

Death and the Afterlife in Mycenaean Thought

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Abstract
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By examining archaeological evidence in the form of grave findings and textual evidence dating from or relevant to the period, this thesis aims to reconstruct Mycenaean eschatological beliefs and mortuary practices.

Despite the plethora of archaeological findings dated to the Bronze Age, specifically on the Greek Mainland from the 16th to 13th centuries B.C., very little is actually known about Mycenaean religion; therefore, Mycenaean grave architecture and the contents found in graves will be considered in comparison with evidence from Minoan Crete and the Near East, other Bronze Age civilizations. These latter are significant because they display similarities with regard to the deposition of wealth with the deceased, the orientations of the bodies and funerary iconography.

Furthermore, in order to obtain a fuller perspective on the subject, the study also includes evidence for funerary practices from relevant literary sources that are dated to or depict the Bronze Age, especially the Homeric epics, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Hittite Funerary Ritual for the King*.

Taking into account the types and complexity of tombs, the nature and abundance of tomb gifts and funerary iconography, the evidence for a cult of the dead and the sophistication of funerary rituals in the *Iliad*, this study examines the Mycenaeans' belief regarding death and the afterlife.

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MENIPPOS: Where are all the beauties, Hermes? Show me round; I am a new comer.

HERMES: I am busy, Menippos. But look over there to your right, and you will see Hyacinth, Narcissos, Nireus, Achilles, Tyro, Helen, Leda, - all the beauties of old.

MENIPPOS: I can only see bones, and bare skulls; most of them are exactly alike.

HERMES: Those bones, of which you seem to think so lightly, have been the theme of admiring poets.

MENIPPOS: Well, but show me Helen; I shall never be able to make her out myself.

HERMES: This skull is Helen.

MENIPPOS: And for this a thousand ships carried warriors from every part of Greece; Greeks and barbarians slain, and cities made desolate?

HERMES: Ah, Menippos, you never saw the living Helen; or you would have said with Homer,

‘Well might they suffer grievous years of toil
who strove for such a prize.’

We look at withered flowers, whose dye is gone from them, and what can we call them but unlovely things? Yet, in the hour of their bloom these unlovely things were things of beauty.

Lucian. Dialogues of the Dead. XIX.

Translated by Fowler, F.G.

Mylonas 1966: 111.

INTRODUCTION

When Heinrich Schliemann unearthed the remains of a dead civilization in 1876, he unexpectedly resurrected a heroic age known only through legend. As Schliemann gazed upon the golden face of 'Agamemnon' in his tomb, amidst its multitudes of wealth, the treasures of Mycenae, 'rich in gold' were revealed to the world. Indeed, Schliemann's excavations exposed Mycenae as a great and very important power, perhaps the greatest center of the Mycenaean civilization. However, despite the plethora of archaeological findings uncovered, significant darkness still surrounds those who lived in Greece during the Late Bronze Age between the 16th to 13th centuries BC, and who ultimately came to an end by the middle of the 11th century BC.

In an attempt to pierce this darkness and shed light upon the identity, beliefs and ideologies of the Mycenaeans, we must examine the traces they left behind, specifically, their graves, their offerings to the dead, as well as their burial customs. Setting aside questions regarding their ethnic origins and focusing instead on the archaeological remains, we are able to define the basic social stratum of Mycenaean civilization in their burial practices, and thus gain a glimpse of their eschatological beliefs. A significant factor to be considered when attempting to ascertain Mycenaean funerary traditions is Minoan Crete, for striking similarities with this culture have been noted with regard to the deposition of wealth with the deceased as well as the orientation of the bodies. Therefore, in addition to Mycenaean burial sites, we will also consider evidence from Minoan tombs. However, as contributory as the Cretan influence may prove to be, one

source is insufficient to provide us with a complete picture of the Mycenaean burial practices, funerary rituals and eschatological beliefs.

To complement the archaeological finds and their implications, we will also examine Near Eastern Bronze Age funerary traditions, as well as textual evidence from various sources, specifically the Homeric poems, the epic of Gilgamesh and the Hittite Funerary Ritual for the King. Near Eastern evidence is extremely relevant and will be taken into account because it depicts clearly delineated funerary practices that are contemporary with those of Mycenaean Greece. Considering that there is no mention of funerary traditions or eschatological beliefs on surviving Mycenaean tablets, it is therefore essential that we look at the Homeric epics, for they depict not only representations of a Heroic Age, but also actual remnants of the Mycenaeans. It can be further surmised that because the portrayals presented in later centuries by Homeric bards rang true to their contemporary audiences, in addition to the fact that the ceremonies themselves were highly evolved and elaborately sophisticated, it is reasonable to assume that they were fairly accurate, and thus reasonably represent Mycenaean funerary traditions.

The purpose of this research is to examine the complexity of tombs, the sophistication of funerary rituals, the representations of funerary iconography, the existence of a cult of the dead and the abundance of valuable and exotic tomb gifts found within the graves, in order to demonstrate the Mycenaeans' belief regarding death, the afterlife and thus their own existence. By examining Mycenaean funerary archaeology, as well as a variety of textual evidence and the funerary traditions of neighbouring cultures, I will attempt to define Mycenaean funerary customs in order to determine their religious

and eschatological beliefs. A people can be partially defined by the disposal of their dead; since, their funerary rites reflect their beliefs and ideologies: the more sophisticated the ritual, the greater its significance to the living members of the society.

CHAPTER I

Archaeology

In 1876, Heinrich Schliemann brought to light the magnificent treasures of the Shaft Graves at Mycenae. The splendour of the Shaft Grave offerings remains to the present day one of the most puzzling questions of Mycenaean archaeology. The ethnic origins of the people buried in these graves, the provenance of this unprecedented wealth, the origins of the shaft graves, and the derivation of new stylistic principles have been continuously debated for more than a century. However, the very act that has preserved these riches for posterity, their 'deposition with the dead', has never been adequately discussed¹.

During the MH period (ca. 1900-1580 B.C.), burials were in shallow earth-cut graves, which were occasionally lined with upright slabs of stone to form cists. At the beginning of the period, it was customary for graves to be located within settlements²; however, some have also been found in more rural areas, either in cemeteries or in large artificial mounds³.

The Shaft Grave period at Mycenae (ca. 1575-1475 BCE), which covers roughly one hundred years, breaks away from former types of interment; for instance, all shaft graves are now enclosed within a circular wall⁴. A further distinction is the amount of wealth deposited with the dead. It should also be noted that the contents of the two grave circles, labeled Circle A and Circle B, demonstrate the strong Minoan influence and indicate that contact with Crete persisted throughout the period. Circle A, containing twenty-six adult burials⁵, was first discovered by Schliemann in 1876, while Circle B,

¹ Voutsaki 1999: 103.

² Treuil 1987: 11.

³ Found especially in the Western part of the Peloponnese in Messenia.

⁴ Mylonas 1966: 110.

⁵ Alden 1981: 88.

enclosing over twenty-five graves⁶, was only discovered in 1951. However, Circle B seems to predate Circle A, although some of the interments may have been contemporaneous⁷. It is clear that the individuals buried in the graves belong to a strictly defined group, perhaps royalty; this is evidenced by their large and complex tombs, elaborate funerary rituals, representations of funerary iconography and the abundance of valuable and exotic objects accompanying them in their graves. One of the principal aims of this research is therefore to examine the different tombs of previous periods and place the Mycenaean graves and funerary customs within a greater Bronze Age framework.

⁶ Alden 1981: 105. Mylonas states the only fourteen of these are considered real shaft graves. Mylonas 1957: 131.

⁷ Mylonas 1957: 175.

I. I – MINOAN

The island of Crete has preserved a large number of tholos tombs. These tholoi, dated between the Early and Middle Bronze Age (ca. 2800-1700 BC), seem to have been built either in the EM I or MM I period⁸. The former group is larger and centered exclusively in the Mesara Plain and its surrounding areas, e.g. the tombs at Vorou I and II, Gypsades, Kamilari II and III, Apesokari I, Vali, Myrsini; whereas the later group located outside of the Mesara region includes several notably smaller tholoi, a number of which are at Myrsini, Viannos. At least a dozen tholoi have revealed material covering the entire Early Bronze Age – from EM I to MM I. Furthermore, tholoi like Agia Triada II, Platanos I and II, and Porti II clearly show that burials in the tholoi did not suddenly cease at a specific moment during the MM I period. The tholoi gradually went out of fashion, though some tombs were still being used as late as the seventeenth century BC⁹. These tholoi were constructed using local Cretan stone, limestone and clay¹⁰.

The tholos developed in Crete in the 3rd millennium, when Crete was relatively thinly populated and inhabited by small family groups who buried their dead in communal graves, possibly delineated by kinship. Burials were performed in communal tombs, thus entailing fumigatory fires prior to the inhumations¹¹, which were accompanied by a significant amount of grave goods, possibly the possessions of the deceased.

⁸ The majority of which are dated to the Early Minoan I Period. Petit 1987: 36.

⁹ Petit 1987: 35-37.

¹⁰ Branigan 1970b and Sampson 1987: 19-20.

¹¹ Branigan 1987: 45.

Standard burial practices of these tholoi consisted of the skeletons placed either in an extended¹² or contracted (flexed) position¹³, with bent knees. Although confirmation is lacking, it is suspected that the extended bodies could have been laid on their backs (supine), while those in the contracted or flexed position may have been placed on their sides. The only direct evidence for the original orientation of the bodies is found at Vorou, where the bodies were mainly aligned in an eastern-western direction, with the heads facing the east¹⁴. A general eastern-western orientation of the bodies might thus be postulated, considering that the entrances of a great majority of the circular tombs face east¹⁵.

Based on artifacts from these tombs, it can be surmised that the assemblage for a Minoan male frequently included a jug, a bowl, a cup, a necklace or amulet, a dagger and perhaps a stone vase or an assortment of seal stones¹⁶. Gold jewellery and imports, such as daggers or scarabs, were probably placed in the graves of males in order to demonstrate their wealth or social standing. Minoan women would have been buried with a similar assemblage except that the weapons would have been replaced by toiletries, like tweezers or scrapers. Moreover, figurines would probably been deposited in the female burials, since it is generally believed that they belonged to women¹⁷.

The rituals performed within the tombs at the time of burial appear to have been very few and simplistic. Based on certain architectural features of the tholoi, specifically their low and narrow doorways, it could be presumed that the corpse was dragged into the

¹² As attested in the two tombs at Vorou. Branigan 1987: 43.

¹³ As noted at Gypsades and Agia Triada. Branigan 1987: 43.

¹⁴ Branigan 1987: 43.

¹⁵ Branigan 1987: 43-44.

¹⁶ See Laffineur 1987: Pl. 10.

¹⁷ Branigan 1970b.

tomb by one or two men already inside. The living would have probably lit small fires and burnt aromatic substances to cover the stench in the tomb. Previous burials would have been swept aside to make room for the latest interment¹⁸, and the newly deceased, along with his offerings, would then have been placed on the floor with his head facing east. As the occupants of a tomb increased, new interments would probably have been placed on top of pre-existing inhumations. Furthermore, holes found in large stones¹⁹, as at the tombs at Vorou A and B and at Agia Triada A, suggest that libations were poured in the tomb during the funeral. The antechambers to these tombs must have served as the places where the rituals occurred at the time of the burial; they were a part of the tomb and as such were only entered during the funeral²⁰.

Sometimes hundreds of conical cups, presumed ceremonial, have appeared in the chambers outside the tomb²¹, confirming that the chambers must have been used for ritual practices²². The presence of a 'bench' built alongside the wall of Room 2 at the tomb of Agia Kyriaki²³ also points to additional ritualistic practices, though their exact function is unknown. The ceremonial nature of the conical cups is undisputed, since they are present in almost all tholoi, whereas the benches appear rarely, and thus do not seem to be necessary for ritual activity. Additionally, altars, hearths and fireplaces have been found in some tholoi, suggesting their involvement in funerary rituals, such as feasts and sacrifices²⁴.

¹⁸ Branigan 1987: 47-48.

¹⁹ Pierpont 1987: 87.

²⁰ Petit 1987: 40-41.

²¹ Found at Apesokari II, Agia Triada A and Vorou A. Walberg 1987: 55.

²² Walberg 1987: 56.

²³ Blackman and Branigan 1982: 52.

²⁴ Found in the centre of tholos B at Koumasa. See Branigan 1970a: 171 and Petit 1987: 41, as well as Walberg 1987: 56.

Overall, the burial of the dead in the Mesara tombs does not seem to have been a particularly elaborate affair. The small size of the tombs suggests that the funeral must have been attended by very few mourners and a larger, though still small group of the deceased's relatives. The principal mourners would enter the tomb with the body; once inside, the body, surrounded by its possessions, would be laid to rest by the light of lamps and torches. The mourners would then pour and drink a 'toast', and perhaps eat a token meal, leaving behind the urns, cups and bowls. Libations must have been poured from a ritual vessel either before or after the deposition of the body. These short, simple rituals must have originally been practised within the tomb itself, but as the number of the tomb's occupants increased, the rites would have been relocated either to the antechamber or outside the tomb.

The burial of the dead with their personal belongings, libations, funerary feasts and the disregard for the decomposed skeletons considered as a whole implies that Early Minoans believed in a spiritual afterlife which was not necessarily dependent on the survival of the physical body.

I. II – MYCENAEAN

At Mycenae, five general types of tombs were found: pit graves; cist tombs; shaft graves; chamber tombs; and tholoi. The simplest of these by far is the pit grave, for it is shallow and rarely exceeds half a meter in depth²⁵. They were dug into the earth or soft rock in either oval or rectangular shape and seem to have had no man-made roof. Additionally, they contained very few funerary offerings, and the deceased was usually buried alone in a contracted position. This type of tomb was commonly used during the MH period on the Greek mainland²⁶. Similarly, cist tombs were also fairly small and had a box-like shape. Their walls consisted of four stone slabs, with a fifth serving as a roof²⁷. The floor was occasionally covered with pebbles. Cist tombs, as a rule, also contained only one body, placed in the usual contracted position, and only a few modest funerary offerings. These tombs also date to the MH period. The remaining three types of Mycenaean tombs, the shaft graves, chamber tombs and tholoi, span a later period, specifically from the end of the MH period to the LH period²⁸.

²⁵ Wace 1949: 13.

²⁶ Wace 1949: 13.

²⁷ Wace 1949: 13.

²⁸ Wace 1949: 13.

I. IIa – THE SHAFT GRAVES

Developing from the simpler pit graves and cist tombs of MH period²⁹, the shaft graves appear to be the next stage of funerary architecture. In addition to their architecture, significant changes also seem to have occurred in the deposition of wealth with the deceased, the manner of burial – multiple versus single interments – and funerary practices in general. These graves belong to a later period, the Late Helladic³⁰.

CIRCLE A (ca. 1600-1500BC)

Circle A, located south of the Lion Gate, was first excavated in 1876 by Schliemann, who unearthed the first five shaft graves³¹ (Fig. 1). Shortly thereafter, Stamatakes excavated the sixth. Papademetriou found an additional three graves, and the final four were uncovered by Stamatakes³². Furthermore, the shaft graves of Circle A at Mycenae appear to have been built on a pre-existing cemetery dating to MH times³³.

The shaft graves of Circle A vary in their architectural design: they are either rectangular or oblong trenches, shafts cut vertically into the earth, or shafts cut into rock³⁴. In most cases, the floor of each grave was covered with pebbles, on which the deceased was placed, usually in a contracted or extended position. Additionally, funerary offerings were deposited around the bodies, which were interred rather than cremated.

²⁹ Wace 1949: 13.

³⁰ Wace 1949: 13.

³¹ Schliemann 1880: 150-349.

³² "Four bodies of a later period were buried in as many different parts of the eastern side of the enclosure. Two of the graves were of the usual design [shaft graves], but the others were round pits [cists or pit graves]. In these graves nothing was found but the bones." Tsountas and Manatt 1897: 97 and Papademetriou 1957: 105-109, as well as Mylonas 1966: 91.

³³ Wace 1949: 8.

³⁴ Mylonas 1957: 105.

There is one instance, in Grave V, where the body appears to have been embalmed³⁵. All graves contain between two to five occupants, with the exception of Grave II, in which one interment was found³⁶. Furthermore, there is no consistency in the orientation of the bodies. Few vases were reported; however, a significant number of bronze swords and daggers was recovered, mostly in the graves of men. Along with these weapons were also spearheads, arrow points, knives and gold masks. The graves of women produced diadems and headbands. Discs, jewellery and rosettes were found accompanying these gold offerings. In almost all cases, we find cups and rhyta deposited in the graves of both men and women. The bodies of the two children interred in Grave III were wrapped in gold foil with thin gold masks covering their faces³⁷.

Having briefly summarized the general characteristics of the shaft grave burials, we will now examine each grave in greater detail.

Shaft Grave I³⁸

This grave contained three bodies, presumably women, placed eastward with their feet pointing west. The pottery from the grave suggests that the earliest interment dates to the MH III period, whereas the other two appear to belong to the LH I period.

Shaft Grave II³⁹

This grave contained one male interment, which has been dated to the LH I period on the basis of accompanying offerings.

Shaft Grave III⁴⁰

This grave contained three female burials, and two children⁴¹. Although no pottery can be specifically attributed to this grave, some metal objects in it propose a date of the LH I period.

³⁵ Mylonas 1957: 106.

³⁶ Alden 1981: 84.

³⁷ Schliemann 1880: 198-200.

³⁸ Karo 1930: 66-71 and Alden 1981: 84.

³⁹ Karo 1930: 70-1. Alden 1981: 84.

⁴⁰ Karo 1930: 43-66. Alden 1981: 84-85.

⁴¹ Schliemann 1880: 199 mentions only one child. Wace 1949: 60 mentions two children.

Shaft Grave IV⁴²

The burials in this grave, namely three men and two women, appeared to have been rather squeezed together. The two male burials were placed in a north-south orientation. According to Dickinson, these are believed to have been the earliest interments in this grave because the style of their masks appears to belong to an earlier period than that of the last male burial, which was placed in an east-west orientation.⁴³ The two females are also oriented east-west as well, and probably belong to the LH I period. "The five bodies of this Fourth Tomb were literally smothered in jewels, all of which – as in the other tombs – show unequivocal marks of the funeral fires."⁴⁴

Shaft Grave V⁴⁵

This grave contained three occupants; the one in the centre appears to have been despoiled of almost all its belongings, a fact that indicates an interval between the burials. The southern burial appears to have been the last interment in the tomb, and may be attributed to the LH I period⁴⁶. "The three bodies of this tomb lay with their heads to the east and their feet to the west; all three were of large proportions, and appeared to have been forcibly squeezed into the small space of only 5 ft 6 in. which was left for them between the inner walls. The bones of the legs, which are almost uninjured, are unusually large."⁴⁷

Shaft Grave VI⁴⁸

This grave contained two burials: one was laid out in a fully extended position; and the bones of the other were pushed aside. One burial seems to be MH III period, while the other is dated to the LH I period.

Shaft Grave VII⁴⁹

This grave was found in 1955 by Papademetriou⁵⁰ and contained one large male body in a contracted position. The excavator dates it to the MH period.

⁴² Karo 1930: 71-121 and Alden 1981: 85.

⁴³ Dickinson 1977: 48.

⁴⁴ Schliemann 1880: 214.

⁴⁵ Karo 1930: 121-160 and Alden 1981: 85.

⁴⁶ Dickinson 1977: 49.

⁴⁷ Schliemann 1880: 295.

⁴⁸ Karo 1930: 106-6.

⁴⁹ Alden 1981: 86.

⁵⁰ For further details see Papademetriou 1957: 105-109.

Shaft Grave VIII⁵¹

This grave was found very near to Grave VII. Its shaft is very small, and it appears to have been robbed during the Mycenaean period. It has been suggested that this tomb dates to the MH period.

Shaft Grave IX⁵²

The shaft is very small and irregular in shape; Papademetriou was uncertain whether it should even be interpreted as a shaft grave⁵³. Parts of its northern wall were ruined by later constructions of Grave VI; therefore, we can conclude that it belongs to the MH III period⁵⁴.

Four Other Graves within the Grave Circle

These four small graves were discovered by Stamatakes in the eastern part of the circle; however, not all are shaft graves per se⁵⁵. They may belong to the MH period, since MH vases were found nearby⁵⁶. However, there is virtually no information about these tombs.

It seems likely that other burials were cleared out of the graves to make room for later occupants⁵⁷. This may be inferred from the fact that the Circle contained an ashy layer, which partly consisted of human bones⁵⁸. These bones suggest human sacrifice was practiced, although it is now apparent that they belonged to other disturbed graves⁵⁹. Furthermore, a significant quantity of animal bones was also found indiscriminately piled over the shafts; these are certainly the remnants of feasts held after the interments⁶⁰.

⁵¹ Alden 1981: 86.

⁵² Alden 1981: 87.

⁵³ See footnote 43.

⁵⁴ Date given by Alden 1981: 87.

⁵⁵ See footnote 26. Alden 1981: 88. She calls these cist graves, though they are found in Circle A. For more information see Tsountas and Manatt 1897: 116.

⁵⁶ Tsountas and Manatt 1897: 97. He states that these four graves fall into two distinct groups.

⁵⁷ Alden 1981: 88. For the same occurrence in Circle B, see Mylonas 1966: 107, see below.

“Between Graves Alpha and Delta, that is, in the area immediately beyond the northwest corner of Rho, was found in 1952 a pile of bones without any furnishings laid in the earth; we called them a bundle burial ... we could maintain with reason that the bones found are remnants of the person who was buried in the built grave, whose skeletal remains were removed when the chamber was emptied of its contents.”

⁵⁸ Schliemann 1880: 291.

⁵⁹ Mylonas 1966: 94.

⁶⁰ Mylonas 1966: 94.

CONCLUSIONS

Circle A consists of twenty-six known adult interments⁶¹. The later burials of the grave circle seem to have taken place in the LH I period. All burials within one grave were oriented in a similar direction, independent of other graves⁶². It should also be noted that the interments of Graves III and V were placed approximately three feet from each other⁶³, therefore suggesting that these burials occurred concurrently, since other interments show such a clear disregard for the previous occupants.

The remodelling of Grave Circle A in the LH IIIB period⁶⁴ and the construction of the new fortified citadel walls, which surround the circle, indicate that the occupants of the circle were still revered many years after the burial site had fallen into disuse. Prior to the reconstruction, such respect for the long deceased had been largely unparalleled at Mycenae⁶⁵, where the usual practice had been to build over older graves, or rob them without restraint.

⁶¹ Alden 1981: 88.

⁶² Schliemann 1880: 155. Although Mylonas (1966: 91) states that no clear orientation for the bodies was observed.

⁶³ Schliemann 1880: 164 and 294.

⁶⁴ Mylonas 1966: 96.

⁶⁵ Alden 1981: 89.

CIRCLE B (ca. 17th – 16th century BC)

Circle B, located outside the city walls, has contributed greatly to our understanding of Circle A, for it has preserved a greater number of burials. The general consensus seems to be that Circle B predates Circle A, though the use of both may be concurrent⁶⁶. It is possible that the earliest interments of Grave Circle B occurred in the latter half of the MH period, specifically at the end of the 17th century BC, whereas the later ones can be dated to the 16th century BC⁶⁷. Evidence shows that a number of the graves in Circle B are contemporary with those of Circle A, which are usually dated between 1600-1510 BC⁶⁸.

Grave A⁶⁹

Grave A was excavated by J. Charitonides. A sculptured stele was found over this grave, which contained two burials, one in the extended position and the other with bones piled in a heap. The pottery discovered in this grave dates it to the MH III period.

Grave A1⁷⁰

One of the sides of Grave A cut into the eastern side of this grave, which contained one burial lacking the skull and no offerings whatsoever. The skeleton is presumed to be that of a woman. This grave must date before Grave A, but might also belong to the MH III period.

Grave A2⁷¹

There is evidence for only one burial, though it is likely there were more; no grave goods were found. This grave seems to date after A and A1, because it was built between them.

⁶⁶ As suggested by Alden 1981: 90.

⁶⁷ Alden 1981: 90-91.

⁶⁸ Mylonas 1966: 109.

⁶⁹ Mylonas 1964: 20-34 and Alden 1981: 96.

⁷⁰ Mylonas 1964: 34-35 and Alden 1981: 96.

⁷¹ Mylonas 1964: 35 and Alden 1981: 97.

Grave B⁷²

This shaft grave contained only one interment, and the gifts placed with the dead are assigned to the MH III period.

Grave Γ⁷³

This is one of the largest graves of the Circle. Fragments of a sculptured and an unsculptured stele were found over this grave, which contained four burials: three complete skeletons; and the bones of a fourth body, which had been swept aside. One of these interments was female. The earlier two burials probably date to the MH III period, whereas the later two belong to the LH I period.

Grave Δ⁷⁴

Three interments were discovered in this grave. Only bone fragments of the earliest have survived; these were located at the north-eastern side of the grave. The second burial appears to have been female, though the only remnants are cartilage and fragments of the skull. The last interment included grave gifts belonging to the LH I period

Grave E⁷⁵

One complete skeleton in a strongly contracted position was recovered from this grave. It was covered with gold ornaments. A discovery of twenty teeth in the grave suggests an additional interment. The pottery excavated from this grave places it in the MH III period.

Grave Z⁷⁶

Only one burial was uncovered in this grave; it appears to belong to a man. It was also accompanied by a number of grave offerings dating to the MH III Period.

Grave H⁷⁷

This early shaft grave contained only one burial that was dated to the MH III period.

⁷² Mylonas 1964: 36-42.

⁷³ Mylonas 1964: 43-79.

⁷⁴ Mylonas 1964: 83-89.

⁷⁵ Mylonas 1964: 90-101.

⁷⁶ Mylonas 1964: 102-105.

⁷⁷ Mylonas 1964: 106-109.

Grave Θ⁷⁸

This grave also only contained one burial, this time a woman, which also probably dates to the MH III period.

Grave I⁷⁹

This is one of the oldest graves of the Circle and contains two interments: the skeleton of an adult male; and the bones of a previously buried child. All finds from this grave date to the MH III period.

Grave K⁸⁰

This grave contained only one burial, namely the badly decomposed bones of a man. Adjacent to the grave was discovered a horseshoe-shaped construction, whose use has yet to be determined; it may have served as a cenotaph. Pottery from this grave dates it to the MH III period.

Grave Λ⁸¹

This grave, though robbed, contained three burials: two early interments; and one later burial of an adult male. The pottery from this grave dates to the MH III period.

Grave Λ2⁸²

This grave contained two burials: an adult male; and a child. The pottery found in this tomb also belongs to the MH III period.

Grave M⁸³

This shaft contained two burials, a young girl and a small child, presumably belonging to the LH I period, although they may date to the MH III period as well.

Grave N⁸⁴

A stele, only fragments of which were found, had been erected over the mound of this grave. On its floor was found evidence of two burials as well as the jawbone of a child, possibly representing the remnants of an earlier third burial within the fill. This once again probably dates to the MH III period.

⁷⁸ Mylonas 1964: 109.

⁷⁹ Mylonas 1964: 110-121.

⁸⁰ Mylonas 1964: 122-127.

⁸¹ Mylonas 1964: 128-143.

⁸² Mylonas 1964: 145-147.

⁸³ Mylonas 1964: 148-157.

⁸⁴ Mylonas 1964: 158-176.

Grave Ξ⁸⁵

Two burials were found in this grave; these consisted of an adult who had been swept aside to make room for the later burial of a little girl, aged approximately five years of age. The pottery dates between the MH II and III periods.

Grave Ξ1⁸⁶

The skeleton of a two- or three-year-old child was found in this grave; it had been placed in a contracted position. The accompanying artifacts are difficult to date, but must range to the MH II to the MH III periods.

Grave O⁸⁷

Over its mound was erected an undecorated stele, of which only fragments survive. Of the three burials found in this grave, two earlier interments – an adult and an infant – had been moved aside to make room for the last burial, the richly stocked interment of a woman. The majority of the pottery is dated to MH III period, though one vase seems to belong to LH I period.

Grave Π⁸⁸

A child between five and eight years of age was discovered in this grave, along with four MH III vessels.

Grave P⁸⁹

Grave P consists of a corridor and a thalamos chamber. Both its form and construction seem to parallel the graves at Ras Shamra and Minet-el-Beida in the Near East (ca. 14th to 13th century BC)⁹⁰. There are some differences between Grave P and that at Ras Shamra, however: the latter is equipped with steps in the dromos as well as niches and windows in the chamber, which the former lacks; the roof construction is also different. Similarities are the lack of a stone wall blocking the entrance, at both sites. This similarity points to possible contact between Greece and Syria during LH times. Grave P was found robbed, and thus no information on the burials is available. Grave P had also been reconstructed on a pre-existing MH grave; unfortunately, the interments of the earlier grave were sealed and thus remain inaccessible.

⁸⁵ Mylonas 1964: 177-185.

⁸⁶ Mylonas 1964: 185-186.

⁸⁷ Mylonas 1964: 187-207.

⁸⁸ Mylonas 1964: 208-210.

⁸⁹ Mylonas 1964: 211-225. The architecture of Grave Rho is thought to be of Canaanite Origin, as stated by Mylonas 1964: 220-222.

⁹⁰ Schaeffer 1939: 30-92.

Grave Σ⁹¹

When Grave Σ was first unearthed, it was thought to contain only one burial; however, the subsequent discovery of a thighbone in the fill of the grave pointed to a second earlier interment. The pottery found in this grave is of the MH III period.

Grave T⁹²

This grave was unfortunately destroyed when Grave Λ was built; therefore, there it contains no human remains. It can be presumed that this grave belongs to the MH III period, on the basis of nearby burials.

Grave Y⁹³

In this grave was found one burial, the extended skeleton of a woman accompanied by vessels dated once again to MH III period. According to Mylonas, this grave contains the most completely preserved burial of a woman in Circle B. She was placed in a fully extended position⁹⁴.

Grave Φ⁹⁵

The fill of this grave contained various human bones at different levels. It is therefore impossible to state the number of skeletons buried within it. It had been robbed, and only two vases remain; these date this grave to the MH III period.

The Prehistoric Cemetery near the Two Grave Circles

Outside Circles A and B was discovered part of a Prehistoric Cemetery, which contained seventy-eight known graves, dating between the MH III and the LH II period⁹⁶. Nearly every type of burial (cist tombs, pit grave, shaft grave, and pithos burial) was discovered here⁹⁷. Additionally, some of the graves seem to include more than one occupant, though a majority of the graves housed children.

⁹¹ Mylonas 1964: 226.

⁹² Mylonas 1964: 227.

⁹³ Mylonas 1964: 228-236.

⁹⁴ Mylonas 1966: 104.

⁹⁵ Mylonas 1964: 237.

⁹⁶ There are also other graves, e.g. sub-Mycenaean, but these are not considered here. Wace 1949: 204 and 228.

⁹⁷ Alden 1981: 119.

CONCLUSIONS

Located by the side of the modern road leading toward the Citadel, the graves contained in Circle B span the MH II to the LH I periods. Unlike Circle A, fewer of the graves in Circle B have been destroyed, and they therefore provide a more accurate count in terms of the number of interments⁹⁸. These findings suggest that the burial practices must have encompassed the digging of a vertical shaft through the earth and rock, and the placement of the deceased within, on pebbles, either in an extended or contracted position⁹⁹. As the decomposition of the flesh progressed, gravity would take its toll, causing the leg bones to shift to their respective sides and producing a bow shape. Placed around the body with care were the final gift offerings, *kterismata*. The roof was then constructed and covered with earth until it reached ground level. A funerary feast was then held and libations were poured in honour of the deceased¹⁰⁰. A fragment of coal found with the bones of Grave O and stone slabs from the fill of Graves I, K, and N may have been used as *trapezai* for the funerary feast¹⁰¹. It is inferred that the goblets used for libations were then smashed, and the bones of the animals of the funerary feast were thrown into the tomb itself¹⁰². A marker or stele could then be placed on the grave. We assume that the Mycenaeans believed in a general concept of the soul, perhaps similar to the idea of the *psyche* found in Homer, with the spirit lingering in the grave as long as the flesh existed¹⁰³. Whilst in the grave, the deceased would be revered and honoured, as attested by the offerings and gifts provided. When decomposition of the flesh had

⁹⁸ Alden 1981: 105.

⁹⁹ Mylonas 1966: 98. For further details on the construction of the shaft graves, see Mylonas 1966: 98-99.

¹⁰⁰ Mylonas 1966: 99.

¹⁰¹ Mylonas 1964: 187.

¹⁰² Mylonas 1966: 94.

¹⁰³ Mylonas 1966: 113.

occurred and the body had turned into a pile of bones, then the spirit was believed to be released from its body or its corporeal ties to this world, never again to return to the world of the living. With the spirit gone, the bones could then be swept aside with impunity or thrown out of the grave altogether.

There has been a great deal of controversy surrounding the existence of a cult of the dead practised in the grave circles at Mycenae¹⁰⁴, focusing around the funerary altar discovered over Grave IV in Circle A¹⁰⁵. The funerary architecture and the burial customs of Circles A and B appear to be similar, as indeed are the funerary offerings. Both Grave Circles display evidence of extended burial practices, which seem to have begun at the close of the MH period. One unusual feature particular to the shaft graves is the use of gold masks covering the faces of a number of the deceased; five such masks were uncovered in Circle A and only one in Circle B¹⁰⁶. Additionally, the size of the shaft graves necessitated a significant amount of manpower, and the preparations for these burials were indicative of the deceased's high status. In fact, it has been ascertained that ten men needed ten days to dig a shaft the size of those in Grave V of Circle A¹⁰⁷. Overall, the large size of the shaft graves, the wealth deposited within, and the one instance of an embalmed 'mummified' body¹⁰⁸ suggest that this was a time of funerary experimentation for the Mycenaeans.

Both Circles A and B contain rich as well as poor graves, and both men and women, as well as children, are also present. Circle A was convenient as cemetery for the

¹⁰⁴ Mylonas 1966: 162-186.

¹⁰⁵ This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter III.

¹⁰⁶ Mylonas 1966: 92.

¹⁰⁷ Graziadio 1991: 405.

