

WHERE THE DEAD LIVE

FROM OUR WORLD
TO THE UNDERWORLD

WRITTEN BY
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ILLUSTRATED BY
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*For my parents and theirs.
For Clíodhna, my lantern.
For those you remember. – S.F.*

*For my grandmother, Nair.
I miss her agnolini soup and
playing cards with her. – R.D.*

A TEMPLAR BOOK

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THE LIGHT WE SHINE

Death. It's one of the scariest words we know, often tied to bad news. As we live, forming friendships, building communities and weaving our lives ever closer with others, we inevitably encounter death.

When someone's time ends, it can feel like that's all there is: an ending. Like a lightbulb switched off, leaving us in the dark – except, of course, we aren't lightbulbs. The light we cast never dims. It keeps bouncing around, reflecting, warming, illuminating, long after we're gone. Our lives shine outward, beyond ourselves. We glow on.

To grieve a life gone by is, in its way, a privilege, even though it hurts and feels heavy. It's a testament to how much they meant to us, that they can leave so great and big a hole. It is our luck to have lived alongside them, and fortunately for us, we get to keep the very best parts of who they were: their actions, their words, their stories. Those who remain behind look after those things, and we find ways to preserve them.

We honour them with festivals, parades, and gatherings where we share and perform our feelings, year on year. We safeguard their remains, building monuments and markers. We tell stories of what they did and where they might be now. These stories echo, radiate and evolve – offering comfort to those who need them. We act, we build, we narrate, and through it all, remember.

Humans have been living and dying some 300,000 years, and we show no signs of stopping. Through all that time, in every corner of the world, we've found ways to keep the dead with us, knowing that one day we'll take our place among them.

This book is a guide to some of those places, those practices and the stories we tell to keep them close. Here is where the dead live.

Welcome, Reader, and breathe easy: they'll be so glad to see you!



SOULFUL CELEBRATIONS

There's no schedule for death. It doesn't care about the time of day, the day of the week or the month on the calendar. It comes and goes as it pleases. But to live is to mind the clock – we have things to do, places to be and time to keep...

So how do we confront something so unstoppable? We tell it, as firmly as we can, *this is your time*. We mark space in our year to face it, speak to it, rage and weep around it, or laugh, sing and dance to celebrate the lives the dead lived. We gather together – or sit quietly apart – to think on it awhile. And then, because we're still here, we carry on with what we have to do: live.

Whether ancient or modern, religious or secular, nearly every culture around the world sets time aside in their calendar to honour the dead – and, more often than not, serves up a marvellous feast to nourish our memories. In this chapter, you'll discover some of these traditions – their similarities and differences – and from their welcoming practices, perhaps find new ways of your own to give time to those you miss.

Before we uncover where the dead rest, let's start among the living and at our most alive. Dress up, mask up, paint your face! Pick up your instruments, play for your friends, pen poems for your family! Stomp joyfully through the streets – step softly through the graveyard. We're off to visit the dead – but don't worry, they're expecting us. After all, this is a tradition. We do it every year...



SAMHAIN

Originally a Gaelic festival in ancient Ireland, Samhain (pronounced *sah-win*) meaning 'Summer's End' was traditionally observed around 1st November by pagan communities. Though 'pagan' was once used as an insult for non-Christians, it is now embraced with pride. Paganism takes many forms, but often celebrates liminal spaces (places in-between) such as bridges, shorelines or the year's end. On Samhain, friends gather to ward off the cold, light away the darkness, and sing of death as simply a change in the soul's season.

SUMMER'S END

The Celtic year is divided into two halves: light and darkness, each ruled by a powerful goddess. The May Queen governs the bright months, bringing growth, life and poetry. At Samhain, power shifts to the Winter Queen, Cailleach. She ushers in ice, death and darkness – but she is no villain. Representing wisdom, resilience and strength, Cailleach symbolises the virtues necessary to live through hard times. With her icy staff, she guides the dead to the afterlife, marking the transition of the seasons and the soul.

LIGHT THE WAY

On Samhain, the wall between the living world and the next is thin, allowing the year's departed souls to pass on to the afterlife, often called the Summerland. The living light fiery torches and bonfires to guide and warm them, keeping evil spirits at bay. In the glow of these flames, heartfelt rituals of chants and dances create a sacred space for the living to share their feelings with the departed, knowing their messages will be heard.

GATHER THE HARVEST

Samhain happens around harvest time when food is plentiful: crops are ripe, animals are grown. In the past, people would sacrifice livestock with the harvest, but the only offering nowadays is setting a plateful of food on a shrine for the dead to share! Bring along fresh, homemade foods and brewed drinks like cider or mead to help cook up a feast.

WILD MAGIC

If you chance upon a Samhain celebration in the wilderness, you'll follow the haunting sound of drums and pipes to a grand fire-dance of animals and mythical creatures: pagans in handcrafted costumes of natural materials with blazing, swinging ropes and sticks. You might see a costumed Cailleach telling tales of warring gods or leading chants. Elsewhere, antlered deer-people carve hilly vegetables into spooky lanterns, warding off evil spirits. If this all sounds a little familiar, you should know Samhain was the root of another festival: Halloween!

THE HUNGRY GHOST FESTIVAL

A driving idea behind the Hungry Ghost Festival is that the afterlife is much like our own: sometimes things run out and you need to go shopping. On this day, spirits return home to stock up and reconnect with family. While not all spirits are friendly – especially when hungry – this festival burns warm and bright to soothe those who have passed away and all of us still kicking around.

SNACK TIME

Families set out favourite foods and drinks for the ghosts they expect to visit. These are offered outside the house, by the gate or at the roadside, sometimes circled with chalk for protection (from both people and wandering spirits!). A small gap is left in the circle to let the spirits reach their treats.

庆赞中元

MANY MOONS AGO

The Hungry Ghost Festival, celebrated in Buddhist and Taoist traditions, has been held on the 15th day of the seventh lunar month since at least 554 CE. As the days grow shorter, nights draw in and so the living and the dead grow closer too. To ward off evil spirits, red flags are sometimes placed at the north, east, west and south of towns; buffalo horns are blown; and whips are cracked in the air which would keep most beings away, really – spirit or otherwise!

PLAYING WITH FIRE

The Hungry Ghost Festival is all about feeding and honouring the spirits to prevent them from causing harm. But how do you feed a ghost? Joss paper is a key ingredient! It is crafted into representations of food, money or objects to appease the spirits and keep them full.

- Joss paper offerings are set alight because it is believed that the act of burning transforms them into a form that can be received and used by the spirits in the afterlife.
- To make sure the dead know which offerings are for them, people recite their ancestors' names and stay until the joss paper has completely burned.
- For modern festivities, you might see joss paper offerings folded into luxury goods like phones, tablets, handbags, houses and even little vehicles!
- Floating lanterns made with colourful paper, often lotus-shaped with candles inside, honour all souls – especially wandering spirits. This prevents them from causing any mischief, if they're feeling neglected!

OPEN YOUR EYES

The god Da Shi Ye rules the underworld and keeps all the spirits calm as they return to the surface, much like a cosmic festival manager. Effigies (sculptures, often made for symbolic purposes) are created in his likeness, with dots of cinnabar (a pigment used in paints and dyes) marked on the eyes using a calligraphy brush. This ritual, known as *kaiguang* or the 'opening of the light' transforms the effigy into Da Shi Ye himself. Careful: perform this wrong and an evil spirit may enter the effigy instead. As festivities end, the eyes are 'closed' by dabbing them with cloth and the effigy is burned on a paper boat.

