Ghost Stories: A Survey of Cultural Beliefs in Regards to Death and the Spirit

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No matter what culture, or historical time period, the only inevitable truth is that life is finite. Comfort is found with either the formation of religious or philosophical belief systems that establish certain, accepted standards for life and death. Human beings have always strived to understand the supernatural and what happens after life. We tell ghost stories around the fire and speak wistfully about our lost loved ones. We are connected by our desire to believe in something more, something greater than what we know. These practices have existed since the beginning with the Neanderthals, when grave goods were first placed with the dead in the form of flowers, until today when hills are filled with tombs and stone angels. The purpose of this project is not solely to be an exploration of different cultural beliefs, but to create an understanding of how people try to hold on to those they have loved and lost, and how they create their own ghosts. While this project covers many different, isolated points of history which all give a different answer to what comes after death, it was not created to give one true answer to this question. It was also not meant to present certain cultures as having correct or mistaken views on the happenings of death and after. Rather, the goal has been to bring light to the different cultural perspectives and practices that exist outside of the popular Western canon.

The belief in a life after death has permeated much of human culture and spirituality. Whether this believed life is in a manifestation of a holy land, or in the simple idea that our physical world could run adjacent to one of ghosts and spirit energies, people from a vast number of cultures and historical time periods have found a common hope that the spirits of their dead may find a peace or freedom in their death. And, while the supernatural has always been a

fascination of humanity, it is an intangible comfort that people find in faith and spirituality. The mourning rituals conducted by people in grief are a way for the living to create palpable connections with the deceased.

The first funerary practice of placing flowers over graves can be traced back to early humans as many as 14,000 years ago, when it first began. When humans first began to create cemeteries and brought the bodies of the dead together, as opposed to burying them isolated and sporadically, they also began to place flowers and other flora with the dead. In research presented by Nadel et al. (2013), the emergence of more elaborate grave sites and grave goods is associated with the presence of 'complex social organizations' in the Natufian Period. These complex grave sites which included new graves dug in the same proximity of older ones, bedrock which was chiseled away to accommodate the grave, and graves which were lined with a thick layer of floral species known specifically for their aromatic fragrance and bright colors (Nadel et al., 2013). There is only so much that traces of pollen in the dirt can tell us, but thousands of years ago when early humans buried their dead in shallow, purposeful graves, it is attested that they also surrounded them with flowers and other flora. Research by Iriarte-Chiapusso, Arrizabalaga, and Cuenca-Bescós (2015) meticulously presented and discussed the presence of pollen from a number of native floral species in ancient grave sites. Iriarte-Chiapusso et al. observe a grave from the Natufian Period, noting the impressions of flora, primarily stems, leaves, and certain fruits left in a layer of clay that was purposely used to line the grave in an example of an atypically elaborate grave. Comparing these findings to those that they have observed in the El Mirón Cave, Iriarte-Chiapusso et al. (2015) make the argument that pollen findings are indicative of purposely placed floral grave goods. There are many hypotheses as to why floral offerings were placed with the dead in their graves; the favored idea is that they were

placed as loving offerings to the dead. Another suggestion is a more practical one, that they were used as objects meant to cleanse the body and the grave, or the more morose idea that they were used to cover the "stench of death" (Iriarte-Chiapusso et al., 2015). Regardless, these practices are indicative of the earliest grave goods which eventually grew to encompass not only flowers but also ocher and pigments, jewelry, elaborate headdresses, clothing, and other things all meant to send the departed loved ones off with the love and goods they held in life.

After the emergence of these rudimentary grave goods, human graves began to include things such as the bones of animals which hold symbolic significance. The animal bones lay with those of humans to accompany them as spectres into whatever may follow after death. Horses have been buried with their lords, headdresses made from the skulls and antlers of deer have also been excavated from ancient tombs (Walker, 2014, p. 47, 54). While many animals hold symbolic and theological significance to different cultures, one of the most common after-worldly companions have been the domesticated dog. Rather than serving many of the pack-animal purposes that horses later supplied, dogs were believed by countless cultures to be guardians, spirit guides, and symbols of passage or mediators to the spiritual realms (Walker, 2014, p. 47). Their bones, whole skeletons or simply the skull, were often placed in graves with human remains, or at the entrance to a home, sanctuary, temple, or palace. In cultures where the preference was to burn the body rather than to bury it, dogs were often placed directly on the funeral pyre to also be taken away by the flames (Horard-Herbin, Tresset, & Vigne, 2014, p. 28). In the more permanent, and later excavatable earth-bound graves, dogs were placed in positions incredibly indicative of their roles as spiritual guardians. These positions in the graves, range from being buried placed on the lap or chest, to even being interlocked with the buried human. A very visceral example is included in Walker's (2008) research and description of a burial in

which the dog was found to be curled around the head of a young child who had been buried (p. 47). A comfort is found in the idea that a loved one may have a companion to protect, and to guide them, creating a stark contrast to cultures which believe that spirits left in this world were cursed to wander alone.