¹⁰⁸ Schliemann 1880: 297-298.

community living in the vicinity because it consisted of a soft-rock terrain¹⁰⁹. On the other hand, Circle B, some distance away, suggests a deliberate attempt to establish a separate cemetery area. Furthermore, the area between the two Circles, though extensively excavated, has yielded no graves or evidence of burials whatsoever¹¹⁰.

The origins of the shaft graves are problematic. Wace best rationalized their existence by stating, "the shafts graves ... seem to be a development of the simple pit graves and cist tombs of the MH period"¹¹¹, suggesting that they are a traditional and locally-developed mode of interment and not an innovation imported from Crete or elsewhere. Therefore, when larger graves became necessary to house multiple interments, the traditional large slabs forming small graves were inefficient and needed to be adapted; thus were developed walls made of smaller stones. As the shaft or chamber grew larger, new roofing also had to be devised and firmly erected, which was achieved by laying beams along the wall ledges¹¹². The increased wealth placed with the deceased necessitated deeper shafts to hinder robbery. Consequently, nearly all architectural features of the shaft grave may stem from earlier cist tombs. The presence of two grave circles in use concurrently is in itself suggestive of two distinct social groups, but their exact relationship is uncertain.

The Grave Circles at Mycenae therefore do not seem to be derived from the earlier circular ossuaries of the Mesara, since the shaft grave itself does not appear to be a development of the Cretan structures¹¹³. In recent years, Pelon has highlighted

¹⁰⁹ Alden 1981: 110.

¹¹⁰ Alden 1981: 110.

¹¹¹ Wace 1949: 13.

¹¹² Mylonas 1957: 105.

¹¹³ Mylonas 1966: 110.

similarities between the royal tombs of Alaça Hüyük¹¹⁴ and the Mycenaean shaft graves; however, he did not assertively claim a common line of descent¹¹⁵.

¹¹⁴ For further details see Chapter I.III – Hittite and Anatolian Cemeteries.

¹¹⁵ Pelon 1987: 108.

I. IIb – CHAMBER TOMBS

Chamber tombs, thought to be the graves of ordinary individuals, naturally far outnumber tholos tombs, thought to house kings¹¹⁶. Consequently, there exist hundreds of excavated chamber tombs¹¹⁷, too numerous to catalogue in detail here. Therefore, the general practices involved in chamber tomb burials will be examined in this section.

Chamber tombs are characteristically underground, cave-like hollows that were cut horizontally into the slope of a hillside¹¹⁸. They are composed of three distinct parts: a dromos; a stomion or deep doorway; and a burial chamber. The dromos leads to a rectangular doorway with a horizontal lintel and inward-inclining sides, making the opening narrower at the top than the bottom and providing no base for a door. The dromos found in the earliest chamber tombs of the LH I to LH II periods is short and wide, whereas the LH III dromos tends to be long and narrow with its sides increasingly straight¹¹⁹. The chamber itself was either oval, round, or rectangular. Some chamber tombs contained benches within the chamber that were either built or carved from rock¹²⁰. The restricted space within the tomb did not allow for an elaborate ritual, even in the event that the tomb was sufficiently vacant to allow for it. Following the burial, the doorway would have been blocked by a wall and subsequently the dromos covered with soil, paralleling the Homeric reference ‘χεύειν χυτην γαιαν’, the typical custom of covering a burial with earth.

Chamber tombs in general appear to be familial graves, and were probably in consistent use over long periods of time, as is attested by the burial of a mother and child

¹¹⁶ Mylonas 1966: 120.

¹¹⁷ Mylonas 1966: 120.

¹¹⁸ Wace 1949: 14 and Mylonas 1966: 111.

¹¹⁹ Wace 1949: 14.

¹²⁰ Wace 1949: 15.

in a chamber tomb at Eleusis¹²¹. The bodies discovered in the chamber tombs generally appear to have been placed in a more or less extended position without any noticeable importance given to orientation¹²². Gifts or *kterismata* appear to have been carefully placed near the bodies. Among the funerary offerings, a plethora of vases and small terracotta figurines representing female figures were recovered; these are mainly of the φ and ψ type. The deceased must have been buried fully clothed, since buttons are occasionally found with the skeletons. Remains of funerary feasts and libations were discovered in this type of tomb as well. Signs of fumigatory fires are also present in the chambers, presumably for purification purposes¹²³. The religious and ritualistic significance of the finds within the chamber tombs will be explored at length in Chapter III.

Local Peculiarities found in different Chamber Tombs

Although there is strong evidence that inhumation was the general practice for the Mycenaeans, signs of cremation have been discovered spanning from the LH II to the LH IIIC periods, specifically at Traghana, Prosymna and Perati¹²⁴. These cremations span the LH IIIB and C periods; however, their exact origin is as yet undetermined. They are thought to have stemmed from Asia Minor where the practice dates back to the Early Bronze Age¹²⁵. This suggests some contact at the end of the Late Bronze Age between Perati, perhaps the Mainland, and the opposite Asian coast.

¹²¹ Mylonas 1966: 112.

¹²² Mylonas 1966: 112.

¹²³ Mylonas 1966: 113-114.

¹²⁴ For Traghana, see Marinatos 1952: 251-254. For Prosymna, see Blegen 1937: 242. For Perati, see Iakovidis 1953: 31.

¹²⁵ Kontorli-Papadopoulou 1987: 145-160.

Further peculiarities were discovered in other cemeteries, where burial pits were dug into the chamber floor, with burials placed on top¹²⁶. In Kephallonia, however, these types of interments within small pits in the chamber floor appear to be the standard burial practice¹²⁷. The Kephallonian burial pits are an isolated phenomenon, however, and are rationalized as a local tradition since the space in the chamber and the hardness of the rock allowed for customary burials. This oddity seems to be limited to Kephallonia in the LH IIIB and IIIC periods. Another variance discovered in Chamber Tomb A at Kontogenada, Kephallonia, is the presence of a stone sarcophagus measuring 0.80 meters in length¹²⁸.

Another instance of a local peculiarity is a series of eight tombs in the Argolid and one in Boeotia that display two grooves of varying depths in the stomion¹²⁹; Tomb A at Kontogenada also has a single groove down the middle of its dromos. Blegen suggested that these grooves were probably used for royal libations¹³⁰. This theory is further strengthened by the fact that the grooves of Tomb 8 at Dendra were protected by carefully placed stones, which would have preserved the libations¹³¹. Among the many peculiarities that are too numerous to list here, one that bears mentioning is Chamber Tomb 2 found at Dendra. This tomb is noteworthy due to its two menhirs, possibly in honour of two absent burials, a hearth, a sacrificial table, a stone slaughtering block as well as two pits, one empty and one containing animal bones (Fig. 2)¹³². Furthermore, not

¹²⁶ In the Argolid, Asine and Messenia. Kontorli-Papadopoulou 1987: 149.

¹²⁷ In Kontogenada, see Marinatos 1933: 72-73. In a total of 23 tombs are 169 burial pits. Kontorli-Papadopoulou 1987: 150.

¹²⁸ Marinatos 1933: 68-100.

¹²⁹ Either they overlap the stomion, as at Dendra, Prosymna and Thebes or they are restricted to the stomion, as found at Prosymna. Kontorli-Papadopoulou 1987: 150.

¹³⁰ Blegen 1973: 88.

¹³¹ Kontorli-Papadopoulou 1987: 151.

¹³² Persson 1931: 79-80.

a single human bone was discovered inside this tomb. It should be emphasized that this is a unique instance where all these features are found together in one chamber tomb. Many more peculiarities have been reported, such as the bones of dogs found in Tomb 1 at Asine¹³³, the six skeletons found in the fill above the door of Chamber Tomb 15 in the Lower City of Mycenae, and an additional skeleton found above the door of Tomb 7 at Prosymna, all of which were thought to be sacrifices performed at Mycenae¹³⁴. Whether these sacrifices were performed or not is a question that concerns the eschatological beliefs of the Mycenaean and thus will be examined in Chapter III – The Religion of the Mycenaean.

¹³³ Wace 1949: 15.

¹³⁴ Mylonas, G.E., Mycenae and the Mycenaean Age, 116.

I. IIc – THOLOS TOMBS

The third type of grave used at Mycenae towards the end of the LH era is the tholos, occasionally referred to as the beehive tomb. It resembles the chamber tomb in that it has the same number of sections. Hewn into the rock of a hillside, it possesses a dromos, stomion and chamber; however, the difference is that its chamber is a tholos, conical, vaulted and resembling a beehive¹³⁵. Another distinction is its construction, specifically the artificial roofing of conglomerate blocks covering the chamber¹³⁶. The earliest tholoi at Mycenae are believed to have appeared at the beginning of the LH I period¹³⁷, early in the sixteenth century.

The tholoi appear to have been constructed for the use of one royal individual each, and not as a family tomb over a long time. Signs of disturbance were found at all tholoi at Mycenae; the only instance of a Mycenaean tholos escaping plunder seems to be the tholos tomb at Dendra¹³⁸. Therefore, in addition to the nine tholoi at Mycenaean, evidence found at Dendra will fill out our understanding of the burial practices involving tholoi in the LH era.

The construction of the Dendra tholos appears to have been typical; however, the floor was coated in plaster and features four pits¹³⁹. Within these pits, only three burials were unearthed. In the largest, which is located on the west side, two interments were recovered: one was a male – labelled ‘the king’ – who had been positioned on the northern side of the pit and the other – ‘the queen’ – lay to the south. In the eastern pit

¹³⁵ Wace 1949: 16.

¹³⁶ Mylonas 1966: 119.

¹³⁷ Mylonas 1966: 120.

¹³⁸ Persson 1931. Although partially intact tholoi have also been found at Vapheio, Pylos and Myrsinochorion-Routsi, for further details see Mylonas 1966: 120.

¹³⁹ Persson 1931: 19-25.

was found another body, identified as 'the young princess', who had been placed upon a bed of clay. The bodies had been arranged in extended positions with lavish possessions surrounding them: these included a green-paste-decorated helmet¹⁴⁰ and a large gold cup filled with rings and gems for the king¹⁴¹. The broken shell of an ostrich egg and a necklace made up of sixty-one small beads were found between the king and queen; the princess was gifted with a necklace of thirty-six gold rosettes¹⁴². No terracotta vases, the most usual of funerary offerings, were found in this tomb. There is no indication whether these burials occurred simultaneously or at different times, though it has been suggested that the king and queen were buried at the same time¹⁴³. The third and fourth pits are both thought to be sacrificial; however, the third pit was clearly filled with the burnt remains of funerary offerings, suggesting that these gifts were thrown into the fire as part of a ritual¹⁴⁴. In contrast, the fourth pit contained unburnt bones, both human and animal, including the well-preserved skull of a dog; these were thought to be sacrifices made for the king. It seems more likely, however, that these bones were simply earlier burials that had been swept aside¹⁴⁵. The third pit was found in the stomion itself, while the fourth lay in the northern section of the tholos tomb. Additionally, the floor of the tholos contained a scattering of bones throughout, though it is uncertain to whom these belonged. The interments of the Dendra tomb suggest that the burial customs practiced in the tholoi were very similar to those performed in chamber tombs, namely that less important burials were placed upon the floor of the chamber and the more valued ones were placed

¹⁴⁰ Persson 1931: 36 and 44.

¹⁴¹ Persson 1931: 31.

¹⁴² Persson 1931: 40.

¹⁴³ Persson 1931: 68 and 70.

¹⁴⁴ Mylonas 1966: 128.

¹⁴⁵ Though Mylonas maintains that this is not a sacrificial pit, but a pit where the remnants of previous burials were swept.

within cists and any previous occupants of the tomb were swept aside to make room for new interments.

Nine tholoi were found at Mycenae, of which the 'Treasury of Atreus' and the 'Tomb of Clytemnestra' represent the epitome of construction and architecture¹⁴⁶. The 'Treasury of Atreus', dating to approximately 1250 BC¹⁴⁷ and thus the LH IIIB period, differs from the other tholoi at Mycenae in several significant respects, one of which is that it includes a side chamber¹⁴⁸ (Fig. 3a-b). Furthermore, its construction suggests that it was among the last tholoi built, for its doorway is of monumental proportions and its chamber is lined with thirty-three perfectly cut conglomerate blocks¹⁴⁹. The 'Tomb of Clytemnestra' is dated a few decades later, approximately 1225 BC, and unlike the 'Treasury of Atreus', this tomb was buried and well hidden. Though it had been significantly destroyed, its dromos had remained intact; within the dromos was discovered a pit grave, which produced the body of a woman accompanied by two bronze mirrors and many gold ornaments¹⁵⁰. Lacking the grandeur of the first two, the remaining seven tholoi at Mycenae consist of the 'Tomb of the Genii' (1300-1200 BC)¹⁵¹, the 'Panagia Tomb'¹⁵², the 'Kato Phournos'¹⁵³, the 'Lion Tomb'¹⁵⁴ (all three dated around

¹⁴⁶ Mylonas 1966: 120 and 122.

¹⁴⁷ Mylonas 1966: 122.

¹⁴⁸ Although a side chamber has also been found in the tomb at Orchomenos.

¹⁴⁹ Mylonas 1966: 120-1.

¹⁵⁰ Wace 1949: 36.

¹⁵¹ Wace 1949: 18.

¹⁵² Wace 1949: 18.

¹⁵³ Wace 1949: 18.

¹⁵⁴ Wace 1949: 18.

1300 BC); and the 'Cyclopean',¹⁵⁵ the 'Epano Phournos',¹⁵⁶ and the 'Tomb of Aegisthus',¹⁵⁷ (these last dating around 1510-1460 BC).

The earlier tholos tombs were constructed of very small, undressed stones, chosen for their flatness. The lower sections of a circular wall were built to a height of approximately one quarter of the intended height of the tomb; a vault was then constructed using the corbelling system and giving "the impression that the vault came to a point. Behind the rings of stone, loose earth and rubble were piled to weigh them down, and then the area between the walls of the shaft and the loose earth and stones was filled with thick layers of water-resisting clay."¹⁵⁸ As time progressed, developments of this technique led to the use of increasingly larger stones, which were carefully shaped on the bottom to produce the curve of the vault; this construction is found perfected in the Treasury of Atreus¹⁵⁹.

Though the methods of construction are clear, there has been some controversy about the origin of the tholos tombs. Evans suggested that they were derived from the round ossuaries of the Mesara¹⁶⁰, but Marinatos has effectively shattered the possibility of any Minoan descent¹⁶¹. Additionally, Cavanagh has stated that "the idea of a grave within the (tholos) tomb may have been taken over from the earlier tumuli"¹⁶². Mylonas further supports this position by stating that he "believe[s] that it was developed locally with the Grave Circle as a prototype"¹⁶³. According to Wace, "on the Greek Mainland

¹⁵⁵ Wace 1949: 16.

¹⁵⁶ Wace 1949: 16.

¹⁵⁷ Wace 1949: 16.

¹⁵⁸ Mylonas 1966: 118.

¹⁵⁹ Mylonas 1966: 122.

¹⁶⁰ Evans 1921-1935 (Vol. II): 39-43.

¹⁶¹ Marinatos, S. stated by Mylonas 1957: 99.

¹⁶² Cavanagh and Laxton 1981: 122-4.

¹⁶³ Mylonas 1957: 100.

and in the islands immediately adjacent to it (Euboea and the Ionian Islands) at least forty tholos tombs are so far known. These figures are enough to prove that the tholos tomb is a product of Mainland or Mycenaean rather than of Cretan or Minoan architecture”¹⁶⁴. Whatever its origin, this type of burial monument is typical of the LH mainland civilization.

Overall, approximately 136¹⁶⁵ examples of tholoi have been found in the Argolid and elsewhere in the Mycenaean world, with examples in Triphylia, Achaia, Lakonia, Boeotia and Thessaly. There are fewer tholoi compared to the hundreds of excavated chamber tombs, with the result that we have less knowledge about them. Although we find more lavish gifts with the tholoi as well as larger and more elaborate constructions, the underlying rituals and beliefs apparently remained analogous to those involved in the chamber tombs.

Peculiarities involving the Mycenaean Tholos Tombs

Having examined some of their general characteristics and the discoveries made therein, we will now consider the irregularities of Mycenaean tholos burial practices. Although there is some certainty that cremations and sacrifices were not commonly performed, there is evidence to indicate that it was sporadically practised¹⁶⁶. One such example was the discovery by Papadimitriou of two horses facing each other and buried in the dromos of a tholos in Marathon (Fig. 4)¹⁶⁷. Additionally, another horse skeleton was unearthed by Marinatos, this time in a tumulus - specifically in Grave 3 of Tumulus I

¹⁶⁴ Wace 1949: 119.

¹⁶⁵ Kontorli-Papadopoulou 1995: 111.

¹⁶⁶ Kontorli-Papadopoulou 1995: 118.

¹⁶⁷ Mylonas 1966: 116.

at Marathon¹⁶⁸. Curiously, in uncovering this burial, it was revealed that certain body parts were missing, specifically the hind legs. “Παραδόξως ἔλλείπουν οἱ πόδες τοῦ ζώου ... καὶ προφανῶς ἀνῆκεν εἰς τὸ εἶδος Przewalski.¹⁶⁹” Apparently, this horse had been partially sacrificed and partially buried¹⁷⁰. Marinatos found the skeletons of four more horses in Triphylia; others were found at Argos in 1956, in a tholos tomb at Archanes¹⁷¹, and another, this time decapitated, in the Mycenaean cemetery at Aidonia¹⁷². These finds suggests a common Indo-European horse-sacrificing tradition.

In or around more than ten tholoi¹⁷³ were found other animal bones – oxen, dogs, sheep and goats – a favourite pet or one chosen for an undetermined reason – suggests that these animals were sacrificed at the funeral in honour of the dead. Additionally, dog skeletons were also excavated in the tombs at Asine and Dendra, and a set of dog’s teeth was among the finds at the Vapheio tomb¹⁷⁴. Dog sacrifices were found to have occurred in the Hittite civilization during the Late Bronze Age as well¹⁷⁵; however, their concurrent dating with Mycenae seems to dispel the notion that this practice originated in Anatolia. In most cases, the burial of dogs was performed with inhumations, but there are a few exceptions where they accompanied cremations¹⁷⁶.

¹⁶⁸ Marinatos 1970: 9-18.

¹⁶⁹ Marinatos 1970: 13.

¹⁷⁰ Marinatos 1974: 111-2.

¹⁷¹ Demakopoulou 1996: 25.

¹⁷² Mylonas 1966: 116 and Demakopoulou 1996: 24-25.

¹⁷³ Kokla, Kazarma, Marathon, Menidi, Vapheio, Peristeria T. 3, Voidokoilia, Koukounara-Polla, Dendra, Tranaga, Mouriatada, Dara, Kato Englianos T. III, Oxyolithos, Katakalous. Kontorli-Papadopoulou 1995: 120.

¹⁷⁴ Mylonas 1966: 116.

¹⁷⁵ Tomb No. 29 at Sardis. Day 1984: 26.

¹⁷⁶ Perati, tomb No. 15. Day 1984: 26.

It is fairly certain that inhumations were the general practice; however, there is evidence that cremations were also occasionally performed. According to Marinatos¹⁷⁷, the earliest and best example of this practice is clearly observed in the case of the ‘young princesses’ discovered in the Pit 3 of Tomb I at Traghana. Signs of cremations have also been found at Oxyolithos¹⁷⁸ and Argos¹⁷⁹. Tomb 301 at Argos revealed “une couche de cendre, mêlée d’assez gros charbons et d’ossements calcinés ... de petits fragments d’os brûlés, parmi lesquels on reconnaissait ... les restes d’un crane humain”¹⁸⁰. The discovery of a charred layer covering the floor of the tomb clearly indicates that cremations took place within this tomb itself. When taking into account the numerous tholoi thus far explored, it is clear that though cremations were known to have occasionally occurred, inhumations seem to have been a more standard and widespread tradition.

¹⁷⁷ Marinatos, stated by Kontorli-Papadopoulou 1995: 118.

¹⁷⁸ Kontorli-Papadopoulou 1995: 118.

¹⁷⁹ Daux 1968: 1038-1039.

¹⁸⁰ Daux 1968: 1038.

CONCLUSION FOR ALL TYPES OF TOMBS

It is clear that cist graves, pit tombs, shaft graves, chamber tombs and tholoi underwent numerous modifications throughout the Bronze Age. Graves evolved from mere pits in the ground to grand structures with an abundance of grave goods. Chronologically, the earliest known cemeteries belong to the EH II period, when multiple burials in hollow pits or stone-constructed chambers were common¹⁸¹. However, the EH III period has yielded very few burials, but very little about them is known.¹⁸² The MH period, on the other hand, specifically between 1900 and 1600 BC, has revealed a great uniformity in burial customs, namely cist graves, contracted skeletons and poor, if any, grave goods found among the deceased¹⁸³. This seems to be the case for most of the MH period. In the years between 1700 and 1650 BC, however, striking changes seem to have occurred: the tombs had significantly grown in size, often reaching the dimensions of a small room. The main reason for this adaptation into a new type of tomb seems to be the necessity of multiple burials, which were introduced in the MH III and LH I periods¹⁸⁴. Additionally, the positioning of the bodies within the graves was no longer uniform; bodies are now found in crouched, contracted, supine 'semi-contracted' and extended positions¹⁸⁵. Moreover, some emphasis now seemed to be placed on orientation, but no universal orientation was detected: the bodies found in chamber tombs were generally oriented towards the east, whereas they tended to be positioned to face the north in

¹⁸¹ Syriopoulos 1964: 231-40.

¹⁸² Howell 1973: 79.

¹⁸³ Wace 1949: 13.

¹⁸⁴ Hiller 1989: 138.

¹⁸⁵ Contracted and supine positions are sometimes confused, or the bones are described in a manner that makes it impossible to determine the original position. In the supine position the spine is found to be straight – or almost straight – and the arms are placed on both sides of the body, whereas in the contracted position the spine is curved and both arms are usually in front of the body. Lewartowski 1995: 105.

simpler graves¹⁸⁶. A final development appears to be the custom of placing extraordinarily rich goods within the grave, such as weapons, jewellery and ornaments, as well as vessels¹⁸⁷.

In general, the significant differences lie not so much in the burial customs, but rather in the types of tombs themselves¹⁸⁸. Frequently, multiple burials, whether small or large, seem to have been practiced over long periods of time. The new types of tombs uncovered at Mycenae, the shaft graves and chamber tombs, both seem adapted to serve the necessity of multiple and successive inhumations. As such, they represent a noticeable change in practice from the customs of the MH period, where the individual tombs do not seem to have been reopened for new interments in almost every case. Along with these innovations, changes in the funerary practices have also been observed, namely, the increasing number of deceased placed in extended positions, the growing number of larnakes¹⁸⁹. In Peristeria, Messenia, for instance, Tholos Tomb 1 “possède en effet, creusés dans son sol à l’entrée de la chambre, deux sillons parallèles distants d’1m que Marinatos a interprétés comme les ornières artificiellement créés pour guider les roues du char funéraire jusqu’à l’intérieure de la chambre”¹⁹⁰. These changes accompanied by more complex burial rites suggest a development in the funerary practices of the Mycenaeans. Therefore, this was clearly a transitional period, during which even new hybrid forms of tombs were created alongside standard graves¹⁹¹. One example of this form of experimentation belonging to the MH III period is the ‘complex

¹⁸⁶ Lewartowski 1995: 106.

¹⁸⁷ Voutsaki 1995: 58-63.

¹⁸⁸ Mylonas 1966: 133.

¹⁸⁹ Hägg and Sieurin 1982: 177-186.

¹⁹⁰ Pelon 1974: 48.

¹⁹¹ Touchais 1989: 114.

tumuli', i.e. a tumulus containing numerous small and rudimentary tholoi¹⁹², as well as the occasional pithos and the emergence of the new Grave Circles.

The LH II and IIIA1 periods display further progress in funerary architecture and culminate in extravagant chamber tombs and magnificent tholoi, such as the 'Treasury of Atreus' and the 'Tomb of Clytemnestra'. Additionally, evidence of competition among the Mycenaeans is manifest in the appearance of tholoi alongside chamber tombs and in the extravagant amount of wealth deposited within; as Voutsaki proposed, "mortuary display became an important strategy of social and political competition, as it implied the mobilization of social force and specialized labour"¹⁹³. From the LH IIIA2 to IIIB periods, restrictions are observed in the use of tholoi, which are increasingly limited to palatial centres¹⁹⁴, and a rise is noted in the number of chamber tombs, which have become consistently poor. Furthermore, the decline of intramural burials, namely cists and pit graves, further emphasizes the growing distance between the palatial elites and the *hoi polloi* during this period, thus becoming a period of a consolidated central hierarchy. "It is evident that the full concentration of power by the palatial authorities was only possible if a main symbol of prestige, mortuary display, became restricted to the palatial elites."¹⁹⁵ Moreover, it is inferred that at this time Mycenae emerged as one of the most important palatial centres of the Mainland¹⁹⁶.

Therefore, in addition to the emergence of an elite class, the adapted funerary practices not only serve to reinforce their position, but also to emphasize their direct

¹⁹² Touchais 1989: 114.

¹⁹³ Voutsaki 1995: 62 and Voutsaki 1999: 103-117.

¹⁹⁴ Darcque 1987: 202-203.

¹⁹⁵ Voutsaki 1995: 62.

¹⁹⁶ Voutsaki 1995: 62.

kinship with their ancestors, those long-buried in the extravagant tholoi¹⁹⁷. The deposition of extravagant wealth that serves as a form of offering for the deceased becomes the tool by which ties of kinship are reinforced and status legitimized, thus creating an irrefutable ruling class. A further development is the appearance of secondary or multiple burials within these tholoi to strengthen the notion of familial ties with the previously deceased¹⁹⁸.

However, the absence of elaborate elite dwellings during this period¹⁹⁹ prevents us from clearly asserting that a gulf existed between the elite and the rest of the population, as is suggested by the new mortuary practices, although they can simply be rationalized as funerary experimentation by the Mycenaeans.

¹⁹⁷ Voutsaki 1995: 59-62.

¹⁹⁸ For a catalogue and description of multiple burials within Mycenaean tholoi see Kontorli-Papadopoulou 1995: 111-122.

¹⁹⁹ Voutsaki 1999: 112.

I. III – HITTITE AND NEAR EASTERN CEMETERIES

The following section will focus on Near Eastern tombs and cemeteries; however, only those that correlate with Mycenaean funerary architecture will be discussed. Specifically, we will be examining the tombs at Ras Shamra in Ugarit, Alaça Hüyük in Anatolia and the Hittite cemetery at Gordion. We will conclude with a general comparison about the similarities between Mycenaean and Near Eastern funerary practices in an attempt to draw parallels between these two civilizations and to determine their interrelations if any, thus establishing the existence of a widespread Bronze Age funerary tradition.

I.IIIa – The TOMBS at RAS SHAMRA

The Ras Shamra tombs at Ugarit are significant for our purposes because their excavations revealed many Minoan artefacts dating to the MM period, and therefore attesting to trade relations between Crete and the Near East. The architecture and the evidence of funerary customs bear striking similarities to those found on Crete and the Greek mainland²⁰⁰. Schaeffer attributes these similarities to the fact that “Ras Shamra Ugarit, en tant que port syrien et entrepôt des marchandises asiatiques à destination de l’Ouest, entretenait dès les temps préhistoriques des relations avec le monde égéen”²⁰¹. It is significant, however, that along with the Minoan objects were also found numerous Mycenaean goods dating to the 15th and 14th centuries, including female figurines and rhyta²⁰². Additionally, the tombs at Ras Shamra, dating to the 13th century B.C., were

²⁰⁰ For similarities between Ras Shamra and Isopata, Crete, see Schaeffer 1939: 30.

²⁰¹ Schaeffer 1939: 53.

²⁰² See Schaeffer 1939: Fig. 94.

constructed in a similar manner to the Mycenaean tholoi²⁰³, with the same corbelled masonry and rectangular chambers; however, the dromoi in the Ras Shamra tombs display steps²⁰⁴. Although this distinguishes them from their Mycenaean counterparts, “c’est aux civilisations méditerranéennes qu’il faut attribuer l’invention du dromos avec escalier”²⁰⁵. A further similarity between the Mycenaean tombs and those at Ras Shamra is that both contained niches²⁰⁶, although the latter also have windows²⁰⁷. The only other instance of this feature comes with a tomb at Isopata, Crete²⁰⁸. Tomb 36 at Isopata bears mentioning for it contained multiple burials, and the previous occupants of the grave had been removed and placed into pits dug into the floor of the tomb²⁰⁹. Within these pits were also found fragments of Minoan pottery dating to the 17th century. These tombs parallel the tholoi found in Mycenae, for they may have housed members of a single family, possibly royal. These tombs also included Mycenaean rhyta and ψ figurines, which indicates that similar funerary rites were performed. The positions of the earlier internments are unknown, for it appears that all bones were gathered and placed inside either pits, jugs or vases. However, the last burials appeared to have been laid in either a contracted or extended position.

Schaeffer states that “c’étaient donc des Mycéniens qui, au XIII^e siècle, étaient devenus la classe possédante à Ugarit. Leurs demeures et leurs caveaux funéraires sont installés au milieu des ruines de l’établissement proto-phénicien”²¹⁰. Furthermore, an

²⁰³ See Schaeffer 1939: Fig. 66.

²⁰⁴ Tombs 36, 41, 42 and 45 at Ras Shamra. Schaeffer 1939: 67-68.

²⁰⁵ Schaeffer 1939: 68.

²⁰⁶ Mylonas 1966: 179.

²⁰⁷ See Schaeffer 1939: Fig. 86.

²⁰⁸ Schaeffer 1939: 30.

²⁰⁹ Evans 1906: 14-15.

²¹⁰ Schaeffer 1939: 42.

examination of the bones found within these tombs dating to the 14th and 13th centuries revealed them to belong to non-Semitic, but rather Mediterranean individuals²¹¹.

I.IIIb – The ROYAL CEMETERY at ALAÇA HÜYÜK

The royal graves of Alaça Hüyük in Anatolia are unique and deserve consideration. Unlike the tombs of Ras Shamra, which shared features with both Minoan Crete and Mycenae, the Alaça Hüyük graves can only be paralleled with those of Mycenae. Though the Mesara tombs in Crete are lavish and grandiose, the Alaça Hüyük graves are associated with those of Mycenae because both are deemed royal, and when considered together they provide insights about the funerary tradition of the Aegean and Anatolian world during the Bronze Age. The material discovered in Alaça Hüyük can potentially contribute to our understanding of Mycenaean funerary practices even though its geographical location – in the bend of the Halys – is too remote for any immediate impact on Aegean matters.

The settlement of Alaça Hüyük, approximately fifteen miles north of the famous Hittite capital of Bogazköy, housed a royal cemetery dated to the Early Anatolian Period ca. 2500 BC²¹². These graves are remarkable for they were intramurally located in an area among the town buildings that had apparently been set aside for use as a royal burial ground, and were expanded as needed²¹³. Unlike the few remnants uncovered from the Early Anatolian dwellings at Alaça Hüyük, the tombs of the cemetery yielded an abundance of wealth, and technical, artistic and religious articles, such as copper

²¹¹ Schaeffer 1939: 100.

²¹² Pelon 1985: 19

²¹³ Mellink 1956b.

figurines, sun discs, ornaments, weapons, jugs and goblets, diadems, bracelets, and beads²¹⁴.

The thirteen graves uncovered in the royal cemetery were uniform but varied in size, with single and double inhumations in rectangular pits and fine metalwork accompanying the burials²¹⁵. The wealth found within these tombs establishes this as a royal cemetery. The tombs at Alaça Hüyük are described as shallow shaft-graves, as shafts granted access to low tomb chambers²¹⁶ made up of stone walls and beamed ceilings. The interments were laid in a contracted position and rich gifts were deposited within the graves. Ceiling beams were then put into place and covered with clay; sacrificial offerings were made; a funerary feast took place²¹⁷; and finally the shaft was filled with earth. Since some graves appear to have been stacked, overlaid, or even partly overlaid by subsequent burials, we can assume that no grave markers were used²¹⁸.

The construction of the tombs at Alaça Hüyük differs greatly from other forms of funerary architecture in the ancient Near East. The more standard Early Anatolian small cist-grave, or pithos burial contained a simple contracted inhumation, confirming that Alaça Hüyük practiced a developed and exceptional type of burial. Its royal character explains the wealth, but not the unusual construction of the tombs. The only significant parallel to the Alaça Hüyük royal graves is found in the shaft graves at Mycenae; though their depth is greater, the same standards of construction were nevertheless employed. The distinctions between these tombs are the extended inhumations and the multiple and subsequent interments found at Mycenae, and the fact that the Alaça Hüyük tombs are

²¹⁴ See Mellink 1956b: Pl. I-II.

²¹⁵ Mellaart 1966: 155-156.

²¹⁶ Length: 3-8 m; width: 2-5 m; height: 0.75 m. Mellink 1956b: 55.

²¹⁷ As bones of sacrificed animals were found on the roofs of the graves, as reported by Mellink 1956b: 55.

²¹⁸ Graves A and A¹ and the two burials in Tomb T. Mellink 1956b: 44.

not shaft-graves per se. "Archaeologically speaking, one can admit the possibility that we have here a case of diffusion of one original burial type, viz. the subterranean built chamber tomb"²¹⁹. Despite the differences between them however, the royal cemetery at Alaça Hüyük and the shaft graves at Mycenae do in fact share a common architecture and a vastly wealthy deposition offered to the deceased.

I. IIIc – The HITTITE CEMETERY at GORDION

The Gordion cemetery is unique in Hittite archaeology. It displays various features occurring simultaneously: burials were invariably laid in gravel or bedrock; they consisted of inhumations (usually in a contracted position), cist and the pithos graves (always in a contracted position); and no evidence of cremations has been found. On occasion, bodies were found in a semi-contracted position under a pile of stones.

The pithos-burials seem to belong to a later date because their orientation was consistently to the south-east. The scarcity and scattered distribution of the cist graves, on the other hand, indicates that they probably date to a later period, since they never reached the stage of conformity found in the pithos graves. Most of the tombs appear clearly separated from one another; therefore, surface markers must have been set up. Since no markers, tombstones, or stelae have been found, it seems likely that small mounds, stone piles or mud bricks were arranged on top of the graves. Only a few of the graves found in this cemetery will be discussed, either because they are well preserved or exceptional.