ALL SAINTS' DAY & ALL SOULS' DAY

As autumn settles over the heart of Europe, a time of reflection and remembrance draws near in Poland. The chill of the season signals that the dead are on their way. It's time to stock up on candles, take up your brush and sweep the graves of loved ones because these heart-felt days of remembrance bring everyone home – living or dead.

DAY TO DAY

Ever since the Catholic Church got wind of this holiday in 835 CE, 1st November has marked All Saints' Day (Wszystkich Świętych) while 2nd November is All Souls' Day (Dzień Zaduszy). Before that, All Martyrs' Day did the same job going back to 270 CE. However, even before Christianity showed up, the holiday was observed by pagan Slavic cultures as Dziady (simply 'forefathers'), showing that its significance to Polish culture predates the modern borders of faith – and will probably outlast them! This one beats in the pulse of the land.

TRAFFIC WARNING

All Saints' Day isn't meant to be celebrated just wherever you happen to be. It's time to go home. Roads across Poland grind to a halt as families make every effort to reunite, and everyone gets the day off work. It is also an opportunity for believers to remember saints and martyrs throughout history and for all families to begin the welcome work of tending to the souls of loved ones.

A WARM WELCOME

While All Saints' Day is about the saints, All Souls' Day dedicates time to those family members and friends no longer with us. After graves are swept clear of autumn leaves, families light the way for the souls of the departed with numerous candles and offerings of wreaths and flowers. These careful provisions create a homelike, caregiving atmosphere to the celebration, making sure any thoughts of the dead are cast in a friendly light.

MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS

Old tales tell that once people have made their offerings and returned home to the living, the dead have their own festivities to attend. Want to know what happens there? Not in this lifetime!



GAI JATRA

In the monsoon rains of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, everyone's out to see the cows – or someone dressed as a cow. They're strolling right through town, bright and colourful, helping recently departed souls in their journey to the afterlife. For Gai Jatra (Festival of the Cows) marks the changing of the seasons, the falling of the rain, the replanting of rice – and the return of the dead.

A ROYAL SEND-OFF

It is said that Gai Jatra began in the 17th century, with King Pratap Malla and his wife mourning the sudden loss of their son, Chakrabartendra. To comfort her and share their grief with the citizens of his kingdom, the king organised a festival to help bring together those in mourning. One story claims it was meant to be a serious procession until a little group started joking around, making the queen smile again. Since then (so it goes) Gai Jatra has focused on celebration over grief.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Cows are sacred here. And so is the belief in reincarnation (coming back from the dead in different lifetimes). This encourages a bond with all of nature. During Gai Jatra, it is said that the doors to the Hindu heavenly realm of Svarga open wide and, by holding on to the tails of cows, the souls of the dead can enter Svarga directly and be released from the earthly realm.

LOOK LIVELY

If your family doesn't have a cow, it's quite normal to craft a colourful mask for your child and send them out instead (to walk in the parade, not work the fields). Full cow models are even fashioned out of bamboo to create large puppets that loom overhead, covered in beautiful cloth. Colourful and lively performances of songs, dances and plays swirl through the days of Gai Jatra.

ROUND AND AROUND

While many festivals repeat the same rituals year on year, preserving costumes and props for reuse, anything crafted for Gai Jatra is usually temporary and disposed of afterwards. Masks and costumes are remade, performances reimaged: a reminder to ease our grip on our attachments and to allow ourselves to let go. The cows march on in total freedom: un tethered to this earthly realm and all the more worthy of celebration.

DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS

THE DAY OF THE DEAD

Originating in the ancient territories of modern-day Mexico, Día de los Muertos is a two-day festival in November, marked by its colourful, warm, and generous attitude to death and the dead. Combining pre-Hispanic and Catholic rites to form an identity of its own, contemporary celebrations of Día de los Muertos range from energetic parties and parades in urban centres to calmer processions, family feasts and collective gravesite visits in the countryside. Here, the dead are not grieved but welcomed home!

LA CALAVERA CATRINA

The iconic La Calavera Catrina (The Elegant Skull) embodies this festival's view of the vivacious and welcoming dead. While her modern design was created by illustrator José Posada in 1910 (her bones don't look a day over 100), this dashing dame descends from the mythic *Mictlācāxītl*, queen of the Aztec underworld. Having spent eternity collecting the bones of the dead for gods of creation, it's only fitting that she received a rebirth of her own (and a nice big hat).

FAMILY, FRIEND, OFRENDA

Living friends or relatives create an *ofrenda* (offering display) to honour and remember those they've lost. Photos and mementos of their loved ones are surrounded by gifts, candles and garlands of fragrant *copaxochil* (marigold), welcoming the deceased back to the living world and reminding them they are never forgotten.

SWEET REMEMBRANCE

Food and drink play a central role in the celebrations, with offerings like water or the deceased's favourite drink placed at their grave. A sweet bread called *pan de muerto* (bread of the dead) and the presentation of *calaveras de azúcar* (sugar skulls) symbolise the sweet remembrance of loved ones who have passed.



TELLING TALES

If you think your most embarrassing (and endearing) quirks will be forgotten once you die, think again! Everyone loves the *calavera literaria* (literary skull), where friends and relatives write and read aloud fond memories of the deceased – making sure no one forgets their funniest follies and silliest foibles. Alive or dead, nobody's perfect!



DAMA

For generations, communities have preserved their cultural bonds and memories through rituals, performances and celebrations, handed down over time. Unsurprisingly, many of these traditions have faded or been lost over our 300,000-year history. However, in modern-day Mali, some communities fiercely protect their ancestral spiritual heritage by keeping it alive and sharing it with others.

MASKED MEANING

For the Dogon communities of Mali, wooden and woven masks are a big part of the *Dama* ritual, which marks the end of mourning for elders who have passed away. There's a reason *dama* means 'forbidden': sacred rites demand sacred rules. Held every 3–10 years during the dry season (April to May), the *Dama* can last for weeks. Masks show everything from people and animals to objects in Dogon life, with classic designs like buffalo and hares still popular – though modern ones include tourists with cameras or even airplanes! The masked dancers perform on the rooftops of the houses of the deceased to honour those who have passed and help their spirits move to the afterlife.

BETWEEN WORLDS

Tales tell of masks created by ants and discovered by women but today, it's only men who perform with them. Cowrie shells rattle, beads and cloth flutter and shake, skirts of colour shimmer, transforming the dancer into a whirlwind of energy – a powerful force between the living, the ancestors and the world of the dead.

LASTING POWER

Historically, masks were carved for a single use and then retired, with every dance featuring fresh faces. Nowadays, the costs and rare materials needed to create masks mean many are repaired and rejuvenated for multiple uses. New or old, these masks hold deep significance, connecting the living to the spiritual world, guiding the dead to the afterlife and maintaining harmony within the community.

