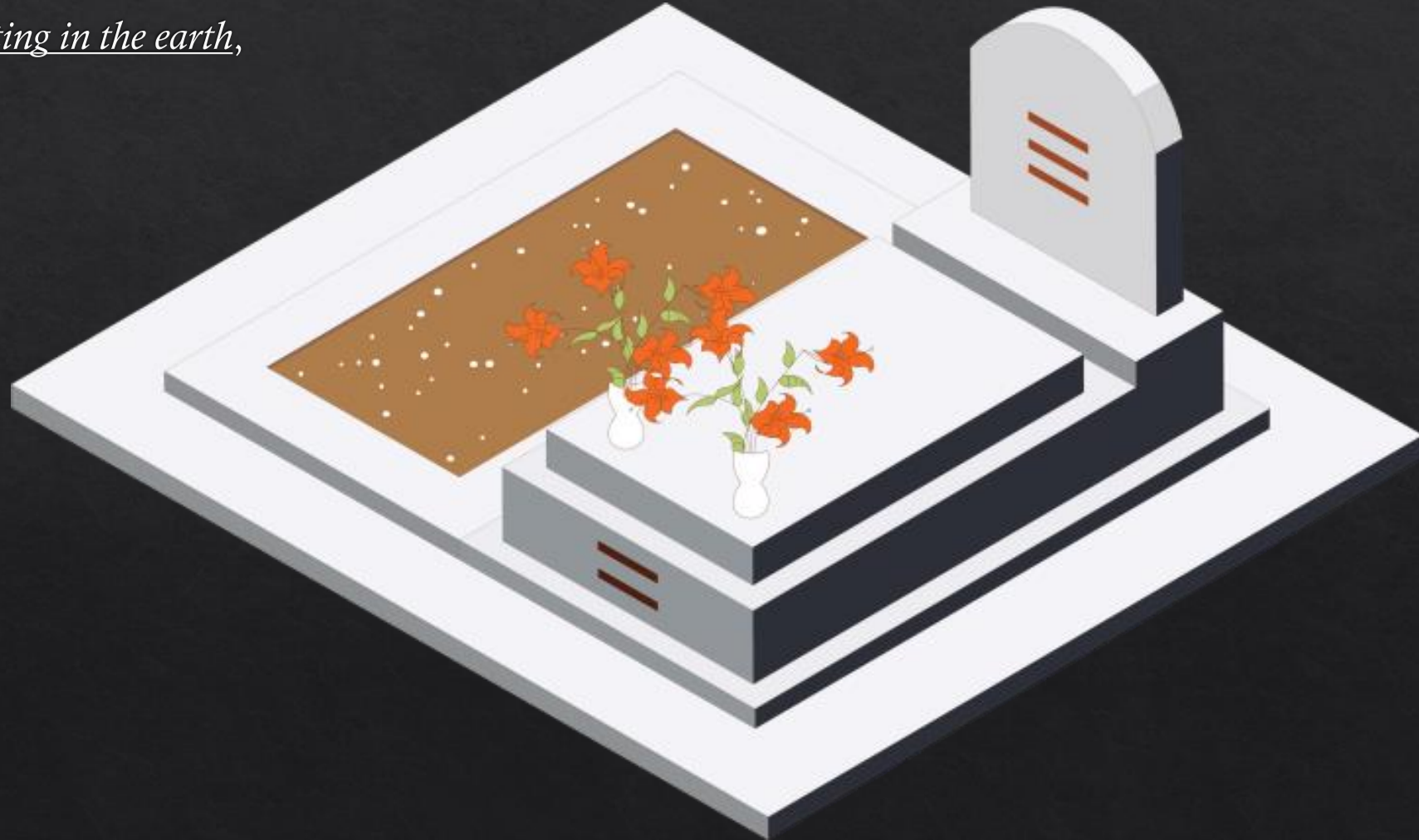
All these spaces are not fixed, it is interesting to see the interactions between them.



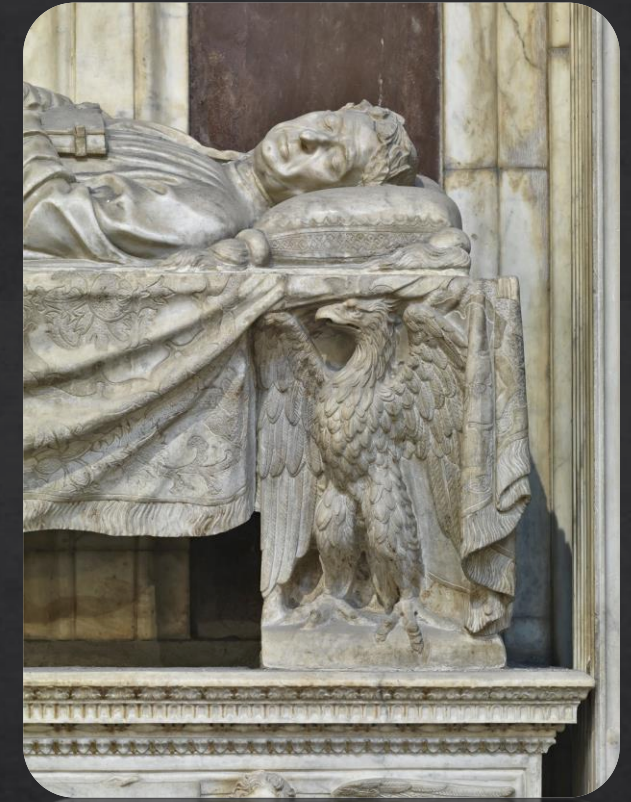
Burial

The disposal of human remains by depositing in the earth,

- ◇ a grave, or a tomb,
- ◇ by consigning to the water,
- ◇ or by exposing to the elements
- ◇ or to carrion-consuming animals



Burial



1. Geography,
2. Religion,
3. Social system

→ all influence burial practices.



Climate & topography determine whether the body is:

1. buried under the ground,
2. placed in water,
3. burned,
4. or exposed to the air.



Religious & social attitudes determine how elaborate the burial should be; e.g., rank may determine whether the body is:

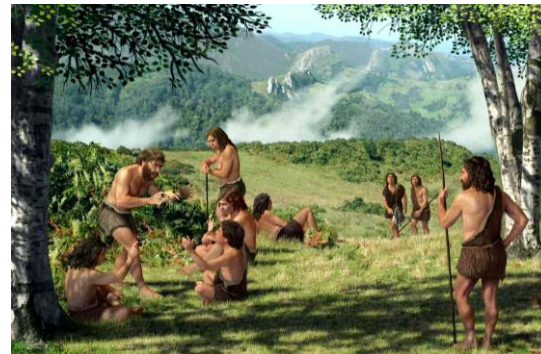
1. placed in the shallow trench of a simple burial
2. or in an underground chamber of impressive dimensions and construction.