²¹⁹ Mellink 1956b: 56.

The most significant of these graves is H 31, which contains a double burial, thus indicating that the tomb must have been reopened for a second burial. The two skeletons in this grave were found superimposed with the upper skeleton contracted on its right side, though both were oriented towards the south. The right upper arm of the top skeleton had been broken and the lower arm was missing²²⁰. The condition of the skeleton on the bottom appears to have been disturbed, though based on the position of its legs, it can be inferred that the body was also contracted and buried on its right side²²¹. The only remnants of this skeleton were the upper pelvis, the right upper leg, one hand, shattered arm bones and crushed skull fragments, indicating that the lower burial had disintegrated prior to the placement of the upper body in the grave²²².

Ten other instances of inhumations were discovered. These are simple interments, two of which were accompanied by rather elaborate funerary gifts²²³; two others were children²²⁴. Additionally, there is only one instance of overlapping graves in this cemetery²²⁵, where the later interment disturbed the first burial²²⁶.

This cemetery contained thirty-four pithos burials, with the pithoi serving as coffins for contracted burials; these were either simple brick-red pithoi, ribbed pithoi or cooking-pot pithoi.²²⁷ A single case of double burial in one pithos²²⁸ was uncovered; however, it can be explained as the burial of a mother and child, presumably due to a simultaneous death at the time of the birth. Moreover, the discovery of two adult

²²⁰ Mellink 1956a: Pl. 6b.

²²¹ Mellink 1956a: H 31.

²²² Mellink 1956a: H 31.

²²³ H 22 and H 25. See Mellink 1956a: H 22 Pl. 7c and d; H 25 Pl. 7b.

²²⁴ H 23 and H 26.

²²⁵ And in the Bronze Age in Anatolia, see Mellink 1956a.

²²⁶ H 29 and H 30. See Mellink 1956a: Pl. 7f.

²²⁷ Mellink 1956a: H 18.

²²⁸ H 1. See Mellink 1956a: Pl. 8c and d.

skeletons found in one pithos burial is problematic because it had been disturbed to such an extent that no concrete conclusions can be drawn about the exact nature of the burials, namely whether they were buried simultaneously or subsequently²²⁹. Though most pithoi were large enough to contain the contracted bodies of two adults, the general practice seems to have been single burials, and thus the burial in H 7 are exceptional. Another unique occurrence found in this cemetery, in Tomb H 47, was a broken red vessel buried among the cover stones of the tomb in a smashed condition, which is suggestive of a funerary ritual²³⁰.

I. IIId – Other CEMETERIES in the EAST

Secondary burials have occasionally been discovered at other cemeteries in Anatolia. For instance, the cemetery at Iasos²³¹ has revealed forty Early Bronze Age cist graves that contained contracted burials²³². In the tombs with multiple burials, the previous interments appeared to have been collected, and their bones separated in a corner of the grave²³³. Evidence of this practice was also found in the cemetery at Karatas, where one-quarter of the tombs seem to contain successive multiple interments²³⁴. Further similarities between Anatolian cemeteries and Mycenaean tombs have also been found in the necropolis at Müsgebi, where thirteen chamber tombs were uncovered²³⁵. These chamber tombs, much like those at Mycenae, were cut into the local

²²⁹ H 7.

²³⁰ Mellink 1956a: 13.

²³¹ However, Iasos stands between the Aegean islands and the Anatolian highlands.

²³² Mellink 1965: 139.

²³³ In Iasos, burials are placed in cists, whereas in Anatolia burials are almost always found in jars.

²³⁴ Wheeler 1974: 417.

²³⁵ Mellink 1965: 140.

rock and their dromoi blocked by stones; each tomb contained one to three burials, which were accompanied by an array of pottery, bronze weapons and spearheads²³⁶.

Three rectangular graves found at Pular, dating to the twelfth century BC, yielded the bones of animals, indicating that funerary sacrifices could also have taken place in Asia Minor, thus paralleling the practice of occasionally burying horses, dogs and other animals among the Mycenaeans²³⁷.

Another informative site is the Indo-Iranian cemetery at Sintashta, which dates to the first half of the second millennium BC²³⁸. The cemetery itself is quite small and contains large grave pits, numbering forty in total; however, “the pottery, ... the sacrificed animals and the burial chambers discovered there are so numerous and variegated that any particular grave seems rather unique for the steppe zone Bronze Age”²³⁹. Some burial chambers in this cemetery yielded the bones of sacrificed animals and even the remains of a chariot²⁴⁰. Twenty-six of the burials were single interments and twelve were double burials, both children and adults indiscriminately. Additionally, two graves were found to have multiple occupants, three and five respectively, and another was revealed to be a cenotaph²⁴¹. All occupants of these graves were laid out in contracted or flexed positions²⁴², with the exception of five, which were extended. The remains of sacrificed horses are also numerous in this cemetery, either buried whole or

²³⁶ Mellink 1965: 133-149.

²³⁷ Mellink 1965: 138.

²³⁸ Gening 1979: 1.

²³⁹ Gening 1979: 4.

²⁴⁰ Grave 28. Gening 1979: 19.

²⁴¹ Gening 1979: 11-13.

²⁴² Gening 1979: 13.

consisting of fragments, such as the skulls or limbs found in several burial chambers.

Cattle, sheep and dogs also figured prominently among the animals sacrificed²⁴³.

The contracted bodies found in these graves are comparable to the skeletons uncovered in Graves Γ, M, N and probably in Grave Z of Circle B at Mycenae as well.

Regarding their positions, Mylonas summarized:

Sometimes the bodies were placed on their backs with legs not fully extended, but pulled up slightly with knees bent upwards and heels resting on the floor of the grave. As the decomposition of the flesh advanced, the leg bones would fall to the sides and would lie in a bow-shaped position, seen in the last persons buried in graves Gamma, Mu and Nu.²⁴⁴

This position is particularly characteristic of the burials of the Early Iranians²⁴⁵ and can also be found in numerous tumulus burials in Albania, more specifically in the Pazhok area²⁴⁶, where the bodies were laid on their backs with the knees raised in what is considered a vertical contracted position. Additionally, the tumuli in the Albanian burial chambers resemble the tholoi at Mycenae, in both their dimensions and the placement of cairns of stones above the burial chamber²⁴⁷. “In some cases stones dug into the ground encircled the *kurgan ...grave*”²⁴⁸; this practice is reminiscent of Graves A, B, E, I, M, and O of Circle B, where the perimeter of the grave was outlined with stones and the bodies were usually placed on a layer of pebbles²⁴⁹.

Additionally, Tumulus A at Vajnë displays further similarities, such as the same array of Minoan and Mycenaean weapons from the shaft graves of Circle A²⁵⁰. Another

²⁴³ Gening 1979: 19-24.

²⁴⁴ Mylonas 1964: 404.

²⁴⁵ Gening 1979: 13.

²⁴⁶ Where inhumations were found alongside cremations. For further details of Albanian mortuary practices see Hammond 1967: 77-105, as well as Makkay 2000.

²⁴⁷ See Hammond 1967: fig. 2a.

²⁴⁸ Makkay 2000: 20.

²⁴⁹ Mylonas 1964: 403.

²⁵⁰ Hammond 1967: 91.

comparable characteristic is the apparent sacrifice of animals, namely horses, bulls, and dogs discovered in the cemetery at Shintastha²⁵¹; this parallels the remains in the cemetery of Aidonia, which revealed the remains of a decapitated horse, and the skeleton of another horse in its entirety with the jawbones of fourteen additional slaughtered horses buried beneath it²⁵². These findings are significant because they imply a central Indo-European tradition of horse sacrifice as a funerary ritual.

Therefore, evidence for a widespread Indo-European funerary custom can be inferred from the evidence of similar burial customs, whether multiple interments, horse or animal sacrifices, the similar architecture of the tombs across these various civilizations, or the similarity of the offerings of pottery or weapons to the deceased²⁵³, although this may be limited to the Aegeo-Anatolian world.

²⁵¹ Gening 1979: 19-20 and 23-24.

²⁵² Demakopoulou 1996: 24-25.

²⁵³ As is evidenced in Alaça Hüyük, Mycenae and Indo-Iranians, and later in the first millennium among the Phrygians and Scythians.

CONCLUSION

Similar funerary traditions seem to appear in all early cemeteries across Europe, North Africa and Hither Asia; the most universal practice during the Early Bronze Age is burials in flexed or contracted positions. In contrast, throughout the Bronze Age, contracted positions gradually developed into extended poses²⁵⁴. However, contracted burials remained the standard in Greece until the MH period, and it was only in the course of the MH period that extended positions slowly gained popularity. The following will focus on changes in the funerary practices during the Bronze Age, as well as clearly parallel mortuary customs found in the Mycenaean and Anatolian worlds.

Firstly, the general practice of Anatolian cemeteries seems to be single inhumations, although occurrences of double burials in one tomb have occasionally been found. These are explained as exceptional secondary burials or concurrent burials due to simultaneous deaths, as in the case of the mother and her newborn child. The Hittite cemetery at Gordion is significant because it demonstrates the existence of inhumations in the Hittite world, where the standard seems to have been cremation, as at the capital of Bogazköy. However, in the vicinity of the Gordion cemetery, specifically near Yazilikaya, a crematory cemetery was discovered. The two cemeteries near Bogazköy, when considered together, highlight the dual character of the overall funerary practices in the Hittite world²⁵⁵.

Secondly, the only tombs discovered in Anatolia with extravagantly rich and elaborate funerary objects are the royal graves at Alaça Hüyük. No other such tombs appear to have existed in the Near East. Their general architectural features, their

²⁵⁴ Childe 1945: 13.

²⁵⁵ For further details, see Mellink 1956a: 47.

ritualistic nature, and the abundance of wealth found within them identify these tombs as royal and undoubtedly distinguishes them from other burials found in most cemeteries across Anatolia, namely those of the common populace.

Hence, the graves at Mycenae and the tombs of Alaça Hüyük provide the best parallels in the Aegeo-Anatolian world. The royal tombs at Alaça Hüyük, though containing but a single burial, were nonetheless rich in funerary offerings, which included the remnants of funerary feasts and sacrificed oxen or other bovine animals. This evidence is also seen in the graves at Mycenae, where: "... dans une fosse ... sur le sol, une couche épaisse de cendres, avec ossements de veaux, moutons, oiseaux"²⁵⁶. The similarities found in the architecture, specifically the shafts of the tombs at both Mycenae and Alaça Hüyük, demonstrate that these tombs may represent a localized Aegeo-Anatolian funerary tradition with corresponding rituals²⁵⁷. Additionally, the discoveries at Sintashta in conjunction with all the previously drawn parallels support the theory of a common Indo-European funerary tradition.

This widespread Indo-European mortuary tradition can be inferred from the following features: multiple interments; animal sacrifices; architecture; and pottery and weaponry.

²⁵⁶ Picard 1948: 268.

²⁵⁷ Mellink 1956b: 39.

I. IV – FUNERARY GIFTS

I. IVa – MYCENAEAN GRAVE GOODS

κατὰ δ' ἔκτανεν Ἡετίωνα
οὐδέ μιν ἐξενάριξε· σεβάσσατο γὰρ τότε θυμῷ·
ἀλλ' ἄρα μιν κατέκρη συν' ἔντεσι δαιδαλέοισιν,
ἦ δ' ἐπὶ σῆμ' ἔχεεν.²⁵⁸

An increasing amount of wealth was present in the graves of the deceased during the MH and LH periods, attesting to Mycenae being *rich in gold*. The funerary objects, or *kterismata*, can be classed into two basic categories: personal and functional objects²⁵⁹. Personal objects comprise ornaments, weapons and goblets, whereas functional objects mostly consist of vases that contained supplies²⁶⁰. However, all objects reveal a Mycenaean belief that the deceased continue to require the objects he/she possessed while living²⁶¹. The symbolic value of many of the objects must be emphasized, for they undoubtedly represent the status or authority of the deceased²⁶². For instance, the high quality of both metal and clay vessels, the gold funerary masks and ornaments, as well as the small fragments of ivory clearly denote wealth and high social standing. According to Voutsaki,

funerary offerings are more than simply the possessions of the deceased or the direct reflection of actual roles held in life ... [they] play a role in the process of self-definition, i.e. the selection of certain roles, activities and qualities that encapsulate important cultural and social norms. In the case of the Shaft Grave assemblage, the funerary offerings and their decoration clearly express a set of culturally defined gender roles.²⁶³

²⁵⁸ *Iliad*. 6. 416-9.

²⁵⁹ Branigan 1970b: 58.

²⁶⁰ The placement of supplies is paralleled to the offerings of oil and honey given to Patroclus on his funeral pyre.

²⁶¹ Mylonas 1966: 134-135.

²⁶² Voutsaki 1999: 108.

²⁶³ Voutsaki 1999: 115.

In addition to the plethora of pottery, an abundance of weapons, tools, jewellery, ornaments, and miscellaneous objects, such as ornate staffs, boxes and objects made of ivory were also discovered among the burials, essentially demonstrating the status and prestige of the deceased. The bodies accompanied by diadems, bracelets, and pins were originally thought to be female, while those with face masks and swords had been considered male²⁶⁴. However, it has since been revealed that some men wore bracelets, and women masks.

In contrast with earlier cist and pit burials, the funerary objects now deposited within the Grave Circles demonstrate what the Mycenaeans deemed appropriate gifts for the deceased; these offerings ranged from carved stelae, long swords with elaborate hilts in gold, a quantity of knives and daggers, gold and silver cups, gold ribbons decorating the collar, sleeves, and waist of funerary costumes, and partly exotic rich materials such as amber, faience, rock crystal and ivory²⁶⁵.

The shaft graves also yielded a large number of bronze weapons: swords, battle-axes, spearheads and daggers. About the fourth tomb of Circle A, Schliemann stated that he “collected in this tomb, forty-six bronze swords more or less fragmentary, also four lances and three long knives”²⁶⁶. A custom may therefore have arisen at Mycenae of local rulers provided with their weapons in their graves.

Some fragments of artefacts found in Circle A appear to possess the same workmanship as objects found in the earlier Circle B; for instance, the electrum mask from Grave Γ was apparently hammered by the same smith who forged the two gold

²⁶⁴ Vermeule 1975: 9.

²⁶⁵ Mylonas 1966: 100-105.

²⁶⁶ Schliemann 1880: 278.

masks found in Grave IV of Circle A²⁶⁷. The same treatment of the eyebrows – furrowed across in an unbroken arc, the same technique of locking the eyes across the centre – using strips of eyelashes as though stitched together,²⁶⁸ and the same thin lips turned in a downwards direction and the same ivy-leaf ears, indicate the work of the same man. Furthermore, the arcaded gold cups from Grave V are directly related to those found in the graves of Circle B, as indeed are some of the weapons. Therefore, either both Circles were used concurrently, at least for a short period of time, or the lapse was so insignificant as to last less than one lifetime.

Masks

No reference to the custom of burying the deceased with masks has been found in Homer or in other classical authors. The masks found in the Shaft Graves were made of gold plate and portrayed distinct facial features: high or low foreheads, thick or thin lips, crooked or long noses; however, the eyes were usually shut (Fig. 5). Since the masks differ so greatly from one another, Schliemann suggested that they represented the specific features of the deceased²⁶⁹. Additionally, the closed eyelids of the masks suggest death. Most masks also seem to be perforated near the ears, which implies that they were either fixed to an object in the grave or simply placed upon the face of the deceased²⁷⁰. Traces of a black substance have been discovered on the lower surface of some masks, which could indicate that glue was used to affix them to the deceased²⁷¹. As Karo suggests, the perforated masks must have been tied around the head of the deceased, or

²⁶⁷ Mylonas 1966: 102 and Vermeule 1975: 10-11.

²⁶⁸ This is probably a technical solution to the problem of showing closed eyes rather than a display in the fear of the dead.

²⁶⁹ Schliemann 1880: 222.

²⁷⁰ Most obvious is the mask found in Grave IV of Circle A. Schliemann 1880: 222.

²⁷¹ The same black substance has also been found on some gold plaques in the Shaft Grave objects, which lack perforations and thus could only be glued on to clothing or other objects.

such was their intention²⁷². In the case of the child buried in tomb III of Circle A, a thin gold plate covered not only the face, but the entire body of the child, and “the child’s mask consists of very thin gold plate; the places for the eyes are cut out, and even in the present crumpled condition of the mask the nose is slightly protruding”²⁷³.

The significance of these masks is that they suggest Minoan origins, perhaps parallel to the gold bandages found by Seager in an EM II tomb at Mochlos.²⁷⁴ These bandages were bound directly over the faces of the dead by means of perforations and also bore features marking the eyes. These bandage-masks also appear to have been attached to the deceased the same way the ornaments were affixed to the bodies found in the Mycenaean Shaft Graves, either glued or tied.

The last mask to be considered is that of the ‘mummy’ found in Grave V, about which Schliemann wrote “the round face, with all its flesh, had been wonderfully preserved under its ponderous golden mask; ... both eyes were perfectly visible, also the mouth ... and showed thirty-two beautiful teeth”²⁷⁵. Based on the colour of the body, the mummy was immediately associated to Egypt, and thus represented a foreign influence on the Shaft Graves as a whole.

The purpose of these masks is still unknown, since they do not accompany every body. It is possible that these masks, designed as a means to hide the corruption of the body, were used during the wake, or *πρόθεσις*, of a very select few, perhaps princes²⁷⁶. This may also explain the scarcity of the masks.

²⁷² Karo stated by Evans 1929: 13.

²⁷³ Schliemann 1880: 198-199.

²⁷⁴ See Evans 1929: Fig. 7.

²⁷⁵ Schliemann 1880: 296.

²⁷⁶ Evans 1929: 13.

Grave Stelae

Most famous among Mycenaean art, the grave stelae are used to indicate status. The symbolic carvings on them indicate the deceased's high rank and this is further supported by their complete absence or scarcity from poorer graves.

It was originally believed that sculptured stelae were erected over the graves of men, whereas those of women and children bore unsculptured stelae; this assumption was based on the imagery of horses, lions and war, which were thought to portray masculine ideals not suitable for women²⁷⁷. However, the artefacts of Grave III of Circle A depict more lions than any other tomb, and these contained nothing but female interments. While the imagery may refer to men, the geometric designs, thought to be derived from textile patterns, are in fact associated with women²⁷⁸.

Thirteen sculpted stelae were discovered at Circle A over Graves I, II, IV and V and a fourteenth appears to have been reused as the base for an unsculpted stele. In Circle B, sculpted stelae were found only over Graves A, and I²⁷⁹. Fourteen unsculpted stelae were found, nine of which still stood in Circle A and five of which were in Circle B. All standing sculpted stelae were oriented in an east-west direction, with their sculpted sides facing west²⁸⁰.

The stelae were carved from two types of poros limestone: oolitic limestones with or without shells²⁸¹; both types were originally a light oatmeal colour²⁸². Based on a comparison with the decorated objects found in both Circles, sculpted stelae are dated to

²⁷⁷ Angel found in Mylonas 1964: 404.

²⁷⁸ Younger 1997: 230.

²⁷⁹ Mylonas 1966: 99 and Younger 1997: 229-238.

²⁸⁰ Schliemann 1880: 92 and Younger 1997: 230.

²⁸¹ The oolids in the oolitic limestones are calcium carbonate secretions and look like grains of sand.

²⁸² Younger 1997: 230.

the MH to the LH I periods²⁸³. Most sculptured stelae were rectangular and erected vertically; their design consisted of two or more horizontal panels, one of which always depicted a figural composition, while all others simply represented spiral patterns²⁸⁴. The funerary iconography of the stelae can be divided into several categories: the larger stelae invariably represent horses and chariot scenes in a military setting honouring the deceased man²⁸⁵, while the smaller examples depict men attacking either a pair of lions or a bull (Fig. 6). The stelae do not stylistically resemble Minoan art²⁸⁶. Without any modeling on the surfaces or attempt at three dimensional roundness, the motifs on the stelae were either simply incised, or more frequently rendered in flat relief, resembling later Hittite and Hurrian carvings²⁸⁷. They depicted on hard surfaces two artistic elements, one emblematic, the other a frozen narrative.

The most informative stelae are those portraying chariot scenes; these are so heavily framed in spirals that they give the impression of windows into lost heroic tales. It is unknown whether they represent any particular battles, hunts or excerpts from specific funeral games, or if they are merely generic motifs²⁸⁸. The iconography of the stelae is reminiscent of Egyptian scenes, where the Pharaoh in his chariot controls his rearing horse. Similarly, the Mycenaean charioteer is always the emphatic centre of attention.

These timeless and symbolic representations are not unusual in either Greece or Anatolia during the Bronze Age. In fact, it should be noted that the coarse stones, shallow

²⁸³ Younger 1997: 231.

²⁸⁴ See Karo 1930: Pl. 6.

²⁸⁵ Hood 1978: 97-100. He discusses stelae IV and V, where the dead man rides in his chariot, facing his enemy.

²⁸⁶ Younger 1997: 233.

²⁸⁷ Vermeule 1975: 16-17.

²⁸⁸ Vermeule 1975: 17.

relief, ceremonial drama, sharp-edged figures and abstract emblematic themes seem to be more frequent in Anatolia than elsewhere. On the other hand, the Hittite grave stelae seem to be religious in nature²⁸⁹. One example found near the small village of Aghabeyli, northeast of Marash shows a seated mother goddess facing three priests, while a second stele, found in Atabey, depicts libations poured for a god of the mountains.

The stelae from Circles A and B at Mycenae indicate first that the carvings were influenced by Egypt, such as the chariot scene that represents a cruder version of the Pharaoh in his chariot; second that the spiral frame was influenced by a Minoan, Cycladic, or northern European tradition; and third that the chariot theme, also apparent in Hittite or Mitannian art, is assumed to be Indo-European²⁹⁰.

The stag-hunting frieze at Alaça Hüyük, though dated later than the Mycenaean shaft graves but still within the fifteenth to the thirteenth centuries BC, shows the same arrangement of hunted animals in dashing, bent or folded poses²⁹¹. Even the inserted spirals do not detract from the drumming hooves and paws, but they are clearly separate. The Alaça Hüyük frieze thus represents a strong link with the stag-hunting depictions on many Mycenaean artefacts, even though there is no evidence that Anatolian art provided any significant model for Shaft Grave art, but the two regions certainly shared Aegeo-Anatolian or Indo-European predispositions.

The Mycenaean stelae fragments are replete with swinging clubs, falling men kicking their feet in the air, and spears ground under rolling chariot wheels²⁹². Figures and faces are crudely depicted, not only due to inexperience, but also because action

²⁸⁹ Donmez 1954: 47-48.

²⁹⁰ Vermeule 1975: 17.

²⁹¹ Vermeule 1975: 17.

²⁹² Heurtley 1921-1923: 134-136 and Vermeule 1975: 17.

seems more significant than the individual details; the action is conveyed mainly through the gestures and stances of the Mycenaeans. That the action is meant to be timeless and recurrent seems clearly demonstrated in another stele, which depicts three horses in a vertical pattern. Though the chariot symbolizes power and victory, without the horses it is rendered inadequate; thus this motif emphasizes the Mycenaean warrior's care and respect for his animal²⁹³.

The grave stelae indicate the burial site of honoured individuals, and the iconography of the scenes carved upon them explicitly suggest a behavioural characteristic associated with the deceased. Stelae served as a means for the Mycenaeans to mark their graves, and are also described by Homer as the γέρας θανόντων; that is the stele proclaims the κλέος of the departed²⁹⁴.

The evolution of a distinctly Mycenaean masonry style that became the characteristic architecture of Mycenae during the 13th century BC is evident in the stelae found with the Mycenaean tholoi. The architecture of the tholoi and their stelae made of conglomerate stone instead of poros limestone imitates the construction of the Lion Gate and its side-walls, and thus highlights the relationship between the tholoi and the Citadel²⁹⁵. A visitor coming through the Lion Gate would already have passed by the tombs, and, after being immediately struck by the similar architecture, would instantly recognize the connection between the authority of the living rulers and their dead ancestors. This new masonry employed in the construction of the stelae and Lion Gate must certainly have been a conscious decision of the Mycenaean elite to advertise itself

²⁹³ Vermeule 1975: 17-18.

²⁹⁴ *Iliad*. 16. 675 and Mylonas 1966: 135.

²⁹⁵ Wright 1987: 174-175.

as the sole and legitimate heir of power. Hence, the grave stelae would clearly denote the idea of lineage and power at Mycenae²⁹⁶.

The Art of the Shaft Graves²⁹⁷

Whether or not the artefacts found in the shaft graves belong to a particular and consistent style remains unclear, for it is unknown if the diversity in style represents different origins and influences, or is due to the range of materials used. When we reflect upon the assortment of grave objects – the diadems and breast coverings, the gold masks, the gold repoussé discs with ornaments, the cups and jugs in gold, silver, electrum or bronze, plain or studded with rosettes, the rhyta and seals of bulls, lions and stags, the long swords, the plain or inlaid daggers, the knives, the gems and golden rings, the faience, alabaster, amethyst, amber, ostrich eggs, wood, cloth, ivory and stelae – it is unreasonable to expect a single and consistent style. Although a standardized and uniform style would indicate a distinct culture, the fusion of various styles and the assimilation of different motifs into a local iconography suggest that Mycenae was perpetually developing; yet the Mycenaean identity and ideology, as expressed through these objects, remained stable and secure.

From their initial discovery, the contradictory characteristics of the objects caused bewilderment among scholars: how can they, in their entirety, represent the magnificence expected of Mycenae *rich in gold*, while simultaneously being so crudely fashioned as to be inadequate for her legendary kings? This question had remained unanswered until archaeologists realized that these objects, though barbarous and irregular, were nonetheless consistent in themselves. As he handled the artefacts, Gardner described

²⁹⁶ Wright 1987: 175-184.

²⁹⁷ Vermeule 1975: applies to this entire section, with exceptions where indicated.

them best: "... the feeling in the mind grew even stronger and stronger: 'these things are strange, new, almost inexplicable, but they certainly belong to one race and period.'"²⁹⁸ Since then, the concept of Mycenaean art as the predecessor of everything classical is no longer appropriate. The new focus thus became the identification of specific Mycenaean elements as opposed to the search for parallels in Crete, Egypt, the Levant, and Anatolia; consequently only objects deemed too crude to have originated elsewhere are considered native Mycenaean.

Although some of the artefacts from the graves have strong local roots, others were only starting to be developed; for instance, weapons and armour were expertly made even in the oldest graves, while gold craftsmanship underwent noticeable improvement, evolving from rough to excellent. While some objects seem to have had a long-standing tradition at Mycenae, some innovations could be attributed to the influence of imported objects or the training of smiths abroad.

There is great expertise among the armourers and smiths, in raising thin sheets of metal, casting rivets, rolling gold on copper wires, working with repoussé and incision; there is an ornamental repertory, rather stark, with rosettes, leaf-shapes, spirals, and filled circles. If the armourers made the gravestones, they were less expert in this sphere, yet if only stone could be repoussé how fine these would be.²⁹⁹

The dominant influence upon the objects found in the shaft graves appears to have been Minoan, whether as imports or as inspiration for motifs. For instance, the faience flower cup from Knossos is clearly an import, whereas the octopus and the butterfly found in the graves of Circle B represented motifs inspired by Minoan Crete but made locally. In addition, a fusion of two styles, Minoan and Mycenaean emerged: while certain motifs were common to both, Mycenaean art displayed a new idealism and imagery, such as the

²⁹⁸ Gardner, found in Vermeule 1975: 10.

²⁹⁹ Vermeule 1975: 13.

lion, the bull and weapons with depictions of animals biting the hilt, now appearing to be alive. A single aspect of the animals, showing a gallop or chase, the contortion of the victims, and the abstract and timeless struggle with death were frequently represented. Similar motifs were often repeated: animals flying or running across blades and weapons, or biting the handles of goblets.

Most of the objects and motifs suggest a foreign origin, and thus narrowing the scope of influence impacting Mycenaean art is ultimately futile. It should also be mentioned, however, that although the abundance of ivory, faience, ostrich eggs and glass paste recovered from Mycenaean tombs clearly indicates that foreign materials found their way to Mycenae, large amounts of Mycenaean vases were also exported eastward into Syria, Palestine and Egypt³⁰⁰. Raw materials were also traded: gold was imported from Egypt and silver and iron from Anatolia. Furthermore, “the center of production [of faience] was in Egypt, where actual factories have been discovered. That Egypt inspired the use and production of faience beads cannot be disputed”³⁰¹. On the other hand, the presence of amber in Shaft Graves III, IV and V reveals that trade routes also existed with the north, specifically indicated by the amber “of Baltic origin. The amber has a relatively high succinic acid content, from 3 to 8 per cent”, thus attesting to its provenance³⁰². Yet another source of influence is the Levant. Though located somewhat farther away, it may nevertheless have played a background role in the metallurgy found in the shaft graves, namely the cloisonné work, the inlaid coloured metals and niello. However, its degree of influence is disputable, as these techniques were already in use in

³⁰⁰ Blegen 1956: 32-35.

³⁰¹ Gimbutas 1965: 46.

³⁰² Gimbutas 1965: 48.

Crete and Egypt³⁰³. The magnificent sword hilt with two eagle heads gripping the blade from Grave IV shows the influence from abroad: the scaled feathers, a design common in Egypt, and encrustations of rock crystals and lapis lazuli, the latter originating in Afghanistan. However, in its form, size and motif, the sword itself is clearly Mycenaean, with the depiction of animals as allusions to the bite and speed of the blade. Additionally, the flowers on the hilt are depicted on other gold ornaments in the shaft graves are clearly a Mycenaean motif; this in turn indicates the integration of foreign influence into local iconography.

In the case of Anatolian influence however, it remains unclear whether the similarities are due to parallels in culture, or are simply a result of direct trade. The only Mycenaean artefact that reveals a clear association with Anatolia is the silver stag rhyton uncovered in Grave IV. The features of this rhyton, its four legs and the centered spout on its back, are common characteristics in Anatolia, as evident in the stags, lions, and bulls from Kültepe³⁰⁴. The stag, embodying the speed of the chase, is an Anatolian motif; therefore, the object itself may be an import³⁰⁵ – if this is the case however, it is the only example. Furthermore, Grave IV has also produced other rhyta, whose inconsistency in style once more demonstrates Mycenae's tendency to incorporate foreign motifs.

Any Egyptian connection is problematic, for though shaft grave art appears to have been inspired by Egypt, ultimately it was given Minoan shape and design, and as such, no truly Egyptian objects can be said to have been found in the shaft graves³⁰⁶. Though clearly displaying Egyptian influence, the rock crystal duck from Grave O and

³⁰³ Smith 1965: 15-16.

³⁰⁴ For the Kültepe rhyta see Vermeule 1975: 16.

³⁰⁵ Vermeule 1975: 16.

³⁰⁶ Obviously Egyptian influences lie behind some of the objects of the Shaft Graves, "but what must be stressed is that there are no Egyptian imports in Greece yet." Vermeule 1975: 18.

the spoon in the shape of hands from Grave III also bear Minoan, Cypriote, as well as eastern traits. Another example of this connection is the ostrich eggs in Graves IV and V; these came from Egypt, though originating in Libya, Sudan, or Nubia. They nevertheless display signs of Minoan manipulation before reaching Mycenae.

Furthermore, the Egyptian influence evident in the shaft graves at Mycenae did not only display Minoan manipulation, but also appeared to have succumbed to Mycenaean integration.

There is scarcely any pool of art in the transitional period represented by the Shaft Graves, which is not marked by features of foreign styles and new experiments. Yet where shared features can be matched, as in scenes of chariots or the iconography of the lion, the difference between Mycenae and Egypt is profound³⁰⁷.

The most significant example of Mycenae's practice of incorporating foreign concepts into their local iconography is the *Nilotic* dagger found near the mummified body in Grave V (Fig. 7). The depictions on the dagger blade are reminiscent of a traditional Egyptian theme: the fierce hunting cat attacking ducks on the riverbank. A further parallel with Egypt is noted in the colour on the dagger: the gold wildcat speckled black; the silver or gold ducks bleeding electrum drops; the dark river spotted with silver fish; and the shoots of gold-tipped silver lotus. It is rather peculiar, however, that although these colourful depictions parallel the iconography found in Egypt, they only appear in Egypt at a later date. A further discrepancy is the depiction of the fish, which is found in neither Egyptian nor Minoan art. Nonetheless, other similarities can be traced to Crete, where depictions of shoots are equally portrayed, usually bending to contrary crosswinds; however, the Minoan shoots appear less organic. An additional distinction is the Mycenaean technique of gouging the surface with a point to create rough-textured cats

³⁰⁷ Vermeule 1975: 21.

and ducks, which is also manifest in the fabrication of horses and a hunted stag on a gold ring discovered in Grave IV, thus demonstrating a departure from Egyptian or Minoan conventions. These features therefore suggest that the dagger is indeed Mycenaean, and that foreign attributes have been assimilated into local iconography.

It should also be mentioned that there are connections between Mycenae and the Kurgan or Timber-Grave cultures in the Steppe, north of the Black Sea, both with regard to artefacts and artistic motifs on them. Specifically, the array of weapons and gold ornaments, daggers and pins as well as goblets from shaft graves under tumuli north of the Black Sea points to interaction between these people and Mycenae, but no precise parallels have been determined³⁰⁸. Parallels with nomadic art have also been inferred; these include the portrayal of animals, such as stags, antlered red deer, wild steppe *Przewalski* horses, antelopes, leopards and lions in distorted or flying poses. Additionally, bones elaborately covered with gold foil and ornamented with intricate loops, along with diadems and armbands, were unearthed in the graves of both these cultures. Furthermore, similarities could be drawn when examining the six-sided wooden box found at Mycenae, which demonstrate this link:

Here the decorative exaggeration of 'nomadic' art is paramount: the clutter of the dense background, the surprising leaps of the hunter, the dancing collapse of the victim, the emphasis on leg, horn, neck, mouth, and eye, the concentration on the surface and not on the story. In the plants one finds a contrast to normal Cretan handling; here the curled palms and leaf sprays have a neat authority in themselves, but also display a capacity for ambiguous metamorphosis, turning into a ruff along the lion's back or mirroring the deer's horns from corner to corner; there is the curious distortion of the floating bull's head with eyes front and mouth in profile whose horns sprout and frame leaves³⁰⁹.