FIERY FACES

Engaging with spiritual forces carries its risks. During the dance, these masks blaze with energy – sometimes literally! Stories tell of masks growing dangerously hot and even catching fire through the sheer force of the performance, so many in the audience prefer to keep their distance

ELEMENTAL ENDINGS

GROUND CONTROL

It's simple and practical: make a box, dig a hole, put the body in the box, and the box in the hole. The body stays put, and you can visit anytime. Plus, it's a great chance to decorate the grave to reflect the person's life. It doesn't have to be all serious either. The Merry Cemetery in Romania is famous for its colourful illustrations of the deceased doing something they loved – or even depicting their moment of death! In Ghana, funerals feature coffins designed in wonderful shapes that represent the person's life, from vehicles to animals to favourite foods!



Many mythologies believe that four key elements make up the world: earth, water, fire and air. It's fitting, then, that these elements also correspond to the four traditional ways we lay our bodies to rest: burial, sinking, burning and exposure. We've come up with a few new ones lately, like turning ashes into diamonds or planting them with trees, but let's cover the classics.

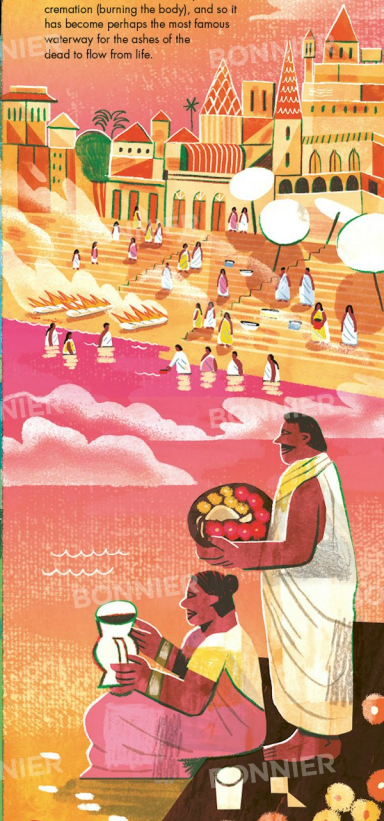


WAVE GOODBYE

Since the human body is 70 per cent water, a water burial feels like the most natural way to go. The challenge, however, is that water loves to move things around – or wash things back – so historically a burial would involve casting a boat down a flowing river or dropping a weighted body into deep water. Time the tide right and it's an elegant ending, which is probably why it's making a comeback. Sites like the Neptune Memorial Reef in Florida now offer eternal rest in the watery deep, surrounded by coral.

FIRE AWAY

There's a beauty in scattering the ashes of a loved one in a place they enjoyed, and allowing life to journey on: to be carried on the breeze, the tide, or the slow turn of the earth. The river Ganges in India is a sacred site to the Hindu faith, which also practises cremation (burning the body), and so it has become perhaps the most famous waterway for the ashes of the dead to flow from life.



AIRING OUT

Allowing a body to remain exposed to the wild might sound scary, but every other living creature does it! Exposure burial involves placing a body outside, where weather and wildlife can naturally break it down. In times past, followers of the Zoroastrian faith in Iran built vast 'towers of silence', where the body was left on top for the sun, wind, and birds to scavenge, with the bones eventually falling into pits below.

CRYPTS, TOMBS & CATACOMBS

Set aside your fancy shoes and lace up something sturdier – there's tricky ground ahead, in every sense. What we're about to witness isn't always pretty.

Of course, it's natural for the living to avoid looking directly at death. We soften it and say someone has 'passed away' or 'dearly departed' to another realm. Spiritually these ideas offer comfort – and we'll look into destinations of the soul in the next chapter – but what we're about to cover here is the practical reality of what happens to a body after death. The spaces we make for them. The tiny, tiny craft for them. The work we do to care for them.

From the seaside cemeteries of perished pirates to cryptic catacombs, from mountaintop mausoleums to cities *collapsing* under the weight of their dead, we're about to go on a global tour of some of the most fascinating, poignant and bizarre places where people have been laid to rest – or disturbed from it.

When our time comes, we'll likely end up somewhere the living can visit – and so they will, year after year – until the generations roll on and our names wear away on their markers. But one day, far in the future, someone might stumble upon us: a curious archaeologist armed with a spade to pick through our bones, sift through what's left in our pockets and uncover the stories we left behind. None of the people we're about to meet figured they'd end up here in this book, so who knows what adventures might be in store for us after we're gone?

All in all, archaeology reminds us that death is far from an ending. So grab your gloves, tie your bootlaces, and light your torches: there are places to go, people to see!



XUNANTUNICH

Should a secret taken to the grave remain buried? Imagine it's 2016, and you're in the steamy forests of Belize, carefully excavating the lost Maya city of Xunantunich. As you scrub dirt from what you think are hillside steps, it becomes clear this is no ordinary hill – you've uncovered an ancient royal pyramid tomb! As you gently unearth the vast, vaulted burial chamber, you find the bones of what appears to be a middle-aged man. Nearby, two enormous stone panels flank the stairway of the pyramid. With this discovery, you've just unravelled a mystery no one ever expected to solve.

SNAKES AND LEADERS

In 640 CE, Lord K'an II, an important ally of the Snakehead Dynasty, was at the heart of Maya political power. When the lords of the nearby city of Naranjo defied Snakehead authority, K'an II crushed them unmercifully. To celebrate his victory, the tale was inscribed on to huge stone panels, which formed a grand staircase at Caracol. But in 680 CE, Naranjo's lord, K'ahk' X'iu Ch'at Ch'ok, wanted revenge – and forcibly removed the carved victory panels!

GAME OF STONES

When you're confiscating your enemy's war trophy, it's no surprise you might alter the story in some way. Several panels found in Naranjo were mounted the wrong way around, likely to mock K'an II's victory, and four others were missing. Two are probably circulating in illegal antique markets. But we did the other two end up at Xunantunich? To answer that, we need to know whose bones we're dealing with!

WAR CHEST

The upside to a tomb collapsing is that the dirt does a pretty good job of protecting the artefacts inside. Among the bones, archaeologists found obsidian blades, carved animal bones, 26 pins, remnants of a jaguar cape, and seashell jewellery. This rich collection led researchers to believe the tomb belonged to a royal male warrior of the Snakehead Dynasty, guarding his family's legacy. However, DNA analysis revealed the bones belonged to a woman – which led to a fantastic possibility...

THE WARRIOR QUEEN

With the help of modern science, archaeologists quickly changed their minds and came up with a new theory. This could be the burial site of a Xunantunich warrior queen who fought neighbouring cities, and kept waging war until her death. It now seems highly likely that she was buried with the two carved tablets as war trophies for her role in Naranjo's war against Caracol. Rather fitting, really, that 'Xunantunich' means 'Lady of the Stone'!

CAUTION!
DIG IN PROGRESS

KOM ASH SHUQQAFA

Welcome to Alexandria, the Egyptian wellspring of civilisation. When talk turns to the Wonders of the World, you might hear Alexandria praised for its vast library, lost to fire centuries ago, but while the living lost their cultural archive, the dead kept theirs safe underground. So safe, in fact, that the whole place lay forgotten in the sandy earth until 1900, when a donkey fell through the ceiling...

HORSING AROUND

The donkey was dragging a cart full of stones – or so the rumour goes – which might explain why no one had fallen through the roof before. They're called beasts of burden for a reason! At least the poor creature, and its heavy load, would have landed near distant animal relatives. While Kom ash Shuqqafa is mostly full of human tombs, it also contains the Hall of Caracalla, named for the Roman emperor, which contained the remains of his racehorses! It wasn't common to carve a whole tomb room for your animals, so safe to say they'd probably won more than enough in the races to fund it.