Inhumation

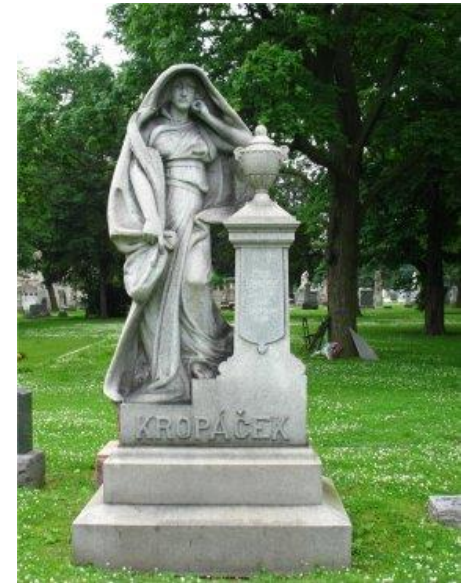
- ◆ Burial in the ground by hollowing out a trench in the earth for the body or covering it with rocks or dirt dates back at least to the **Middle Paleolithic Period**

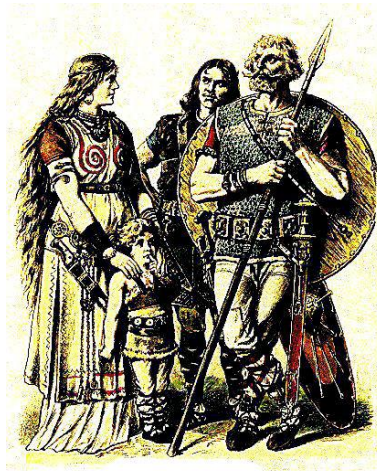


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simple or elaborate





Inhumation

- ◇ **Eskimo people:** cover the corpse with a pile of stones or, if not, with a small ice igloo.
- ◇ **Old Norse people:** built high barrows.
- ◇ **Eastern North America:** large burial mounds/characteristic of Indian cultures from 1000 BCE to 700 CE.

Inhumation

- ◇ Shallow pits, or Subterranean
- ◇ Simple pits, or elaborated
- ◇ One body or several persons





Inhumation: Caves

- ◇ A natural refuge of humans, also used for dead.
- ◇ Ancient Hebrews carved caves and recesses in walls for burying the dead: which led to the creation of **mausoleums**.
- ◇ **Rock temples** western India & in Sri Lank: elaborate architectural & sculptural treatment.





Caves & Earth graves

- ◇ encouraged the development of other burial practices as use of:
 1. Coffins
 2. Rich graveclothes
 3. Burial goods



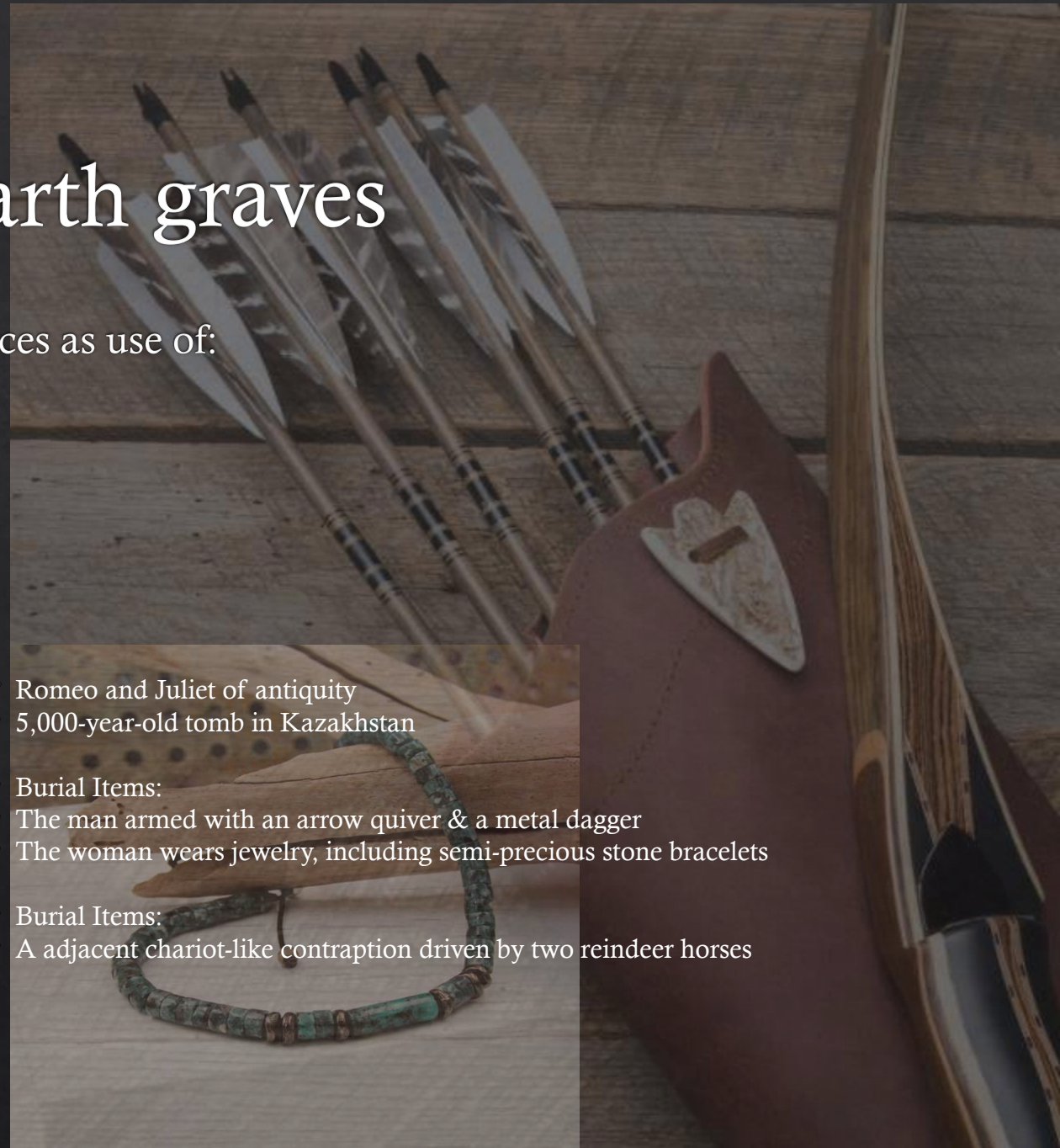
♥ Romeo and Juliet of antiquity
♥ 5,000-year-old tomb in Kazakhstan

♥ Burial Items:

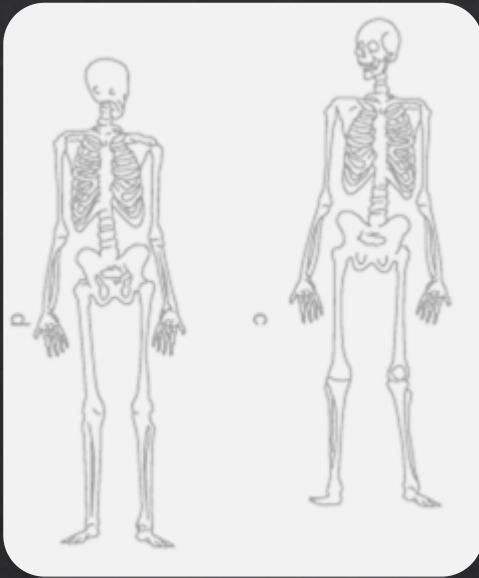
♥ The man armed with an arrow quiver & a metal dagger
♥ The woman wears jewelry, including semi-precious stone bracelets

♥ Burial Items:

♥ A adjacent chariot-like contraption driven by two reindeer horses



Inhumation: Body Position



Has significance:
'religious nature'.

Often
extended
/sleeping.

Muslims
laid on right
side, facing
Mecca.

Buddhists
laid with the
head to the
north.