³⁰⁸ Evans 1929: Fig. 34.

³⁰⁹ Vermeule 1975: 24-5.

Regardless of these external factors, Minoan remains the single most dominant influence upon the artefacts from the shaft graves. Although Minoan impact is undeniable, Mycenae nevertheless displays independent features: the main difference lies in the portrayal of narrative and the choice between life and death. Crete continues to represent a sense of reality, where accidents might still occur, whereas shaft grave art presents no choice, only frozen drama – the predator will undeniably kill the prey.

This type of emblematic art emphasized eternal facts and not suspended action; for instance, the boar will irrevocably be stabbed between the eyes by the hunter and the deer will always be twisted in a hopeless flight from the dog. This drama portrays a

direct continuity between the underlying principles of art in the Shaft Graves ... [which] never dissolved under the influence of Crete. If Cretan art had not intervened there might have been more of it, perhaps in less skilful style, as the art of the Hittites is not really skilful. It is an art which glorifies active men, and glorifies the animal as his worthy but inevitably defeated opponent. That worth is codified by raising the animal from a real body to some species of divinity³¹⁰.

Despite this innovation, much of Mycenaean art is still indebted to Crete; however, it is impossible to distinguish between the objects that were imported. Mycenaean reproductions, hybrids and native Mycenaean, since no parallels of shaft grave art have been found in Crete. Cretan creations were unearthed throughout Circle A burials, particularly in Graves III, IV and V, with the most obvious imports the triton shell³¹¹ and the sacral knots. As Vermeule states, further similarities are noted in

the different kinds of crested and plumed helmets, and the figure-of-eight shields, [which] are better known in Greece than Crete; [but] the figure of the archer is shared. But the undulating ground, the alternations of stretched and sunken human figures, the stance of the lunging shield-bearers, the archer and the wounded man, the long smooth contours of the legs and thin-toed feet, the

³¹⁰ Vermeule 1975: 25.

³¹¹ With counterparts found in Zakro and Knossos, for further information see Evans 1921-1935 (Vol. II): 221.

intricate poses which ever threaten battle but never collide physically, the marked ankle-tendons and curl of relaxing fingers, leave little doubt of the ultimate connection to Minoan figured works in stone and ivory, as well as fresco. I would guess that this is a true Mycenaean creation, perhaps the best of any that survive, in which the imprint of the Minoan tradition is clear but where the new technical skills and imagery of the Mycenaeans have already grown mature³¹².

Some of the objects seem to be purely Mycenaean and appear to have had an influence on Minoan artistic motifs, such as the figure-of-eight shield³¹³. This primitive body armour was a Mycenaean innovation, though it appears to have been admired in Crete; in the LM Ib period, it became incorporated into Minoan religious imagery. However, as pertains to the borrowing of religious iconography in general, the opposite seems to have been the norm, for

no one doubts that much religious iconography in the Shaft Grave is Minoan in inspiration, while the scenes of men and animals in action do not seem to be. The bull, the double axe, the sacral knot, the triple shrine, the 'dove-goddess', the panoramas of sea life, are, from this moment on, drawn into the development of Mycenaean art as indispensable ingredients³¹⁴.

Since virtually all religious iconography in shaft grave art displays ties with Minoan Crete, it seemed likely that Minoan religious themes did not conflict with Mycenaean ideology, and as such were readily integrated. Therefore, even in the borrowing of religious iconography, Mycenae managed to imprint its own tradition and culture upon it.

The infusion of numerous influences into Mycenae, specifically from Crete, Anatolia, the Steppes, the Levant and Egypt, was fundamental for the creation of Mycenaean art. Although the focus has been on the artefacts found in the shaft graves, it is also significant that artefacts from the tholoi and chamber tombs also reflect the same

³¹² Vermeule 1975: 30.

³¹³ Vermeule 1975: 30. She states that the general opinion that the figure-of-eight shield originates in Crete and spreads to the mainland in the Shaft Grave period is not supported by the facts.

³¹⁴ Vermeule 1975: 47-48.

Mycenaean tendencies³¹⁵. While the whole picture has yet to be defined, the artefacts uncovered in Mycenaean tombs infer that this was a period of trade, communication and transition.

The artistic spheres of Anatolia and the Levant are very distant from these objects; Egypt exports nothing to Mycenae, and even her traditions of iconography are faint and distorted ... the Balkans may come to impinge more closely ... there is certainly a better link in habits, profusion of gold and ceremony of rite, love of horses, stags, and lions in odd decorative poses, intricacy of ornament and crescendo of rhythm, though few direct archaeological links³¹⁶.

In the midst of this interaction and the ensuing influences, Mycenaean art remained reflective of a solid mainland tradition and culture, as is evident in its own emblematic form of expression. Unfortunately, the Dark Ages that followed the Mycenaean civilization cast a shadow upon its identity, beliefs and background, thus clouding them in obscurity and leaving nothing behind but these few precious glittering gifts of gold.

³¹⁵ The difficulties in discerning Minoan and Mycenaean styles in tholos tombs and rich chambers are offshoots of the problem in the Shaft Graves.

³¹⁶ Vermeule 1975: 49-50.

I. IVb – HITTITE GOODS

Just as at Mycenae, the abundance of glittering gold objects discovered within the royal graves of Alaça Hüyük established the wealth of the kings entombed therein. The ensuing discussing will only consider those objects paralleling the discoveries from Mycenae. With regard to imports, metallurgy and thematic borrowings stemming from the East, I will not be reiterating the evidence, since it has already been explored at length; however, a few additional parallels can be made.

Although this study focuses mainly on Mycenae and related connections, the artifacts found in the royal graves at Alaça Hüyük establish the date of the graves to the middle phase of the EA period and indicate a superior metal industry. This technical proficiency contrasts with the primitive nature of the ceramics found in the royal graves³¹⁷. Though some of the metal objects found at Alaça Hüyük appear to have Sumerian origins³¹⁸, the artefacts within these graves display innovations in technique and local stylistic differences, paralleling those at Mycenae. Less proficiency in technique is evident in jewellery and precious metals, when compared to non-precious objects such as daggers. Furthermore, the metal animal figurines and sundiscs from Alaça Hüyük represent a local religious iconography, paralleling the gold-foil discs and rhyta found at Mycenae³¹⁹. Therefore, similar objects and motifs appear in both these cultures.

A further parallel, though not strictly with Mycenae, but between the greater Aegean and Alaça Hüyük exists in the realm of metalworking, specifically the bronze daggers with curved tangs, two lengthwise slits in the blade and a distinct midrib³²⁰. Two

³¹⁷ Mellink 1956b: 44.

³¹⁸ For further details see Frankfort 1958: 113.

³¹⁹ Mellink 1956b: 44 and Schliemann 1880: 319.

³²⁰ See Mellink 1956b: Fig. 2.

such daggers were uncovered in Tomb T at Alaça Hüyük and another in an Early Cycladic tomb on Amorgos³²¹. Daggers with bent tang are often called Cypriote, because a significant number of them were found in the EC tombs at Vounous³²². However, the Cypriote daggers lack the slits that characterize those from Alaça Hüyük, and the slit is probably therefore an Anatolian feature. These weapons were also discovered in Troy, Tarsus and Til Barsib³²³, though with slight variations in chronology and size. This same slit also appears in two objects at Amorgos, a spearhead and a simple dagger, and it thus can be assumed that Cycladic smiths borrowed this shape from Anatolia.

An additional parallel between Alaça Hüyük and Mycenae is evident, in jewellery, specifically the miniature gold beads. The EH and MH periods presented no evidence of this bead with a quadruple spiral design, but it appears to be rather popular among the Mycenaean shaft grave objects³²⁴.

Beyond the few examples mentioned above, no direct correlation can be identified between the funerary gifts found in Anatolia and those uncovered at Mycenae; however, the mere presence of vessels, jars, kraters, bowls, as well as pins, rings, bracelets, earrings, pendants and so on deposited with the deceased confirms a widespread Bronze Age funerary tradition³²⁵.

³²¹ Mellink 1956b: Fig. 2-3.

³²² See Stewart 1950: Pl. 102-105.

³²³ Found in Mellink 1956b: Fig. 2.

³²⁴ See Mellink 1956b: Pl. 11.8 and Schliemann 1880: 82, as well as Vermeule 1975: Fig. 27.

³²⁵ See Mellink 1956a: Pl. 13, 17, 19-21 and 23.

CHAPTER II

Literature

II. I – Greek Literature

In an attempt to reconstruct the funerary tradition of the Mycenaeans, one source is insufficient to grant us a complete picture; therefore to complement the preceding archaeological findings, we will now be turning our attention to textual evidence. Seeing as there is no specific mention of any funerary rituals in the Mycenaean tablets, we will be focusing on the Homeric epics, although it should be remembered that it is only conjecture that the Homeric epics depict the Bronze Age¹. Moreover, although the *Iliad* provides no direct description of any Mycenaean funerary practices as such, nevertheless it can be surmised that the themes presented rang true to their audience; and thus the burial practices described by Homer may be considered fairly accurate and reasonably representative. “Where questions of chronology are concerned, it is not really possible to pin the poem to a single historical period. There is a strong – but far from complete – scholarly consensus that the *Iliad* was first written down in ... the last half of the eighth century B.C.”²; however, traces throughout the *Iliad* also indicate that it is the result of a long-standing oral poetic tradition. However, we should not neglect to mention that although the *Iliad* mentions the boar’s tusk helmet and greaves, actual remnants of the Mycenaean Period, it is nonetheless a fictitious account of a legendary past. Despite the myth surrounding legendary heroes, any portrayals of funerary practices seem to reflect actual customs, and will thus be considered in that light.

One of the main themes presented in the *Iliad* is the conflict between life and death; where the hero, defined by his pursuit of fame and glory, is ultimately fated to die.

¹ Albeit well-founded conjecture: see pp. 81-83.

² Lombardo 1997: xlix (Introduction). All English excerpts from the *Iliad* were taken from this translation.

The great theme of the *Iliad* is heroic life and death. What it is to be a hero is brought out by the terrible contrast between ‘seeing the light of the sun’ and ‘having one’s limbs full of movement’ on the one side, and the cold, dark emptiness of death on the other. It is in keeping that whole books of the epic are dominated by death in its most tangible and least metaphorical form: the vital importance of the corpse and its treatment. From the opening of Book I – the wrath of Achilles ‘cast many brave souls of heroes into Hades, and made themselves (αὐτούς) they prey of dogs and the food of birds’ (I.3-5) – to the last book devoted to the final fate of the corpse of Hector, the theme is never far from our minds...³

In so far as death is one of the fundamental motifs in the *Iliad*, it is constantly looming over the heroes throughout the epic, and as such a variety of its components are represented: funerary rituals, lamentations and the afterlife. Essentially, the specific deaths and funerals found in the Homeric epics are those of Patroclus, Hector, Achilles, Sarpedon, Eetion, Elpenor and Phrontis⁴. Among the descriptions of funerary ceremonies presented in the *Iliad*, the Trojan warriors, i.e. Hector and Sarpedon, are depicted as having been buried in their ancestral land; however no details of any specific rituals are provided in a straight-forward manner; this practice was repeated with regard to the deaths of Penelope’s Suitors in the *Odyssey*: “ἐκ δὲ ... οἴκων φόρεον καὶ θάπτον ἕκαστοι”⁵. As regards the Greek warriors, no doubt due to the nature of their circumstances and their distance from their native lands, the standard practice described by Homer is cremation. It could be suggested that this tradition was borrowed from Anatolia, or even further justified by the practical inconvenience of maintaining the bodies of fallen comrades so far from home. Regardless of the actual disposal of the bodies, Homer provides great details in his depictions of accompanying funerary

³ Griffin 1980: 44-45.

⁴ For the deaths and funerals described in the *Iliad*, see 6. 417: Eetion; 16. 667: Sarpedon; 18. 22 and 315: Patroclus; 24. 582 and 710: Hector. In the *Odyssey*, see 3. 285: Phrontis; 11. 50 and 12. 12: Elpenor; 24. 76: Achilles.

⁵ *Odyssey*. 24. 417.

rituals. However, as pertain to the warriors in the *Odyssey*, who perished on the journey home, very little emphasis is placed on the actual funerary rites, only on the promptness of their execution. This is clearly portrayed in the funerals of Elpenor and Phrontis. In all these varied portrayals, a common factor seems to be the emphasis placed on the promptness of the rite itself, rather than any accompanying ceremony. The significance of a promptly executed burial is plainly stated by the ghost of Patroclus:

θάπτε με ὅτι τάχιστα πύλας Ἀΐδαο περήσω.
 τῆλέ με εἰργουσι ψυχαί, εἶδωλα καμόντων,
 οὐδέ με πῶ μίσγεσθαι ὑπὲρ ποταμοῖο ἔωσιν,
 ἀλλ' αὐτὼς ἀλάλημαι ἀν' εὐρυπύλῃς Ἀΐδος δῶ.⁶

With these words, Patroclus clearly expresses that it is only through a proper burial, executed without delay, that entrance into Hades shall be granted.

Since the funeral of Patroclus is described with the most detail, it will thus serve as a prototype for the rest of the burials in the *Iliad*⁷. I will therefore be focusing on this event specifically as being representative of Homeric burial customs. Funerary rites in the *Iliad* began with the washing and anointment of the body “τότε δὲ λουῖσάν τε καὶ ἤλειψαν λίπ' ἐλαίῳ,”⁸ continued with dressing the deceased in linen and a robe “λίτι κάλυψαν ἐς πόδας ἐκ κεφαλῆς, καθύπερθε δὲ φάρεϊ λευκῷ,”⁹ and concluded with a prothesis. These preparations were then followed by lamentations and a funerary feast, at which time, “πάντῃ δ' ἀμφὶ νέκυν κοτυλήρυτον ἔρρεεν αἶμα”¹⁰, thus granting the deceased his due¹¹. These same rites were observed in the funeral of Hector, in as much as he was also placed on a funerary pyre amid the sound of lamentations. Moreover,

⁶ *Iliad*. 23. 71-74.

⁷ *Iliad*. 18. 22 and 315, as well as 23. 5 and 130.

⁸ *Iliad*. 18. 350.

⁹ *Iliad*. 18. 352-353.

¹⁰ *Iliad*. 23. 34.

¹¹ The funeral feast may also be held after the funeral as in the case of Hector.

during the funerary meal for Patroclus, cattle, goats and swine were slaughtered¹²: their blood summoning the deceased while the Achaeans feasted, therefore rendering this feast a last communion between the living and the dead. Following the feast, the body, in this case Patroclus, was placed on the pyre along with the bodies of four newly slain horses, nine dogs and twelve sacrificed Trojan captives. According to Mylonas, the horses and dogs slain for Patroclus were merely the possessions of the deceased accompanying their master, and as such not necessarily the victims of sacrifice¹³. This is further supported by the absence of any such animals at the funeral of Elpenor, whose status also entitled him to receive sacrifices. Amid the many offerings, honey seems to have been common practice, for it not only appears during the funeral of Patroclus, but also was repeated by Odysseus when he offers it to the dead on his visit to Hades¹⁴. Oil was also commonly offered, perhaps as sustenance for the deceased on his journey to the Netherworld. It should be mentioned that the twelve victims slain for Patroclus were killings to avenge his death, and thus do not constitute part of a greater funerary ritual.

Parallels aside, the funeral of Patroclus¹⁵, being the only detailed ceremony, warrants closer examination. He was carried to his place of cremation in a great chariot procession of armed warriors and a throng of foot-soldiers, all of whom had cut off locks of their hair to throw on the body. The deceased was then laid upon a huge pyre. The sacrifice of numerous sheep and cattle followed, in order to cover the body in their flesh and fat; their flayed carcasses were then heaped around the pyre. Pots of honey

¹² *Iliad*. 23. 29.

¹³ Mylonas 1948: 59.

¹⁴ *Odyssey*. 11. 27.

¹⁵ *Iliad*. 23. 110-257.

and ἄλειφαρ grease were deposited among the sheep carcasses around the bier bearing the deceased. Several other animals were then killed and added to the offerings, specifically four high-necked horses, nine dogs – two of which had belonged to Patroclus – and a dozen Trojan captives. The pyre was then set aflame. Throughout the night, Achilles maintained vigil and poured wine into the earth while invoking Patroclus' soul. At dawn, wine was used once more to extinguish the last of the flames. Patroclus' bones were then removed from the remains of the pyre, wrapped in fat and placed inside a golden bowl; the entirety was then covered with a fine linen cloth and set aside to await the addition of Achilles' bones.

Some of these rites are repeated in the less detailed accounting of Hector's funeral¹⁶. Although the bones of Patroclus were placed inside an urn to be kept by Achilles, the standard practice seems to have been that once cremated, the bones were buried at the site of the pyre, over which a mound was built. Despite the fact that his bones remained unburied, there is absolutely no allusion to Patroclus' funeral being unfinished; we can therefore conclude that Homer considered cremation sufficient enough to permit Patroclus' ψυχή to Hades. Furthermore, there is an apparent lack in the *Iliad* of any requests for bones to be returned to their native land, which would seem to indicate that no significance was placed by Homer on the actual remains themselves. Rather, the only emphasis seems to be the disposal of the body and the burning of the flesh, in order to separate the ψυχή from its corporeal existence.

This belief that the disposal of the body is sufficient to ensure access to Hades is demonstrated by the request made to a sleeping Achilles by the ghost of Patroclus. It implored him to execute a prompt burial, and foretold of Achilles' death, urging him to

¹⁶ *Iliad*. 24. 777-804.

have their bones laid together. Achilles attempted to embrace him, but did not manage to take hold of the deceased's soul, as it slipped away like a vapour. Achilles jerked awake, exclaiming "Ah, so there is something in Death's house, a phantom spirit, although not a body"¹⁷. This is paralleled in the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus attempted to embrace his mother's soul in the Underworld three times and equally failed. When asking her why she was so elusive, she informed him that the body wastes away οὐ γὰρ ἔτι σάρκας τε καὶ ὀστέα ἵνες ἔχουσιν¹⁸, while the soul flies like a dream. Both these events portray the heroes' attempts to embrace ghosts, failing and thus gaining a better understanding of death. It was therefore believed that when someone died, his or her ψυχή departed and went to Hades; however, the soul was nevertheless able to manifest itself to the living, either as a ghost or in a dream.

Turning our focus from the specifics of Patroclus' funeral and focusing on burial ceremonies in general, it was customary during the heroic age to bury the dead with the objects they held dear in life; this is further depicted by Homer, when the soul of Elpenor begs Odysseus to bury his weapons with his body and erect a mound over him. "ἀλλὰ με κακῆσαι σὺν τεύχεσιν, ἄσσα μοι ἔστιν, σῆμά τέ μοι χεῖναι πολιῆς ἐπὶ θινὶ θαλάσσης"¹⁹. Although there are numerous instances in the *Iliad* of heroes saying they will throw the bodies of their enemies to the dogs and birds, Achilles is actually depicted violating custom by burning his slain enemy fully armoured and accompanied by all of his weapons, as is clearly expressed by Andromache:

κατὰ δ' ἔκτανεν Ἡετίωνα,
οὐδέ μιν ἐξενάριξε, σεβάσσατο γὰρ τό γε θυμῷ,

¹⁷ *Iliad*. 23. 111-112.

¹⁸ *Odyssey*. 11. 219.

¹⁹ *Odyssey*. 11. 74-75.

ἀλλ' ἄρα μιν κατέκτεσεν ἔντεσι δαιδαλέοισιν²⁰.

Among the ceremonies described by Homer, one of the most clearly depicted and delineated rites is the ritual lament. The first lament to honour Hector was performed by Priam, who was described as utterly distraught and rolling on the ground, “κυλινδόμενος κατὰ κόπρον”²¹; his mother in turn was depicted leading the Trojan women in their wailing “αδινῶ ἑξήρχε γόοιο”²². The latter appears to be a more formal lament describing what appears to be a ceremonial mourning ritual. Another peculiarity involving Achilles concerns Hector’s body, which he had washed and wrapped, prior to personally returning it to Priam, thus allowing the Trojans finally to “τότ’ ἄρ’ ἐξέφερον θρασὺν Ἑκτορα δάκρυ χέοντες, ἐν δὲ πυρῇ ὑπάτη νεκρὸν θέσαν, ἐν δ’ ἔβαλον πῦρ”²³. Hector is thus placed by the Trojans on the highest pyre, while they shed their tears and lament. Upon Priam returning Hector’s body to Troy, Hector’s wife Andromache rushed to the scene and, cradling his head, she pulled out her hair in anguish; she is followed in her lament by Hector’s mother, and thirdly Helen. Furthermore, with regard to this death, Priam says that his grief for his favourite son will carry him down to Hades²⁴. This portrayal is employed to depict the grief of a warrior’s female relations, as well as actual funerary lamentations.

Lamentations were not just considered private outbursts of grief, although a perfectly natural part of it, but also a gift of honour for the dead, which forms part of the ritual obligation, as stated by Odysseus: “ἀλλὰ χρὴ τὸν μὲν καταθάπτειν ὅς κε

²⁰ *Iliad*. 6. 416-418.

²¹ *Iliad*. 22. 414.

²² *Iliad*. 22. 430.

²³ *Iliad*. 24. 786-787.

²⁴ *Iliad*. 24. 425.

θάνησι, νηλέα θυμὸν ἔχοντας, ἐπ' ἥματι δακρύσαντας”²⁵; weeping was therefore viewed as essential, and consequently burial could only be performed after one day's weeping. This is further evidenced during the evening and night following Patroclus' funeral and funeral games, when Achilles is depicted as restless, tossing and turning in his bed “ἔστρέφετ' ἐνθα καὶ ἐνθα”, and getting up to wander distractedly, δινεύεσκ' ἀλύων on the seashore²⁶. He wept recalling the hardships they faced together, the battles and the voyaging over wild seas:

ἦδ' ὅποσα τολύπευσε σὺν αὐτῷ καὶ πάθεν ἄλγεα,
ἀνδρῶν τε πτολέμους ἄλγεινά τε κύματα πείρων²⁷.

While Patroclus' funeral pyre was burning, Achilles called out to his friend in Hades, and declared that his funeral had been carried out as promised, and all rituals and lamentations have been performed.

Since the rites performed at Patroclus' funeral are being used as textual evidence for Mycenaean practices, it should be highlighted that Achilles' sacrificing of horses, dogs and twelve Trojans on the pyre parallel horse and animal burials found in Mycenaean graves, therefore “le témoignage de l'épopée, et la tradition légendaire ou religieuse font admettre comme possible, en principe, l'usage de sacrifices humains à l'époque achéenne”²⁸. In addition, the phrase used by Homer to portray the souls of Patroclus and Hector leaving their bodies:

ψυχὴ δ' ἐκ ῥεθέων παμένη Ἄιδόσδε βεβήκει
ὄν πότμον γοόωσα, λιποῦσ' ἀνδροτῆτα καὶ ἦβην²⁹

²⁵ *Iliad*. 19. 228-229.

²⁶ *Iliad*. 24. 5-13.

²⁷ *Iliad*. 24. 7-8.

²⁸ Picard 1948: 288.

²⁹ *Iliad*. 16. 856-857 and 22. 362-363, which may be further represented by the depiction of the winged figure found on the Tanagra larnax in Kassel, figure 13b.

is linguistically very old, as demonstrated by the scansion of ἀνδρατῆτα which must be scanned ~ ~ - ~, otherwise the verse does not correspond to the Homeric hexameter. The term ἀνδρατῆτα must therefore be read with the syllabic liquid unchanged: *anṛtāta in order to fit the Homeric meter. The verse is believed to be dated circa 1400 B.C. or perhaps even earlier³⁰. If the language describing death is established as Mycenaean or even pre-Mycenaean, then the rituals associated with death can also be reasonably assumed to date from the Bronze Age. This phrase therefore becomes crucial in implying beyond a reasonable doubt that the terminology used to depict the deaths of Patroclus and Hector dates to or predates the Mycenaean era, and therefore, by association, the funerary rituals accompanying these deaths may also date to the Bronze Age³¹. In other words, this solid data establishes that some verses are dated to the Bronze Age, and we can reasonably extrapolate that the beliefs they depict are also pre-Homeric and reflect the Bronze Age.

A further parallel can be drawn from the death of Hector, specifically from the scales used by Zeus to balance and weigh the fates of Achilles and Hector against one another³². Clearly determined by Zeus' scales: Hector is fated to die. In terms of archaeological evidence to support this imagery in its association with death, gold scale balances were unearthed from early Mycenaean graves (Fig. 8). Moreover, the association of these scales to death is further implied in the decorations of butterflies

³⁰ Watkins 1995: 499-504. This dating is based on the syllabic r being written in the Linear B texts with the sign for 'ro'.

³¹ For further details on metrical irregularities in the Homeric text which show that the original verses in question date to the Mycenaean or pre-Mycenaean era, see Bennet 1997: 511-534.

³² *Iliad*. 22. 239-240.

found on the scales from Mycenae graves, for these could be easily interpreted as representing the flight of the soul of the departed³³.

In direct opposition to Patroclus' funerary ceremony, Hector's is barely described; what is emphasized instead is the appalling treatment of his body by Achilles. This brutality in his treatment of Hector's body can also be paralleled by Achilles' slaughtering of twelve Trojan captives for the pyre of Patroclus. The horror conveyed by the vengeance exacted by Achilles resounds in the very words used by Homer to describe it, specifically ἀεικέα μῆδετο ἔργα³⁴ and κακὰ δὲ φρεσὶ μῆδετο ἔργα³⁵, i.e. unseemly and evil. This savagery is further manifest in Achilles' refusal to return Hector's body for burial, in the cruelty of dragging it and in his threatening to throw it to the dogs, as well as in the slaying of Trojan prisoners for Patroclus. In fact, there are many references in the Homeric epics to leaving an unburied corpse to be devoured by dogs and carrion-eating birds, though it is never actually depicted³⁶. The custom of throwing the body of an enemy to the dogs is a common Homeric theme, and references can be found as early as the fourth line of the *Iliad*: "and left their bodies to rot as feasts for dogs and birds". Despite the frequent allusions to desecrating the bodies of enemies, Achilles' treatment of Eetion at the sack of Thebes³⁷ – when he burned the king on a pyre with all his armour and erected a tomb over the ashes – renders his treatment of Hector all the more horrifying. It should therefore be emphasized that the only hero in the *Iliad* to bury a dead enemy is the very one who is ascribed the most

³³ Refer to footnote 28.

³⁴ *Iliad*. 22. 395, 23. 24.

³⁵ *Iliad*. 23. 176.

³⁶ It also appears in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, where Gilgamesh refuses to bury his friend Enkidu: "Six days and seven nights I wept for him, I would not give him up for burial, until a worm fell out of his nose", 10. 58-60.

³⁷ *Iliad*. 6. 414-416.

gruesome treatment of an enemy's body. We should not neglect to mention however that there is clear evidence to indicate that Hector would have likewise mistreated Patroclus' own body had the Achaeans not intervened and recaptured it "On your own, out of shame that Patroclus is becoming a ragbone for Trojan dogs"³⁸. All these references suggest that the general mistreatment of an enemy's body was not necessarily viewed as outrageous.

In addition to Achilles' shaming Hector, he further refuses to have himself cleaned of dust and blood afterwards; he is in essence demonstrating the most gruesome aspects of dishonour when maltreating the corpse of Hector, for a soldier's ghost cannot rest until his body is granted the appropriate rites and buried. Nor does this belief seem limited to Achilles and Hector, as is clearly revealed when the spirit of Elpenor requests that his body be burned with his armour and buried in a mound by the shore, not left behind unwept and unburied: "μή μ' ἀκλαντον ἄθαιπον ἰὼν ὀπιθεν καταλείπειν νοσφισθείς"³⁹.

The previous statement, in addition to supporting the significance of burial, serves to grant us a glimpse into the Underworld, specifically in the Nekyia scene of the *Odyssey*, Book XI⁴⁰, something Homer refrained from doing in the *Iliad*. In the Nekyia, we are led into Hades, through which Odysseus must travel in order to return home, and the κατάβασις *descent into the underworld* is depicted as a typical heroic ordeal. Here certain obligations in association with a cult of the dead are clearly emphasized: the hero must dig a pit in a specific location and pour a libation to all the dead, starting with milk and honey μελικρήτωι, followed by sweet wine ἡδέι οἴνωι, then water ὕδατι and

³⁸ *Iliad*. 12. 254-255.

³⁹ *Odyssey*. 11. 72-88.

⁴⁰ Also the *Deutero-Nekyia* scene in *Odyssey*. 24.

white barley ἄλφιτα λευκά⁴¹; these acts are then followed by the sacrifice of sheep and the pouring of their blood over the pit “τα δὲ μῆλα λαβὼν ἀπεδειροτόμησα ἐς βόθρον, ῥέε δ’ αἷμα κελαινεφές”⁴². The fact that Circe is the one who instructs him on his homecoming upon his return to the world of living, indicates that the Nekyia scene is significant since it conveys the theme of κατάβασις, in order to instruct the reader as to the fate of the dead. There is little doubt that the Nekyia illustrates rituals, which reflected a real cult of the dead⁴³.

In addition to Circe’s instructions, she also explains to Odysseus that Teiresias the seer is the only entity in Hades still in possession of his wits, while the others are reduced to mere shadows of their former selves: τοὶ δὲ σκιαὶ αἰσσοῦσιν: lacking the ability to speak except when the epic requires them to make conversation. And indeed upon his arrival, he finds them fluttering about τετριγυῖαι, reminiscent of bats in a cave; collectively the noise they create resembles the screaming κλαγγή of birds⁴⁴. Moreover, Odysseus further describes the situation of the dead in the afterlife, informing the audience that in their final destination, they are divided into categories reflecting their varied situations or circumstances in life, or even representing the manner of their death. In Odysseus’ tale, the ghosts appeared in Erebus as follows:

Brides, unmarried youths, old men who had suffered greatly,
Once happy girls with grief still fresh in their hearts,
And a great throng of warriors killed in battle,
Their spear-wounds gaping and all their armour stained with blood⁴⁵.

⁴¹ *Odyssey*. 11. 27-28.

⁴² *Odyssey*. 11. 35-36.

⁴³ Albinus 2000: 69.

⁴⁴ *Odyssey*. 11. 43, 605 and 633, as well as 24. 5-9.

⁴⁵ *Odyssey* 11. 38-41.

The first of the ghosts to approach Odysseus was his fallen comrade Elpenor, who had broken his neck falling off Circe's roof, thus serving to illustrate the plight of the unburied. After speaking to Teiresias and his own mother, Odysseus is surrounded by a gaggle of women, wives and daughters of heroes, and he addresses them each in turn. Odysseus then holds conference with Agamemnon and others with whom he fought at Troy. These reminiscences are followed by Odysseus spying a series of legendary figures: Minos, Orion, Tityus, Tantalus, Sisyphus and Heracles, who all appear to be having a different and unique afterlife experience⁴⁶. Aside from the preceding list of extraordinary individuals, there is nothing to suggest that different people received different treatment in Hades; however, it seems that Homer wanted to convey that the 'inhabitants' were divided into groups, and therefore preserved their former status. This clearly is evident in the portrayal of men killed in battle still wearing their bloody armour, in Teiresias still carrying his mantic sceptre and Agamemnon still being attended by his slaughtered retainers. Moreover, Achilles remains a lord among the dead, Minos still presides over legal matters, Orion still kills his prey and Heracles still searches for enemies.

Beyond the actual activities taking place in the Underworld, the exact location of Hades is provided by Circe as being a meeting point of four separate rivers: Acheron, Pyriphlegeton, Cocytus, and Styx⁴⁷. In fact, the presence of a river or a large body of water as a characteristic of the Underworld is a recurring theme in many various traditions, and Homer's depictions of Hades are no exception. Although Homer does not very clearly define the Underworld, he does specify that it contains rivers and

⁴⁶ *Odyssey* 11. 565-630.

⁴⁷ *Odyssey*. 10. 514-515.

gates. This is clearly demonstrated in the *Iliad* when Patroclus' ghost complains about Achilles' delay in executing a prompt funeral for him, specifically mentioning gates and a river as features of Hades⁴⁸. It should also be noted that Patroclus does not identify the river by name, thus making this reference to specific rivers in the *Odyssey* rather striking. Additionally, the clearly described landscape greatly contrasts Homer's otherwise vague descriptions of Hades. The only Underworld river to be actually named in the *Iliad* is the Styx⁴⁹, and no reference whatsoever is made to the other three. Similar omissions are likewise made in the *Odyssey*, where only Styx is referred to⁵⁰, with the sole exception of the Nekyia scene. Additionally, no mention is made of these rivers when Odysseus actually travels to Hades⁵¹. Considering that the only identification of these rivers is provided by Circe and only in Book X of the *Odyssey*, it could be inferred that they are later additions⁵². One significant factor however seems to be the names of the rivers themselves, especially Cocytus from κῶκύω⁵³, which is a verb used in Homer to describe the high-pitched wail of female mourners, and as such seems to denote the pain and suffering connected with death and funerary rituals. Moreover, the images evoked by the names of these rivers are associated with funerary ideology, rituals and cremations: Styx: a place of hate, Cocytus: wailing, Acheron: misery and Pyriphlegethon: flaming fire.

The main purpose for Odysseus to visit Hades was to confer with the soul of Teiresias in order to obtain advice with regard to going home. This therefore reflects

⁴⁸ *Iliad*. 23. 71-74.

⁴⁹ *Iliad*. 2. 755, 8. 369, 14. 271 and 15. 37.

⁵⁰ *Odyssey*. 5. 184-186.

⁵¹ *Odyssey*. 11.

⁵² Mackie 1999: 486.

⁵³ *Iliad*. 18. 37 and 71, 19. 284, 22. 407, 24. 200 and 703, and in *Odyssey*. 4. 259, 8. 527, 19. 541 and 24. 295.

the practice of necromancy, a form of divination. The steps he followed, as instructed by Circe, parallel certain Hittite purification rituals⁵⁴, which summoned not the dead, but rather specific Underworld deities⁵⁵. As Odysseus carries out the ritual on the shores of Oceanus, so did the Hittites perform theirs on the banks of a river; specifically, they dug a sacrificial pit, sacrificed a lamb or black sheep⁵⁶ allowing the blood to run into the pit; they then poured oil, beer, wine, as well as *walhi* and *marnuwan*, which were followed by groats and bran. They finally called upon the Sungoddess of the Earth to come and open the gate, allowing the other gods and the seer Aduntarri to partake in the offerings⁵⁷.