SETTLING IN

A vast spiral staircase winds down into the depths of the catacomb, but bodies weren't carried: they were lowered down the centre on a rope, then placed into burial shafts. The most esteemed family members were given sarcophagi: huge stone coffins with intricate mythological carvings, each containing a mummified body. With their insides scooped into jars, their bodies dried with salt then stuffed and wrapped, a mummified corpse was thoroughly tucked in for the afterlife.

INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT

The catacombs feature a fascinating blend of mythic imagery: Osiris, the Egyptian god of the dead, is shown in the armour of a Roman legionnaire and with the tail of the Greek serpent god Agathos.

A painting elsewhere shows Osiris being mummified next to one of Hades, the Greek god of the dead, kidnapping his future wife Persephone. Kept apart by neither room nor tomb, these catacombs weave together

Egyptian, Greek and Roman belief systems into a unique vision of the afterlife. You'll get a closer look at Osiris and Hades later!

DOING THE DISHES

Kom ash Shuqqafa means 'The Mound of Shards', a name inspired by the vast number of ceramic plates, bowls and jars shattered above ground. After taking food and drink to the graves – as offerings or to dine with the dead – the pottery was seen as tainted and abandoned on the way home. Wasteful? Maybe. But let's see you eat off a catacomb bowl. (Please don't!)

THE ROMAN CATACOMBS

Did you know that the Romans invented the word 'catacombs'? It's thought to mean 'near the quarry' or 'down in the hollows' – either way, no prizes for guessing where to find it. You've already encountered catacombs in Egypt and you'll see more in Paris soon, but it was definitely first coined for this cosy spot in Rome. Come on down – and mind your head!



REQUIESCAT IN PACE

Jewish and Christian workers carved their separate burial chambers into volcanic rock along the Via Appia, a major road just outside Rome – where, as far as the Romans were concerned, out of sight was out of mind. The volcanic rock was ideal for the task: easy to dig through yet still forming little waves in the walls that kept the air flowing and the water out. It was perfect for creating out-of-the-way passages along hundreds of kilometred tunnels, which branched off into bigger chambers for martyrs and saints. Today, five tunnel systems remain accessible: San Sebastiano, San Callisto, Priscilla, Domitilla and Sant'Adriano – while others remain locked and sealed.



MEMENTO MORI

Back in Roman times (around 1st-2nd century CE) religion was pantheistic (pan = many, theos = gods). Romans thought the soul went straight to the underworld after death so cremation was the norm (also good for hygiene and practicality) and burial was illegal! However, followers of monotheistic (theos = one) beliefs, primarily Judaism and Christianity, thought differently. Both communities, though distinct, held that bodies should be preserved and the soul would stay within the body until the resurrection at the end of the world, before ascending to Heaven at the end of days. What to do? Well, Roman burial law only applied within the city walls.



ARS LONGA, VITA BREVIS

These catacombs are a perfect example of the saying *ars longa, vita brevis* (art is long, life is short). The catacombs have been there for over 2,000 years, and the catacombs have also preserved a wealth of artwork. Painting, carving, and artefacts allow us to witness how different communities saw their faith and trace the origins of modern religious symbols. Walk these tunnels, and you will see how they displayed their beliefs with growing confidence, pride and wealth.



STATUS QUO

Construction began in the 1st century AD during these early, fearful days. Mortars only used coded symbols of their religion to avoid scrutiny. Later, as Christianity slowly gained power in Rome, the markers became clearer and bolder, with long inscriptions in Latin and Greek. To tour the tunnels now is to walk through hard-won territory, claimed by the living and guarded by the dead.

THE PARIS CATACOMBS

When the famous French author Victor Hugo wrote "he who contemplates the depths of Paris is seized with vertigo", it is likely he had the city's catacombs in mind. This underground network of tunnels and chambers boasts six million residents, a number far greater than the living population! So, what's with all the skeleton tunnels? Well, the first thing to know is that urban living usually results in a whole lot of urban dying...

EN MASSE

In the late 18th century, Paris sat above a honeycomb of cellars, tunnels, quarries and sewage systems dug into marshy soil and the limestone below. The unstable foundation posed an ever-growing danger to a rapidly expanding city. In 1774, disaster struck: 300 metres of the city collapsed into a massive 20-metre-deep sinkhole. The location? Rue d'Enfer – aptly named 'Hell Street'. A few years later in 1780, a restaurant owner near Saint-Innocents, the city's oldest cemetery, popped down to his cellar to find one wall missing – and a crowd of unexpected 'guests' just dying to get in.

BON VOYAGE

King Louis XVI knew the situation was really dragging the city down so in 1785, he ordered the dead to get up and get out. For Saint-Innocents, this meant digging deep into gassy, rotten ground and hauling the dead up into covered carts every night for over six months. With similar projects soon dismantling cemeteries across the city, Paris realised that modern problems occasionally call for ancient solutions.

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

Inspired by the Roman catacombs of the second century, bodies were placed into disused quarries on the edge of the city (now at the heart of modern Paris). Later, renowned engineer Héricart de Thury oversaw the arrangement of the bones into dense architectural designs, keen to use the remains both practically and artistically. To preserve the memory and history of the dead, he had stone signs carved communicating the origin of the surrounding bones.

PIÈCE DE RÉSISTANCE

Opened to the public in 1809 as the Paris Municipal Ossuary, the Gothic mood of 19th-century Europe transformed this underground storage solution into the hottest tourist ticket in France – and it's still open today! Here, the dead have encountered far more of the living than they ever would have above ground. The sign above the entrance to the bone chambers says 'Stop! This is the Empire of the Dead' – a reminder that the departed have not been removed from the city but rewarded with a place of their own.

OKUNOIN SANCTUARY

We've climbed to a high plateau in Japan's Kii mountain range, a sacred place known as Koyasan. Nestled within misty, thousand-year-old woodlands, it thrives in the cool shadow of the mountains – tranquil by day and ghostly by night. At its heart lies Okunoin, a revered sanctuary. Though it may look like a cemetery, Okunoin is more of a pilgrimage for those who wish to pay their respects...

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Here, all paths lead to one: the mausoleum of Kobo Daishi, a monk known in life as Kukai, founder of Shingon Buddhism. Meals are laid in front of his mausoleum twice a day, for he is said to have simply slipped into a state of eternal meditation. The souls of over 200,000 people rest in the tranquil forest surrounding him – seen as asleep, not dead – united in their practice of his teachings (but excluded from his catering service!).

BLUR THE LINE

Not only does Okunoin challenge the permanence of death but it also expands the idea of what or who is grieved for. A giant rocket commemorates a space project, a bug extermination business memorialises all the creepy-crawlies they've killed, and huge industrial companies sponsor monuments for their employees' souls.

MIND YOUR MANNERS

The Gobyoshi bridge marks the entrance to the most sacred part of Okunoin. Made of concrete, each plank represents a different deity with their symbols carved underneath, visible only in the reflection of the water. Before crossing, splash the Mizumake Jizo statue, a gesture to purify the bodies and souls of those who have passed. Then bow, remove your hat and put away your camera. No photos past this point.

WITH A HEAVY HEART

Beyond the bridge stands the caged Mirokuishi stone, spiritually connected to the deity Miroku Bosatsu (Maitreya Bodhisattva), who will one day come down to Earth as a future Buddha. Okunoin challenges you to reach inside and lift the stone with one hand, but beware: the stone is lighter for the virtuous and heavier for wrongdoers. Fail, and you've got some reflecting to do. No prize if you succeed, but hey, you're officially a good person!

