

Byzantine Empire

Practices

Prior to converting to a Christian nation in 324 AD the empire worshiped the Roman gods and goddess.

After the outlawing of the Pagan religions many of the ancient practices were still honored alongside the more modern Christian practices, for example the women continued their lamentations, which were accompanied by acts of self-mutilation: they cut their chests and faces; they undid and tore out their hair, and wrung their hands and held them up to the sky. Another older pagan tradition that was still honored was the practice of burying the corpse with funerary offerings; perhaps with the hopes that they would be used again in commemorative rites that brought the deceased back cyclically from beyond the grave.

Archaeological excavations on Thasos Island have revealed that the deceased were sometimes covered with freshly cut grass, possibly symbolizing the cycle of life and death. Finally, objects that facilitated the passage to the other world were placed in the grave. The most commonly used objects were coins, like the mythical obolus (Greek silver coin) used to pay Charon for the passage of the deceased across the Styx.¹

Deities and Important Concepts

See Deities and important concepts in the Roman section as the Byzantines worshiped the Roman gods and goddesses.

Modern Adaptations

- Speak of the grass that will cover the grave as a reminder of the cycles of life and death. A small patch of grass could be laid on top of a coffin as the following was said.
"Following the practice of the ancient Byzantine Pagans we offer this grass as a reminder that life and death are connected.
Life will rise and fall and rise again. So too has ___ lived and died, and in time will return to us."
• Create a small altar in your house to the memory of the deceased. Privately take some time to remember what they meant to you in life and leave offerings of something they might have enjoyed, such as a small bit of food.

Sample Readings

Readings from Roman sources would be appropriate.

Resources

Funerary Practices in Byzantium

http://www.qantara-med.org/qantara4/public/show_document.php?do_id=1170&lang=en

¹ "Funerary Practices in Byzantium." Qantara. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Mar. 2014. http://www.qantara-med.org/qantara4/public/show_document.php?do_id=1170&lang=en