Position & social status

Babylon & Sumer:

Extended: high status

Crouching position:

servants killed & buried with their rulers - ready to serve at royal command

Native American:

fetal position

in a basket or clay urn, with knees under the chin and the body neatly tied into a death bundle

Warriors:

Upright position



Coffin vs. Casket



- Anthropoid shape like a human body with six or eight sides
- Flat lid that can be taken on or off
- Handles on the side for pallbearers
- Tends to be made from cheaper materials
- Average price range is \$600 to \$3,000
- Requires special order or can be made on your own



- Rectangular shape
- Domed lid that opens on a hinge
- Rails on the side for pallbearers
- Tends to be made from more expensive materials
- Average price range is \$2,000 to \$5,000
- Most popular option available in the U.S.

Western burials have become fairly standardized.

21st century:

1. interred in cloth-lined simply ornamented coffins called caskets,
2. after ceremonies of eulogy and farewell the casket is lowered into a rectangular hole, which is then filled up with earth.

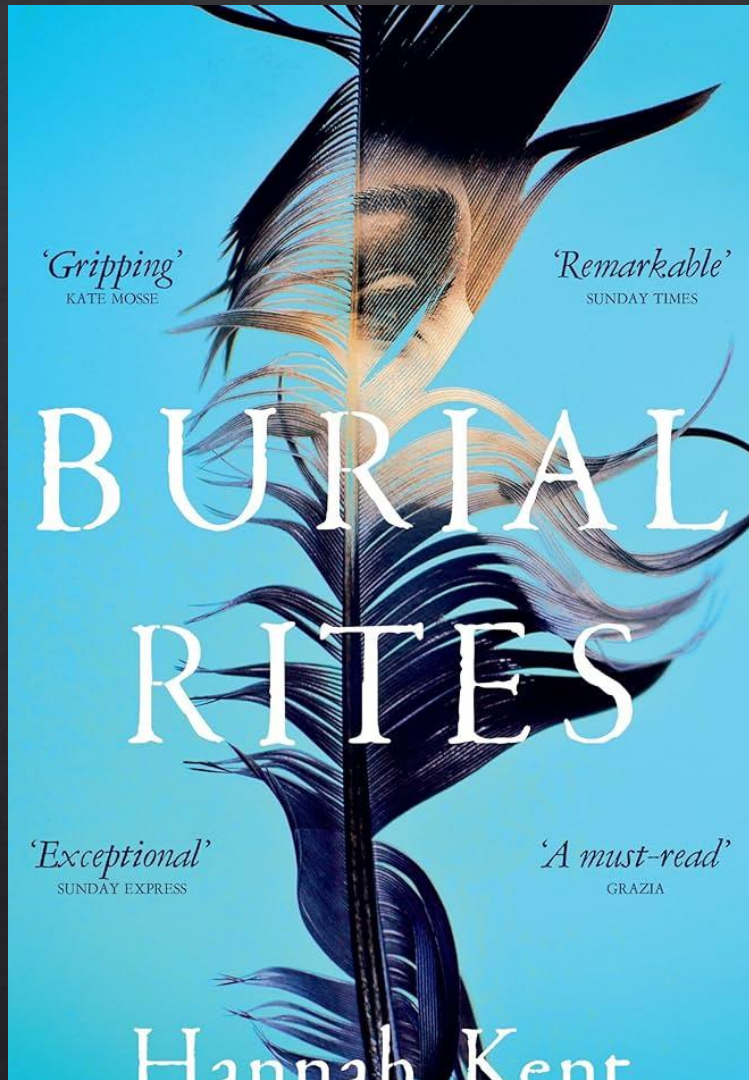
19th century:

burials increasingly in cemeteries
special areas set aside as sites for graves



Cremation

The practice of reducing a corpse to its essential elements by **burning**.



Burial Rites change
radically & quickly
like our society

Burial Rites change radically & quickly like our society

◆ E.g., in Czech Republic:

1. Cremation 80% prevails over inhumation 20%
2. Less classical funerals & more without a farewell ceremony
1. More people tend to opt for ashes-scattering





Natural burials

- ◇ Or **forest** cemeteries
- ◇ Environmentally-friendly/**Eco** urns
- ◇ Ashes deposited in the ground near **trees**
- ◇ Another trend rising in **Western Europe**



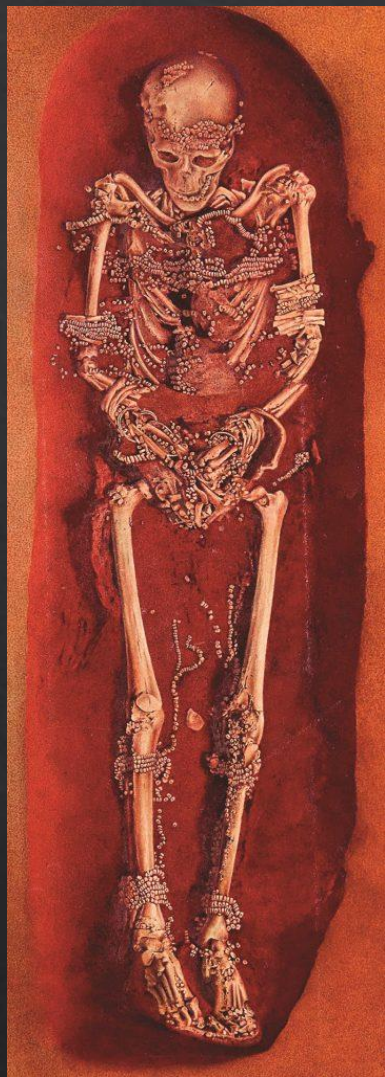
Natural burials

- ◇ Human composting,
- ◇ water cremation,
- ◇ & green burials

are gaining traction as people seek to minimize their environmental impact in death.