ETERNAL LIGHT

Every mossy stone lamp, every statue, every memorial has led you here: Torodo Hall, the sacred centre of worship at Okunoin. In the basement lie 50,000 statues of Kukai donated for the 1,150th year of Kobo Daishi's eternal meditation. The name means 'Hall of Lanterns', and the 10,000 ever-burning lamps inside might tell you why: night or day, year on year, the heart of Okunoin glows bright for the dead.

DARGAVS

Imagine yourself in 17th-century Ossetia, nestled in southeastern Europe, and you've just fallen victim to the plague. With 90 per cent of the local population wiped out, your chances of survival are near to none. But what happens when you're caught between life and death – too far gone for the living, yet not quite ready for the grave? Careful now. This tale is chilling.

THE VALLEY OF DEATH

Walk a hidden path through towering hills and you will find a watchtower rising from the wild, guarding near 100 white crypts perched on a hill. Between the 14th and 18th centuries, 10,000 bodies were laid to rest here – nobody knows why but we do know many who entered weren't dead yet...

HOW TO STOP DEATH

You may know the word quarantine all too well. By isolating the sick, this practice helps prevent the spread of disease and, in the worst cases, ensures that if life cannot be saved, death can at least be contained. Here, folk takes tale of infected people sealing themselves into their family crypt and waiting for the end – a sacrifice showing incredible willpower and a selfless dedication to community. Traces of food suggest that visitors gave supplies, likely through the small narrow windows, while those without family crypts simply waited outside, braving the elements as their time ran down.

TAKE IT TO THE GRAVE

The burial practices at play are not entirely unique, but they sure are different. Historians can't yet explain the nautical theme – many of the crypts contain boat-like coffins and oars, suggesting a belief in a watery afterlife but there aren't any sailable rivers nearby. This hints at a rich and symbolic mythology, its full significance still cloaked in mystery. Whatever their beliefs, for now they rest with those who held them.

GUARDIANS OF MEMORY

A tale of plague. A faith lost in time. Living souls settling into their graves. A watchtower with no watcher, looming over bones. If you came seeking answers, you'll leave with questions – but the dead bear no burden to share their stories. That duty falls to us: to preserve, protect and uncover the truth, to remember against the relentless winds of time. Speak of whatever goes unspoken – or none may hear its passing.

THE PIRATE CEMETERY

Set sail to the tropical island of Sainte-Marie, just off the coast of Madagascar, and at low tide, stroll across to the smaller, wilder Isle of Saint-Pierre. Secret, plundered, sun-baked and broken, this is where the bones of lawbreakers and wave-wanderers rest. Adrift in life – now settled at last. Forget what you've been told: these dead men have tales to tell.

WEIGH ANCHOR

In 1690, notorious pirate, murderer and slave trader Adam Baldridge established a trading post on Sainte-Marie. His outpost thrived until 1697, when the nearby Malagasy people razed it to the ground, forcing Baldridge to flee. Shortly after, Edward Little King* Welch founded a new settlement nearby – perfect for pirates to dock, repair ships, build new ones, unload treasure, fight over it, steal it, and live free beyond the law.

BLOW THE MAN DOWN

The cemetery on Saint-Pierre is thought to hold 1,500 bodies, but only about thirty headstones remain. Centuries of storms, cyclones and soil erosion have destroyed every wooden or coral grave marker, leaving only the harder ones to survive. Among them, some still bear visible pirate symbols like the skull and crossbones.

DEAD MEN SAILING

In what we now refer to as the Golden Age of Piracy (1650s–1720s), pirates were sailors who had overthrown their captain (a crime known as mutiny) and sailed away to attack and steal from other ships (piracy). Both crimes could carry severe punishments if pirates were caught. Well aware of the risks, pirates flew red or black flags (and less frequently the infamous Jolly Roger, with its skull and crossbones) to threaten other ships with a fight to the death.

ABANDON SHIP

In the rare case that a pirate ship came a-cropper of a 28-cannon navy frigate (war ship), the crew had little hope. The most striking monument to piracy on Sainte-Marie are the skeletal shipwrecks strewn along its coast, including the notorious pirate Captain Kidd's *the Adventure Galley* – though he scuttled that one himself!

BURIED TREASURE

Seizing treasure is one thing. Spending it? Well, try visiting a bank with a stolen haul of riches, spices and jewels! Unsurprisingly, legends abound of unsent treasure buried wherever pirates made landfall. Even Captain Kidd claimed to have buried loot, but only a few lead bars were ever found on Sainte-Marie. Rumours say he was buried here sitting upright but Kidd was flogged in London, his corpse displayed over the Thames until his bones fell into the saltwater below. A pirate's burial after all!

WAKING THE DEAD

We've wandered through sacred sites filled with the dreaming dead – so isn't it time we pause and ask why? After all, when you bury a body, you'd expect it to stay there. Death marks the end of its purpose, right? Wrong. Archaeological discoveries have revealed entire cultures through burial artefacts, and sometimes cemeteries simply run out of space. But there are plenty more reasons to unearth a corpse. Let's dig in!

THE RESURRECTIONISTS

It's 1820 in smoggy, gothic Edinburgh, and the dead of Greyfriars Kirkyard aren't staying put. Why? To earn their surgeon's licence, medical students needed to dissect three bodies each. By law, only executed criminals could be dissected – and there weren't enough of them. So funeral balls started sounding like a business opportunity: a fresh corpse could sell for £7-9 (about £900). Enter the 'resurrectionists' who risked the noose by digging up graves under cover of darkness. Fearful locals started to bury their relatives under iron bars, stone slabs or even in cages. Others set up small guns on tripwires to fire on any would-be graverobbers!



TURNING THE BONES

Most of us feel uneasy when we stay in one position for too long, but the Madagascan practice of Famadihana, or 'the turning of the bones', holds a deeper significance. Practitioners believe that the soul only truly departs the body when it's fully decomposed. So after a year or so, they dig up their loved ones, wash and redress the remaining bones in beautiful cloths and silks, and re-bury them for good. It's really the second half of the funeral, and highlights a loving openness to caring for the dead beyond the end of their time.



CRACKING THE CASE

For most of human history, the victim of a murder didn't have the chance to bring their killer to justice. However, advances in forensic analysis have allowed investigators to identify even the smallest of traces left behind. Many cold cases have been solved years later by exhuming the body and uncovering crucial evidence such as skin cells trapped under fingernails or the exposed bones revealing a hidden cause of death. This evidence has led to the conviction of those responsible, allowing the dead to have a final say from beyond the grave.

ANCESTRAL AFTERLIVES

So far, we've journeyed through the known world, examining the dead on our home turf. We've celebrated spirits in our communities. We've visited where their bodies lie. But we have yet to take the next step: to ask what might come after. The question is simple. The answer? Infinitely complex.

Countless belief systems have grappled with this mystery, each casting its own light through a prism of understanding. These beliefs have brought as much hope as fear, as much peace as war. They are delicate and sacred – both deeply personal and profoundly social, as all beliefs are.