For cultures that were centered in the belief of an afterlife, there often existed trials and tribulations that the living and the dead would need to endure to have gained access to such a place. For the Egyptians, the heart determined the worth of the spirit, and its fate. While archaeological evidence and surviving medical documents show that while the Egyptians understood that the brain connected the body and allowed for movement, the heart was considered the most important organ in the body (Aziz, 2014, p. 45). Aziz (2014) describes the Egyptian belief that the heart was a 'metaphysical entity', which not only embodied, but was believed to be the originator of thought, memory, wisdom, and other emotions such as sadness and love. As such, the heart was believed to be the center of the 'life force' or soul of the body (Aziz, 2014, p. 44). Without the heart, a corpse lost its spirit. It was also believed that the heart was what determined the soul's fate in the next life. In the many depictions of the 'judgement scene', it was the heart that was weighed to determine if the deceased was wicked, or free of sin. To ensure that the deceased would be judged fairly in the next life, the heart was often left whole in the chest while other, lesser organs were removed and kept in canopic jars. This significance is imperative to understanding the process and consequence of the mummification process. While the brain was removed from the body and discarded, the heart was mummified and preserved with enough care that in the research of Isidro, Gonzálvez, and Huber (2014) they describe the excavated Lady in Red grave site, dated back to the Coptic period, where the intact mummified heart of the corpse was found. Here, Egyptians varied greatly from other cultures in their beliefs

about the connection between the physical body and the spirit. Other cultures viewed the body as an empty vessel, which the soul transcended after death. The Egyptians observed the heart as being an anchor to the soul, and believed that one could not exist without the other. This belief directly influenced the development of very meticulous mortuary practices.

Before the Christian canon became widespread, nature was regarded and revered as a symbol of life and death, and of female and male fertility (Greenberg, 2015, p. 379). This reverence for nature was reflected in various cultures as the association of the cave structure as earth's, or as the goddess', womb (Greenberg, 2015, p. 379). As such, the natural landscape, including trees, caves, and groves, became associated with goddess and female saint figures and became sacred places for worship. Trees could become temples in and of themselves, where women would go and dance around them to attempt to have the specific goddess associated with that sight materialize (Greenberg, 2015, p. 180-181). Caves and burial sites often became the foundation for temples and churches, as observed with the tradition of church catacombs. Cave-tombs, or 'womb-tombs' as considered in the research of Stadler (2015), were often the sites of saint or goddess burials, became common pilgrimage sites where the devout could travel to respect and or to invoke the dead.

Caves and man-made underground sanctuaries have been a part of the Christian tradition since the year 339. In their research, Bertash, Keypen-Warditz, and Levoshko (2016) summarize the history of churches built over sacred caves, starting with the Basilica in Bethlehem which was built in the year 339 (Bertash et al., 2016, p. 1830). This church was believed to be built over the cave where the Nativity scene took place. In Jerusalem, the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre was built from fragments of the cave where Christ was buried (Bertash et al., 2016, p. 1830). These caves and churches represented scenes of action and great importance to those of

faith. Later on, catacombs and church-caves became places of prayer over tombs of saints and martyrs and places of asylum. In present day, these sacred places represent a duality in religious ideals. First, they are representative of the exemplary 'solitary ascetic' lifestyle (Bertash et al., 2016, p. 1833). This conduct would have been considered as the true goal of all those rigorously devoted to faith, to live a lifestyle of extreme self-discipline and restraint. The caves are also observed as being portrayals of the church's Holy Land, and as a reminder for the fate that everyone of faith strives for (Bertash et al., 2016, p. 1834). In the twelfth century, before the Catholic Church began to accept the practice of cremation, the catacombs below churches were used to house the bones of the dead, once the body had deteriorated, and the bones were cleaned. The score of skeletal remains were visual reminders of the inescapable nature of death and were a sacred resting place for those of 'true faith' (Graf, 2016). The dead, residing eternally in dark catacombs were not forgotten. The seemingly grim and morose catacombs were a quiet place of reflection and respect for the dead.