photograph by mat hayward, getty images for recompose



Take home message here

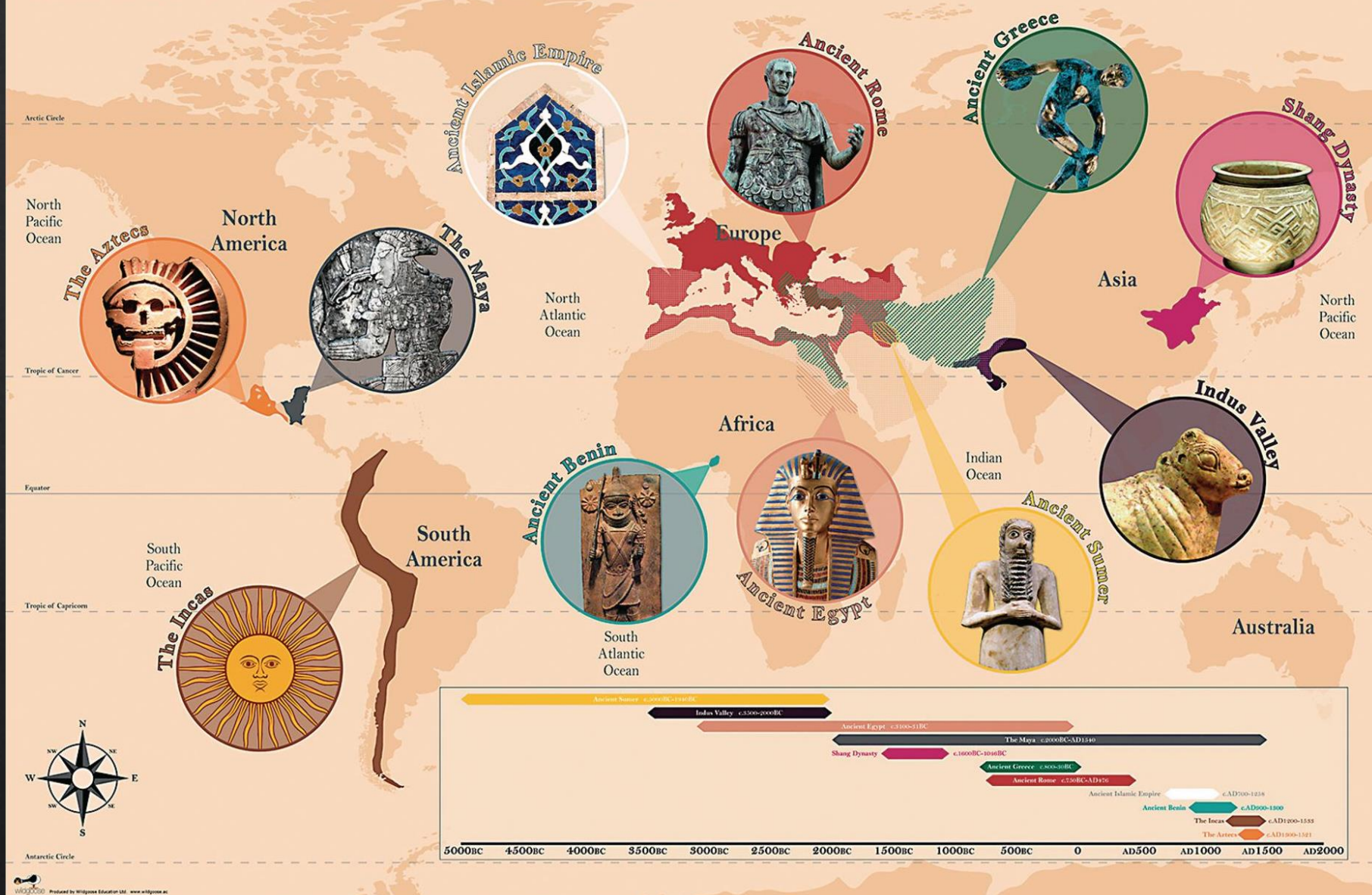


Refer to the norms but do not follow your expectations while reconstructing burials,



Use taphonomy & archaeoethanatology
Everything is possible

Ancient Civilisations of the World





- ◇ Uniquely characterized by objects associated with death.
- ◇ A complex belief in the afterlife:

believed that the 'Ka,' an entity closely associated with the physical body was able to eat, drink, smell, & essentially enjoy the afterlife.

***The soul, or 'Ba' could not survive without the body,** and what's more, had to be able to recognize its body to be able to return to it.*

***Body's preservation:** essential to*

- 1. reach the afterlife*
- 2. to be able to enjoy it.*



Mummification (3 Millennia)

1. **Remove the brain:** deceased washed, a hook inserted through a nostril to mash up the brain. brain removed in chunks
2. **Drying out:** internal organs removed via an incision on the left side. body filled & covered with a naturally occurring salt, known as natron, to dry it out (steeped in for 40 days)
3. **Oils and fragrance:** natron removed, body stuffed with linen or sawdust to fill the voids left by the organs. Oils & fragrances rubbed into the body to keep the skin supple.



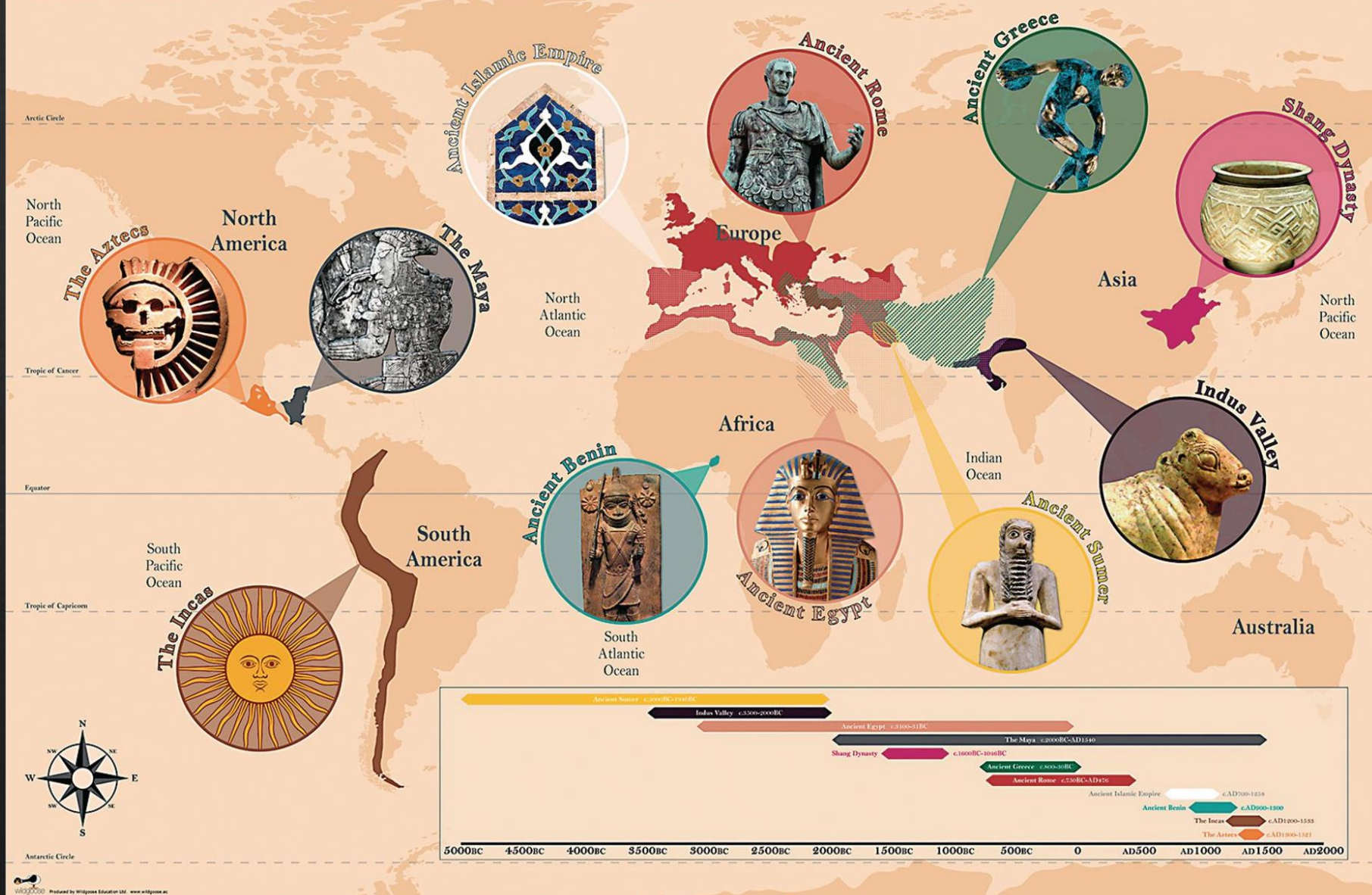


Mummification (3 Millennia)

- Wrapping:** Layers of linen wrapped around the body, starting with the head/neck, then the limbs, and finally the torso. Resin applied after each layer, which acts like glue (150 m needed to wrap a mummy)
- Shroud and mask:** final layer is a shroud, sometimes decorated with hieroglyphs denoting passages from the Book of the Dead then a mask or painted the deceased's face
- Entombment:** mummy is sealed in up to 3 coffins, typically all wooden & brightly painted.
Coffins, finally, placed in a stone sarcophagus



Ancient Civilisations of the World



Ancient Mesopotamia

Where? around modern day Syria & Iraq

When? around the same time as the time of Pharaohs of Egypt

a very different view of death



Death in the Mesopotamian tradition

- ◆ Something to be **feared**
- ◆ Humans created from **clay** mixed with the blood of a sacrificed god (partly immortal)
- ◆ The spirit didn't die but stayed on to endure a miserable afterlife.
- ◆ After death, the soul lives in darkness underground, consuming only dust and clay, without access to drinkable water.
- ◆ The only relief from this state was when their descendants provided food and offerings.