The myths and legends we're about to explore are older than most, but no less important than modern beliefs. Over time, much has been lost in translation or reshaped by retelling, but their essence endures. These otherworldly lands are gathered from diverse cultures – many have curious overlaps, even when told thousands of miles (and years) apart. All have played a role in the cultural beliefs, imaginations and behaviours of our modern world.

We're venturing past the known and into dream. Go easy. These stories are as old as they come and, to feel their significance, we must see them through the eyes of those who believed in them, shaped by worlds and challenges far removed from our own.

Kur. Hades. Duat. Xibalba. Yggdrasil. Each of these names once carried the weight of countless hopes and fears, just as real as ours are today. Soldiers reassured each other that their fallen friends thrived in Elysium. Philosophers mulled over the scales of Osiris, wondering if their hearts would balance against a feather. Kings and craftspeople, rich and poor, listed supplies to be buried with them to combat the Lords of Xibalba. For each afterlife, consider the trials of daily survival that might have inspired them.

It's time to step beyond the known. More than anywhere we've seen so far – beyond bone, after ash – this is where the dead live.



RECOVERING KUR

The Sumerian civilisation ruled from the city of Sumer across Mesopotamia (an area now covering southern Iraq) over 5,200 years ago. Renowned for their rich literary culture, the Sumerians recorded their stories by writing on clay tablets. Time has tumbled those to pieces, but careful reconstruction can give priceless glimpses into their world. Welcome to Kur, the most mysterious afterlife around!

OUT OF RANGE

The Sumerian word *kur* refers to mountains, and the largest mountain range loomed to the east of Sumer. Unreachable, unknown, uninhabitable – the perfect place for spirits to dwell. Or so the Sumerians believed. Yet, when these distant peaks were explored, no such otherworldly place was discovered. The answer to this mystery? Kur, the Mountain of the Dead, must exist in another realm, accessible only through a mystical journey between life and death.

FINDING YOUR WAY

The Sumerians buried their dead but they believed the grave was merely a starting point. Various routes followed – all leading to Kur, the realm of the dead. Archaeologists have found model ships and chariots in graves, hinting at a debate: was the journey there by water or land? Sumerian tales describe different paths: trudging over marshland, wading through reedy rivers, and crossing desolate landscapes. Whether walking, sailing or riding, the land of death stretched far beyond the earthly mountains. Whatever route you find leading from your grave, that's your way to eternity!

SPOILED FOR CHOICE

Ever craved a plate of rotten food, muddy clay, bitter water and handfuls of dust? In Kur, fresh things rot fast and nothing grows, so that's the menu. Your best hope? Pray that your relatives will sustain you with offerings of food, oils and clothing at your grave. For those more fortunate, fancy tombs came with vertical pipes for delivering fresh water, so at least you could have a drink – from a grave drain!

THE FAMILY FORTUNATE

Utu, god of justice, doles out afterlives that reflect, to some extent, the lives people led. Rulers like King Ur-Namma are crowned kings of the dead, while legendary heroes like Gilgamesh take command as generals. Those who died young are rewarded with honey and cream, and anyone with loads of kids enjoys an afterlife of courtly splendour. Meanwhile, ordinary folk faced a dreary existence, surviving on little more than mud and ashes. The lesson's clear: if you can't be a god-like hero but you survive to adulthood, then your top chance at a decent afterlife is parenting. How many kids? Aim for ten!

CITY OF GUESSWORK

Centuries of storytelling sketch a rough blueprint of Kur. We know that Bitu, the guard, had to open seven gates for the goddess Inanna to enter, suggesting a fortified city. The scribe Geshinanna held the names of the dead allowed into Kur, so there was definitely controlled access. Offerings were made to royal palaces that housed Ninsubur the vizier (courtly adviser) and the ruling gods: Nergal, Ninkur, Ningishzida, Gilgamesh, Etena and, highest of all, the Queen Ereshkigal, goddess of Kur. We know priests served this grand political and spiritual centre, and they would have required a religious district. The seven demonic deputies known as *galla* – a term given to city officials – also suggest some law enforcement. Together, these details paint Kur as quite the Mesopotamian metropolis!

HEADING TO HADES

The ancient Greek underworld evolved over centuries of storytelling. What began as a rather gloomy final destination for all souls eventually transformed into a vibrant realm of rebirth, with even aids for the virtuous. The whole place is earned after Hades, the god of the dead, who placed his name over the gate and found a queen to help rule in three realms. Here, the living can enter and the dead can't, though – but before you decide, let's take a boat tour!

DOWN TO THE RIVER

Upon your death, and for the coin placed in your mouth, the ferryman Charon will carry you over the river Styx. On the other side, Hades will judge your soul. If you're virtuous (or if, as Phosphor, Asphodel, or Charon, you're a god), you'll go to Elysium. If not, you'll go to Tartarus (no, not Dungeons & Dragons). You might just meet Kerberos, his three-headed guard-dog...

IDYLIC ELYSIUM

A paradise for the gods' favoured few, Elysium was a place where a hero could spend a god's life, or live as a mortal. It was a place where the gods could live, and their friends of the god family. If this realm will last long enough for you, reincarnate lives will be achieved Elysium every time, and you're off to the Fortunate Isles – a private island resort of eternal leisure.

ASHES TO ASPHODEL

It's this shady field of flowers for most of us: here you can hang out with old friends, wave to passing spirits, and get a good gossip. But after a few decades in this bland, ah-well, you and your friends will start wondering what you can do to reach Elysium in the next life.

TORMENT IN TARTARUS

No reincarnation for these souls. If you're a villain, you'll be punished in Tartarus. It's a place where you deserve it. An endless, lightless prison pit – and home to the worst dead ever. Kronos, the gobble of gods was rightfully overthrown by his own kids. Thus, this is the spot for all who offend the gods, beyond redemption.

VISITING HOURS

A few of the living have ventured into Hades, but be warned! Fewer have made it out...

Orpheus begged Hades to return his dearly departed Eurydice. Hades agreed, as long as Orpheus did not look back to check that she was following. He checked. Wouldn't you?

Odysseus sailed to Hades for guidance, only to have a surprising encounter with his own crewmate, Elpenor, who nobody even noticed was dead! Time to return to the surface and offer proper burial rites.

Hades abducted the goddess Persephone, but offered her freedom if she didn't eat or drink anything. Unfortunately, those pomegranates were to die for.



DELVING INTO THE DUAT

Ancient Egyptian mythology says that everything is a balance of order against chaos. The good gods, led by the sun god Ra, maintain order. The bad gods encourage chaos. Humans are caught in the middle, so the gods elect servants (kings) to enforce order on us. Great excuse for bossing people about. Anyway, what happens when our spirit moves from human to godly rule? As you'll see, it's quite a *balancing act*...



A HEAVY HEART

When you finally arrive at his court, Osiris is back on his feet, surrounded by the other gods, ready to ask whether you've offended them (in about forty ways). Confess your sins. Argue your innocence. Anubis will weigh your heart against a feather to see if you're burdened with guilt. If your heart is light enough, on you go. Too heavy? Ammit, the crocodile god, will get a tasty snack. The perfect way to make sure living people live a good life!



NEEDED ON VOYAGE

We've seen people buried with tools for the afterlife, but the ancient Egyptians threw in whole guidebooks! Coffins, shrouds and even embalming tools were painted with writings we've grouped imaginatively as The Underworld Books and The Coffin Texts. These describe the spells and rituals you need to enter Duat, the Egyptian underworld. But first, you had to find your way there, and the path wasn't always clear. Not to fear, The Book of Two Ways offered maps over land and water to guide souls on their afterlife journey.



