

# [In throughout history. while dance is normally](https://assignbuster.com/in-throughout-history-while-dance-is-normally/)

Intoday’s modern society dance is capable of being used in any type of situationimaginable even if it goes against typical social norms. The same can be saidfor other cultures throughout history. While dance is normally looked at beingused in times of joy and celebration, a look into the ancient Egyptian, Greco-Roman, and Medieval mourning rituals shows how dance can also be used intimes of death and sorrow.            In order to look at these ancientcultures and their use of dance, it is first necessary to dive into itsorigins.

Oscar G. Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy give a great description ofone of the main theories that most anthropologists believe to be as the originfor all theatrical activities, including dance. They start by pointing out thatsince there is very little remaining documentation from which historians canpull from, the precise origin is purely speculation.

Even so, the most popularbelief of anthropologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuriesdescribe theatricals activities as emerging from myth and ritual. They continueto illustrate that since ancient societies had little understanding of thenatural world they became aware of the forces around them that appeared toinfluence their well-being. For the people in these societies it was easy toattribute positive and negative effects of these forces and try to influencethem so favorable results would follow. By using their perceived connectionbetween the two they would repeat, refine, and formalize their actions untilthey were fixed rituals.

1            Rituals can be described as a seriesof symbolic acts that are focused towards fulfilling a particular objective. Often being associated with religion, rituals are actually a common part ofeverybody’s daily lives. 2 From simple chores toelaborate performances, the use of rituals has been a part of human culturessince even before the first documented societies. There are many differenttypes of rituals for all occasions. One interesting type of ritual is called an” ending” ritual. Renee Beck and Sydney Barbara Metrick describe “ ending” rituals as being one that focuses on something being terminated. This can be assimple as finishing school all the way to the loss of someone close.

“ Therituals of wakes and funerals are very important in helping to cope with such aloss”. 3 One of the main componentsof ancient rituals is the use of symbolic actions which were used to portrayvarious things that related to the purpose of the ritual. These actions areoften described as being mimetic in nature and even though it would be nothinglike the dancing we have today, according to the Oxford English Dictionarydefinition: dance is a series of steps and movements matching the speed andrhythm of a piece of music, they can be described as the earliest forms ofdancing. 4HistoryWorld supports that in their History of Dance saying that, “ Like cave painting, the first purpose of dance was probably for ritual – to appease a naturespirit or accompany a rite of passage”. 5 This gave the people ofancient societies an outlet from which they could release the deep emotionsthat came with losing someone close to them. It is also noted in TheEncyclopedia of Death and Dying that, “ Dance, like other forms of art, hastreated the subject of death continually throughout history and … funeralprocessions were an important example of organized movement to music, expressive of grief,” 6 showing that the use ofdance was important enough to these ancient cultures that they wouldincorporate it into their mourning rituals in order to express themselves. Evenif these ancient cultures weren’t aware of their feelings enough to recognizethe benefits that dancing was providing to themselves, it was kept alivebecause it worked and did help people mourn.

One of the earliest examples ofthis dancing can be found in Egypt where, “ women were known to dance to expressthe grief of the mourners”. 7 Gayle Kassing states that dancewas the chief means of expression in Egyptian religious services, which would emphasizelife after death. For their funerals, one person would wear a mask and dress inthe deceased’s clothing to lead death processions and reenact events from thedead person’s life.

During the procession, professional dancers were hired toperform mimetic dances alongside the mourners from the deceased’s house to thetomb. 8 Therewere three kinds of funeral dances in Egypt; they included ritual dances, postures and gestures, and secular dances. Ritual dances were performed by menand women who would move with their hands above their heads and people whoattended funerals with them would provide rhythmic clapping as accompaniment. The postures and gestures would express grief and were incorporated intomovement and executed in a rhythmic pattern. This type of funerary dancestarted with families and friends showing their natural expressions and thenmoved to hiring professionals that would perform during the funeral instead.

Lastly, secular dances were meant to provide entertainment for the deceasedperson. Higher ranking noblemen would get the men and women who danced for themduring their life perform the dances he liked best before his tomb. 9 The Egyptians, being thefirst society to document their use of dancing in pairs and also have itdocumented that they would also adapt their dancing to be used in funeraryrituals again shows how important the practice of mourning the dead was. Anotherexample of Egyptian funerary rituals is the use of a song called Maneros. Namedafter the only son of the first Egyptian king’s untimely death, Maneros was adirge invented in his honor and became the first and only melody in existenceat the time. 10This gives us one of the first examples of the combined use of dance and musicand it was used specifically for mourning in ancient Egypt. InGreece, funeral processions similar to those of Egypt took place. Theseprocessions included the family and friends to the tomb as well as hiredmourners that performed professional dances in which they executed symbolicgestures and movements such as twisting their hands, beating their chests orthighs, scratching their faces, and tearing their clothing.