Ancient Mesopotamia

- ◇ Distressed, murdered, and evil spirits could escape the land of the dead and enter the bodies of the living through their ears, causing havoc.
- ◇ Unburied dead could rise up to torment the living; even enemies' bodies were buried to prevent this.



- ◇ Most were buried in **cemeteries**, but the bodies of **babies** have been found **under the floors of houses**, often in **cooking pots**.

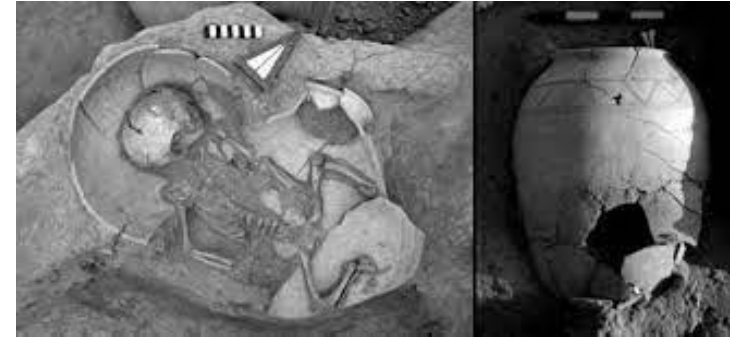


Why at home?

To keep them close to the living family

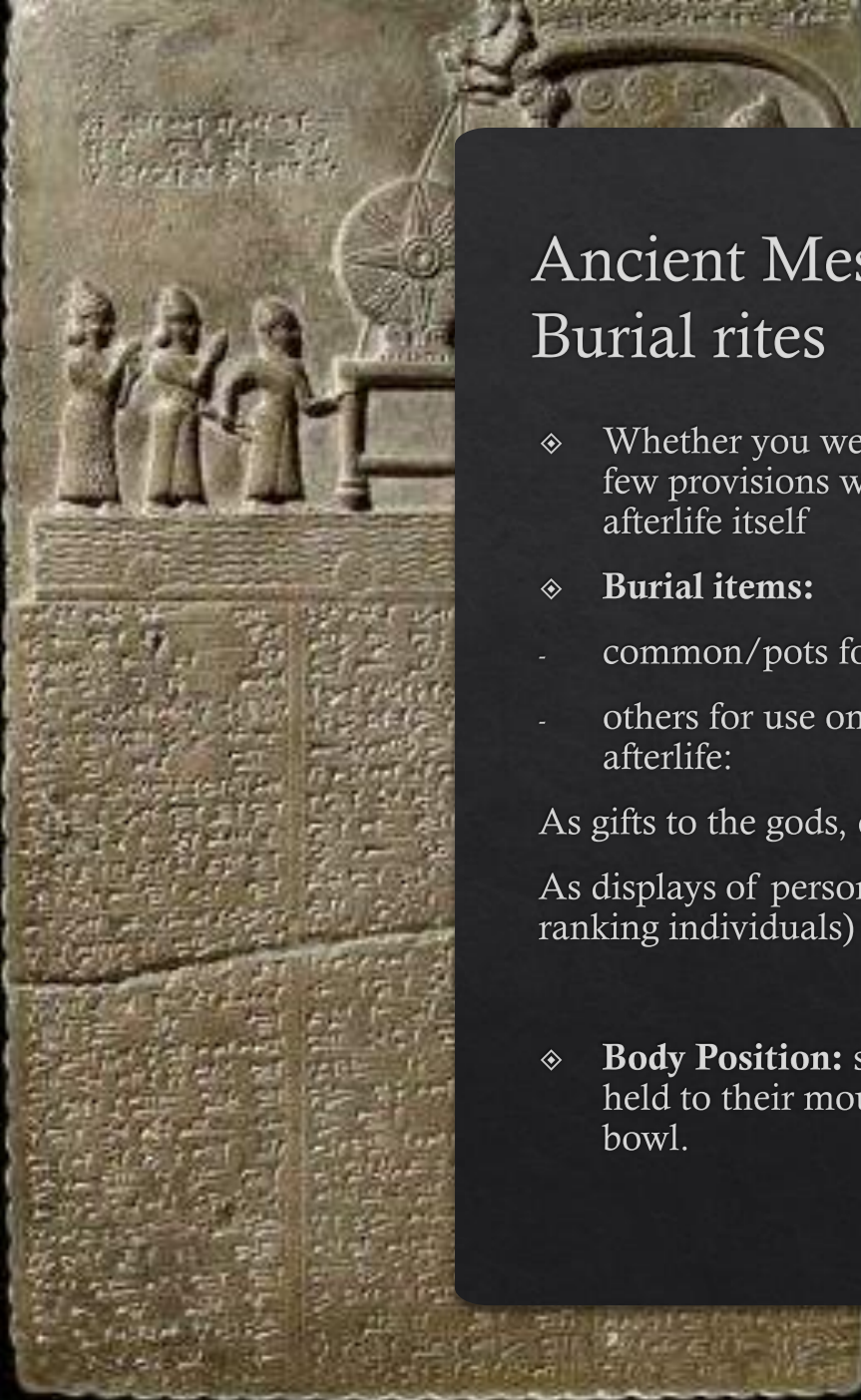
To support their soul's journey through libations and ritual practices