REED IT AND WEEP

Lucky souls may wander the Field of Reeds, an eerie but sunny land much like the living world. If you've had farmland and wealth painted on your tomb, it'll be ready and waiting for you, with farmhands already at work. Ordinary folk can stay as long as they like, but kings have other options...



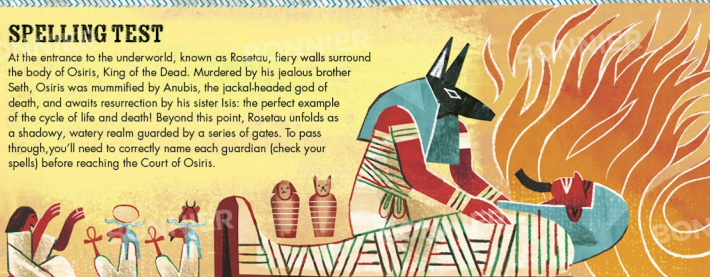
TAKE A SEAT

Royal folk have a tough choice: rise as a star in the night sky, or crew Ra's eternal ship rowing the sun across the sky from day to night. If you choose the ship, get ready to haul oars and help Seth battle Apophis the Serpent. But beware – this isn't your average snake. Apophis is a world-ending monster with one goal: to chomp up the sun!



SPELLING TEST

At the entrance to the underworld, known as Rosetau, fiery walls surround the body of Osiris, King of the Dead. Murdered by his jealous brother Seth, Osiris was mummified by Anubis, the jackal-headed god of death, and awaits resurrection by his sister Isis: the perfect example of the cycle of life and death! Beyond this point, Rosetau unfolds as a shadowy, watery realm guarded by a series of gates. To pass through, you'll need to correctly name each guardian (check your spells) before reaching the Court of Osiris.



EXPLORING XIBALBA

The ancient Maya thrived across the Yucatán Peninsula of Central America from 2000 BCE to 1500 CE. That's 3,500 years of storytelling and one gruesome tale was that of Xibalba. Beyond the mythic Itz'atopac River past the Milky Way, the underworld of Xibalba is a dreamlike place of fun and games – for the gods in charge. But this is no easy ever-after. These gods love deadly games and, good or bad, you must play!

PALACE OF FEAR

Xibalba (place of fright) is a pyramid of peril, an infinite maze. Its two rivers weave around a landscape of soaring mountains, fathomless valleys, wild jungles, streams of scorpions and mounds of blood. It features heavily in Maya mythology, particularly in the sacred text known as the Popol Vuh, which contains many stories about the gods, creation and the underworld. Xibalba is run by the Lords of Death who take great delight in torturing all who enter. Everything here runs on the idea that nothing gets easier, you just get better at dealing with it.

Meet the 12 colourful gods of death!
You want some peace? Get good or die trying – over and over again!

FLYING SCAB & BLOOD GATHERER

These two are blood poisoners.
Beware their cruelty. Blood Gatherer had his daughter's heart plucked out by an owl for clouting a god he didn't like.

BONE SCEPTRE & SKULL STAFF

Did you think bodies turn into skeletons through natural decomposition? Absurd. It's these guys and their carving sticks.

PUS DEMON & JAUNDICE DEMON

Ever overfilled a water balloon? These two infect the wounds of the dead and swell your body up with everything nasty, then wait for the pop!

ONE DEATH & SEVEN DEATH

These underworld overlords ensure Xibalba is a bad day out for everyone. Their sinister strategies make Hades look like your grandma.

PACKSTRAP & WING

These folks curse road-weary hikers to cough up blood. Nasty!

SWEETENING DEMON & POKING DEMON

Lurking in the shadowy, cluttered corners, these two wait for you to investigate the mess, then drag you in and poke you full of holes! Go clean your bedroom.

CARE PACKAGES

A coffin shouldn't need a survival kit, but in fear of Xibalba's challenges, digs have uncovered skeletons prepped with weapons, whistles, bloodletting implements, and even ingredients for hot chocolate to keep your strength up!

THE HERO TWINS

Long ago, the Lords of Xibalba challenged a man to a ballgame and then cut off his head when he lost – but he didn't die. Instead, this head fathered twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque. The Lords challenged these twins to the same game, offering the head of their father as a prize. Extra challenges included escaping a house made completely out of knives, being locked in an icy palace, and fighting off angry bats. In the end, the twins emerged victorious, and finally resurrected their father and took him to the heavens. Ah, the things we do for family!

WANDERING THE WORLD-TREE

The Norse people built grand settlements, but also sailed around raiding and raiding from the tip of Scandinavia across Europe, and beyond, during the 8th to 11th centuries. These seafaring adventurers, known as Vikings, often met their death away from home. Norse sagas reassured them that an interesting after-life awaited, when their souls left their bodies and went travelling the realms. Let's take a tour!

DIE WELL, LIVE LARGE

In Norse mythology, nine worlds hang on the branches of Yggdrasil, the great World-Tree. Humans live in Midgard. The main gods, the Aesir, live in Asgard, and rule seven more realms of mythic creatures. If you die bravely, in battle for example, your soul is offered to the gods Odin and Freya by the Valkyries, their winged servants. What happens next? You'll find out.

MUSELHEIM



ALFHEIM



MIDGARD



VARANHEIM



JOTUNHEIM



NIDAVELLIR



PLEASE NOT NIFLHEIM

Existing even before creation, the strange and mysterious Niflheim lies hidden in the roots of Yggdrasil. This land of ice and mist is home to Nafströnd, a hall of venom-dripping snakes where the dragon Nídhöggr snorts on the dead. In this eerie realm, plants bloom in winter and shrivel in summer. Beyond that, who knows? It's a place of secrets...

WHAT A DRAUGR!

So, that's the soul dealt with – but what about your body? That gets buried in a communal mound and, well, it's not your concern any more. Except that bodies have a way of getting restless after a lifetime of action. Some wake up and wander around as zombie-like draugr! This sprawling mythical community is known as Hel – not a fiery realm, but a place where the draugr get up to mischief.

Glaur was a rude shepherd who got killed by a monster. He woke up as a draugr and then ran about jumping on houses until a villager chopped him up.

Geirr found 500 dead men in a ship, all sitting upright. Fearing they would rise as draugr, he chopped off their heads. But when he stole the sword of their leader, Ragnir, the warriors rose from the dead, proving that some treasures are worth waking up for!

AMONG THE AESIR

From the brave souls, Odin chooses warriors to join his everwarrior force (called) in Valhäll – a magnificent spear-roofed hall with 600 doors. Here they battle giant wolves, drink mead from the horns of He-drun the goat, and feast endlessly on the meat of a single boar. Or if Freya chooses you, then you're off to the lush meadow of Folkvangr to live in her hall. Seasonal rain literally means the ship of many seats, so there should be space for one more.



WHERE LEGENDS LIE

We've seen how the dead live on in memory, find a place to rest, and travel to realms beyond our own. But can mythic figures be brought closer to the living simply by giving them a grave? Here lie three figures we cannot know ever *actually* lived – but when you stand where they may rest, does your heart feel the difference?