Expanding our focus somewhat to include the epic of Gilgamesh, specifically as it relates to the Homeric epics, numerous parallels that depict an essential belief in a similar afterlife can be drawn. For instance Odysseus' interactions with the dead are reminiscent of Gilgamesh's summoning of Enkidu's ghost in Tablet XII, *Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Nether World*, in order to communicate with him. The specific parallels between the Nekyia scene and Gilgamesh are evident in Ea's instructions to Gilgamesh to dig a hole in the earth for Enkidu's spirit and Circe's to Odysseus to dig a trench for his ghosts to appear. One noteworthy distinction is that Gilgamesh manages to embrace Enkidu's ghost, whereas Odysseus' and Achilles' attempts failed, however all three learned about the nature of death and the ensuing dissolution of the body. Additionally, in his descriptions of the different fates of the dead, Enkidu classifies various categories among the dead, once more paralleling Odysseus' experience in Hades: Enkidu also

⁵⁴ KUB vii. 41.

⁵⁵ West 1997: 426.

⁵⁶ KUB vii. 53 and KUB xii. 58.

⁵⁷ West 1997: 426 and Bryce 2002: 185-186.

mentions men killed in battle, unburied men, and a man who fell off a roof. The last two are obviously reminiscent of the *Odyssey*. At the close of the Nekyia scene, Odysseus, finding himself surrounded by a cluster of ghosts, fears that Persephone may have sent the Gorgon's head to him⁵⁸, representing his capture and subsequent inability to depart from Hades. Similarly, when Enkidu, while living, first descends into the Netherworld, Gilgamesh warns him:

Do not anoint yourself with fine oil from a jar,
They would surely encircle you when they smell it.
Do not hurl your throw stick in the netherworld,
Those killed by a throw stick would surely encircle you.
Do not take up your staff in the netherworld,
The ghosts would surely hover around you⁵⁹.

Enkidu unfortunately disregards these warnings and as the dead surround him, he is seized by the underworld, never to escape. Evidently, this motif of being trapped in the Underworld without any means of escape seems to be a recurrent one and not limited to Greek tradition.

Further representations of the existence of the dead in the afterlife can be found in the *Odyssey*, specifically in the prophecies uttered by Theoclymenos, when he describes the death of Penelope's Suitors. In his portrayal, the dead are depicted as enveloped in darkness, lamenting their fate, as well as their descent into the Netherworld:

Your heads, your faces and your knees are veiled in night.
The air is ablaze with lamentation; cheeks are streaming with tears.
The walls and lovely alcoves are splashed with blood.
The porch is filled with ghosts. So is the court –
ghosts hurrying down to darkness and to the Underworld⁶⁰.

⁵⁸ *Odyssey*. 11. 634-635.

⁵⁹ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. 12. 176-181.

⁶⁰ *Odyssey*. 20. 351-356.

Additionally, Homer provides the audience with an imaginative account of the Suitors' reception in the underworld by the heroes already resident there⁶¹. On their way to Hades, the deceased Suitors pass through the Gates of the Sun and the Region of Dreams⁶² to get to their final destination, where they meet many slain heroes, including Agamemnon. Their subsequent interaction is used to further emphasize the significance of appropriate funerary rites to honour and appease the dead:

our corpses still lie uncared-for in Odysseus' palace,
as the news has not yet reached our homes and brought our friends
to wash the dark blood from our wounds, to lay our bodies
and mourn for us, as is a dead man's right⁶³.

In passages such as these, the proper treatment of the dead is not only further reinforced, but also the dead themselves appear to show great concern regarding the fitting disposal of their bodies. Additionally, this clearly stresses the belief that the dead descended into a sunless decayed realm ruled by Hades and Persephone, where they continued on with a dim, shadowy existence, lacking bodily substance and twittering like bats. Homer depicts a God and Goddess reigning in Hades, a practice that is paralleled in the epic of Gilgamesh, in the forms of Nergal and Ereshkigal ruling the Underworld. All these different representations, be they prophecies, depictions of the dead or the very structure of the Underworld, ultimately serve to portray the fundamental beliefs with regard to the afterlife.

Yet another similarity between the two epics is the great friendship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu when compared to that of Patroclus and Achilles. Beyond the existence of these friendships, a parallel can be drawn in the return of the dead to

⁶¹ *Odyssey*. 24. 1-34.

⁶² *Odyssey*. 24. 12.

⁶³ *Odyssey*. 24. 186-190.

inform their heroic friends about the nature of death: as “the spirit of Enkidu, like a phantom, he brought up out of the netherworld”⁶⁴ so did “ἦλθε δ’ ἐπὶ ψυχὴ Πατροκλῆος δειλοῖο”⁶⁵. These parallel friendships also seem to have similar conclusions, beyond the obvious apparitions of the deceased. Achilles was devastated upon learning of Patroclus’ death, and abandoned himself to grief; likewise, Gilgamesh withdraws into an extreme self-repression or symbolic death. Both these tragic heroes lose themselves in mourning their respective losses; Achilles even postponed his friend’s funeral until he killed Patroclus’ slayer. In this wild and inhuman state, Achilles scooped dust and ashes with both hands, pouring it over his head and dirtying his face and clothes; he then hurled himself to the ground and tore at his hair. Gilgamesh similarly mourns Enkidu’s death as follows:

Tearing out and hurling away the locks of his hair,
Ripping off and throwing away his fine clothes like something foul.⁶⁶

Since these acts of lamentation and self-abasement appear in both works, it is reasonable to assume that they represent commonalities in ritual lamentation.

Although this brief comparison with Near Eastern epic tradition served to illustrate some greater funerary belief, the purpose of this study nevertheless remains the determination of Early Greek funerary customs; as such, we will focus once more on the Homeric poems. When Thetis inquired why Achilles was so wretched, considering that Zeus had fulfilled his wishes and kept the Achaeans at bay, he replied:

Mother, Zeus may have done all this for me,
But how can I rejoice? My friend is dead,
Patroclus, my dearest friend of all. I loved him.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. 12. 256.

⁶⁵ *Iliad*. 23. 65.

⁶⁶ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. 8. 63-64.

⁶⁷ *Iliad*. 18. 79-82.

Achilles then proceeded to tell Thetis of his own upcoming death as well as his lack of desire to live; his single remaining purpose being to slay Hector. Once this goal has been fulfilled, he shall readily accept his fate whatever the gods will it to be, since even Heracles did not escaped death:

If it is true that I have a fate like his, then I too
Will lie down in death.⁶⁸

Achilles therefore comes to represent the looming fate that everyone is destined to die, and thus embodies the inevitability of death. This interpretation can be carried even further; specifically, in lamenting Patroclus, his surrogate, Achilles was in fact lamenting his own death:

Achilles began the incessant lamentation,
Laying his man-slaying hands on Patroclus' chest,
And groaning over and over like a bearded lion
Whose cubs some deer hunter has smuggled out
Of dense woods. When the lion returns,
It tracks the human from valley to valley,
Growling low the whole time. Sometimes it finds him.⁶⁹

Emphasis should be placed however, on the fact that Achilles' lament for Patroclus can in no way be interpreted as the standard ritual for lamentations. Where the actual tradition was a structured ritual performed by wailing women, in his grief, Achilles prolonged his lamentation. Yet another idiosyncrasy concerning Achilles and the custom of lamentation is the fact that Thetis and her sisters, the Nereids, perform a lament for Achilles though he is still living: upon hearing of Patroclus' death and Achilles' grief, Thetis lamented while the Nereids beat their breasts⁷⁰. Only in the

⁶⁸ *Iliad*. 18. 128-129.

⁶⁹ *Iliad*. 18. 335-343.

⁷⁰ *Iliad*. 18. 68-76.

Odyssey, do we actually witness the funeral of Achilles, where the Muses and Nereids sing lamentations over his body.

Then we carried you off from the battlefield to the ships, cleansed your fair flesh with warm water and unguents, and laid you on a bed. Your countrymen gathered round you, shedding hot tears and cutting their hair ... the daughters of the Old-Sea-god stood round you with bitter lamentations, and wrapped your body in an imperishable shroud ... for seventeen days and seventeen nights we mourned for you ... we committed you to the flames, with a rich sacrifice of fatted sheep and crooked-horned cattle ... with lavish unguents and sweet honey ... we gathered your white bones at dawn, Achilles, and steeped them in unmixed wine and oil⁷¹.

The preceding passage describing the treatment of the body, as well as the funeral games that follow in honour of Achilles, clearly mirror the rites performed during the funeral of Patroclus, thus reinforcing the notion that they are in fact depicting actual practices.

Regardless of the magnitude of the actual funerary ceremony, the fact remained that the heroes nevertheless ended up in Hades; and although the deceased maintained the status they possessed in life, they had been reduced to mere shadows never to return to the land of the living, “οὐ γὰρ ἐστ’ αὖτις νίσσομαι ἐξ’ Αἴδαο”⁷². Moreover, the house of Hades is often described as εὐρυπυλός, or wide-gated; this clearly alludes to the gates through which the dead must pass, thus barring any possible return. In addition to these evident representations, Homer makes divergent references with regard to the realm of the dead. Beyond the aforementioned gates and rivers of Hades, mention is also made of Persephone’s poplar and willow groves, of an asphodel meadow, located beside the river Oceanus. Furthermore, especially privileged heroes are said to go to the Elysian

⁷¹ *Odyssey*. 24. 43-74.

⁷² *Iliad*. 23. 75-76.

Fields, where they live in ideal conditions⁷³. In the *Odyssey*, Menelaus is foretold that following his death, he will reside in the Elysian Fields:

And now, Menelaus, favourite son of Zeus, hear your own destiny
It is not your fate to die in Argos where the horses graze.
Instead, the immortals will send you to the Elysian Fields
at the world's end, to join auburn-haired Rhadamanthys
in the land where living is made easy for mankind,
where no snow falls, no strong winds blow and there is never any rain,
but day after day the West Wind's tuneful breeze comes in
from the Ocean to refresh its people. This is because
you are the husband of Helen and, in the eyes of the gods, son-in-law to Zeus.⁷⁴

Considering the various descriptions of the Homeric afterlife, which suggest a rather sophisticated and highly evolved eschatology, a reasonable assumption seems to be that although Mycenaean Greece yielded no clear evidence of this belief, these concepts cannot possibly have evolved over the span of a few centuries, and therefore must thus have been rooted in the Bronze Age.

Now that the specific events in the Homeric epics that relate to funerary customs have been examined, their significance in terms of actual practices must be ascertained. In the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, there is no obvious allusion to an actual cult of the dead⁷⁵, beyond the possible implications of the Nekyia scene. It should be mentioned however that as a concept, the cult of the hero is a very old and distinct concept of traditional Greek religion, though its practices were distinct from the worshipping of the gods⁷⁶. The cult of heroes can be interpreted as a highly evolved transformation of ancestor worship, within a strictly localized context. The cult of

⁷³ *Odyssey*. 4. 563-569, 10. 509 and 11. 539.

⁷⁴ *Odyssey*. 4. 561-569.

⁷⁵ For further details on the differences between ancestor worship and the cult of heroes, see Chapter III. Although I use the term 'cult of the dead' to reflect the same notion of performing rites for the long-dead, be they the ancestors or the local heroes of those performing the rituals.

⁷⁶ Nagy 1979: 115.

ancestors or heroes represents a local worship, whereas the purpose of the *Iliad* was to present a Panhellenic ideal. The cult of the ancestors or heroes was a local custom by necessity because as a fundamental principle its goal was to secure the power of a minority over their surroundings. Consequently, Homeric silence with regard to these cults should not be interpreted as their non-existence, but should instead be viewed as Homer's attempt to reinforce a Panhellenic myth and ideology. However, in descriptions of actual funerals, for instance Patroclus', the ritualistic aspects depicted reveal tangible traces of cultic activity: wine libations and offerings of honey and oil can only be regarded as sacrificial.

As has already been mentioned, archaeological findings alone are insufficient to provide a clear picture of the funerary practices of the Mycenaeans, and must be complemented by textual evidence. The following pages will be examining specific grave findings and their significance as they relate to the Homeric epics. A first point to consider is the presence of cenotaphs found in Mycenaean graves; these could be interpreted as graves commemorating and honouring the dead who perished away from home. Obvious parallels can be made with the Homeric epics, where nearly all slain warriors met their fate in distant lands. The only significant difference between Mycenaean and Homeric burial customs is the disposal of the deceased; the former generally interred the dead, while the latter used cremation. Mylonas suggests that this is because warriors fighting far from home would have no difficulty in adopting the custom, since it presented no conflict with their beliefs and practices. It could be inferred that those perishing away from home were cremated, unlike those who died in their native lands. However, Homer attests that cremation was also practiced in Greece

“πολλοὺς πυρῆς ἐπέβησ’ ἀλεγεινῆς”⁷⁷. We can therefore speculate that Homer used cremation because it was a practice that was familiar to him and he deemed it worthy of his heroes.

One reason why Homer adopted cremation is that the expense of cremation limited it to kings and the wealthy class (⁷⁸), and it therefore seemed to him one of the ways in which he could enhance the grandeur of his subject⁷⁹.

It is impossible for the apparent parallels between customs as described in the epic poetry and those revealed by the excavations of the graves of the Mycenaeans not to make a strong impression upon us. The evident conclusion therefore to be drawn from these parallels is that Mycenaean tradition was the source from which the detailed descriptions of the epic were drawn.

Furthermore, concrete evidence can be found in the *Iliad* to support the notion that the Mycenaeans possessed the knowledge and employed the art of embalming. This is clearly obvious in the case of the third body found in Grave V of Circle A, which had been wonderfully preserved under its ponderous golden mask. The embalmed body had been preserved with a round fully-fleshed face without a single vestige of hair, but with both eyes perfectly visible, as was the mouth, which, due to the enormous weight that had pressed upon it, was wide open, showing thirty-two teeth. “The colour of the body resembled very much that of an Egyptian mummy”⁸⁰. This preservation of a 3000-year-old body is otherwise inexplicable; this body is therefore deemed to have been embalmed. Considering this find, the practice of embalming seems likely, although no other evidence of this practice has been uncovered from any

⁷⁷ *Iliad*. 9. 546.

⁷⁸ Due to the oil needed for the funeral pyre.

⁷⁹ Hack 1929: 70.

⁸⁰ Tsountas and Manatt 1897: 95.

other grave of this period. Based on Homer's descriptions, we can infer that the bodies of their rulers lay in a ceremonial state for days; without embalming this would have been impossible. The speculation regarding the embalming of the mummified corpse in Grave V can be further supported by the anointment of Patroclus' body by Thetis. Indeed, Homer indirectly referred to some process of embalming when he described Thetis shedding ambrosia and red nectar on the body of Patroclus through his nostrils in order for his flesh to maintain the same state⁸¹ until such a time as Achilles slew Hector, and buried his comrade. A similar practice is noted when Aphrodite anointed Hector's body with oil "ροδόεντι δὲ χρίεν ἑλαίῳ, ἀμβροσίῳ"⁸², Apollo in turn covered the body with a cloud to keep the sun from shrivelling Hector's flesh⁸³. From these examples, we can speculate that the practice of embalming was not unknown during the Mycenaean age, though it may have only been employed for the preservation of the body while lying in state. The prothesis of chiefs and princes, unlike those of the common people would have undoubtedly lasted many days; therefore, the practice of embalming would have represented a rare exception.

Two types of graves from the LH II and III periods should be considered when comparing to the funerary practices depicted in Homer's epics. Evidence uncovered in the numerous excavated chamber tombs and tholoi revealed that cremation did at times occur – though rarely – and was not the popular mode of interment⁸⁴. The Mounds erected over tholoi are in fact mentioned in the Homeric epics. Where the Homeric heroes raised a τύμβος over the pyre of the deceased, in much the same manner, the

⁸¹ *Iliad*. 19. 29-33.

⁸² *Iliad*. 23. 186-187.

⁸³ *Iliad*. 23. 188-189.

⁸⁴ Cremation became the accepted mode of disposal during the Iron Age, Holt 1992: 324.

Mycenaeans poured earth over the tholos. Contrarily, the shaft graves dated to the MH to LH I periods are too far removed from the Homeric Age.

The similarities presented by Mycenaean findings and the Homeric epics however, are quite astounding: the fundamental notion of what happens to the spirit upon death is the same, i.e. the psyche remained 'sentient' until the body was destroyed either in a fire or through decay in the tomb. Additionally, following the funeral of Patroclus, the Achaeans engaged in a variety of contests, chariot-racing, archery or armed combat⁸⁵, the same motifs echoed in the horses and chariots depicted on the stelae at Mycenae. Moreover, some of the deceased's possessions were burned along with the body in the Homeric epics, as is reflected in the presence of grave goods buried in Mycenaean graves. Furthermore, funerary feasts were discovered to have occurred in honour of the deceased in Mycenaean tombs, as is clearly mirrored in the epics. We can therefore presume that Homer drew upon the various traditions and customs known to him when trying to define a mode of burial for his heroes. One such tradition would have to represent Trojans, and since he deemed cremation to be their standard mode of burial, it was therefore also adopted by the Greeks who fought before the Trojan walls. No tradition of inhumation, tholoi, or chamber tombs was preserved in Troy, because these types of funerals and graves were unknown there. It must be taken into account that most of the burials described by Homer occurred in the Troad and not Greece.

After having followed the various stages involved in the funeral of Patroclus, we must admit that it has not provided us with much knowledge regarding a belief in the afterlife. The treatment of the body, the embalming, or cremation were all performed to

⁸⁵ *Iliad*. 23. 258-285.

assist the deceased in his transition to the Underworld; no further obligations are mentioned on behalf of the living. This being said, we should not neglect that the *Iliad*'s main focus was not the individual's experience *post mortem* but rather the perpetuation of heroic fame κλέος and honour.

The earlier descriptions of the funerals of slain heroes, as portrayed in the Homeric epics, are but variant forms of a motif that is attested throughout many Indo-European traditions; specifically, the journey to the afterlife, the deities of the Netherworld, the hell-hounds, and so on⁸⁶. Additionally, the rite of cremation can also be found in the Hittite funerary ritual for the King.

Part of an Indo-European Tradition

The afterlife depictions in the Homeric epics demonstrate that when a man dies, his ψυχή leaves his body and heads to Hades, where it continues to lead a shadowy existence. The word for psyche is obviously related to ψύχω, *to blow cool*, and therefore suggests that the soul is 'airy' by nature. It was presumed to exit from the face, quite likely during the final breath. The ψυχή of a deceased Patroclus, after appearing to Achilles in a dream, departs again like smoke. A similar tradition can be found in the epic of Gilgamesh, when the dead Enkidu's ghost 'utukku' rises from the earth to speak with Gilgamesh, appearing as *kī zāqīqi*, or a wind or phantom; this same word, *zā qīqu* or *zīqīqu*, is often used in reference to human or supernatural spirits⁸⁷. These portrayals, both in Greek and Near Eastern traditions, depicted the soul descending into the afterlife. Homer speaks of a man's ψυχή descending: κατελθειν or κατιμεν into Hades, where Akkadian texts use the verb (w)*arādu*, *go down*, with the

⁸⁶ Lincoln 1977: 248.

⁸⁷ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. 12. 256. See also West 1997: 151.

phrase, *to the earth*, transcribed as *ana erṣeti*, or in conjunction with the names of the underworld, i.e. *arallû* or *erkalla*. Therefore, the Hittite dead are said to go down to the Dark Earth⁸⁸.

Another instance of this similarity is found in the *Odyssey*, when the seer Theoclymenos foretells the souls of the Suitors hastening to the lower darkness: Ἐρεβόσδε ὑπὸ ζόφον⁸⁹. However, in several passages, the word ζόφος refers to the West, or the direction of the sunset, opposite to ἡέλιος δέ⁹⁰. Furthermore, the name of the West Wind, Ζέφυρος, can be considered to be derived from ζόφος⁹¹. Moreover, once the suitors are dead, it is stated that they are guided by Hermes through the Gates of the Sun. Returning to the actual phrase Ἐρεβόσδε ὑπὸ ζόφον, the word Ἐρεβός has a surprising amount of cognates in numerous other Indo-European languages, namely Sanskrit, Armenian, Gothic and Old Norse; in all these it is found to signify either *darkness*, *dusk* or *evening*⁹². The realm of the dead, Ἐρεβός, is almost always depicted as lying in the West⁹³. Considering that the Egyptian Netherworld also appears to be located in the West⁹⁴, it can be reasonably inferred that the Mycenaean and Egyptian customs are somehow related. However, the word Ἐρεβός itself seems to have Semitic origins. In Ugaritic, the setting sun is referred to as ‘rb špš and sunset as m‘rb; and in Akkadian erēb šamši represents the *setting of the sun* or *West*. Therefore, since the Ἐρεβός is a Semitic word for west, and also appears to denote the afterlife, the same

⁸⁸ West 1997: 152.

⁸⁹ *Odyssey*. 20. 356.

⁹⁰ *Odyssey*. XX. 356.

⁹¹ West 1997: 153.

⁹² West 1997: 154.

⁹³ *Odyssey*. 20. 81.

⁹⁴ West 1997: 471.

idea must have infiltrated the East as well⁹⁵. Furthermore, Chantraine defines the term as “vieux mot désignant les ténèbres, conservé aussi en sanskrit, en arménien et en germanique: skr. *rajas*- ‘région obscure de l’air, vapeur, poussière’, arm. *erek*, -oy ‘soir’, got. *riqiz*, v. norrois *røkk* n. ‘obscurité, crépuscule’; i.e. *reg^w-os n.”⁹⁶. Hence, we could posit that the notion of a Netherworld lying in the West appears in many cultures in the East Mediterranean, even though it was first attested in Egypt.

Essentially, Indo-European languages and cultures appear to display a common understanding of death, though it may simply be the separation of the soul from the body⁹⁷, even though no actual terms for these concepts can be reconstructed for a Proto-Indo-European language. However, the presence of this distinction between the body and soul is paralleled in many later Indo-European languages, and invariably appear as opposites. This is evidenced in the following: ψυχή and σῶμα, in Greek; *animus* and *corpus*, in Latin; *asu*- or *ātman*- and *tanū*- or *sārira*-, in Sanskrit; *urvan*- or *baodah*- and *ast*- or *kəhrpa*-, in Avestan and *hamingja*, *fylgja* or *ond* and *lík*, in Old Norse⁹⁸. Although these two distinct concepts are attested in various languages, it is nevertheless unclear when the separation of the soul and body actually took place, i.e. at the time of death, during the funeral, or upon decomposition. The only reasonable assumption that can therefore be made is that early Indo-European ideology held the belief that the human body and the insubstantial soul were complementary opposites.

⁹⁵ West 1997: 154.

⁹⁶ Chantraine 1970: 366.

⁹⁷ Lincoln 1977: 247.

⁹⁸ Lincoln 1977: 247.

II. II – Hittite Literature

Unlike the surviving Mycenaean tablets that provide no concrete information on actual death customs, and as such needed to be supplemented by the Homeric epics, the existing Hittite tablets present a clear record of the *šalliš waštaiš*, a 14-day funerary ritual in honour of the king, discovered in the 1936 excavations of Bogazköy. Furthermore, another reason for shifting our focus to the Hittites is the fact that they were a neighbouring civilization, contemporaneous to the Mycenaeans, enabling us to establish a greater Bronze Age funerary tradition.

The Hittite funerary ceremony for the king or queen generally lasted fourteen days, and possibly longer; however, the disposal of the body probably occurred within the first or second day, though most likely on the second. The *šalliš waštaiš* text makes a clear reference to fire and burning in its descriptions of the first day, although the body is deposited on the pyre during the night of the second day. The text describing the third day continues as follows: “The pyre is extinguished with the help of thirty vessels of wine, beer and walhi-beverage. The bones are taken out of the pyre, anointed with fine oil and wrapped into the linen”⁹⁹. Now that the collection of bones has been completed, these are placed on a chair; however if the deceased is a woman, they are placed on a stool. The cooks and ‘table-men’ set the dishes and all who had a hand in collecting the bones are offered food to eat. Subsequently, a ritual is performed by the *Old Woman* and her *companion*; unfortunately, the condition of the tablets is so poor, that the references are too obscure and difficult to follow. Unfortunately, the poor condition of the tablets, which is often no more than fragmentary, provides little or no

⁹⁹ Kassian, Korolëv and Sideltsev 2002: 25.

information regarding days four, five and six; any information concerning these days was largely obtained from an outline tablet¹⁰⁰. Regarding the eighth, twelfth and thirteenth days, the text seems to be concerned with rituals and sacrifices of a general nature.

In the fourteen-day ritual described above, which begins ‘when a great sin occurs in Hattusa, in that the king (or) queen dies’, numerous accounts of cremation are revealed that describe the funerary practices for members of the royal family; this is clearly echoed in Homeric depictions of death practices involving heroes. The ritual, replete with details, emphasized that the death of a king or queen is a great sin; for without the ruler, the existence of the society and the fate of the land are in peril. In many respects, the Hittite cremation ritual belongs to the North Syrian-Hurrian tradition¹⁰¹. Although archaeological evidence seems to indicate that both cremations and inhumations were practiced by the Hittites in the disposal of their dead, cremation “in Hittite ritual seems to stem from Hurrian influence”¹⁰²; therefore, the practice of cremation seems to be part of a local Bronze Age development and not part of a common Indo-European tradition¹⁰³.

Furthermore, the role of the grave seems to be transitory, since the king is considered to lead the existence of a husbandman and cultivator in the afterlife. On the eighth day of this funerary practice, ritual offerings are made which include clothes, oxen, horses, mules, sheep, a section of turf, representing a meadow, and all manner of

¹⁰⁰ Kassian, Korolëv and Sideltsev 2002: 27.

¹⁰¹ Haas 2000: 2023.

¹⁰² Haas 2000: 2023.

¹⁰³ I am inclined to believe that inhumation was the common Indo-European tradition and any descriptions of cremation by Homer can simply be considered as either borrowings from the East or a reflection of a post-Mycenaean practice.

farming implements in a broken state. Based on these grave gifts and the address to the dead of “when you go to the pasture”, it is clear that the Hittites believed that life after death mirrored the one in this world. This *post mortem* existence was not restricted solely to the royal circle however, but included others members of society. This is inferred from the grave gifts of the Hittite cemetery of Osmankayasi, which included horses, mules, and donkeys. It remains unclear whether this afterlife is the subterranean realm of the dead, Ereshkigal or Allani, or whether we are in fact dealing with a pastoral afterlife¹⁰⁴, perhaps in the sense of the Homeric meadow: κατ’ ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα¹⁰⁵.

Seeing as belief in the afterlife will be explored in Section III, we will now return to the Hittite funerary ritual itself. The only participants in the funerary ritual were the newly installed King, his high officials and their wives, various cultic functionaries, such as the singers of Ishtar, the comedians and the *taptara*, wailing-women. The following is a brief overview of the deceased King’s fourteen-day cremation ritual, and as such only describes the basic activities. Moreover, it can be inferred that animal sacrifices, wailing and singing occurred on virtually every day of the ceremony.

Day 1

The ritual associated with the death of the king or queen began with a prohibition on eating, as an expression of the troubled period now commencing: ‘if a great sin occurs in Hattusa, either the king [or] queen dies, then everyone, high and low in rank, takes away the reeds for drinking [beer] and begins to wail in mourning’. On

¹⁰⁴ These pastures may be located in the West, see Chapter III.

¹⁰⁵ *Odyssey*. 11. 539.

the first day, a plow ox was slaughtered at the feet of the corpse. This sacrifice was made for the soul of the deceased, and was accompanied by a libation of wine; the wine jug was then broken and offered to the dead¹⁰⁶. After sunset, a cathartic rite took place: a male goat was swung over the dead for the express purpose of purification. The words that accompanied this incantation have unfortunately been lost.

Day 2

Of the rituals performed on the second day, once again very few records have been preserved. On this day, a lip-cover and eye-covers of gold were placed over the lips and eyes of the deceased, who was then transported by means of a cart to an intermediate location, where a tent was erected. The body was then taken to the cremation site. A meal took place during which numerous Deities were offered food, i.e. the Sungoddess of the Earth, the Sungod of Heaven, the ancestral spirits, as well as the deceased. Finally, the Day of Death, euphemistically called the 'Favourable Day', also received a libation. A statue of the deceased was then created. The day concluded with the *taptara-women* wailing and lamenting. At the close of the second day, the body was placed into the pyre.

Day 3

Descriptions of the rituals conducted from the third through the seventh days are preserved only in fragments. The burning of the corpse must have occurred on the evening of the second day. The pyre was extinguished and the bones were gathered, anointed and wrapped in linen. They were then placed upon a throne. Next, a meal took place and the statue of the deceased was adorned with fruit.

¹⁰⁶ For further details of Ritual Killing of vessels, see Chapter III.

Day 4

The small fragment describing this day indicates that the participants were involved in rites of lamentation. All the inhabitants of Hattusa covered their heads. First among them, the newly installed King, who was accompanied by his dignitaries and their wives. A funerary meal in the presence of the deceased probably took place.

Day 5

On the fifth day, an incantation priestess created an image of the deceased from raisins, olives and various other foods; once the image was created, she sprinkled it with beer. A dialogue then ensued between two incantation priestesses, where the first questioned who would lead in the deceased, referred to here by name. The answer was that the deceased should be brought in by the men of Hatti, but this proposal was rejected. The sudden suggestion that one of the priestesses take some silver and gold was likewise refused.

Day 6

Based on the summary tablet for the fifth through the fourteenth days, it has been ascertained that on the sixth day, two oxen and eighteen sheep from the palace were offered to the Sungoddess of the Earth and the soul of the deceased. The gathered bones were transported to the *É.NA₄*, stone-house, i.e. the grave chamber.

Day 7

The events of the seventh day are related in the summary tablet by the sentence 'straw is burned.' A seated image of the deceased was created and given water. A garment, a container of oil for anointing and straw were then ignited. Wine and beer pitchers were smashed. The wailing women offered an ox and eight sheep, which were

then distributed to the Sungoddess of Heaven, the ancestral spirits, the soul of the deceased, and the Day of Death. The deceased alone, however, received liver. The wailing women were lamenting outside the ritual site. After a special food offering was made specifically for the Sungod, earth was obtained from a specific place, and the wailing women brought the ashes from the burnt heads of horses and oxen, adding them to the bones of the deceased. Another funerary repast followed to which was brought the image of the deceased. Libations were then poured to the Deities. The bread offerings that followed were intended for the soul of the deceased and the Day of Death. Comedians then played their part in the rites by crying out ‘Aha’, which may have meant a ‘small place’ and thus a euphemism for the grave. If the day proved favourable they swept the ground. Lastly, the participants had three drinks to the soul of the deceased; the Day of Death was included in the third toast. They called the deceased by name and set out bread for him on the hearth.

Day 8

The summary tablet depicts this day with the following phrase: ‘conducting of water’, it also included a list of materials necessary for the ritual. ‘On the eighth day the pig conducts water (in) and they cut out a piece of turf’. Some utensils were required for the ritual activities of this day, these include: ‘(One) pig’s snout of silver weighing ten shekels, silver weighing twenty shekels, a hoe and spade inlaid with silver in three places, fourteen small stones, of which seven (are) of rock crystal and seven of lapis lazuli’. Some of these objects may have been intended as grave goods, as they are mentioned again in the poorly-preserved ritual instructions.

After the 'conducting of water,' the deceased was fitted for his existence in the next life in accordance with his position. Oxen, sheep, horses and mules were slaughtered near a spring and presented to the deceased, whose image sat upon a cart. Five arta-birds were slaughtered in a pit, presumably for the Netherworld Deities. A jug of wine was then broken and presented to the deceased. The hoe and spade were then incinerated and the resulting ashes were scattered 'where [the heads of horses and the heads] of the oxen have been burned'. Furthermore, the deceased received a section of turf cut with a hoe or spade; it would then pass into his possession in the afterlife, and serve as pasture for the oxen, sheep, horses and mules. The section of turf was then taken to the place of cremation, where the image of the deceased and the Sungod each received a libation. The image was then set upon a golden throne in the ritual tent that had been erected. An offering ceremony was conducted and the Sungod, the Stormgod, the Protective Deity, the ancestral spirits and the soul of the deceased each received a food offering, and the women wailed.

Days 9 to 11

The activities of the ninth through the eleventh days have all been lost; the summary tablet does not provide any information on the rituals. In a damaged text that was discovered, it was reported that on the ninth day an 'appeal to the deceased' was made, followed by a meal and decorations. On the tenth day, one ox and seven sheep were offered, and liver was given to the deceased; this day was labeled the 'day of the plow': a bronze spear was set up and vessels were shattered. Additionally, the horns of oxen were severed and placed in the stone-house. On the eleventh, named 'a day of sprinkling', the deceased is given a blossom.

Day 12

Based on the summary tablet once again, the peak of the twelfth day's activities consisted of cutting down of a grapevine. Early in the day the blood sacrifice of a fattened ox and seven sheep was prepared for the image of the deceased, which still remained in the stone-house, presumably the palace. The sacrifice was also intended for the Sungoddess of Earth, the Sungoddess of Heaven, the ancestral spirits and the Day of Death. A piece of liver was once again held out to the deceased, the image was brought out of the stone-house and placed on a cart, which left the ritual tent. The wailing women walked behind the cart.

The ceremony of the cutting down of the grapevine followed. The vine was decorated with ribbons, real grapes, as well as artificial grapes made of wool. The vine was then carried into the tent and leaned against the table of the deceased by the wailing women, who had returned. Various items were prepared for the deceased, such as an expensive tray, grapes, wheels of dough, an elaborate garment, a container of fine oil, as well as other items, the nature of which has been lost due to the damaged tablets. One ox and seven sheep were slaughtered. Scales were held up to the Sungod and an incantation was recited. The ritual activities on the twelfth day continued as the image of the deceased was taken down from the cart and placed upon its golden throne in the ritual tent. A meal took place and the tray was then shattered, brought into the stone-house, and set on the hearth. A wine jug and beer pitcher were then smashed. A member of the royal circle cut down the grapevine with a silver hatchet, an offering vessel was smashed, and the wailing women began to lament. The decorated vine was placed on the hearth and the wailing women danced around it. However, the hatchet

remained in the possession of the one who cut down the vine. The image of the deceased was taken from the tent and brought to the cart once more, to be carried to another location, with the wailing women following.