To respect the transformation of the body





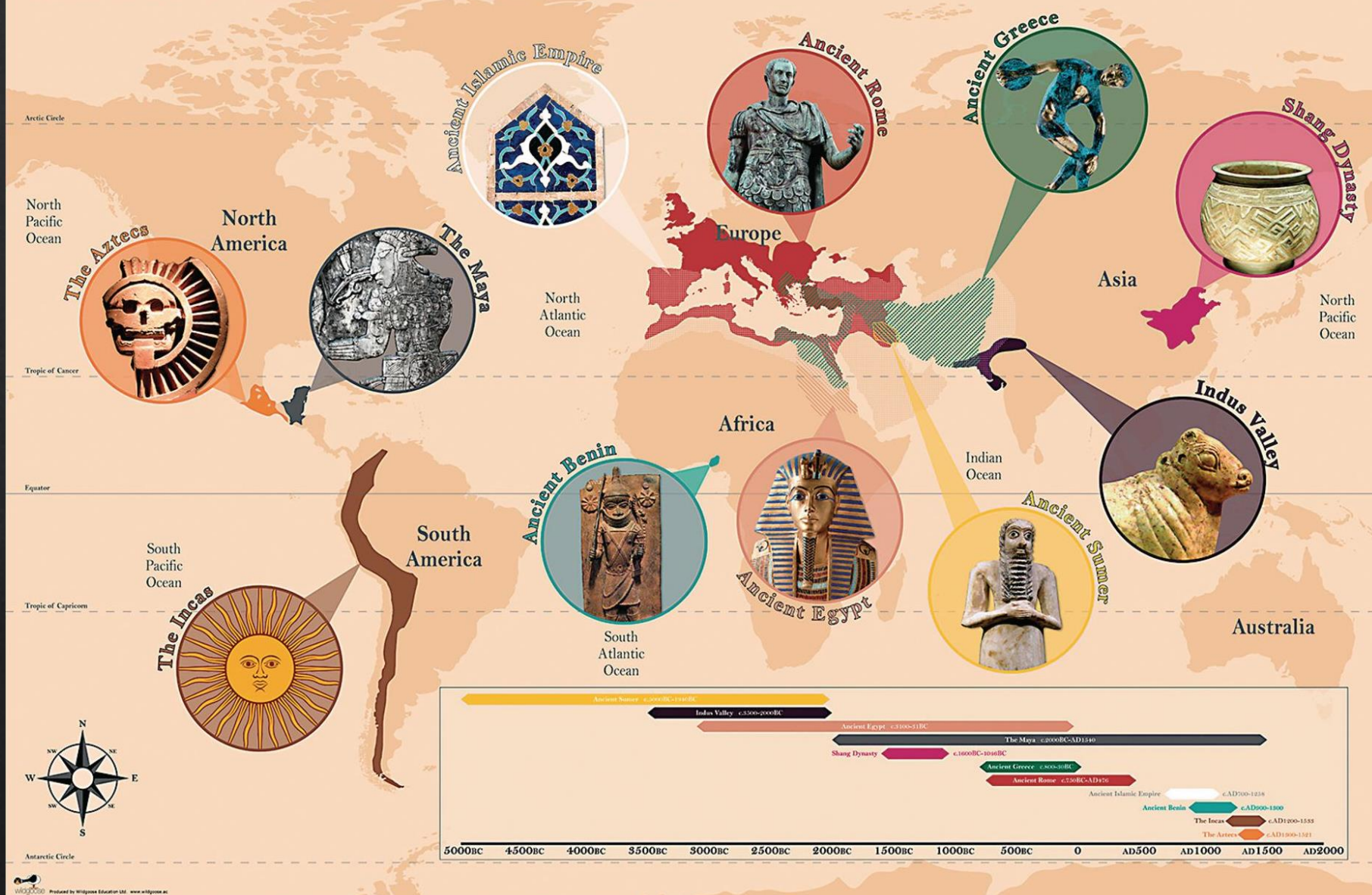
Why cooking pot/pottery?



Ancient Mesopotamia: Burial rites

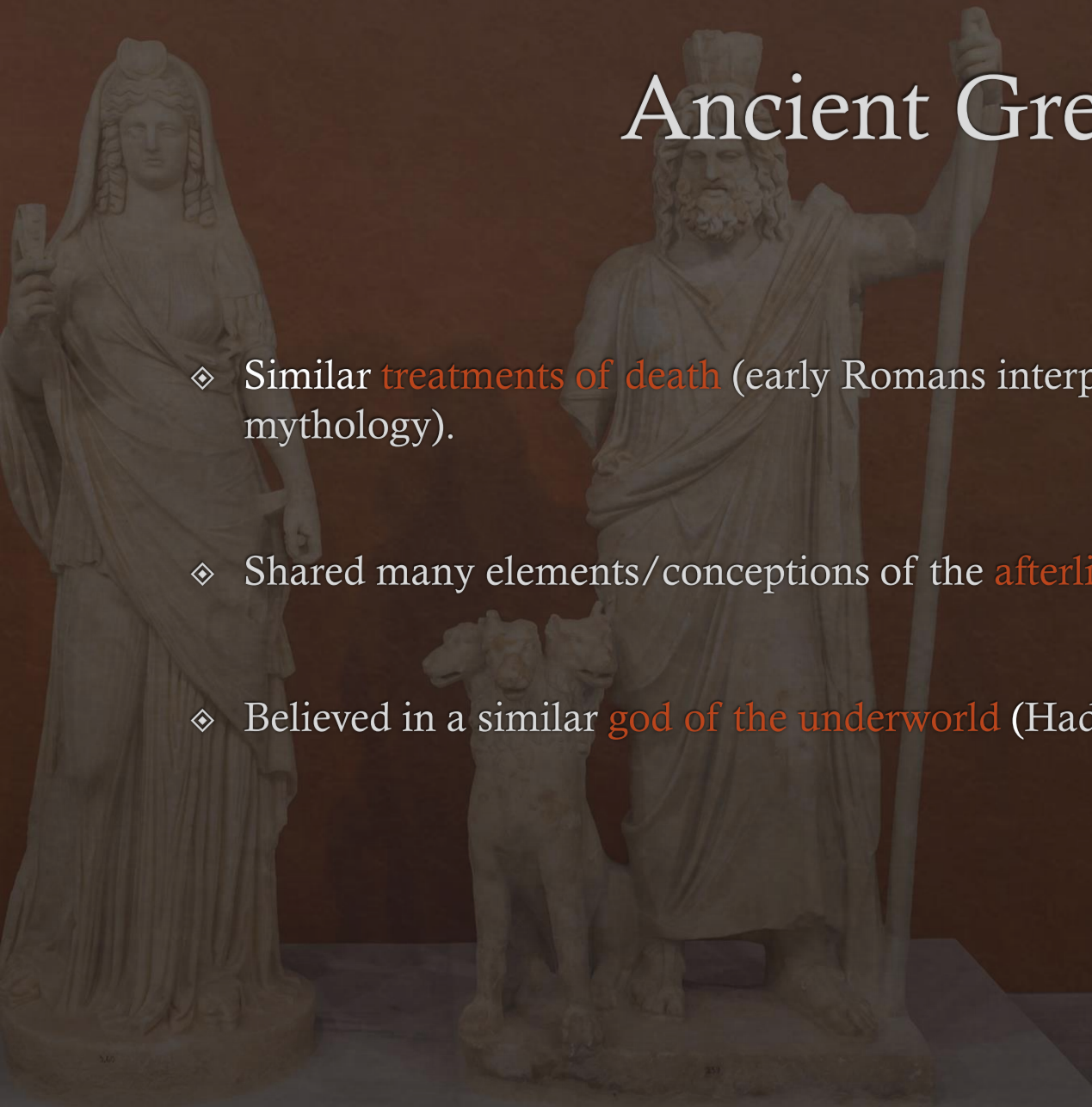
- ◆ Whether you were good or bad, very few provisions were made for the afterlife itself
 - ◆ **Burial items:**
 - common/pots for food and water
 - others for use on the way to the afterlife:
- As gifts to the gods, or
- As displays of personal wealth (high-ranking individuals)
-
- ◆ **Body Position:** skeletons with hands held to their mouths cupping a small bowl.