While many early cultures gave offerings of food, significant flora, and other earthly belongings to the dead, certain other cultures created frugal grave sites where the most important, or only, grave goods were coins. Often considered as "Charon's fee", certain low-value coins were placed in the grave with the deceased (Markowitz, 2016). This practice became commonplace in some cultures, particularly the Greek, Jewish and Chinese, after seventh century BCE, when coins became a part of economical exchange. Today, this custom is depicted frequently in pop-culture, where these coins are placed over the eyes. Archaeological evidence proves that coins were frequently placed in the hands, near the feet of the deceased, or were simply scattered throughout the grave (Doyen, 2012, p. 7). The most popular justification for this practice is steeped in mythology, as the idea that 'Charon' the Greek boatsman who shepherds

souls over the river Styx into the Underworld, or in other cultures some other mystical deity, accepted the coins as payment for passage (Găzdac, 2016, p. 3). Souls unable to pay were believed to be left to wander on the cold shores of the river, left to watch others disappear over into the next life (Markowitz, 2016).

While many cultures believed in a spiritual or religious afterlife, some Southern American cultures such as those who continue to exist in the Andes, believed that the spirits of the dead stayed in a realm that existed together with ours and that the dead's spirit continuously wandered in the cold and dark. This idea may have been what first motivated the Andean people and similar cultures to leave food and drink by the graves of their lost loved ones, to provide them with the comforts they were not given in their afterlife (Hastorf, 2003, p. 547). Due to the fact that these cultures believed that the spirits of their dead remained in this world and held some influence over it, many of them also placed major significance in ancestral worship. These practices are observed through rituals such as the Day of the Dead and the humbler activity of visiting and continuing the upkeep of graves and leaving goods there to invoke the good favor of the spirit that lies there. The dead were often venerated and treated with as much respect as they had earned in life. Gose (2008) reevaluates the ancestral worship and surrounding practices first observed by invading conquistadors who quickly denounced such practices as primitive and devilish. In this era the bodies of the dead were clothed and adorned, given burnt offerings of food and drink, and carried in progressions which walked and danced throughout the streets (Gose, 2008, p. 41). The people believed the dead still existed in this world and that they participated in familial affairs. The dead were known to bring positive energy or misfortune to their loved ones depending on how they were treated in death. Their influence spanned to include sway over resources, being the keepers of domesticated animal herds, and owners of crops. Due

to this influence, the ancestral spirits were often given small sacrificial offerings of food and drink. The Andean people had a very grim view of the afterlife that their loved ones passed into, damned souls were left to wander in a world that was cold and devoid of the comforts of life. And their ancestors would "'*unupin purin'* or 'travel/go around in water'" (Allen, 2002, p. 35). Therefore, above all, they valued traditions that provided worldly comforts to those who had passed on.

Zaduski is the Polish 'Day of the Dead'; this holiday mirrors that of the Mexican holiday 'Día de Muertos' and the Celtic Samhain. As the days grew shorter and the moon became more prevalent, as nature slowly died as the oncoming winter loomed closer, it was believed that the spirits of the departed returned to their homes. Piwowarczyk (2011) reviews the tradition of Zaduszki, as it was observed by Zdzisław Kupisiński in the Opoczno and Radom Regions of Poland. Lights were lit so the dead would have a beacon home, extra places were set at the table, and after the breaking of bread the living wandered to the graveyards to leave offerings of wrapped bread, light candles, and to leave flowers. Traditionally, all graves had to be cleaned and given offerings, so that no soul would go without respect and gifts. The Poles also would take this time to commune with the dead (Piwowarczyk, 2011, p. 272). Here, is where the tradition diverges from other cultures. After the offerings and mourning occurred, the living would cast away hollowed out walnut shells with melted wax candles inside them. As the shells traveled across the waterways, it was believed that they carried the messages, well wishes, and requests for guidance from the living to their lost ancestors (Szafran, n.d.). Such ceremonies connected the living with the dead, and made them a part of their lives in a way that ensured that one's ancestors were never forgotten, and never forsaken.