These processionswere led by a priest, instead of the masked person that would imitate thedeceased’s life events, who could be male or female in order to facilitatecommunication between humans and the gods. The number of mourners participatingin the dance would be directly related to the show of strength for thedeceased. Accompanied by a flute, mourners would speak to the dead or chantlaments or dirges. 11 During this time periodthough, not everyone was exactly in favor of the processions that would takeplace for the dead. Plato believed that regular citizens should keep theirfunerary services discreet and that death was a private family concern.

Mourningshould occur in the deceased’s home and then go straight to the burial and onlybefore daybreak. Only higher-ranking officials and priests could have a funeralprocession outdoors and dirges were not allowed, instead, they would singantiphonally hymns. 12 Similarto Maneros, in ancient Egypt, invocation and lament for things like dying cropswere the bases of folk songs in ancient Greece. One song called the Linus songwas used at the time of harvests and is noted as being of a common type inEgypt among other places. Aristophanes of Byzantium, the third-centuryAlexandrian editor, said that the Linus song is sung not only in times ofmourning but also in the “ happy dance”, as in Euripides. Referencing a passagein Euripides’ Heracles where thechorus joins the ailinos13 with the dance ofprosperity praising the labors of dead Heracles, combining eulogy withlamentation. 14Hugh Thomas also states a line from Heracleswhere the chorus says, “ Alas! What groans or wails, what funeral dirge, ordance of death am I to raise?” mentioning a practice known as ‘ the dance ofdeath’.

Thomas points out that this line is significant because it is the onlyliterary evidence that depicts the role of dancing within a funerary context inancient Greece. 15Despite this, it is noted that there are two groups of Athenian funerary potsthat appear to show figures dancing in a funerary context during the laying outof the body, prothesis, and the funeral procession, ekphora, as well as otherfunerary rituals that are believed to occur after burial. 16Thepost burial rituals that are indicated through these pots are generallybelieved to conclude after 30 days with the tria kostia or “ the ritual whichconcluded mourning held approximately one month after decease”.

However, thereare three other rituals that are known to have taken place within the 30 days, they are perideipnon, ta trita, and ta enata. The perideipnon consisted of afeast where the “ bereaved wore garlands and delivered eulogies on behalf of thedead” and took place in the home of the deceased just after burial. The tatrita was the third day ritual which marked the beginning of the mourningperiod. The only indication of what ta trita involved comes from Cicero’s On the Laws where he states, “ when theyhad cast the earth over the dead, scattered the seeds of vegetables over thespot” in order to sow the earth with the fruits of its bounty. Lastly, the ta enata was the ninth day ritual and it is suggested that “ food, libations, and other offerings were placed on the new tomb”. 17 Duringthe Medieval Ages, death became personified as a skeletal figure that leadpeople from all levels of society in a round dance to the grave.

18 Painted images of thiswere created out of the anxiety produced by the bubonic plague. 19 Death became a majortheme in all medieval arts and appeared in sculptures such as gargoyles onchurches. Medieval churches housed tombs and graves in their yard making therethe scene for the dance of death to take place.

The Dance of Death would beperformed in order to ward off death while symbolizing oblivion and death. Medieval beliefs centered on the idea that all people were equal when they metdeath, so they needed to make the most of their lives. Depictions of the Danceof Death include the belief that the dead danced and would sing and dancearound as an effort to revisit the joys of living. They believed that the deadwould dance in these churchyards to draw the living into the dance, and thosethen would die within the year. Other versions included a mimetic form of thedance that would be more like a march instead of having the liveliness thatpeople did when they were alive. 201Oscar G. Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy, The History of Theatre, 10thEd, Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

, 2008, 1. 2 Renee Beck and Sydney Barbara Metrick, The Art of Ritual, Berkeley, CA: Apocryphile Press, 2009, 5. 3 Beck and Metrick, 27.

4 Editors of Oxford English Dictionary, Dance | Definition of Dance in English by Oxford Dictionaries, Accessed November 27, 2017, en. oxforddictionaries. com/definition/dance. 5 Editors of History World, History of Dance, History World, AccessedAugust 30, 2017, http://www. historyworld. net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.

asp? historyid= ab82. 6Encyclopedia of Death and Dying, s. v.

“ Dance”. 7 Editors of History World. 8 Gayle Kassing, History of Dance: An Interactive Arts Approach, Champaign, Ill: Human Kinetics, 2007, 45. 9Ibid, 45. 10 Steven H. Lonsdale, Dance and Ritual Play in Greek Religion, Baltimore, MD: The JohnsHopkins UniversityPress, 2001, 81. 11Kassing, 55.

12Lonsdale, 82. 13An ancient dirge similar to that of the Linus song. 14Lonsdale, 83. 15 Hugh Thomas, “ The Dance of Death: Dancing inAthenian Funerary Rituals,” Bar International Series 2622(2014): 59-66, 1.

16 Department of Greek and Roman Art. “ Death, Burial, and the Afterlife in Ancient Greece.” The Met’s Heilbrunn Timeline ofArt History. Accessed December 19, 2017.

https://www. metmuseum. org/toah/hd/dbag/hd\_dbag. htm. 17Thomas, 4.

18Kassing, 74. 19Encyclopedia of Death and Dying, s. v.

“ Dance”. 20Kassing, 74.