Ancient Civilisations of the World



Ancient Greece & Rome

- ◆ Similar **treatments of death** (early Romans interpreted their own gods through existing Greek mythology).
- ◆ Shared many elements/conceptions of the **afterlife**
- ◆ Believed in a similar **god of the underworld** (Hades in Greek & Pluto in Roman)



Ancient Greece





Ancient Greece

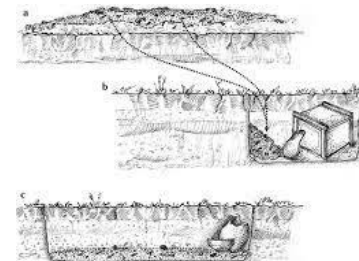
- ◆ Immortality could only be attained through remembrance by the living:
 1. Monumental earth mounds,
 2. Rectangular tombs,
 3. Elaborate marble stelai
 4. Statues



Ancient Rome

- ◇ Early Rome: inhumation
- ◇ Later centuries: **cremation** became popular, with urns buried under grand commemorative monuments.
- ◇ Curious practice of **os resectum**:

A severed finger joint was buried where the rest of the body had been cremated to purify the family of the deceased while mourning was taking place, or could be seen as a symbolic burial after cremation.

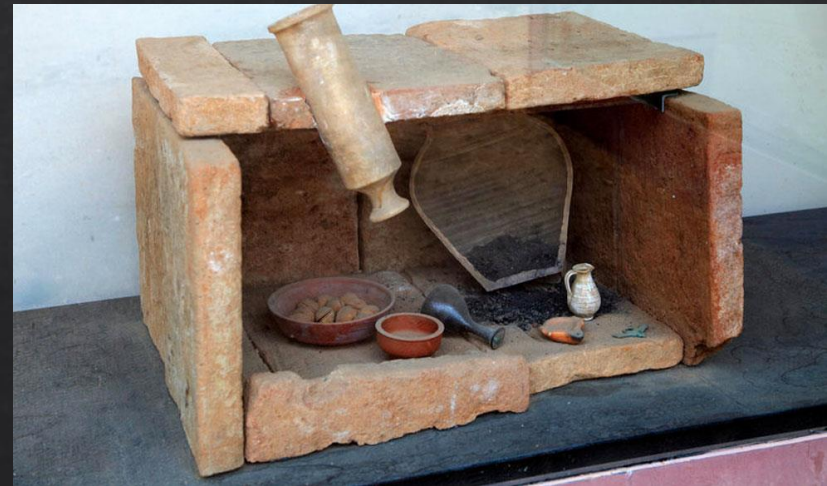


For both

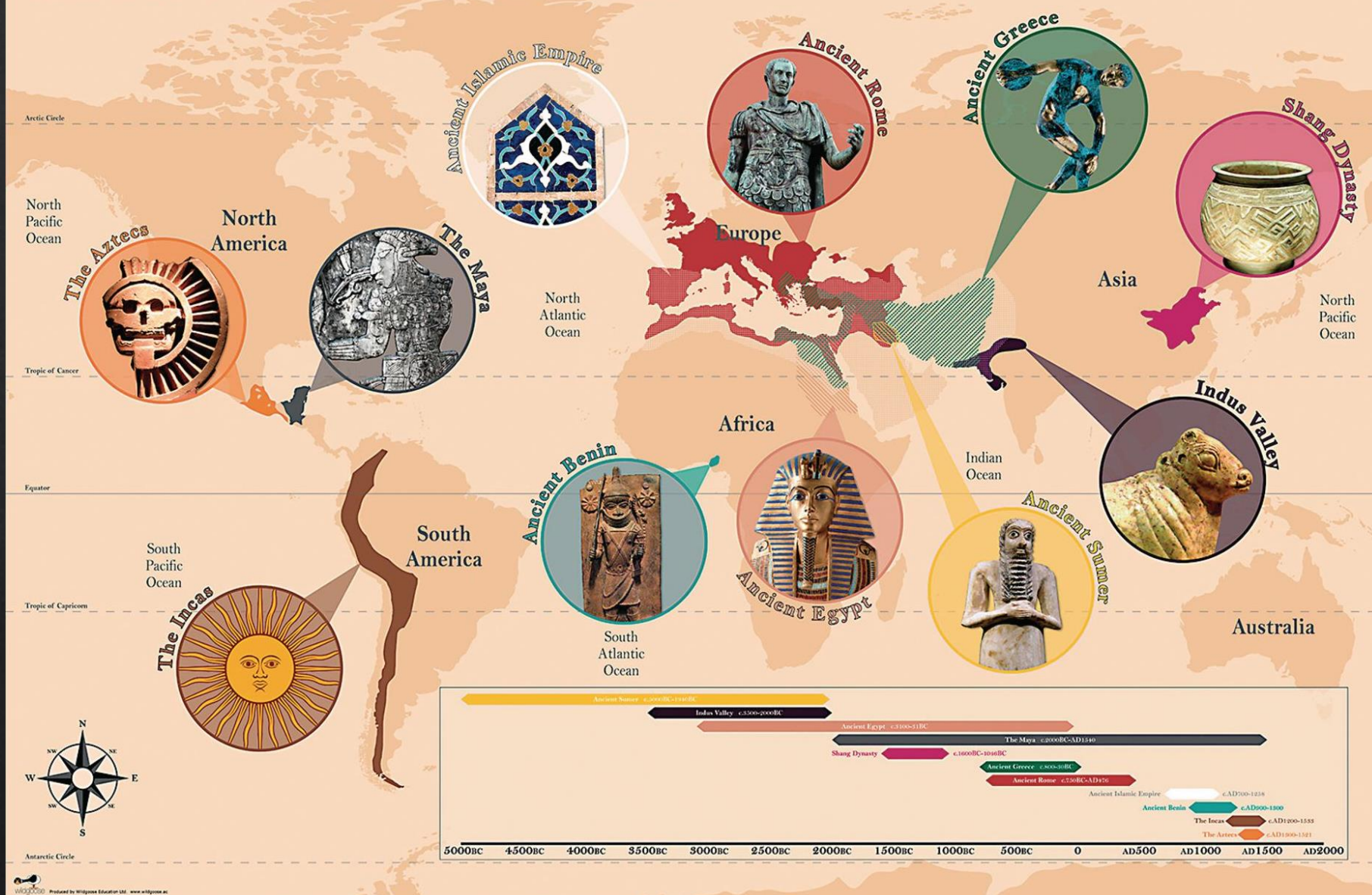
- ◆ A proper burial: important to both
- ◆ If proper funeral rites weren't performed, the dead could remain as ghosts.
- ◆ The attention given to the dead would extend well beyond the funeral.

Greeks believed that the dead were capable of malevolent action if food offerings were not made

Romans continued this practice, sometimes going as far as to incorporate 'feeding tubes' into the grave to facilitate the practice of giving food and wine to the dead.