The Etruscan civilization of 7th century B.C. Italy buried their dead below the earth, in closed off chambers which contained the bodies and simple grave goods which included weapons, tools, jewelry, flowers, ointments, and the unique Etruscan black pottery (Merola, 2014). Like many other civilizations, they also buried their dead together in regards to family or marital bonds (Lorenzi, 2014). The Etruscans often buried their loved ones with sphyrelaton, a wooden funerary sculpture or figure that acted as an effigy of the deceased and was believed to guard the soul (Merola, 2014). These effigies were often accompanied by crafted hands made from bronze or silver, as was observed in the excavation of the Tomb of the Silver Hands (Merola, 2014). The wooden vessels were sometimes replaced with terracotta sculptures on the stone casket, which often depicted the dead in a comfortable, lounging position. Occasionally, when a married couple were buried together, they were given a shared casket and their funeral sculpture would depict them lying together, sometimes as if they were simply asleep in their bed. The Etruscans focused on life and immortalized their dead in the moments of life where they would have found safety, love and comfort.

In life, Vikings used ships to control the seas and to easily access neighboring lands and their riches. Ship iconography has practical roots in the fact that Norse civilizations relied on the sea for travel, trade, and for food (Abbink, 2015). And yet, in death, the Norse used ships to carry their souls to the next life. The belief that souls could not properly transcend to the Viking's afterlife, Valhalla, until the body was disposed of inspired the Norse to go to extreme lengths in their burial traditions. Often, bodies were cremated using a pyre or were laid in their graves in wooden ships, or were burnt while laid in a stone ship (Abbink, 2015). They were often accompanied by grave goods that rivaled that of the Egyptians and depended on the deceased's wealth. Halstad-McGuire (2010) references a number of ship-burials in her research, including

that of a noble woman buried in an enormous longboat - a physical symbol of wealth, power, and influence - and who was given sacrificed horses, wooden chests, ornate carts, beds, and other luxuries (p. 174). She also describes the grave goods involved in the burial of chieftains, warriors or villagers, who were given coins, weapons, tools, and other humble goods (Halstad-McGuire, 2010, p. 172). These traditions seemed to hold incredible theological influence over the Vikings. In their mythology, it was believed that the chief god Odin had sent his own deceased son to sea in a funeral barge, laden with his body, gold and silvers. The ship was set on fire and burned as it sailed, and eventually sunk. Regardless of which method is used, the belief is that if the dead died honorably, they are sent to Asgard and Valhalla, the realm and fabled hall of the gods, where they would spend an eternity in celebration with other spirits, warriors, and gods.

The !Kung people of the Kalahari Desert in Africa were one of the many long standing cultures and people who continued to live as they had for thousands of years, long after the world around them had changed. Shostak (1981) describes intimately her time spent around the !Kung. They had lived in small villages which normally consisted of interconnected families, a death would have had caused major grief in all parties, and sometimes was enough to cause the families to split away from each other (Shostak, 1981, p. 182). When an individual died of an understandable cause, such as age, injury, or accident, they were buried a small ways away from the village and after a brief mourning period, life would continue on (Shostak, 1981, p. 183). When an individual died of something the !Kung could not explain they became fearful of illnesses and germs that they did not understand. They also would become wary of the influence of the spirit world, spirits were attributed with having caused these deaths, and, if the people stayed they were at risk from the same malevolence (Sholstak, 1981, p. 181). An unexplained death would spur a whole village to pack up their belongings - kept minimal for the sake of being

able to carry everything they owned from place to place - and leave, fearful of the negative spirits and energies that could bring great harm to the living (Sholstak, 1981, p. 183).

For the Nso people of Cameroon, death was considered to be the final phase in life, often earned by an individual once they had successfully completed the other stages of life (Chem-Langhee, Fanso, 2011, p. 436). In such a case that a person had experienced a 'good death' meaning that they had a 'fulfilled life,' they may have achieved *mbor la',* or the 'homestead of peacefulness' and the mourning process begun (Chem-Langhee, Fanso, 2011, p. 445). Chem-Langhee and Fanso (2011) give a detailed account of the traditions which surrounded death, which began with the initial cleaning of the deceased, to the mourning rituals which continued on after the burial. First, the body was washed by the deceased's loved ones, so that they may have had one last look at the departed. After burial, the mourning period began and lasted for anywhere from three to twelve days depending on the position of the deceased. The surviving relatives would lament collectively, the females wailed, all relatives wore white and kept a 'shabby and unkempt' appearance for the course of the mourning period. The mourning period was ended with the celebration of *shovir kiwiy'* where all the mourners shaved their heads and bathed for the first time since the death (Chem-Langhee, Fanso, 2011, p. 454). With the completion of their mourning period and their successful cleansing, the living would shuck off any negative energy or spirits, and would continue on in their own lives, and bid farewell to their lost loved ones.