Day 13

Once again as described in the summary tablet, the high point of day thirteen was the ritual of the gulls. Ten such birds were crafted from wool, dough and wood, and plated with silver. The heads of five of the gulls were covered with gold. In addition to these, a few of their living counterparts were attached to the artificial birds. The image of the deceased was incinerated, and the gulls were brought into the grave chamber. This day also closed with a funerary repast.

Afterwards, a new image of the deceased was created and placed on a pedestal next to the golden throne. The grapevine was once more placed on the hearth and one ox and eight sheep were sacrificed for the soul of the deceased, who was once again offered a taste of roasted livers and hearts. The grapevine was anointed and offered to the Deities, ancestral spirits and the Day of Death. Throughout the ensuing night, a festive libation of wine was poured next to, as well as in honour of the deceased. A piece of rope was then brought in, oiled and thrown on the hearth, and flour was spread upon it. The wailing women sang and lamented in a particular manner. The ritual tent was carried into the *Éhīlammār*, gate structure.

Day 14

The only information available with regard to this final day was once again obtained from the summary tablet: ducks were tied, the wailing women were chased away and the offerings to Deities ended.

CONCLUSION

Religious historical evidence indicates that the basis of funerary rites was usually anxiety regarding the possible return of the deceased. Mourning as well as the associated rituals tended to consign the deceased firmly in another realm. The offerings were intended as inducements to prevent any return to the land of the living. This attitude seemed tempered by a clear desire to incorporate the deceased within a social structure where the living and the dead coexist with a certain degree of symbiosis. In essence, these rituals emphasize the desire to obtain favours from the dead for those living, for the good of the individuals as well as the community, and contrast the traditional fear of the dead. This is particularly true with the dead of high standing, such as rulers and kings, or children of the royal household, who were evidently considered powerful even in the afterlife. Additionally, funerary wailing fulfilled an important role: the name of the deceased was invoked and the destiny of the bitter fate of the living left behind was deplored.

II. III – A COMPARISON between GREEK and HITTITE LITERATURE

Following this examination of the various aspects in the Homeric epics that pertain to funerary ceremonies as well as the detailed account of the Hittite funerary ritual for the King, the subsequent pages will now focus on identifying similarities between these two distinct sources of textual evidence in an attempt to establish a probable Mycenaean funerary tradition. In addition to the aforementioned reason for examining the Hittite text, i.e. temporal and geographic proximity to the Mycenaean civilization, a few very clear parallels can be noted between the texts that warrant closer inspection.

The specific common features present in both works are the following: (a) as the Hittite King's remains are burnt, so are Homer's heroes cremated; (b) in both representations the pyres are doused with wine and other beverages; (c) the bones were subsequently gathered and covered in oil or fat; (d) the remains were then wrapped in a linen cloth or fine garment; (e) they were generally deposited in a stone chamber, with the sole exception of Patroclus, whose bones were set aside to be buried with Achilles; and (f) a funerary feast ensued.

Beyond these similarities, there are differences that should not be ignored, namely: (a) the Homeric heroes placed the manipulated remains in a golden urn, a practice not mentioned in the Hittite text; (b) the Hittite ceremony required the bones to be placed on a chair or a stool, a ritual that is never seen in Homeric epics; (c) the Hittite 'stone-house' appears to be complete in and of itself, whereas Homer's characters raised a mound over the grave site; and (d) the Hittite ceremony seemed to entail magical incantations, whereas Homer's funerals were followed by athletic games.

An additional similarity not listed above pertains to the activities immediately preceding the funerary rites, specifically animal sacrifices: the Hittite King is honoured through the sacrifice of an ox and the free pouring of libations, while Homeric heroes receive the blood and carcasses of sheep, cattle or horses. However, when considered in this light, the parallels as opposed to the differences, the former are insufficient to indisputably establish that any borrowing occurred. Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that if cremations were the standard practice, it naturally follows that some treatment of the remains was performed. Therefore, these similarities might be ascribed to coincidence; however, in my opinion, this is rather unlikely.

When considering the archaeological discoveries from Mycenaean graves, though by no means revealed to be the standard practice, a small number of cremations were in fact uncovered. This practice however seems to have been much less common in the Mycenaean Period than it was during the subsequent Geometric Period¹⁰⁷; furthermore, in attributing the practice of cremation to his Achaeans, Homer might actually be depicted not only later, but also Near Eastern customs. In furtherance of this theory, in the sixth city of Troy¹⁰⁸, which may in fact be the one depicted in the *Iliad*, instances of cremations were uncovered, possibly indicating that the Achaeans borrowed this custom from Troy.

Essentially, when considering that Homer's epics, though fictional, must have rang true to their contemporaneous audience, indicating some basis in actual customs, coupled with the detailed account of a Hittite funerary ritual, it can be safely inferred

¹⁰⁷ The Geometric Period is reputed to have started in the 11th century B.C.

¹⁰⁸ Middle Bronze Age to Late Bronze Age, beginning at approximately 1700 B.C. Jansen 2000: 1125-1126.

that both depict a long-standing Bronze Age funerary tradition. Therefore, their commonalities might actually represent actual Mycenaean funerary practices.

CHAPTER III

Religion

A society can be at least partly defined by the manner in which it disposes of the dead, for funerary practices reflect the society's ideologies, beliefs and even the social status of its members. The more elaborate the ritual, as well as the consistency of the location, architecture and practice, the greater its import to the living members of the society. On the basis of the preceding archaeological evidence and the literary descriptions of ritual, I will now attempt to demonstrate Mycenaean beliefs vis-à-vis death and the afterlife.

Funerary rituals of any type are fundamentally performed by the living in honour of the dead; they focus on the rite of passage between life and death, as well as the new status of the departed, and lastly ensure the acclimatization of the living to the absence of the deceased. According to Van Gennep, the funerary ceremony is divided into three stages: the rites of separation, transition and incorporation¹. The first stage of the ritual focuses on separating the deceased from the community, which entails a reorganization of social structures in the event of the death of a king or high ranking individual, as well as the new position and identity of the living members. This is further emphasized during the transitional or liminal phase, when a society adjusts the social roles of its members to compensate for the loss. During the subsequent incorporation period, the deceased is integrated into the realm of the ancestors, and honoured as such. Unfortunately, there is no clear archaeological evidence with regard to this period of incorporation; however, such practices can be inferred from representations of funerary practices, both archaeological and literary.

¹ Van Gennep 1909.

III. I – MINOAN RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Minoan ritual practices are an important part of an examination of Mycenaean religious ceremonies, since many Mycenaean elements, such as the deposition of wealth with the deceased and the orientation of the bodies, bear striking similarities to Crete. This evidence as well as its religious significance will be considered only as it relates to Mycenae.

It can be inferred that many Minoan rituals were carried out within the settlement at the time of death, such as the washing and laying out of the body. The rites of separation would subsequently be performed, in which the deceased was removed from the settlement and placed in a formal disposal site. Evidence of this was uncovered in Prepalatial Minoan tombs, where the deceased was interred in the tholos chamber of the Mesara tombs². During the EM III and MM IA periods, some of the deceased were placed in *larnakes*, or coffins within the tholoi³. Accompanying the interments within the tombs were personal possessions and objects that indicated their status, such as seals and work tools. Domestic pottery is also common, including cups, jugs, bowls and jars. The nature of these vessels strongly suggests that pouring and drinking rituals were held within the tombs at some stage in the funerary ceremony. Based on the remnants of food found in the graves of Lebena⁴, funerary rituals may also have included a feast, i.e. a final communion with the deceased. In addition, the perforations on libation stones found in or around these tombs suggest that ritual libations were chthonic in nature⁵. Evidence of palettes and ‘toilette scrapers’ suggests that a ritual involving the grinding of pigment

² Branigan 1987: 44.

³ See Marinatos 1930: Fig. 10 and Soles 1999: Pl. 176.

⁴ Hamilakis 1998: 119.

⁵ Murphy 1998: 33.

occurred; the mourners may have applied this pigment to reflect inner turmoil and distress. However, it should be noted that these objects are rare. It is probable therefore that interments were accompanied by purification rituals, libations and possibly a feast.

The deposition of grave goods within the tombs, their subsequent removal as well as the sweeping aside of previous burials all strongly suggest the belief in a transient stage in the afterlife where the deceased still required objects, until such a time as it was deemed to have reached its final resting place, evidenced by its decomposition⁶. It is therefore likely that the deceased required earthly possessions in the afterlife until the point of decomposition, beyond which it was believed that the deceased was independent of any physical body and earthly attachments.

An additional ritual involved the cutting or cementing of bones; this is supported by the large amount of obsidian blades found in Prepalatial tombs⁷. The purpose of these rituals is thought to be the removal of any residual flesh or hair in order to purify the body. Cut marks on some bones in the Ayia Kyriaki tombs⁸ and the grinding of others at Kaminospelio⁹ support the speculation that obsidian blades were used for this purpose. This activity was performed in order to aid the process of decomposition once the allotted time had lapsed; in so doing, they enabled the deceased to progress to the next stage of the afterlife. Upon the conclusion of the funerary rituals, the deceased was considered to be integrated into the realm of the ancestors and thus removed from the world of the living.

⁶ Murphy 1998: 34.

⁷ One example of this is Lebena, Hood 1958: 16.

⁸ Blackman and Branigan 1982: 1-57.

⁹ Blackman and Branigan 1973: 199-206.

It is also apparent that tombs went through periodic cleaning and the bodies of former burials were brushed aside or removed from the burial chamber. In later periods, the bones were removed from the main burial chamber and placed in an antechamber, or annex-room that served as an ossuary¹⁰. The bones of previous burials were stored in a variety of ways: the antechambers as at Mochlos¹¹; in pits within the floor of the tomb, also at Mochlos¹²; or in larnakes and pithoi at Phourni¹³. In addition to the removal of the bones, these cleanings also entailed the removal of grave goods as well as the use of fumigatory fires¹⁴. It is therefore probable that the actual remains of the deceased were no longer revered once decomposition had occurred, and, as such, the belief was that the deceased had successfully completed the liminal stage. The ritualistic cleaning of the graves thus emphasized the belief that the deceased, now part of the ancestors in the afterlife and possessing no further ties with his former physical self, would not be offended by the discarding of his remains.

The rituals themselves seem to undergo changes, as is demonstrated by the evolution of the tomb itself, specifically with the addition of antechambers. The function of these antechambers is twofold: firstly they are ossuaries and secondly, they provide a location for cults. The ossuaries¹⁵, containing the skulls and bones of the deceased, can be construed as indicative of the significance of the ancestors for the living and may reasonably suggest it as a location for the practice of ancestor worship. Further, the ritualistic functions of these rooms are indicated by the presence of benches within, as at

¹⁰ Petit 1987: 35-42.

¹¹ Compartment I

¹² Compartment II and VI

¹³ Tomb 6. For further detail see Murphy 1998: 35.

¹⁴ Evidence of which has been found at Porti, Lebena and Platanos.

¹⁵ Tomb Y at Porti, for further details see Xanthoudides 1924.

Ayia Kyriaki¹⁶ and Lebena II¹⁷, and by the discovery of conical cups¹⁸. The smallness of these rooms, as well as the small number of cups in each burial, imply that a small number of participants, perhaps a selected elite, performed these rituals. The benches and cups, as well as the bull rhyta and human figurines found outside the tomb¹⁹, suggest the presence of grave site cultic rituals. These ceremonies likely occurred to gain favour with the deceased, who has now joined the realm of the ancestors, and thus to solidify the link between the living and the dead. If our interpretation of these cultic rituals is accurate, it would therefore indicate a certain degree of ancestor worship.

A further aspect that should not be neglected is the orientation of the body in the tomb, generally revealed to be in an east-west direction, as well as the eastern entrance of most tombs. Both these features, namely the orientation of the body and that of the entrance, indicate a connection between the afterlife and the east. However, since evidence regarding the orientation of the bodies is scant and the entrances of several tholoi do not align with the east²⁰, this remains mere speculation.

Some bodies were discovered inside sarcophagi, but, although this practice did not provide any evidence regarding the aforementioned orientation, its imagery is useful for reconstructing funerary practices. The use of *larnakes*, or coffins during the EM period, was rather common, as was the practice of elaborately decorating them with octopi, birds, flowers and fish²¹. In fact, the animal motifs seem to have been a particular style, which included wavy lines that possibly alluded to sea waves. According to

¹⁶ Room 2.

¹⁷ Room AN.

¹⁸ Blackman and Branigan 1982: 52.

¹⁹ Xanthoudides 1924: 40.

²⁰ At least five Mesara tombs have their doorway on the South-East: Vorou B, Drakones D, Lebena Ib, Trypiti and Marathokephalon II. Also, the Myrsini tomb faces North-East, Lebena IIA faces North and Kaloi Limenes II faces South.

²¹ Hood 1978 as well as Tsipopoulou and Vagnetti 1996.

Watrous, this marine imagery, both for the animals as well as the waves, could suggest of a journey undertaken by the deceased across the sea towards an afterlife²². The only terracotta Minoan larnax with depictions of funerary practices was uncovered in a chamber tomb in the village of Pigi, and is dated to the Post-Palatial Period²³. Unfortunately, the presence of wavy lines painted over the prothesis scene makes it difficult to recognize the original image of the body, drawn in profile with a dot for an eye and placed upon a bier. The head of the deceased was positioned towards the right side of the larnax, and the body painted black to indicate that the deceased was wrapped in a shroud, which was decorated with vertical stripes. To the left side of the central figure, or the deceased, stands a female figure in a long robe with her arms extended towards the body, while on the deceased's right was depicted a male figure practically touching the head of the dead. Therefore, based on this imagery on the larnax itself, it is fairly reasonable to assume that the ritual of a prothesis was part of the standard funerary ceremonies.

The Agia Triada Sarcophagus is undoubtedly the most significant documentation of funerary iconography found on Crete, for it clearly depicts the rituals performed during funerals, specifically pouring libations, offering gifts, sacrificing goats and bulls, as well as playing music. In this instance, the honouring the dead to ensure that he reaches the afterlife is portrayed by a bull sacrifice and the female figure stretching her hands over the altar. In this imagery a figure is wrapped in what appears to be a shroud and he is featured as armless; this may represent the deceased as powerless in the world of the

²² Watrous 1991: 289-290.

²³ Baxevani 1995.

living²⁴. Moreover, the Agia Triada Sarcophagus displays the prominent role of women in funerary rites, sacrifices and the pouring of libations. Further imagery on the sarcophagus is the depiction on one short side of a chariot led by a griffin transporting two Netherworld deities, a probable representation of the afterlife. The importance of the Agia Triada sarcophagus is that it represents a funerary procession and associated rituals, which are seldom seen elsewhere in the Aegean, Crete or even at Mycenae.

Another instance of Minoan iconography that demonstrates their beliefs of the afterlife is the 'Ring of Nestor' (Fig. 9). Though found at Pylos, it might have been a Cretan import or simply crafted by a Cretan artisan at Pylos; nevertheless, it is Minoan²⁵. This signet-ring presents very complex imagery divided into four scenes separated by a tree; these will be examined in their order of appearance²⁶. The upper left compartment depicts two women seated in the same pose with two figures standing beside them: these may be two newly arrived spirits. Two butterflies flutter near the head of one of these figures. Above the butterflies are two objects, which, based on their form and the manner in which they appear, could be chrysalides. According to Evans, the butterflies are representations of the departed spirits, which represent a new life after death²⁷. These butterflies are comparable to the numerous butterflies uncovered from the shaft graves at Mycenae, and their appearance on the scales in Shaft Grave III of Circle A. The importance of the funerary associations of the scales has already been seen in the Literature Chapter. Evans ascribed their fluttering presence above the head of one of the

²⁴ Long 1974: 45-47.

²⁵ Evans 1925: 72.

²⁶ The following descriptions are based on the reconstructed representation of the Ring of Nestor and not the ring itself. It should be noted that what appears on the right in the representation is located on the left on the picture of the ring.

²⁷ Evans 1925: 54.

seated figures as the emergence of a soul to a new life²⁸. A simple extension of the previous statement might be to view the butterflies as symbolic representations of the departed soul, in its 'light' and 'airy' nature. It is possible that the two standing figures in this panel display joy that they are greeting one another. This might indicate a belief in meeting loved ones or re-uniting with the departed in the afterlife. The next scene, located in the top right corner, shows a large lion lying on a bench with two girlish figures below him, in the act of reaching up toward what is probably a sacred animal. The bench resembles a three-footed bench such as that found in a chamber tomb at Mycenae²⁹. This animal has been interpreted by Evans as serenely guarding the dead³⁰. The third scene, located in the lower left corner, portrays four figures, which could be interpreted as being the same figures from the first panel, now heading for the Griffin Court. The two lower scenes appear connected by the presence of she-griffins. In the final scene, located in the lower right section of the ring directly beneath the lion and the spreading branches of the tree, is a scene portraying the Griffin Court. Seated on a high throne is a winged Minoan griffin, with a female figure standing behind it that is probably a goddess. In front of the seated griffin are fantastic creatures with another two in the background; these display female bodies with griffin heads. These two figures may represent the same two figures depicted in the first scene, though much changed after having traveled through the land of the dead. The many motifs on this remarkable signet-ring seem to be connected, and thus appear to be relating one single story, possibly giving us some solid insight into Minoan eschatology.

²⁸ Evans 1925.

²⁹ Evans 1925: 66.

³⁰ Evans 1925.

The archaeological evidence from Minoan sarcophagi, tombs and artefacts reveals a belief in the afterlife that includes assisting the deceased by providing earthly possessions, aiding the decomposition of the body when necessary, which suggests a belief in a liminal stage in the afterlife, and performing cultic rituals at the grave site to obtain favours from the deceased, implying the existence of a cult of the dead, afterlife and ancestor worship.

III. II – MYCENAEAN ESCHATOLOGICAL BELIEFS

The topic of Mycenaean religion is a rather complex one and has produced much debate and controversy. The fundamental views seem to be that (a) either it is impossible to pronounce conclusions with any certainty regarding Mycenaean religion, or that Mycenae itself does not provide sufficient material for such conclusions to be drawn, (b) any religious representations are Minoan in origin and (c) there was no religious borrowing of any kind and that their 'gold-trinkets' had no religious value whatsoever.

The first school of thought, as stated by Nilsson, is that the

Mycenaean religion is a picture-book without text. If we wish to compel the pictures to speak, the most obvious method is to make use of analogies from other religions. Since the racial origins of the people are unknown, none of the religions of the world has in fact greater pretensions than another to supply the text, but it lies in the nature of things that it should have been first sought in Greece itself and among the neighbouring peoples³¹.

Additionally, Dickinson believes that we must "confess our total ignorance of mainland religious practice", which is further supported by Hägg, who states that "from Mycenae itself we can get no certain information on the religious practices of the Mycenaeans"³². Vermeule on the other hand believes that, although local traditions existed, any religious representations found among the grave goods can be interpreted as Minoan borrowings, or otherwise remain unknowable³³. The most negative stand has been taken by the third group of scholars, specifically Hooker³⁴, who claims that former interpretations were 'faulty'. He adamantly denies (a) that the Mycenaeans borrowed any foreign ideas and (b) that their artefacts held any religious value; he also affirms that all the objects uncovered from the graves were trivial.

³¹ Nilsson 1925: 10.

³² Dickinson 1984: 115 and Hägg 1984a: 119.

³³ Vermeule 1975: 25, 41, 47 and 51.

³⁴ Hooker 1976: 190.

Despite this on-going debate, the following pages will focus on specific aspects of Mycenaean funerary evidence in an attempt to establish at least an overall picture of the culture's funerary rites and eschatological beliefs. Specifically, we will consider the significance of tomb architecture, libations, human sacrifices, the afterlife and the possible existence of a cult of the dead.

Whether Mycenaean tombs evolved from older types of graves or not and despite any differences they may present, i.e. tholos, chamber tomb and shaft graves, they display one remarkable consistency: they are all made up of three parts: the dromos, a entryway and a chamber in the case of chamber and tholos tombs, and a shaft, roof and area containing the body for the shaft graves³⁵. This is noteworthy because the consistency in compartments may indicate the same three stages in the funerary process, specifically separation, transition and incorporation. An important aspect of these tombs is the presence of a transitional section that separates the world of the living from the area designated for the dead, namely the dromos or the upper shaft filled with earth. These transitional passageways often reveal traces of ritual practices.

Mycenaean tombs, like the Mesara tholoi, also display evidence of the removal of earlier burials, as well as the breakage and scatter of accompanying offerings, which indicates concern for the needs of the newly deceased and neglect for the former occupant; this is further indicated by new animal sacrifices, funerary feasts and libations. This care and concern to honour and appease the newly deceased did not appear to survive beyond decomposition, as is clear in the disregard the ancients displayed towards the disarticulated bones and offerings of previous burials, found either heaped against the

³⁵ "The Lower Part [empty area containing the body] of the shaft used for the burial was securely sealed and protected from seeping water by its Roof covered with *plesia*. The Upper Part of the shaft was filled with earth." Mylonas 1966: 99.

wall or within a pit. This following section will focus on the rituals involved in the Mycenaean funerary tradition in greater detail in order to determine their views on death and the afterlife.

Evidence from the shaft graves, as well as the tholoi and chamber tombs, is consistent in that it includes clothes, jewellery, food and various other articles of everyday use. This custom of tending to the body does not immediately suggest a belief in the afterlife or even a cult of dead; instead, evidence of grave cults in Mycenae has led to the general opinion that the Greeks had a long history of belief that the living dead walked among the living as long as they possessed physiological similarities. Moreover, there was a general “belief in the continued life of the dead in the grave, from which they sometimes rise up in complete bodily form to help their friends and injure their foes”³⁶. In fact, it was believed that only after decomposition had occurred and the corpse had lost its human likeness, did the deceased truly depart³⁷. The remaining bones would therefore inspire no fear. This statement is supported by the undeniable displacement of bones within the graves as well as the offerings. What seems to have been taboo was to manipulate the corpse for a certain period of time, that is until decomposition; the reason being that the deceased, while still retaining human appearance, was able to walk among the living. In the following pages we will examine a variety of rituals in an attempt to determine Mycenaean eschatological beliefs.

The Dressing of the Dead

Gold masks were unearthed in a number of burials in both Circles A and B and span two or three generations. These masks were only found within the Shaft Graves, and

³⁶ Nilsson 1925: 100.

³⁷ Rohde 1925: 122-124.

therefore do not represent a standardized Mycenaean tradition since they were used only in the shaft grave community. An obvious interpretation is that they served as ornaments, placed upon the deceased, sewn, or even glued onto a shroud. It should be noted that this custom of dressing the corpse was not limited to Mycenae during the time of the Shaft Graves; for it has also been identified at a later date in the larnakes at Tanagra, which contained corpses wrapped in shrouds³⁸. It may be that the tradition of wrapping the bodies of the deceased was the evolution of the traditional wake or *προθεσις*, which was popular among the Mycenaeans, when lavish displays were necessary during funerals to establish and promote kinship and status.

Egypt may provide a possible source of inspiration for these masks, since the act of covering decaying flesh with pieces of gold to hide decay seems to have been common practice among the ruling elite³⁹. Parallels of gold-dress ornaments are also found in the Near East, specifically in the form of rosettes intended to be sewn onto garments⁴⁰; however, this does not appear to be common in Near Eastern graves⁴¹. The facial features depicted on the gold masks appear to be simultaneously human and divine; moreover, the golden dress ornaments did not simply mimic Aegean attire, but used the shroud to reconstruct the body as consisting partly of natural physical elements, such as the face and the chest, as well as ornaments, in the form of circlets, diadems, garters and sleeves⁴². The paucity of gold masks may also indicate that they were only used in the event of a long *προθεσις* for a select few individuals; for instance a great figure like Achilles, whose

³⁸ However, grave robbing may have blinded us to later examples, note for instance the gold foil ornaments from the Treasury of Atreus [Wace 1979: 353], the Tomb of Clytemnestra [Wace 1979: 363].

³⁹ Cavanagh 1998: 105.

⁴⁰ Cavanagh 1998: 105.

⁴¹ Tufnell 1958: 82.

⁴² Cavanagh 1998: 105.

πρόθεσις lasted a full 17 days “Ἑπτὰ δὲ καὶ δέκα μὲν σέ’ ομῶς νύκτας τε καὶ ἡμῶν κλαίοντες”.⁴³

Unction

An innovation found in the earliest Mycenaean graves is the provision of unguent vessels, initially alabaster and subsequently stirrup jars. The oil may have been used to anoint the body of the deceased, or simply represent a grave offering of perfumed oil. The practice of anointing the body is described by Homer⁴⁴, specifically regarding the treatment of Hector’s body after it has been desecrated by Achilles, and is further supported by Priam’s wish that Hector not remain a bloodied corpse, but rather be washed, anointed with oil and clothed in a chiton and winding cloth. The placement of unguents as simple offerings in the graves suggests that the Mycenaeans believed that a person nevertheless required cleansing with oil, though he/she may be dead, as he/she did when alive. In either case, it seems fitting for a funerary ritual.

Wine and Libation

The various fragments of drinking cups, or *kylikes*, found smashed in the dromos of Mycenaean tombs must represent a classic rite of separation, as described above; this can be inferred from their presence in the passageway as opposed to within the tomb, thus separating the living from the deceased. Libations were a common practice that can be regarded as a collective ritual involving either all members of the community or merely a few mourners⁴⁵. As with the dressing of the body, the libation ceremony was not restricted solely to Mycenae; it has also been noted in cemeteries at the Argive Heraion,

⁴³ *Odyssey*. 24. 63-64.

⁴⁴ See Chapter II.

⁴⁵ Cavanagh 1998: 106.

Asine and Dendra, and as many as forty kylikes have been found in a single tomb⁴⁶. The existence of these fragmented drinking vessels so closely associated with tombs, specifically in dromoi, suggests a standardized custom of pouring libations or performing toasting ceremonies in honour of the deceased. Therefore, it can be inferred that libations were standard funerary practice in honour of the deceased.

The 'Killing' of Vessels

In addition to the shattered vessels offered to the deceased, other gifts were found 'killed' in a ritualistic sense. The ritual 'killing' of pottery differs from the ritual 'breakage' of pottery, though both can be interpreted as intentional acts of severance. Ritual breakage concluded the ritual, and any pottery used during the ceremony, such as a drinking cup, was broken and thrown into the grave after the funerary toast⁴⁷. Ritual 'killing' on the other hand, of objects such as vases, was something altogether different⁴⁸. Whereas an object can be broken as an expression of an emotional state or superstition, perhaps even as a demonstration of wealth and status⁴⁹, the ritualistic 'killing' of an object only destroyed non-crucial parts of the object in question, such as the handles of spout, though still believed to be of use to the dead (Fig. 10). The object may also be burned, and thus not broken at all. Once it has been 'killed', the object is then discarded, although ensuring that its greater purpose remains inviolate. From this practice, it may be inferred that since the object was 'killed' in a funerary context, it is no longer of use to the living, and can consequently only serve the dead.

⁴⁶ Found in the entrance of tomb 13 at Dendra.

⁴⁷ Mylonas 1966: 99, 113 and 165-166.

⁴⁸ Soles 1999: 787-792.

⁴⁹ Grinsell 1961: 475-491.

A variety of 'killed' objects found in Mycenaean graves clearly demonstrate this practice: the objects usually found in this state consisted of swords⁵⁰, knives, needles⁵¹ and pottery.

This practice is also identified on Crete, specifically in Tomb 15 of the LM III cemetery at Mochlos; however, only one of the tombs reveals ritualistically 'killed' pottery, while most burials were placed within *pithoi*, or chest larnakes, which themselves denoted high status⁵². In one larnax that contained the semi-articulated skeleton of an adult male, two objects among thirty discovered outside the larnax had been ritually 'killed'. These consisted of one decorated rhyton, whose funnel was carefully broken, and one jug decorated with an octopus, whose handle and spout were similarly ritualistically broken.⁵³ Both of these would have been offered to the deceased as 'killed' objects.

Further evidence of this practice comes from a small pit in the cemetery at Nichoria, where a sword bent at a ninety-degree angle was found⁵⁴. This object was clearly not broken or bent simply to fit into the grave; rather, it was manipulated in accordance with ritualistic custom. Therefore, in the same 'killed' state as the deceased, the sword no longer belonged to the world of the living, and having gone through a funerary ceremony, it now belonged to the dead.

This same process of 'ceremonial killing' is paralleled at Ras Shamra⁵⁵, where on the skeleton in the lower layer of tomb LIV Schaeffer found: "Autour du cubitus et du

⁵⁰ 'Killed' Mycenaean swords have been reported in graves at Pylos, Nichoria, Ialysos, and Panaztepe near Izmir. For further details see Soles 1999: 789.

⁵¹ For instance at Kakovatos Tomb B and Routsis Tomb 2.

⁵² Soles 1999: 789.

⁵³ Soles and Davaras 1996: 216-221.

⁵⁴ Wilkie 1987: 127-135.

⁵⁵ Aström 1987: 213-217.

radius un poignard en bronze plié formait un bracelet”⁵⁶. Ras Shamra presents additional examples of bent metal weapons and pins; however, no details of the finds are known, although broken swords and rapiers have also been reported from Miletos⁵⁷. This rite centres upon the belief that the destruction of an object makes it of no further use for the living, and thus it belongs to the deceased.

Funerary Feasts

Funerary feasts undoubtedly took place in or around many Mycenaean tombs, attested by the bones of goats, swine and deer littering the ground. It is probable that these feasts followed the libation ceremony. Textual support of this comes from the Homeric epics, which describe funerary feasts – either before or after the burial – as indispensable. During the funeral of Patroclus, for instance, the participants sit for a banquet, which Achilles provides by slaughtering so many oxen, goats, sheep, and swine so that “the ground around the corpse ran cup-deep with blood”⁵⁸, suggesting that the deceased is somehow afforded some pleasure from the red libation. Albinus states that in later classical times, importance was placed on the funerary feasts to mark a final communion between the living and the dead, and “the relatives prepare the so-called *περίδειπνον*, which seems to have been a communal meal. A month later the final meal, *τριακοστή*, takes place at the grave and may have closed the ritual period of grief”⁵⁹.

⁵⁶ Schaeffer stated by Aström 1987: 215.

⁵⁷ Schaeffer 1939: 50.

⁵⁸ *Iliad*. 23. 39.

⁵⁹ Albinus 2000: 30.

Sacrifice

In Homeric epic, Achilles dedicates sheep, oxen, horses and dogs to the pyre of his comrade's body; he further adds a greater sacrifice, specifically twelve valiant sons of great-hearted Trojans whom he slew with his sword.⁶⁰ Archaeological evidence confirms animal sacrifices, the numerous skeletons of horses and dogs uncovered indicate that such practices occasionally occurred, for instance at Vapheio, Marathon, Aidonia and Mycenae. However, there is no secure evidence that human sacrifices ever took place. The inhumation burials do not indicate that the disarticulated bones in pithoi or buried in dromoi belong to sacrificial victims. The woman buried in the dromos of the 'Tomb of Clytemnestra' could have been a sacrificial victim, killed because she was the favourite slave of her master buried in the tomb; however, such statements are outright fiction.

Altars and the Cult of the Dead

No secure evidence for a general cult of the dead has ever been identified, yet the appearance of grave altars, such as in Grave Circle A at Mycenae⁶¹ (Fig. 11), is unexplained. Furthermore, the precise nature of cultic activities remains ambiguous, and the altar itself does not appear to have been standard feature in later Mycenaean graves⁶². The altar in question was discovered above Grave IV of Circle A, and must have been intended as the receptacle of offerings to the dead, namely, libations and perhaps the blood of the victims slaughtered over it. Other such altars have been found in various other tombs located in Messenia⁶³, the Argolid⁶⁴, and at Dendra⁶⁵ and Vapheio⁶⁶. At

⁶⁰ *Iliad*. 23.175-77.

⁶¹ Schliemann 1880: 212.

⁶² Dickinson 1994: 229-30.

⁶³ Peristeria T.2 and T.3 and Voidokoilia.

⁶⁴ Kazarma.

⁶⁵ In pit II and IV of the tholos tomb at Dendra that we have already discussed.

⁶⁶ A sacrificial pit was found in the tholos.

Dendra, the slaughtering block and the sacrificial table are within the tomb, and this location suggests animal sacrifices. The animals could have been burned above the hearth, with the pit before it receiving the blood and bones of the sacrificed animals. Within this same pit, alongside the animal bones were discovered a sacrificial knife and a silver cup with a gold rim; these may have been used for libations. An offering table was also found in Routsis⁶⁷, which may have been connected with a cult or even ritualistic performances during or after the burial ceremony. In general, these funerary altars seem to be the same type as those used for ordinary cultic practices that honoured the deities. The grave altars resembled those used for chthonic divinities, seeing as they were both underground structures in the form of a circular pit. According to later traditions, both the dead and the chthonic deities dwelled underground; for instance, the Homeric epics always depict the dead descending into Hades⁶⁸. Therefore, the existence of grave altars, which allowed offerings to be passed underground, suggests that the Mycenaeans believed that the dead dwelled beneath the earth.

When Schliemann uncovered a well-like structure over Grave IV, which he called “a primitive altar for funeral rites”, based on its location, he concluded that “it had been erected in honour of those whose mortal remains reposed therein”⁶⁹. Mylonas originally shared this belief of the cultic functions of the altar, but later changed his mind and argued that the structure was too deep within the ground to have been used for cult practices when the Grave Circle was erected⁷⁰. Though it is clear that this rough but impressive structure rising four feet above the ground had some ritual significance, the

⁶⁷ Routsis Tomb 2.

⁶⁸ See for example *Iliad*. 6. 19.

⁶⁹ Schliemann 1880: 213.

⁷⁰ Mylonas 1966: 94 and 178.

question of whether this altar served a cult of the dead or one of the divine remains unanswered.