Ancient Civilisations of the World





Ancient China

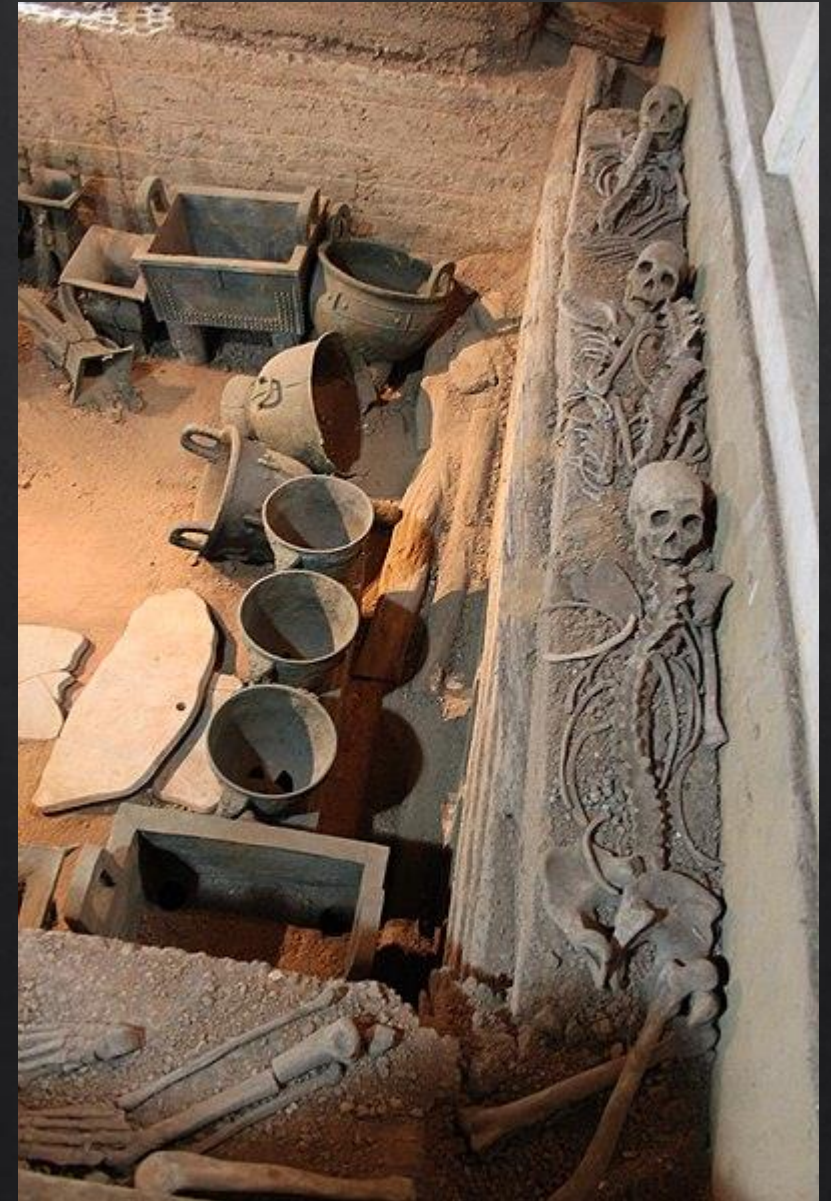
- ◇ Death : a prolongation of life
- ◇ Dead continue in the spirit life much as they had done in this life
- ◇ > Provisions made for use in the afterlife

Ancient China: noble & royal funerals

Shang Dynasty tombs (1600B.C. – 1046 B.C.):

Human **sacrifice** : servants & concubines

(hundreds of skeletons) evidences of interred alive



Ancient China: noble & royal funerals

Replaced at

Han dynasty tombs (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.)

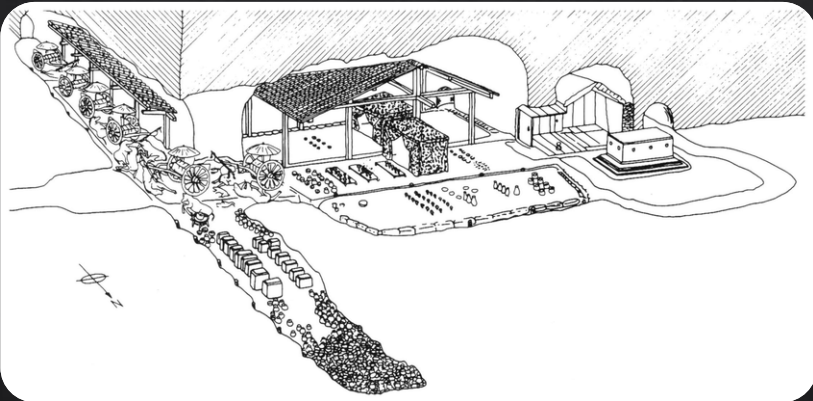
By pottery figures



Ancient China: Impressive discoveries

Liu Sheng's tomb (Mangheng):

Designed like an actual house, complete with windows, stables, storerooms, cookbooks and a bathroom,





Ancient China: Impressive discoveries

- ◇ 'Terracotta Warriors'
- ◇
- ◇ A massive burial complex,
- ◇ Complete with 8,000 soldiers, 130 chariots with 520 horses and 150 cavalry horses, acrobats, strongmen and officials.

Ancient China

Song Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.):

- ◇ Tradition becoming more popular
- ◇ Mass production of inexpensive grave goods allowed less affluent individuals the opportunity for a luxurious afterlife.



Ancient China



◇ **Children** had obligations to their ancestors for the sacrifice they had undertaken in having children and that as in life these duties continued even after death.



◇ **Spirits** had the power to influence people's lives on earth and that if they were not cared for by the living they might return, causing untold mischief.



◇ **Ancestor cult** emerged, with people making offerings and observing ceremonies for their line of descendants.

Ancient China

- ◆ Buried with sets of bronze vessels, thought to be so that they could continue making offerings to their own ancestors.
- ◆ Developed further with Confucian influence, which instigated 'spirit tablets' to be placed in the family shrine and revered, with offerings to remoter ancestors being made at longer intervals than to those who had just died.





Final thoughts

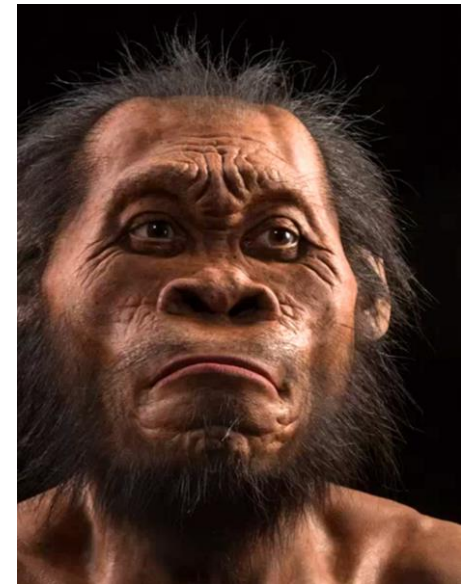
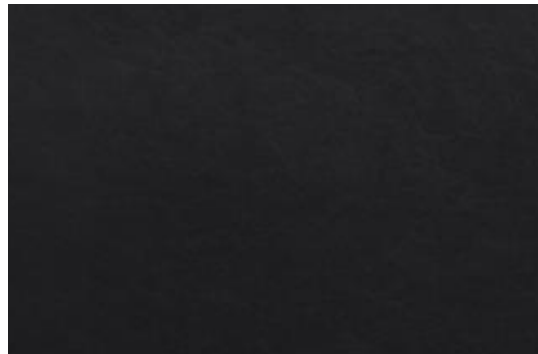
Qafzeh: Oldest Burial (In Asia)

- ◇ 100,000 years old/ Paleolithic
- ◇ Southern Levant
- ◇ Remains 15 individuals of modern humans (*Homo sapiens*)
- ◇ with 71 pieces of red ochre and ochre-stained stone tools.
- ◇ The ochre was found near the bones, suggesting it was used in a ritual.



H. naledi

- ◆ the oldest burial site **in the world**
- ◆ located in South Africa
- ◆ date back to at least 200,000 BC
- ◆ bodies of adults & children deposited in fetal positions = intentional burial of the dead,



Hail To Thee, O My Father Osiris, I Have Come And I Have Embalmed This My Flesh So
That My Body May Not Decay.



Inscription on one of the linen wrappings of the Egyptian mummy of Thothmes II, 1493-1479 B.C.