Throughout the Native American tribes of the Pacific Northwest it was customary to erect a totem pole, or some symbolic wooden sculpture, as grave monuments after someone had passed away. Blackman (1973) describes the mortuary traditions of the Haida, presenting the raising of the mortuary totem to be an act of the immediate family, often made possible by gifts

from the community, as a last physical memento to the deceased. These totems were often placed in front of the homes of their owners, typically part of the land that surviving family inherited from the deceased. Most totem symbolism referred to the relationship between the natural phenomena and the human groups. These phenomena typically referred to animals, celestial bodies, and other natural occurrences. Halpin (1980) explores the totem symbology used by the Lummi tribe and certain Kwaigiutl families in her comprehensive research into totems and their significance to the people who created them. First, the Lummi tribe of the Coast Salish brought these grave monuments into the home, and carved house posts which represented large human figures or spirit helpers. Other tribes often carved powerful animals or spirits who they claimed as their family's ancestors, or whom their ancestors have had encounters with. For example, some Kwaigiutl families carved the symbol of the Thunderbird on the top of their totems because their history believed that the Thunderbird descended from the heavens and transformed to become their human ancestor. As such, these totems identified the dead and connected them to their families and ancestors. Totems left lasting reminders of the lives lived by the deceased loved ones as they are remembered by the living.

Betsinger (2014) explores the root causes of the fear, rather than veneration, of the supernatural that resulted in abnormal, or deviant burials in post-medieval Poland (p. 467). Vampires were believed to be people and evil spirits who had the potential to rise again from the grave after death, with the potential to harm the living. The fear of vampires and other supernatural creatures was inspired by the same fear that caused the witch trials across Europe and America, the fear of the unknown and a concern for the immortal soul which was threatened by such evils and dangers. There were many social and biological factors that shaped an individual's identity enough to influence the population after their death; which included being

born out of wedlock, lacking a proper baptism, being an outsider, suspected of witchcraft, or being born with teeth, having a deformity, or being the first to die in an epidemic (Betsinger, 2014. p. 469-470). All of these may have caused a soul to be 'unclean' which meant that when it separated from the body after death it became a threat to the living (Betsinger, 2014, p. 469). To avoid this, these individuals were buried with apotropaics or objects to ward against evil (Betsinger, 2014, p. 470). These objects are usually sickles or stones placed across the throat or in the mouth to prevent the deceased from rising from the grave (Betsinger, 2014, pg. 471). These concerns were all based on the fear of any outsider or Other that threatened the safety of the people. Due to these fears, the spirits that walked amongst the living are a great source of fear, rather than comfort to the ones they had known in life.

Before photography became commonplace, people seldom had photographs of their families or individual loved ones. As such, post-mortem photography became a common trend in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Aytemiz, 2013, p. 323). At first glance, the practice of dressing up the corpse and the posing the body to be photographed seems gruesome, but the resulting photographs were often the only visual memento of a loved one's life and memory. The living family often posed in the photograph with the deceased, creating solemn family portraits (Aytemiz, 2013, p. 331, 335). Kürti (2012) researched post-mortem photographs specifically made by and for the Hungarian immigrant community in Toledo, Ohio during 1918 to 1920. These photographs stand out because of the sheer number of people in each. They showed, rather than the body propped up and poised, the attendants of the funeral gathered around the open coffin, a farewell to the dead orchestrated not only by their immediate family, but by the community that they had shared their life with. This practice also took on a new significance in the Victorian era where child mortality was a grim reality; the photographs therefore, became the

only token of the young child's life. This niche of photography became the only visual memento of the dead, the only remaining record of the deceased's face. These photographs were cherished by the loved ones who outlived the deceased. They became cherished keepsakes and kept the memory of the dead alive.