Yet another altar was discovered depicted on the sarcophagus of Agia Triada⁷¹; this artistic rendering permits some conclusions about its significance. The religious nature of the painting itself was originally interpreted as indicating the existence of a cult of the dead in Minoan Crete, but this was a misconception⁷². It is now doubtful whether the scene of sacrifice can be associated solely with a cult of the dead. “The sarcophagus of Aghia Triada ... [depicts] symbols of the divine cult, and because of them it is concluded that the dead man was deified ... indicat[ing] that the placing of these emblems on sarcophagi is a Minoan and not a Mycenaean practice and points to the fact that the ‘kin’ of the deceased who wanted ‘a funeral display’”⁷³. Allowing for variations in the funerary rites between the Minoans and Mycenaeans, as well as any possible deviations in the funerary iconography of the two civilizations, it can be argued that Schliemann’s altar corresponds to the type depicted on the sarcophagus of Agia Triada, namely both rise above the ground⁷⁴.

It remains therefore to determine the nature of altars during Helladic times; the only available evidence seems to be the Nekyia passage in the *Odyssey*. Comparing the altars to Homer’s descriptions, the conclusion seems be that they were *bothroi*, or altars, by nature, and best suited to a cult of the dead⁷⁵. In the Nekyia scene, Odysseus must dig a pit in order to make an offering to the dead before communicating with them:

Βόθρον ὀρύξαι ὅσον τε πυγούσιν ἐνθα καὶ ἐνθα,

⁷¹ Vermeule 1965: 145.

⁷² Mylonas 1966: 176.

⁷³ Mylonas 1966: 177.

⁷⁴ Though the Mycenaean altar is hollow.

⁷⁵ Tsagarakis 1980: 229-240.

ἄμφ' αὐτῶι δὲ χοὴν χεῖσθαι πᾶσιν νεκύεσσι,
πρῶτα μελικρήπῳι μετέπειτα δὲ κτλ.⁷⁶

The offering of food seems to mirror the practice of chthonic cults⁷⁷. Circe further advises Odysseus to sacrifice a black sheep⁷⁸, again reminiscent of chthonic rituals, and to pour the blood into the bothros⁷⁹. She also recommends that Odysseus, upon reaching home, should offer a barren heifer and other gifts to the deceased⁸⁰; it is further indicated that this ritual take place within the palace⁸¹ ῥέξειν ἐν μεγάροισι πυρὴν τ' ἐμπλησέμεν ἐσθλῶν and makes use of a sacrificial altar, presumably a bothros⁸².

Before exploring the underlying concepts of the ritual described in the above passage, the Homeric bothros should be more closely considered. It is surprisingly πυγούσιον, i.e. small, roughly fifteen inches in diameter; however, it is only temporary and will serve Odysseus' immediate purpose. Additionally, the fact that he uses his sword as a digging implement: ἄορ ὄζυ⁸³, further indicates that it is rather shallow. Homeric literature can therefore illuminate the general function of the bothros, and represent it as the ideal receptacle for offering non-solid food, including animal blood, both to the dead as well as to the gods of the underworld⁸⁴. Odysseus performs the animal sacrifice primarily because he is crossing the realm of the Nethergods. This practice also appears to be paralleled in Hittite ritual, where

the officiating priest dug a pit with a dagger. This served as a receptacle for sacrificial offerings. A sheep was slaughtered, its blood mingling with

⁷⁶ *Odyssey*. 10. 517.

⁷⁷ Tsagarakis 1980: 233.

⁷⁸ *Odyssey*. 10. 526f.

⁷⁹ *Odyssey*. 11. 36.

⁸⁰ *Odyssey*. 11. 521.

⁸¹ *Odyssey*. 11. 523.

⁸² A walled pit was found in the Megaron of Tiryns, stated by Schuchardt but found in Tsagarakis 1980: 233.

⁸³ *Odyssey*. 11. 24.

⁸⁴ Tsagarakis 1980: 234.

libations of wine, beer, and other liquid offerings which were received into the pit. Bread and meal too were offered. An invocation was made to Lelwani, Queen of the Dead. She was called upon to open the portals of the Underworld, enabling the infernal deities to come forth and partake of the offerings⁸⁵.

The rituals described above and the actions undertaken by Odysseus point to a very sophisticated belief in the afterlife and to the services the living must perform to appease the dead. The animal ashes found within bothroi⁸⁶ also confirm that it was used as a pit-altar, with the bothros used for animal sacrifices.

The Homeric texts also describe that the dead receive sacrifices. With regard to the ritual itself, the epic must reflect even older religious ideologies, for it assumes that the dead regain consciousness after being given blood and food; as is portrayed in the Nekyia scene.

The souls ... are without consciousness when they appear ... Teiresias alone, the prophet famed above all others in Theban legend, has preserved his consciousness and prophetic vision even in the Shadow-world ... the powerlessness and immateriality of the soul after the burning of the body sounds almost like an official confirmation of the orthodox Homeric view.⁸⁷

The belief of offering of food to the dead in an attempt to grant them strength, likely predates Homeric times, as can be attested by the findings of oil, honey, food and animal sacrifices in the graves. This generalized speculation would in turn indicate that these religious elements are fossilized concepts from a previous time. The undisputed fact that bothroi were found near graves and tombs sheds more light on the significance of the ritual, since graves and tombs house the dead, and any associated ritual must by necessity concern them. If textual evidence reflects actual religious practices and the interpretation derived therefrom is correct, two conclusions can be drawn: first, the Mycenaeans

⁸⁵ Bryce 2002: 185.

⁸⁶ Tsagarakis 1980: 234.

⁸⁷ Rohde 1925: 35-36.

practiced some form of a cult of the dead; and second, the cult served the individual and his family in some manner. The cult of the dead, like any other custom or tradition, would have been developed if it met some need. Any ruling house that succeeds in impressing upon the populace the idea of a living powerful figure with authority over his people, even beyond his death, cannot be disputed⁸⁸. Therefore, those forced into lower strata would in turn become more complaisant, particularly if times were hard. In an effort to preserve the memory and extend the influence of a leading figure, an impressive ritual can be concocted, which is as valid a reason for organizing and maintaining a cult as any. In addition, it seems that “ancestral worship of noble families broadened into hero worship”⁸⁹, therefore, it appears that the ancestor cult was the model for the cult of heroes.

When some ancestors became heroes, the practice became more general, or some originally unheroic ancestors were elevated to heroic status after the cult of heroes had taken hold. Heroes, then, could be considered as ancestors, especially when claimed by members of an elite ... Testing the practice of hero cult and the assumption that hero cult is based on ancestor cult depends on archaeology. The locations, use, and reuse of graves, and the rituals connected with them provide the archaeologically visible data for the acknowledgement of ancestors. The Bronze Age Greeks mostly practiced group burial in chamber and tholos tombs and in tumuli, perhaps based on the extended family⁹⁰.

If the above is a reasonable justification for the existence of a cult of the dead, then it becomes dissociated from any fear of the dead. Moreover, the Homeric epics do not support a fear of the dead, a good example of this is the Homeric episode where the deceased Patroclus appears to Achilles⁹¹. The dead are believed to go directly to Hades upon death and never return to the world of the living, therefore Patroclus’ return to see

⁸⁸ Tsagarakis 1980: 240.

⁸⁹ Antonaccio 1994: 391.

⁹⁰ Antonaccio 1994: 401.

⁹¹ *Iliad*. 23. 65ff.

Achilles stands in contradiction to this belief⁹². Furthermore, Achilles requires no reminders regarding his duties to his dead friend⁹³, which are not inspired by fear. Homer also occasionally describes the maltreatment or outright mutilation of an opponent's corpse, thus demonstrating that warriors possessed not the slightest fear of the dead⁹⁴. The care provided to the dead during their funerary ceremony could not therefore have been inspired by fear; when the Mycenaeans sealed up tomb entrances, it was not to keep the dead inside and thus protect themselves, but it was rather to discourage thieves from robbing the dead of their precious possessions. Essentially, it seems that fear of the dead was not necessarily the cause behind a cult of the dead.

It should be noted that the existence of a cult of the dead at the time of the Mycenaeans is still ambiguous and controversial, though I have presented it as real. Nilsson stated that a cult of the dead did indeed exist among the Mycenaean Greeks⁹⁵. Furthermore, these beliefs

were already in the minds of those prehistoric Greeks who in Mycenae and elsewhere took such care (even it seems going so far as to embalm them) to preserve the bodies of their princes from destruction, and who put ornaments and utensils in their graves for future use or enjoyment ... in the times of which Homer's poems give us a picture, the alteration in sentiment as well as the spread of the custom of completely destroying the bodies of the dead with fire must have weakened the belief in the confinement of the soul to this world and to the remains of the body. This belief never entirely perished. It was preserved alive, perhaps for a long time only by a few, in those places where there remained a cult attached to a grave. Such a cult would not, indeed, extend to those whose death had occurred within more recent times, but it did not allow the old-established worship of the great dead of the past to die out entirely. Over the royal graves on the citadel at Mycenae stood a sacrificial hearth, which bears witness to the continuance of the ancient worship of the kings buried there⁹⁶.

⁹² Rohde 1925: 14.

⁹³ *Iliad*. 23. 95.

⁹⁴ *Iliad*. 22. 358.

⁹⁵ Nilsson 1925: 135.

⁹⁶ Rohde 1925: 122-123.

However, even if an active cult of the dead were present, it need not necessarily describe the nature of the afterlife itself, but could merely be a reflection of a general belief in the afterlife. Hooker, on the other hand, supports the notion that the grave artefacts do not necessarily point to a cult of the dead; he supposed that the dead were believed to continue 'living' within their graves, and as such the offerings were functional within the tombs themselves, rather than tools to assist the deceased in his passing 'through' the graves to an afterlife. In contrast, and perhaps more reasonably, the offerings could have had no more significance in the graves of Circle A than the bones did, once they were swept aside. The fact nevertheless remains that a cult of the dead could most certainly have existed and been independent of the altar found at the tombs. Concrete evidence regarding an elaborate cult is further attested by the discovery of a "Temple" at Mycenae, likely connected with cultic practices and Circle A, though not found within the tombs themselves or even in the same area of the site ⁹⁷. This 'Temple' was undoubtedly used for other types of worship, as it seems to exhibit several connections:

- (1) "The Temple was built at about the same thirteenth-century date as the later rebuilding of Circle A. Its site in the Citadel House area was not far away and may have been chosen because of older religious remains which have been found there.
- (2) "The temple contained about nineteen unusual statuettes which approximately correspond in sex and number to the dead in Circle A (the evidence is slightly unclear in both areas).
- (3) "Also in the Temple were small platforms, apparently for ritual display of the statuettes. There were six of them, varying in size, comparable to the six Shaft Graves (no specific explanation of their number and relative construction has yet been given). There was, in addition, a central platform of unknown use, which is big enough to hold a human body and may indicate that contemporary funerary (prothesis) rites were conducted here as well.

⁹⁷ Leuven 1989: 199-200 and Taylour 1969: 91ff.

- (4) “Some of the other finds in the Temple, such as Egyptian objects, amber beads, and representations of snakes, can be correlated more or less directly with features in Circle A. Not far outside the Temple, jars have been found bearing a Linear B inscription of the name ‘Glaukos’, which could refer to a dead person – as it usually did in historic Greek mythology – and thus support a funerary role of the Temple”.⁹⁸

The theory that this was a cult ‘Temple’ is further supported by the grotesque and gloomy appearance of the statuettes, which have also been noted in other funerary art, namely on the Tanagra larnakes. The statuettes may represent divinities, or even portray of the deceased in some stage in the ‘afterlife’, especially if they were used in funerary rites by the living.

Although the preceding points are supported by references in Homer, there is nothing in the epics to support the existence of a cult of the dead. According to Nilsson, the cult of the dead in the Homeric epics

is lacking, and the customs and ideas associated with it have been pushed into the background and considerably reduced. Homer represents not a leap, but a break, in the development; the post-Homeric period joins on where the pre-Homeric period had ended.⁹⁹

However, this absence of a cult in the epics could be easily justified: its neglect should not be considered to imply its non-existence but rather it might indicate that it would have been unnecessary for Homeric heroes engaged in a distant war. Furthermore, if our assumptions are based on the premises that bards were aware of actual cults of the dead or hero-cults, but their choice of not referring to it could be attributed to a desire to emphasize a Panhellenic tradition and consequently to underplay local worship: “the importance and significance of the cult of the dead thus seem to be ideologically

⁹⁸ Leuven 1989: 199-200.

⁹⁹ Nilsson 1925: 135.

challenged by the importance and significance of epic tradition”¹⁰⁰. The Nekyia passage that depicts Odysseus descending to the kingdom of the Dead describes him performing a chthonic sacrifice. This event is the only instance in either Homeric epics that display heroes – Odysseus and his men – honouring the greater dead who have perished and are now in Hades. This scene justifies the reason for such a worship of the dead: the attempt to gain favours, specifically to obtain information from Teiresias.

Figurines

The frequent presence of figurines, specifically the ϕ , τ and ψ figurines, discovered at sanctuary sites, in tombs, as well as settlements, can reasonably suggest them to be a symbol of a Mycenaean popular religion. Their abundance and popularity, followed by their ultimate disappearance during the Greek ‘Dark Age’ is one of the clear indications of the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age. Numerous tombs in the cemeteries of Attica have yielded large numbers of these figurines, and their widespread distribution indicates their popularity; however it must be stated that in some cemeteries the figurines appear to be suitable offerings, whereas in other cemeteries they do not¹⁰¹.

The Mourning Gesture

The Tanagra larnakes are significant for tracing funerary iconography during the Bronze Age: they frequently display the mourning gesture that also appears in subsequent Greek periods. The LH IIIC cemetery at Perati in Attica revealed pottery displaying this mourning gesture: specifically Chamber Tomb 5¹⁰² contained a *lekane*, or pot to which were affixed four identical female figurines¹⁰³ (Fig. 12), whose upper body was rather flat

¹⁰⁰ Albinus 2000: 61.

¹⁰¹ Cavanagh 1998: 109-112.

¹⁰² Excavated in 1953, contained 6 interments.

¹⁰³ One was found whole, two others were fragmented and the last one was in pieces.

with circular pellets representing breasts, a projected nose and dots representing the eyes; overall, their appearance clearly paralleled the Mycenaean Ψ figurines, with the sole exception being their arms raised to their heads. Somewhat removed from Tomb 5, Tomb 111 contained an additional three figurines; one was discovered on the actual skull of the deceased and other two appeared to have been swept aside. Yet another example comes from Tomb 110 at Perati, where a similar *lekane* was found in the fifth grave; this time it is presumed to have been part of a funerary feast, on the basis of the bones of birds found within. In this case, the figurines had been connected to the uppermost section of the pot. These female figurines found with adult burials invariably portray the lamentations, grief and despair of mourners. Similar figurines were uncovered at Ialyssos¹⁰⁴, where the mourning figures parallel the custom described by Homer¹⁰⁵. Further evidence of this mourning gesture, namely the bent elbows and hands raised towards the head, was discovered on the Tanagra larnakes, which are dated to ca. 1400 to 1200 BC¹⁰⁶ (Fig. 13a). However few and scattered the representations of mourners may be, they do demonstrate that wailing was a custom practiced in Greece during the LH period, and that it was a custom originating in the Mycenaean era. Examples from the twelfth to eleventh centuries reveal its continuation into the Dark Age, and the Attic Geometric grave markers of the ninth and eighth centuries BC confirm the continuity of this symbol through a millennium.

In addition to the mourning figurines, similar depictions of mourners appear on the Tanagra *larnakes*, and consequently these *larnakes* deserve a closer examination. The *larnakes* were found in a large Mycenaean cemetery that contained several hundred

¹⁰⁴ Two in Tomb 15 and one in Tomb 32. Iakovidis 1966: 46.

¹⁰⁵ *Odyssey*. 24. 188-190.

¹⁰⁶ Vermeule 1965: 123-48 and Immerwahr 1995: 109-21.

chamber tombs, and were decorated with processions of mourning women whose arms were raised in the traditional mourning gesture. These depictions reveal that it was the role of women to perform ritual laments for the deceased. In some instances, these women are shown with torn clothes and small drops of paint representing tears or blood from scarification¹⁰⁷. On two occasions, these larnakes depict a scene of prothesis, in which the deceased is lowered into the larnax. The men involved in the funerary ritual on the other hand are simply shown in the procession scene or involved in the actual burial.

Further details regarding the actual funerary ceremony presented on these larnakes involve a female holding a kylix, perhaps pouring a libation, as well as a priest holding a mourning figurine with upraised arms. The most controversial depiction, however, is that which displays an unusual winged figure rising upward, which likely represented the $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$, or soul, of the deceased (Fig. 13b)¹⁰⁸.

Turning to textual evidence once more, the mourning custom is also found in Homer:

Μὴ μ' ἄκλαντον ἄθαπτον ἵων ὀπιθεν καταλείπειν,
Νοσφισθεῖς, μή τοί τι θεῶν μήνιμα γένωμαι.¹⁰⁹

This passage is uttered by Elpenor, the first soul to greet Odysseus in the Underworld, who was left unwept and unburied in Circe's house after falling from the roof; it indicates that lamentations were as necessary as burials in order for the deceased to move on, and constituted a privilege of the dead¹¹⁰. The epics therefore suggest that lamentations were essential in properly honouring and granting peace to the dead: "thus Briseis, and the

¹⁰⁷ For Mesopotamian tearing of the clothes, see Scurlock 2000: 1886.

¹⁰⁸ Vermeule 1965: 123-148.

¹⁰⁹ *Odyssey*. 11. 72-73.

¹¹⁰ Alexiou 1974.

women mourned with her, for Patroclus, yes, but each woman also for her own private sorrows”¹¹¹.

The specific rituals associated with mourning appear to be important, i.e. the raised arms traced back to Mycenaean painted larnakes is the most common and ancient depiction, although its precise origins remain unknown¹¹². The *Iliad* further distinguishes this practice in the description of Hector’s prothesis, specifically in the difference between the *thrênos* of the professional mourners, a proper song, and the *góos* of the kinswomen, which was merely wailing:

παρὰ δ’ εἶσαν αἰδοῦς
θρήνων ἐξάρχους, οἳ τε στονόεσσαν αἰοδῆν
οἱ μὲν ἄρ’ ἐθρήνεον, ἐπὶ δὲ στενάχοντο γυναῖκες¹¹³.

This practice may have originated in the Near East since mourning was also conducted by two groups singing antiphonally¹¹⁴.

A Religious Reconstruction

Although the shaft graves of Mycenae have been examined and explored for over a century, longer than any other discovery in Aegean archaeology¹¹⁵, much remains unknown about the civilization that built and used them. The one certainty seems to be that the Mycenaeans exemplified the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age in the Argolid, in particular the two Grave Circles at Mycenae. Despite the certainty of the previous statement, the greatest uncertainty seems to be the religious practices associated with the graves themselves¹¹⁶. One significant factor in this problem is the

¹¹¹ *Iliad*. 19. 301-302.

¹¹² Alexiou 1974: 6.

¹¹³ *Iliad*. 24. 720-722.

¹¹⁴ Scurlock 2000: 1885-1886.

¹¹⁵ Leuven 1989: 191.

¹¹⁶ Leuven 1989: 192.

paucity of artifacts comparable to those from other civilizations and the curious materials involved. Furthermore, in attempting to ascertain the significance of the religious practices and hence beliefs of the Mycenaeans, what is significant is that Circle A dates to the LH I period. Though the burials associated with this Circle are been few in number, they were nevertheless instrumental in transforming the MH traditions into the innovations that became identified with the Mycenaean civilization of the LH period. The Mycenaean funerary customs, in as much as they relate to burials, beliefs and rituals in general, can indicate the culture's perception of life as well as death. These customs should be carefully examined, for they seem to represent a fusion between the various traditions that became incorporated into the greater Mycenaean identity, namely the Indo-European and Minoan traditions.

Belief in Afterlife

Regarding the early Mycenaeans' belief in the afterlife, Hooker's view bears repeating: a type of existence was believed to continue in graves. This statement is based on the presence of rich grave goods found within the tombs; however, if the deposition of wealth were so significant, there is no accounting for the poorer graves of MH era and other Aegean communities. Additionally, Hooker further neglects to account for the displacement of the goods, as well as the bones of the deceased, which implies that the goods, like the dead, were not believed to remain within. Additionally, the respect shown for Circle A by later builders does not indicate a belief that the dead lived on within, or even revisited; it could simply have been maintained as a link between Mycenae and its ancestors. Moreover, the later builders' beliefs about the dead are immaterial when considering the beliefs of those buried in the shaft graves.

The main issue with the evidence of Circle A is what it indicates about the nature of the Mycenaeans' belief in the afterlife. A couple of inferences can be made: firstly, since some of the stelae over the graves portrayed scenes of hunting, which could be interpreted as activities in the afterlife, it can be reasonably assumed that such depictions were representations of the society's beliefs. Secondly, since several stelae were found facing westward, as well as the assumption that the grave circle itself originally opened to the West, and evidence that the bodies were generally found with their feet pointing westward, it would naturally follow that the dead were believed to depart from their graves and head westward to their afterlife. It should be noted however that no secure evidence has been found to support this notion, beyond the general pattern of orientation of the deceased and their graves.

Additional evidence, which seems to have been overlooked, is specifically the orientation of the bodies in Circle B. Though numerous differences can be observed between the two Circles, the tendency to point the feet in a southern/western direction indicates that this was more than mere coincidence; this has also been noted at many other prehistoric sites, both on the mainland as well as on Crete. Furthermore, a western/southern orientation was particularly popular for the openings of tombs, especially in the Peloponnese. Graves and burial jars dated to the MH and LH periods also faced this direction, as did approximately two-thirds of all Mycenaean tholoi¹¹⁷. This consistency has been observed well into historic times in the Argolid as well¹¹⁸. Further support is provided in the fact that cemeteries were generally located west of the

¹¹⁷ Pelon 1976.

¹¹⁸ Hägg 1983: 27.

settlements¹¹⁹. Not only is this the case for Circle A, but also the Shaft Graves had also been positioned in the western half of the Circle, the earlier the grave the farther to the west¹²⁰. Although practical aspects would certainly have been considered when planning the Grave Circle, such as local soil quality or topography, there is no indication that the Circle was determined by them. Although directional features have often been attributed non-religious functions, the causes have never clearly or sufficiently been established¹²¹.

This evidence could be explained by the belief that the dead must journey west to reach the afterlife. Variations on this principle are not surprising, since it must have been difficult for people in prehistoric times to share their beliefs or practice in their religion in a consistent manner. Regardless, there are inherent reasons for the afterlife to be located in the west and south by prehistoric peoples: the sun died every day in the west and then began its nocturnal afterlife. Additionally, the south was where the sun died every year and entered its winter afterlife. A similar idea that the dead were assimilated into the sun, and journeyed with it, has been observed in Egypt, centuries prior to the Shaft Graves¹²².

It is possible that the Mycenaeans borrowed this solar motif for an afterlife from the Egyptians, since Circle A contained Egyptian artefacts, namely porcelain¹²³. Additionally, Circle B yielded the oldest recorded Egyptian import on the mainland, specifically a scarab portraying the sun's orbit, which was believed to exert power over death. The notion of a solar afterlife can also be used to explain two additional features of Circle A, namely its shape and the amount of gold deposited within. The roundness of the Grave Circle or funerary enclosure, presumably an innovation and later emphasized by its

¹¹⁹ Leuven 1989: 197.

¹²⁰ Mylonas 1966: 95 and 178.

¹²¹ Karo 1930: 19-29.

¹²² Leuven 1989: 197-198.

¹²³ Schliemann 1880: 242 and 330.

rebuilding in the 13th century, still has no agreed-upon explanation¹²⁴. It could have been employed, or at least adopted in Greece as an imitation of the sun's orbit. The structure would therefore naturally, though not necessarily mirror this shape to first to function as a place of communication with the afterlife or second that the afterlife itself was associated with the sun¹²⁵. The second aspect involves the plethora of gold goods deposited within the tombs, a practice that has not yet been satisfactorily explained. The assumption that they represented immortality is not sufficient, for gold was not the likeliest material available to last forever in a tomb. The reasons therefore must have been symbolic rather than material. Gold may have been chosen due to its similarity with the sun, in terms of colour, form and decoration it depicted. Moreover, many of the artefacts used to ornament the dead had a round or oblong shape, reminiscent of the flames of the sun¹²⁶ and most showed round or rotating designs, such as wheels and rosettes.

However, the use of gold ornaments need not be restricted to necessity or locality, since similar ornaments were found outside the graves of Circle A, specifically in the ornaments worn by some of the Mycenaeans while alive; as such, these could be viewed as symbols of a fertility cult involving the sun, to name but one possibility.

Overall, it can be asserted that the Mycenaeans believed in divinities, practiced sacred rites, and had an optimistic eschatology, as revealed by other Bronze Age Aegean sources; however, I wish to stress that the evidence regarding the Mycenaeans is not limited to the two Grave Circles and deserves to be re-examined as part of all data available involving Bronze Age Aegean religion. This entails a more specific study of the individual items unearthed from the Grave Circles, i.e. the ritual vessels, stelae and the

¹²⁴ Leuven 1989: 198.

¹²⁵ Leuven 1989: 198.

¹²⁶ Leuven 1989: 198.

gold masks. The aim of this study was to create a general picture of the religious attitudes and activities of the Early Mycenaeans, and subsequently their successors from archaeological and textual evidence and any conclusions that could be derived therefrom.

III. III – HITTITE AND NEAR EASTERN RELIGION

The abundance of Hittite tablets describing religious practices during the Bronze Age far outnumber the amount of information available from Mycenae. Consequently, the discussion below is much less speculative than the preceding. The multitude of Hittite textual evidence dealing with ancestor worship, necromancy, as well as actual written documentation pertaining to their eschatological beliefs, describes Bronze Age funerary traditions and will be examined in order to complement the available information regarding Mycenae.

There is strong evidence the Hittites believed in a cult of the dead and performed associated rituals. The deceased was believed to obtain powers from the Netherworld that strengthened his living clan, with whom he remained in constant contact. This notion of a close connection between the deceased and his offspring was a widespread concept that supported the significance of the relationships between grandfathers and grandsons in Hittite royal families¹²⁷, as is clear from the sequence of names, with the grandfather and grandson bearing the same name from the Middle Kingdom onward¹²⁸. A good example of this relationship is observed when the Great King Muwattalli II transferred the Hittite royal residence from Hattusa to Tarkhuntassha, and brought with him the gods “of Khatti and the ancestral spirits”. He took them to the Land of Tarkhuntassha because the ancestral spirits were believed to belong to the house of a family ‘like the bare walls’¹²⁹.

¹²⁷ Haas 2000: 2027.

¹²⁸ I feel the need to mention that though this practice is still present in some cultures – like Modern Greek – it has since lost all connotations of ancestor worship and can simply be viewed as a remnant of an antiquated belief system, as is evidenced by my name, Antonia, which also belongs to my grandmother, her grandmother, her grandmother and so on.

¹²⁹ Haas 2000: 2027.

The structures associated with the cult of ancestor worship of the Hittite ruling house were the sacred *hišta-building*, the institution of the *hekur*, the ‘House of the Grandfather’ and the temple of the Stormgod of Hatti¹³⁰. With the exception of the temple of the Stormgod, the three other institutions were part of the King’s private domain, or cult. As part of the King’s private cult and not an aspect of state religion, the *hišta-house* was located within the palace. “Since the Old Hittite period, the *hišta-house* was also the temple of the death goddess, Lelwani. She and eight other deities were worshipped there: Shiwat (*Day [of Death]*), the goddesses Tashamatta-Tashimetta, the goddesses of *Destiny* Ishtushtaya-Papaya, a *Sun-deity*, Khashammeli, and Zilipuri. In addition to these nine chthonic deities, the god Shiu assumed a prominent position in the *hišta-house*, where he had his own chapel”¹³¹.

The *hekur-house* was also closely connected to cultic ancestor worship within the royal family; it was an institution whose name seems to denote the *House which is a Mountain*. Royal ancestor worship in the *hekur-house* was the responsibility of the latest ruling house, since only the great King, as legitimate heir, was fit for this office. This belief in rights afforded through a direct line of descent is further emphasized by the fact that Khattushili III excluded his nephew Urkhi-Teshub, son of Muwattalli II, from the cult of the ancestors¹³².

This cult of ancestor worship of dead rulers is further attested in the discovery of offering lists detailing the food rations for statues of the dead kings. This custom appears to originate in the Syro-Mesopotamian tradition of the third millennium¹³³. Hittite

¹³⁰ Haas 2000: 2028.

¹³¹ Haas 2000: 2028.

¹³² Van der Hout 2000: 1107-1120.

¹³³ Haas 2000: 2027-2029.

offering texts can be divided into two categories: the first consists of lists of the Great Kings alone; and the second names the Great Kings, Great Queens and other members of the royal families.

Statues of the deceased kings were recovered outside of the temple of the Stormgod of Hatti. The accompanying offering lists detailed sacrifices of oxen and sheep. The following passage is an offering reserved for the Great Kings and their spouses:

Khuzziya (...) for Labarna one ox and one sheep (likewise); for Kaddushi the one ox [and] one sheep likewise; for Murshili one ox [and] one sheep likewise; for Kali one ox [and] one sheep likewise; for Pimpira one ox ([and] one sheep) likewise; for Khuzziya, the Man of Khakmish, the (one) ox [and] one sheep likewise; (fo)r Khantili the one ox [and] one sheep likewise; for Kharabsheki one ox [and] one sheep likewi(se); (for) Ammuna one ox [and] one sheep likewi(se); (for) Tawanna[na] one ox [and] one sheep l(ikewise)¹³⁴.

The Hittites referred to the Netherworld as the *Dark/Gloomy Earth*; for, they conceived it to be a space without illumination, which parallels the beliefs of Mesopotamia. This darkness could easily be viewed as the antithesis of heaven and earth¹³⁵. The people inhabiting central Anatolia prior to the Hittites believed that the sun passed over the earth during the day and set in the west at dusk, crossing the Netherworld throughout the night¹³⁶. Hence, the Sungoddess was considered to be both the ruler of the earth and the Netherworld.

Likewise, natural caves were considered to be entrances into the *Dark Earth*, or Netherworld. The animal sacrifices performed for the Netherworld Gods were placed in pits, and it was generally believed that any springs, wells and ponds were entryways into

¹³⁴ Haas 2000: 2028.

¹³⁵ Haas 2000: 2029.

¹³⁶ Haas 2000: 2021.

the Netherworld. Every grave was similarly regarded as a direct passage to the Netherworld¹³⁷.

The rituals for the deceased were believed to ease his transition from the society of the living into the realm of the dead. Additionally, it was believed that the unburied dead remained on earth as wandering ghosts who threatened the living¹³⁸. Essentially, as the preceding section illustrates, the Hittites appear to have had a very sophisticated eschatology as well as clearly delineated rituals associated with funerals, the cult of the dead and ancestor worship during the Bronze Age¹³⁹.

¹³⁷ Haas 2000: 2022.

¹³⁸ Haas 2000: 2029.

¹³⁹ Bryce 2002: 176-186.

CONCLUSION

After careful examination of a multitude of data from various and diverse sources, i.e. archaeological discoveries and textual evidence both Greek and foreign, some conclusions about the Mycenaean civilization can reasonably be drawn with regard to the actual tombs and their evolution, the funerary rituals and their significance both for the dead and the living, as well as the associated existence of a cult of the dead and a belief in the afterlife. Amalgamating the conclusions and extrapolations from the previous chapters, I will now attempt to reconstruct a funerary ceremony performed for the death of a prominent member of Mycenaean society during the peak of this civilization, bearing in mind that the following reconstruction is extremely romanticized.

When young prince Philowergos, son of the *Wanax* Kusamenos, perished in the plains of Akerewa¹⁴⁰ while hunting wild boar, his retinue carried his body back to the citadel to be given its vested rites as a member of the ruling class. His young new bride, white-armed Alexandra, upon hearing of the fate of her beloved, leads the dirge of mourning. Surrounded by her kinswomen, she rushes to care for the body of her fallen husband. In the chaotic atmosphere now prevailing in the palace, Alexandra cradles the head of young Philowergos for the last time, as her kinswomen remove his tunic. Laying his head back gently, she and her kinswomen proceed to wash his body and anoint him with sage-scented oil. After he is wrapped in linen and a robe, a gold mask is placed upon his face and thus he is made ready for the prothesis. He is then placed to lie in state; while his young wife laments her loss, tearing at her hair and scratching her face, the wailing

¹⁴⁰ Names found in Chadwick 1976: 44 and 62-64.

women also begin their mourning, as is fitting for a young prince. His wake lasts for eleven days, the time needed by the local young men to prepare the tholos tomb that had previously been built and set aside for his father, the *Wanax*. Once completed, his body is then transferred to a chariot, to be transported to the tomb itself. As the chariot leaves the citadel, it is followed by a procession of mourners, carrying his sword, shield, a multitude of daggers, his bow with quivers as well as other weapons to the tomb.

Upon arriving at the grave site, a few strong men carry his body into the tomb and place him in an extended position on a bed of pebbles with his feet pointing to the west, in order to facilitate his journey to the afterlife. His weaponry is then carried into the grave and deposited around him. The king then surprises everyone by gifting his son a boar's tusk helmet as a final honour; the queen in turn deposits her most valued possession, a unique ostrich egg from the far land of Nubia. In an attempt to ensure that he is well cared for in the afterlife, his kin then place numerous jars containing food and wine, as well as oil and unguents, and other necessities he would require. Next enters his wife bearing their babe, Eker₂wo, who places in his father's hand the protective ψ figurine given to him upon his birth. As a final farewell, Alexandra places upon her husband's breast an ornate belt studded with lapis lazuli. During this time, Philowergos' brother, Euruptolemos, picked up the deceased's favourite dagger, and crouching low to the ground, uses his body's strength to bend and kill the blade, so that his brother may use it in the afterlife. Once all the goods have been deposited around the deceased, the mourners then pour libations and shatter the empty conical cups on the ground. The two fiercest warhorses from the royal stables are led into the tomb and sacrificed over the altar in order to serve their dead master in the afterlife. These are followed by his beloved

dog, Argus, as well as cattle and other sacrificial animals, as befits his status. To conclude the ceremony, the procession then exits the tomb to find that fires have been lit and a funerary feast has been prepared as a final honour for the deceased. The family and friends eat the prepared foods, and drink one final offering to the departed. After a final libation is poured, more conical cups are smashed in the dromos and, as a mound is erected over the tomb, the living return to the citadel.