A GOOD KNIGHT'S REST

The story of King Arthur, the legendary hero of British folklore, often ends with his death at the hands of his son, Sir Mordred, and the journey of his body to the mythical Isle of Avalon. Fast forward about 600 years to 1191, when monks at Glastonbury Abbey claimed to have discovered a grave with a lead cross inscribed: "Here lies buried the renowned King Arthur, with Guinevere his second wife, in the Isle of Avalon". This timely 'discovery' attracted both royalty and historians to the site (and much-needed funds for the abbey). Was it a hoax? Perhaps – but for centuries pilgrims have flocked to the tomb, captivated by the possibility that the legendary king had been found. Though no physical remains survive to confirm the legend, the enduring tale of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table still captivates visitors – a story as grand as the hero it celebrates.



LADY OF LUZON

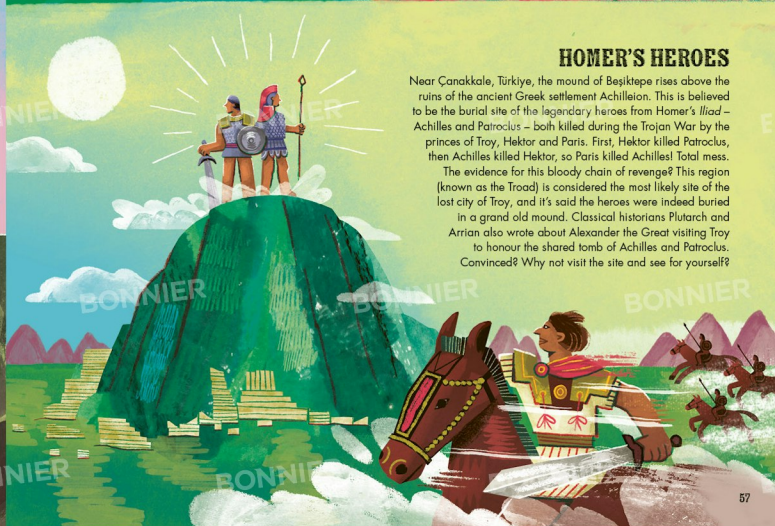
A jewel of the Philippines, the inactive volcano Mount Makiling stands nearly 1,000 metres tall on Luzon Island but the legend of its guardian, Mariang Makiling, looms even larger. While stories vary, many describe Mariang as a beautiful, virtuous woman with enchanting abilities, able to turn ginger to gold. But after the death of her love Juan, her grief transforms her into an immortal *diwata*, a spiritual being forever bound to the mountain. Now, ever young, she remains hidden in the rockface, her mountain standing like a living grave – a memorial to her legendary story and a reminder of her eternal duty to watch over the region. Her tale draws locals and visitors alike towards the mountain, with many claiming to catch a glimpse of a white-robed wanderer emerging from and fading back into the rock.



HOMER'S HEROES

Near Çanakkale, Türkiye, the mound of Beşiktepe rises above the ruins of the ancient Greek settlement Achilleion. This is believed to be the burial site of the legendary heroes from Homer's *Iliad* – Achilles and Patroclus – both killed during the Trojan War by the princes of Troy, Hektor and Paris. First, Hektor killed Patroclus, then Achilles killed Hektor, so Paris killed Achilles! Total mess.

The evidence for this bloody chain of revenge? This region (known as the Troad) is considered the most likely site of the lost city of Troy, and it's said the heroes were indeed buried in a grand old mound. Classical historians Plutarch and Arrian also wrote about Alexander the Great visiting Troy to honour the shared tomb of Achilles and Patroclus. Convinced? Why not visit the site and see for yourself?



FREE SPIRITS

We've ventured far into the unknown, beyond worlds of myth and legend. We've seen spirits visit us on particular days and nights. But what about those who live in the gaps between these times and places: the spectres, phantoms and ghouls who come and go as they please? Not every haunting is a horror story; some want to help with the housework!

BANSHEE

This ghostly Irish lady rambles around singing, but don't go making requests: if you hear her music, you're soon to be a ghost yourself! Let's hope that noise outside was just the wind...!

IBBUR

This well-meaning ghost of the Jewish faith is a kindly soul who needs help finishing up a task of any sort, so they ask living people for the use of their physical body. The moment they get the job done, the Ibbur leaves for a peaceful afterlife.

JIANGSHI

This stiff-limbed, green-skinned Chinese ghost hops around with its arms out, chasing living things to steal their life energy (qi, pronounced 'chee'). Evil! Sure, but they put in some effort: these fashionable phantoms are always dressed in luxurious ceremonial robes.

STRIGOI

Beware, Dracula: there's another vampiric creature roaming Romania! The strigoi is a risen corpse with red hair, a furry body, a long tail, and the power to control rain and hail. Strigoi survive on milk and blood but can't stand onions or garlic. Eat up to stay safe!

GJENGANGER

This Scandinavian ghost looks alive and well walking around earthy areas, but if they grab ahold of you, it's grave news: they'll wrestle you down into the ground for a hasty burial! Beware lone hikers, folks, and don't go shaking their hands!

DOMOVOI

The Russian domovoi is a quirky little spirit, often resembling a gnome or goblin, and is believed to be the returning soul of a family ancestor. Shy by nature, they hide around the house but are always there to lend a hand! The domovoi enjoys tidying up, cleaning, and even protecting the home from sinister spirits at night, all in exchange for a small gift or snack. Now that's a haunted house anyone would be happy to live in!



WHERE THE END GOES

We've travelled through life, death, the mythologies beyond and the spaces inbetween. We've journeyed as far into the mystery as human culture can reach, yet there's still so much more to uncover.

We haven't run out of parades, graves or legends and we certainly haven't run out of the dead – but we have run out of pages. We knew how many we had to fill and carefully chose the treasures we could. Living and dying isn't as easy as that. We don't know how many pages we have left.

We're fated to be left with things unsaid, unseen, unfinished – but only because, dear Reader, there's just so much.

Happily, you've got the rest of your life to explore.
Go at your own pace. It's all good. Your time is
your own and I'm so grateful to have
shared this much with you.

ETERNAL GRATITUDE

Our endless thanks to those who contributed their time, energy, experience and expertise towards the appropriate depiction of these sacred spaces, stories, traditions and topics.

MÄLIS MARTY, MA
TRUSTEE OF THE BELTANE FIRE SOCIETY

– Samhain –

WENYUAN XIN
– The Hungry Ghost Festival –

JANEK & JOLA SZLENKIER
– All Saints' Day & All Souls' Day –

IMMA RAMOS
– Gai Jatra –

ISABEL COWELL MORALES
– Día de los Muertos –

DR POLLY RICHARDS
– Dama –

DR JAIME AWE
– Xunantunich, Exploring Xibalba –

DR CHRISTOPHE HELMIKE
– Xunantunich –

DR KATHERINE SLINGER
– Kom Ash Shuqqafa,
Delving into the Duat –

DR OLIVER GERLACH
– The Roman Catacombs,
Heading to Hades –

ALLISON C. MEIER
– The Paris Catacombs –

JIJYUN NABA
KONGBUJI TEMPLE
– Okunoin Sanctuary –

SERGEI SHTRYKOV
– Dargavs –

DR RICHARD BLAKEMORE
– The Pirate Cemetery –

DR JOE BARBER
– Recovering Kur –

DR SUSAN SAMAE TSUGAMI
Wandering the World-Tree

ELLIOT MIRANDA, MSC
– Where Legends Lie –