Victorian wakes were a time where the body of the deceased remained in the home, dressed and laid so that family could come and look upon the faces of the loved one once more. The wake was an open time for mourning and a period of deep superstition. The Victorian people believed that after death, the spirit of the deceased, along with other wandering spectres, may become trapped in this world, or may possess the living. Mirror and paintings were commonly covered in black shrouds so that the spirits would not become entrapped inside them, leaving them locked in the realm of the living (Frisby, 2015, p. 110, 111). This superstition proved that the Victorian people believed that the living were also endangered, as any who may look into the mirrors and paintings were in danger of becoming possessed by the spirit ("Re-enactment offers glimpse of Victorian funeral rituals," 2016). While windows were often thrown open in the last moments of someone's life, so they could leave the house, they were often covered with white linen sheets as well. These sheets covered the reflections of the glass, which could also entrap spirits (Frisby, 2015, p. 111). Each superstition was enveloped in the fear of inviting the spirit back into the house which endangered the living and left the spirit entrapped in this world, which ensured that it could not pass on. Mirrors were regarded with superstition because of their transformative nature, coming from sand and being turned into glass. This 'magic' of transition left any object of glass to be steeped in superstition. In Victorian literature, spectres appeared in windows and mirrors and called out to the living for entrance into the home.

To ensure that the spirit successfully moved on to the next life, Victorian wakes and funerals followed superstition to protect the living and help the dead move on.

Referenced first in biblical times, in Psalms 56:8, human tears and their collection or recordings have become symbols of grief and sorrow. The collection of tears, therefore become a manifestation of this sorrow and evidence of this practice are apparent throughout history. In the city of Carthage it was believed that mourning mothers would collect their tears during the time of mourning to be placed on the grave of their deceased loved ones as a tangible representation of their loss, and love for the dead (Fein, 2008). Other evidence of the use of tear-collectors existed in Syrian and Roman cultures (Fein, 2008). During the Victorian era, tear bottles became a part of public grieving and joined the many mourning rituals which were often elaborate, purposefully public, and romantic in nature. This practice was later believed to appear during the American Civil War, when men who went off to war would leave their wives with such bottles to shed their tears into in their absence, and often their death (Lachrymatory Tear Bottle History, n.d.). Despite debate about how commonly practiced the task of collecting tears was, it is obvious that the process enchanted people and became prevalent in popular culture through literature and poetry. This practice has transcended history and tear bottles are becoming more popular today. Their creation and use as art items to represent grief and loss, manifest the relationship between the dead and living through sorrow.

The urn today serves the purpose of storing the ashes of the dead, often in their family's home. This practice holds an intimacy that some may find lacking in graveyards as urns allow for the dead to remain in the home; an idea that once lead Neolithic people to bury their dead under the floorboards in their house, and sometimes to even remove the skull to add to a shrine in the upper-levels (Walker, 2014). This practice existed as another form of ancestral worship and was a result of the belief that the dead still held sway over aspects of the living. Ancestral

worship was mostly present in cultures where there was very little or no mobility for families, and often became so extreme that houses and even cities were built on top of each other (Walker, 2014). These hill-cities allow for a deep connection between the living and the dead, as you live where your ancestors once did and where your future family will. Today, the practice of keeping one's ashes in the home is a diluted tradition spawning from ancient family dynamics and ancestral influence.

Depending on their extent, roadside shrines meant to memorialize a fatal accident were often impromptu and anonymous, and most importantly, highly emotional responses to loss. They could range from being a simple cross with some flowers, to having a more permanent form of wood or stone. These memorials, often as a result of some tragedy, were unique in the sense that they were placed in the area in which the event occurred rather than the area that the body is buried. This distinction brought the tragedy, and the death outside of its usual context and created a public, open phenomenon surrounding the loss (Clark & Franzmann, 2006, p. 579, 580). Serving as a connection between ancient and modern beliefs, roadside shrines in Thailand resembled those in Western areas. Though they lacked symbols such as the Christian cross, these shrines were built to help put the spirit who had died there to rest. As they most likely died of unnatural causes, Thai culture and folk religion believed that their lingering spirits may bring misfortune to the physical area and any people who would visit (Cohen, 2012, p. 346). Thai shrines therefore become spaces of mourning and ritual placation for any restless spirit that may remain.

Regardless of our beliefs, as humans we keep our dead close. We bury them, or keep some echo of their lives. We find comfort in this, in being able to visit and feel that our dead still have a place in our lives. Cemeteries today, ancient and new, are physical manifestations of countless years of history that all lend to creating a space sometimes forgotten, sometimes visited too often, but a space nonetheless meant to keep our dead and to offer a connection to the living.

They are also visual anchors to ancient and contemporary cultures, which presented the living with a reminder of the one truth, that this life will end in death.

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