Although the proceeding is a purely fictional account, the rituals themselves are entirely based on the evidence described in the previous chapters. It should also be mentioned that in my own rendition of a funerary ceremony, I included all the rituals and sacrifices; however, this does not imply that they were all performed for every burial; in fact, there are very few instances of 'killed' objects and horse sacrifices. In addition, any secondary burial within a tomb would not have been as elaborate or as pleasant, seeing as it would require the removal of the previous occupant and his *kterismata*, in addition to the necessary fumigation.

After this examination of Mycenaean funerary practices based on archaeological finds, literary depictions and inferences about religion, we can reasonably assume that the Mycenaeans practiced sacred funerary rites, and had an optimistic eschatology, thus indicating a Greek Mainland Bronze Age funerary tradition.

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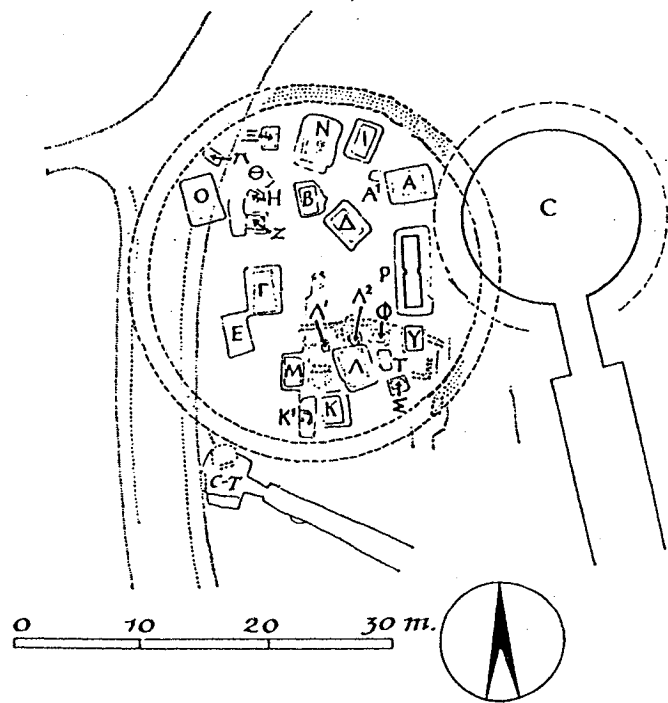
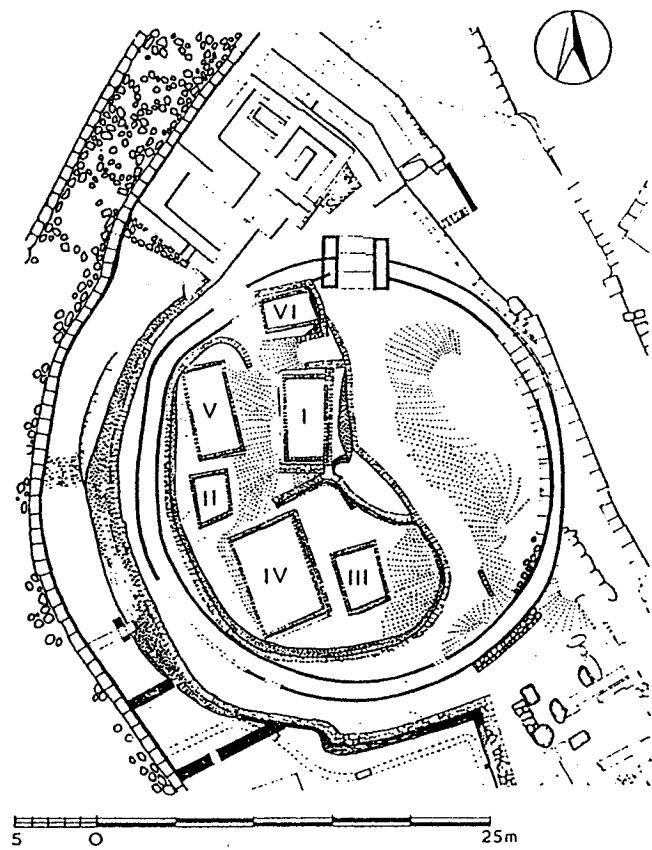


Fig. 1 - Circles at Mycenae

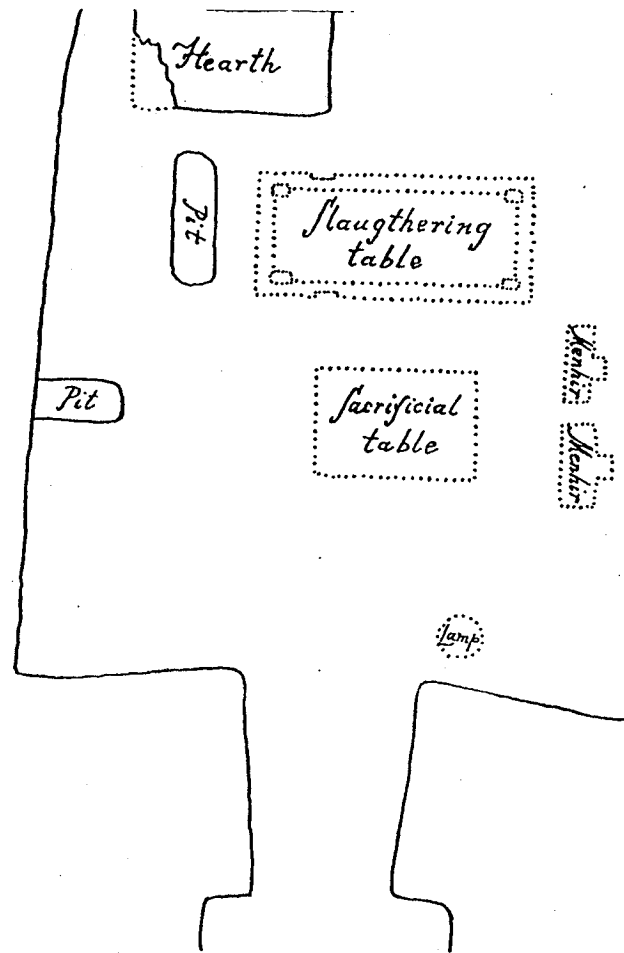


Fig. 2 - Chamber Tomb at Dendra

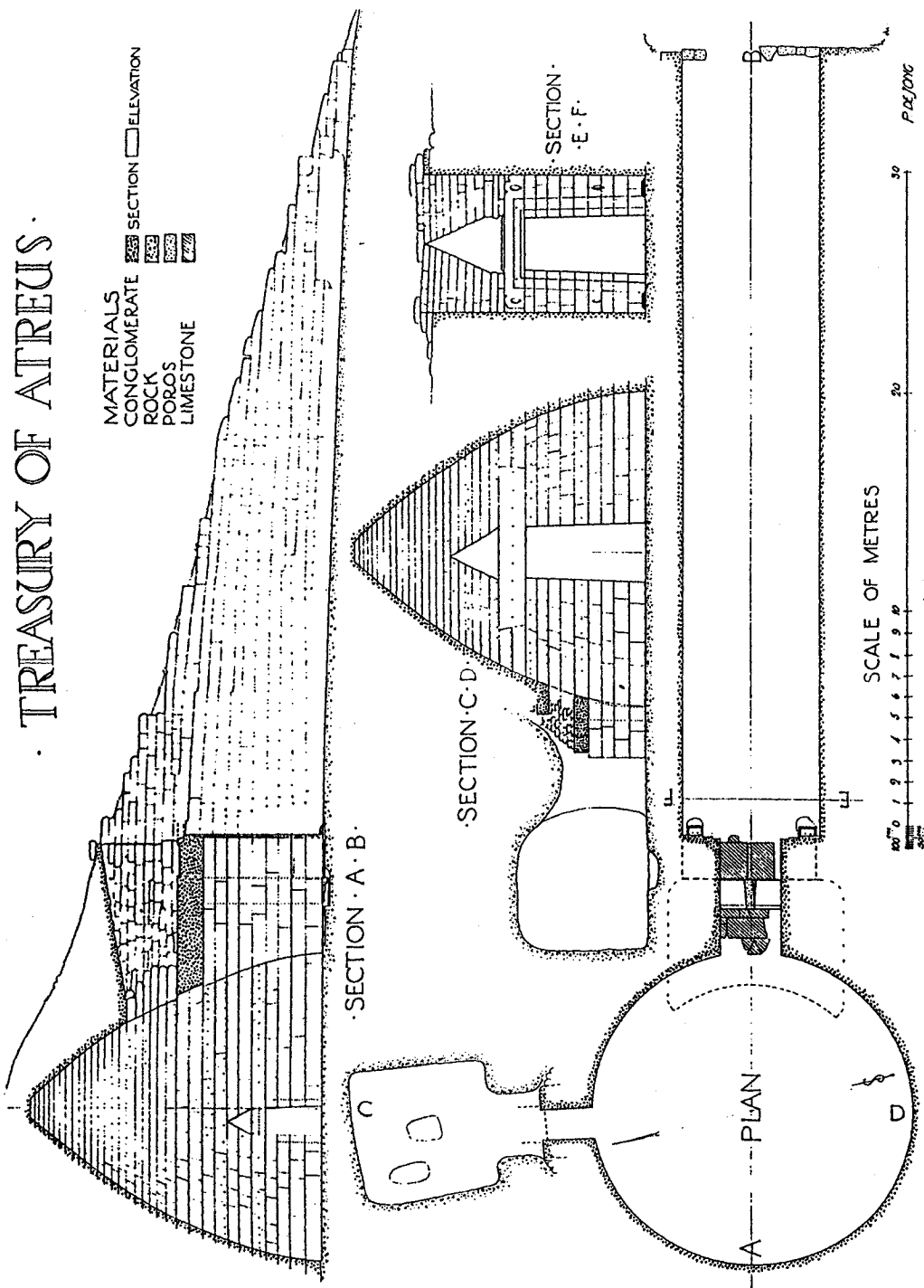


Fig. 3a - Plan of Treasury of Atreus

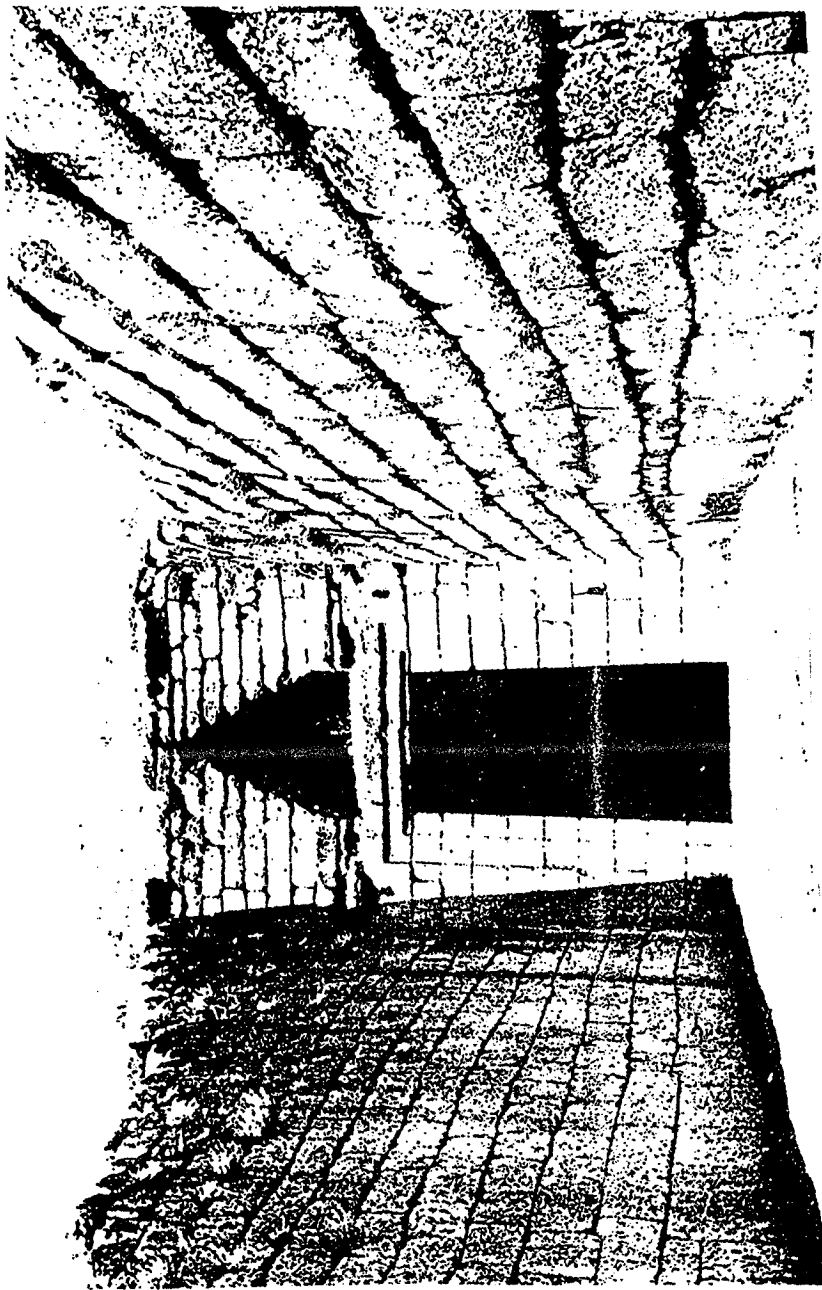


Fig. 3b - Façade of Treasury of Atreus

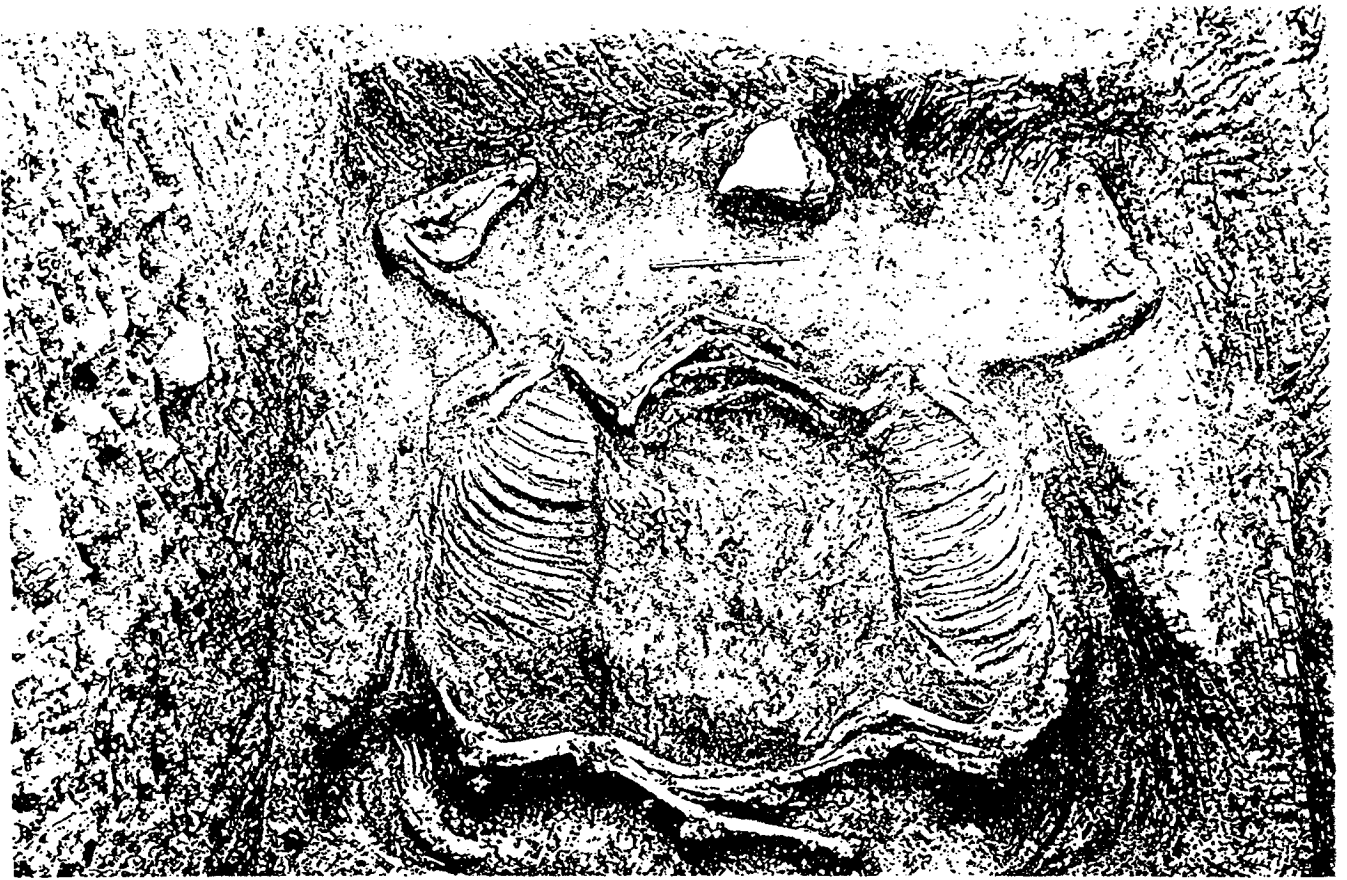


Fig. 4 - Horses found in the dromos at Marathon



Fig. 5 - Gold mask

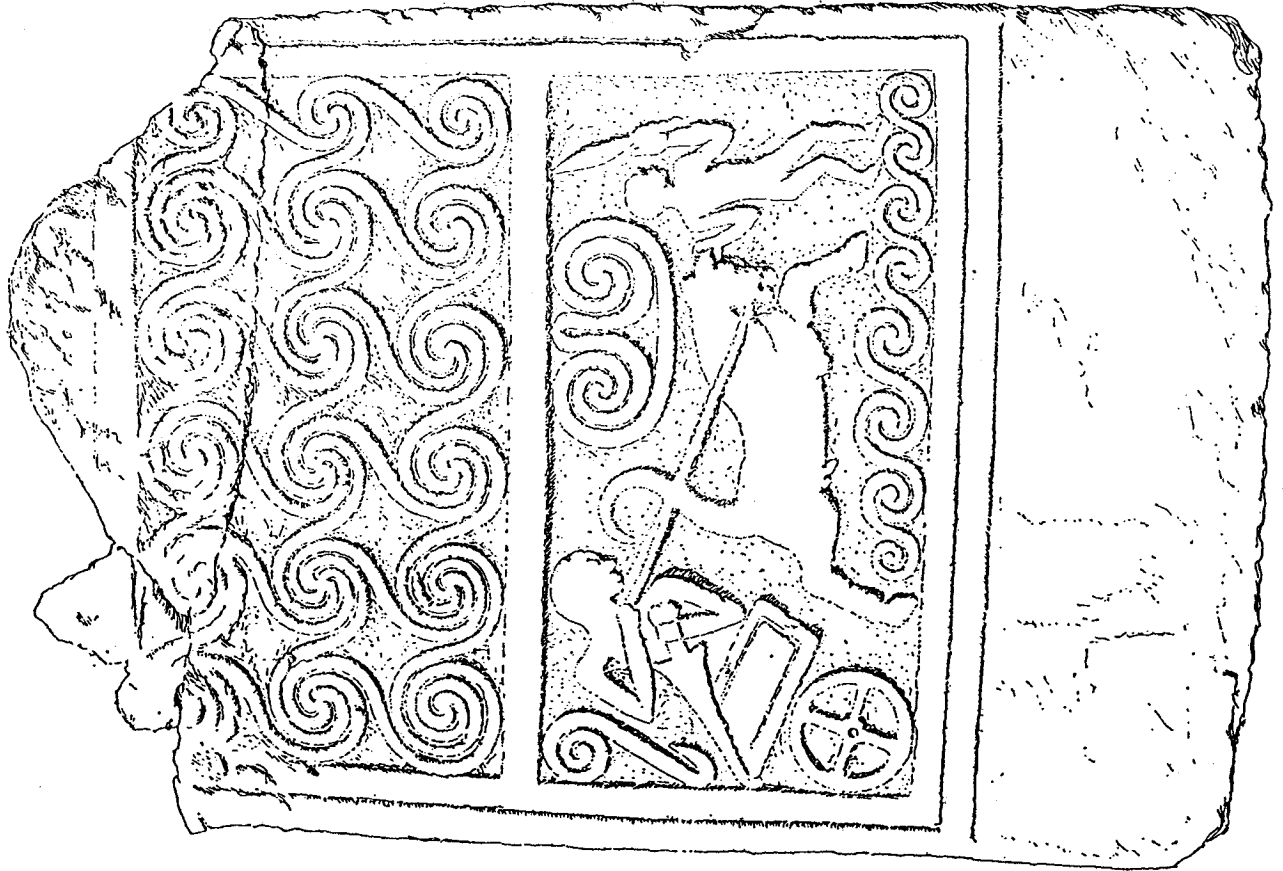


Fig. 6- Stele from Grave V



Fig. 7 - Nilotic Dagger

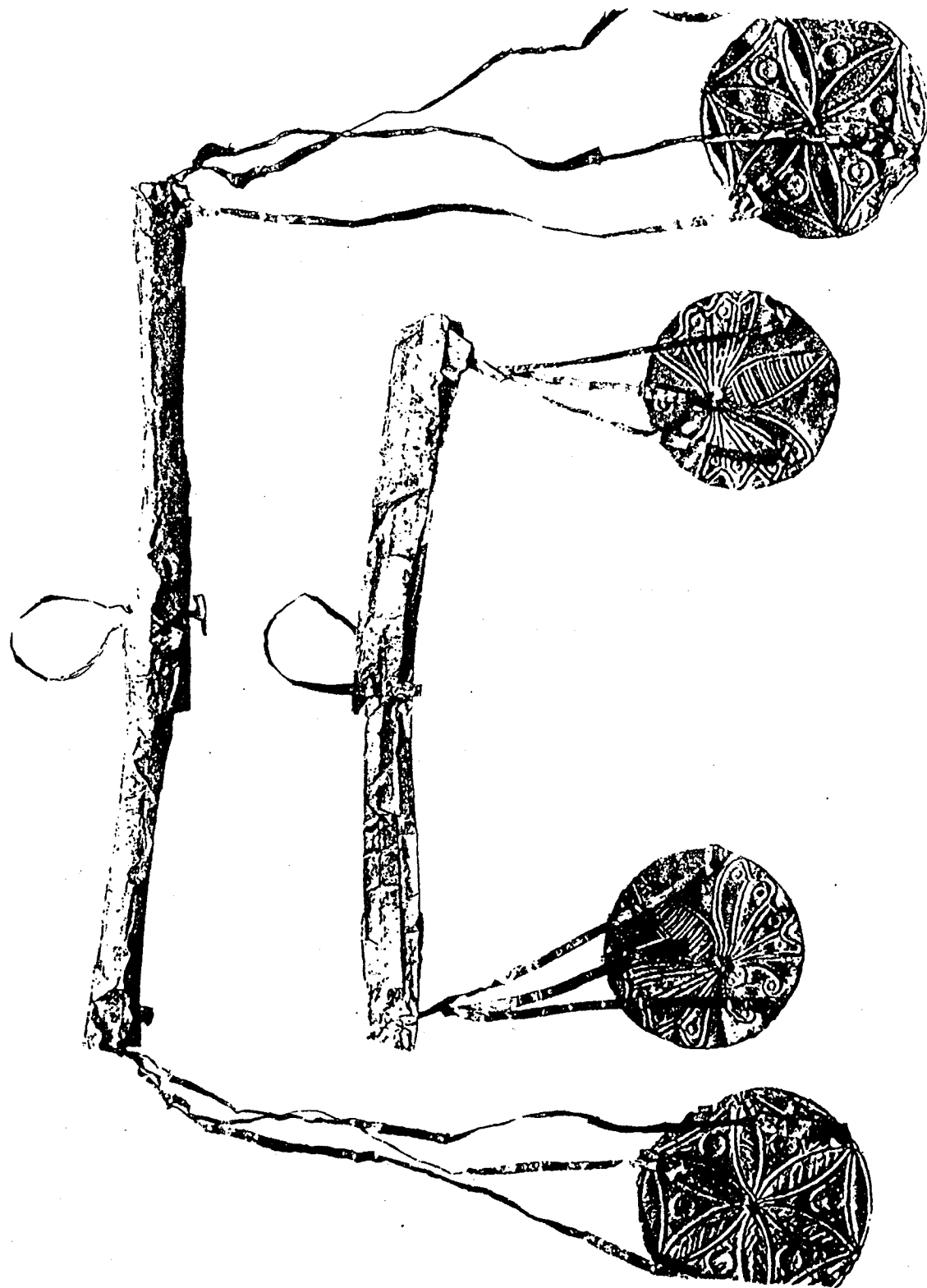


Fig. 8 - Scales with butterflies
from Grave III



Fig. 9 - Ring of Nestor

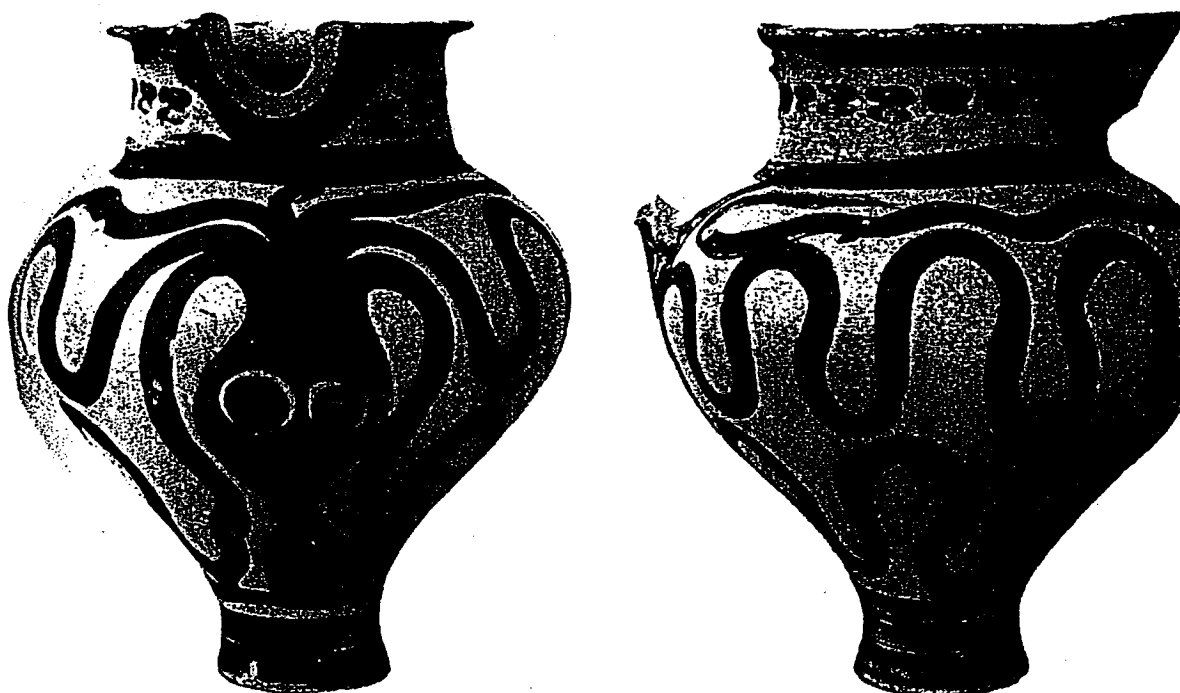


Fig. 10 - "Killed" vessels from Mochlos

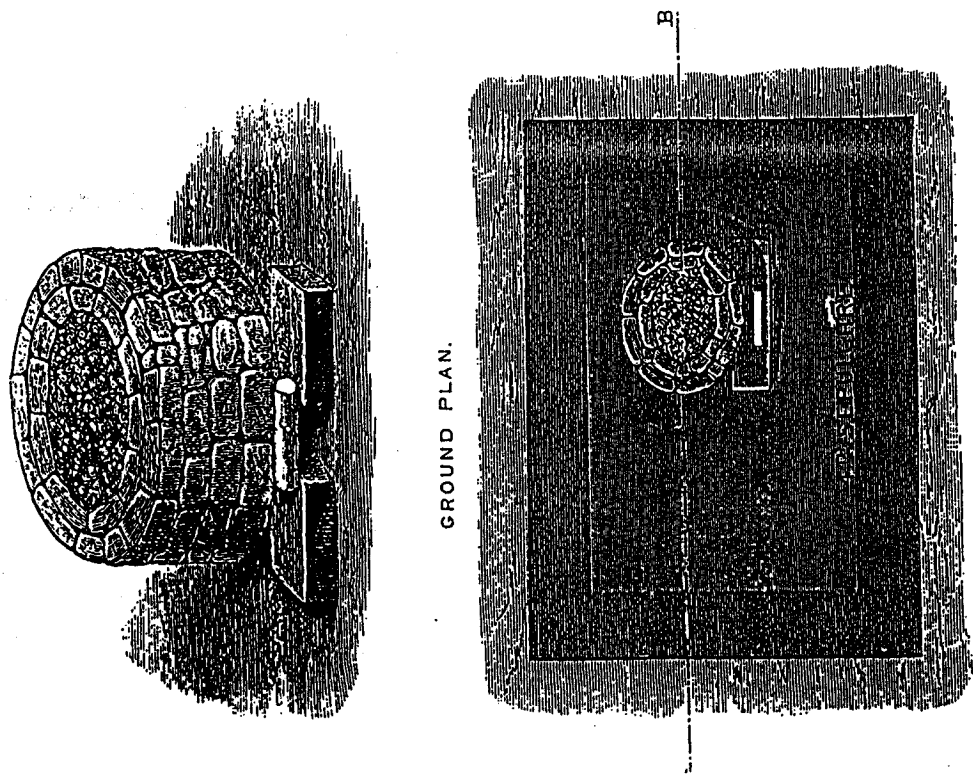
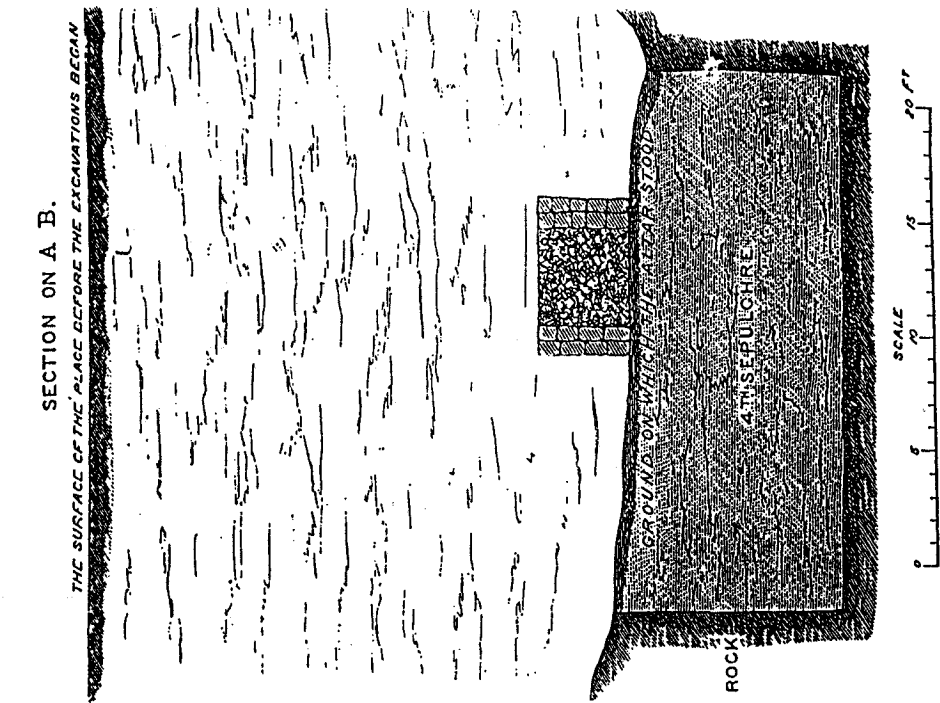


Fig. 11 - Grave Altar



Fig. 12 - Lekane from Perati

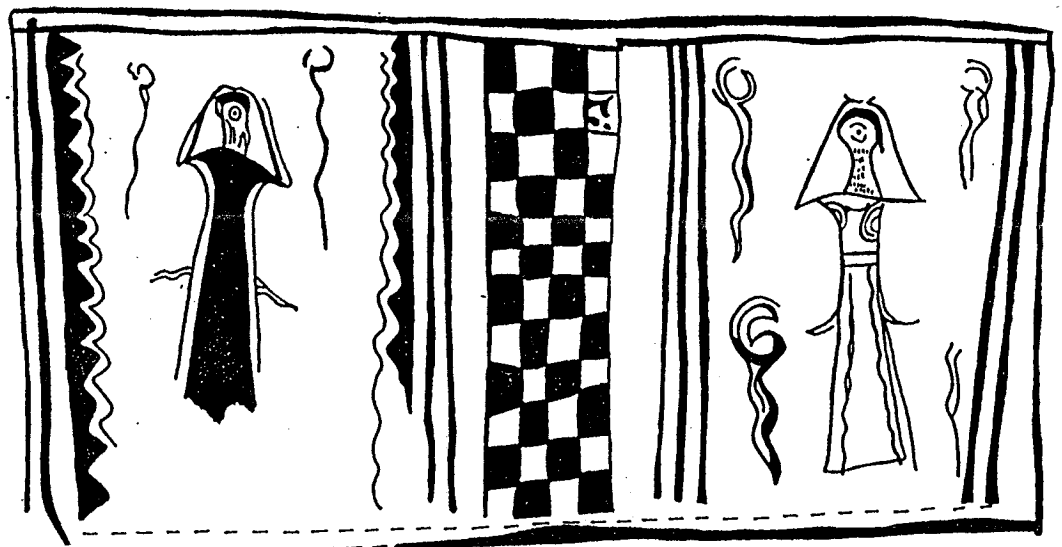


Fig. 13 a -
Mourning Figures
from Tanagra



Fig. 13 b -Winged Figure