

The Archaeology of Cult and Death

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Aneestor Worship, Tradition and Regional Variation in Mycenaean Culture

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Introduction

The study of past ways of thought, not to speak of religious and metaphysical beliefs, as deduced from material remains presents so many challenges that it seems, by any reckoning, an uncertain venture. The practice of a cult of the dead in Mycenaean Greece comprises a good example of a long debated archaeological issue related to the archaeologist's ability to securely recognize cult and ritual in the archaeological remains of a prehistoric society.

Despite the general scepticism and rejection of a Mycenaean cult of the dead, a recent re-assessment of the archaeological material from the central dominion of Mycenaean Greece has sought to pinpoint religious action in late Helladic funerary locales and to gain access in the identification and understanding of the Mycenaean desire to ascribe sacred status to its ancestors and to propitiate them with offerings and acts analogous to those addressed to the divine (GALLOU 2005). Thus, it has been suggested that two main themes informed the post-funerary beliefs of the Mycenaean society: the creation and establishment of a "tradition" focused on the veneration of ancestors; and the existence of strong regional patterns in the expression of ancestor reverence (GALLOU 2005: 137–140).

In the light of this new approach, the aim of this paper is to examine broader regional patterns of belief related to the Mycenaean perception of divine ancestry and mortuary tradition with emphasis placed on secondary burial treatment and the customary acts related to it.

Ancestral identity, worship and tradition: a general account

In many ancient and modern cultures, ancestors are broadly considered to be beings, immortal or not, who are ontologically positioned between the divine and mortal worlds, being accorded sacred status and being capable of influencing the regularity of the living society to a certain extent (HARDACRE 1989: 63; PARKER PEARSON 1999: 165). WHITLEY (2002: 122) conceives ancestors in a generic sense,

linked to present generations through descent and through rituals that emphasise the idea of continuity, even if not always a genealogy of named individuals. Thus, there exist societies where memory of the ancestors or lineage founders is deliberately and thoroughly erased through the performance of rituals designed to lead to a collective forgetfulness (PARKER PEARSON 1999: 26).

In societies characterized by strong patrilineal principles of descent, ancestors possess different status from those in societies with bilateral kinship patterns (PARKER PEARSON 1999: 26; STREADMAN *et al.* 1996: 63–64; WHITLEY 2002: 122). Saxe (1970: 9) suggested that decisions by the living about the social identities emphasized on the occasion of death would have derived from the rights and duties of the relationships between the deceased – in their various identities – and the living. PARKER PEARSON (1999: 74) has noted that for funerary archaeologists a central tenet, not always correctly, has been to draw a line between “achieved status” and “ascribed status”.

Nevertheless, the ability of certain kin groups to control public behavior and regulate access to economic and religious resources can cause, or even manipulate the members of a given society towards the attribution of sacred status to them and, subsequently, the development of an ancestor cult. The reverence displayed by the living for ancestors is often genealogical, serving to reinforce family ties, identity and claims of inheritance, and commemorative in nature, acting as the matrix for strengthening institutions or concepts of nationhood (SOLES 2001: 229). Through time and social processes, ancestor cults embody a variety of forms and attitudinal characteristics and comprise part of broader religious and social systems inextricably linked with traditional or invented patterns.

Not infrequently, traditions that appear or claim to be old are quite recent in origin and sometimes invented. The term “invented tradition” encompasses “both ‘traditions’ actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and datable period – a matter of a few years perhaps – and establishing themselves with great rapidity” (HOBSBAWM 1983: 1). Thus, invented tradition designates “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past” (HOBSBAWM 1983: 1).

Ancestor worship and burial tradition in Mycenaean Culture

Mycenaean burial tradition is by far one of the most intensively and thoroughly analyzed aspects of prehistoric Aegean culture. The bulk of evidence is qualitatively and quantitatively rich, thus conclusions can be – to a certain degree – securely drawn. However, there exist certain parameters of Mycenaean culture still considered taboo and highly debated, as is the practice of a cult in honor of the dead. The stimulus for the debate was provided by Schliemann's excavations in Grave Circle A at Mycenae, especially after the discovery of an "altar" in its ancestral grounds in 1876 (SCHLIEMANN 1880: 212–213). Unfortunately, the "altar" is known only from the drawings published by Schliemann, thus the validity of the find is highly disputed and controversial. Since 1876, the question of the existence of a cult of the dead in Mycenaean times has been considered as a non-existent practice and any attempt to prove the opposite has been dismissed upon the authority of Mylonas who devoted several studies on the issue and upon the archaeologists' inability to recognize cult in the archaeological record (GALLOU 2005: 16–19, with relevant references).

However, even the most negative critics agree on the special character of Grave Circle A. Its intentional preservation as contrasted to the neighboring Grave Circle B, its architectural refinement with masonry and its clear demarcation, the respect of its ground reflected on the absence of any overbuilding and, more importantly, its incorporation within the cyclopean walls and its connection with the palace and the cult center during the Late Helladic IIIB re-arrangement of the citadel, are indicative of its distinct character (FRENCH 2002: 79–80; GALLOU 2005: 28–2, forthcoming; MYLONAS 1966: 95–96; TSOUNTAS 1893: 107; TSOUNTAS – MANATT 1897: 111). Its chthonic character was constantly preserved from the early Mycenaean period onwards, whereas the circular open space it formed and its immediate proximity to the cult center point to the performance of ancestral rites in its grounds (Gallou forthcoming). No doubt, Grave Circle A seems to have been pivotal for the claims of lineage and the political ideology of the wanax or the ruling clan at Mycenae, as well as the incentive for the suggestion that Mycenaean post-funerary ritual acts related to the dead were much more complex than previously believed.

In the light of new methodological approaches and a new study of the available archaeological data, GALLOU (2005: 30–32) has recently argued that the Mycenaeans performed sacral and performative acts with the aim of invoking the

presence of the ancestral spirits and at achieving their mediation and benevolence for the living community by means of offerings and participation.

Instrumental for the performance of invocation rites was the performance of secondary burial treatment whereas the benevolence and aid of the ancestral spirits would have been achieved through the participation of the living community in feasting celebrations in honor of the dead. Taking into account that Mycenaean burial tradition was not diachronically and intra-regionally unified, post-funerary rites should be expected to appear local in character and expression.

The performance of secondary burial treatment in Mycenaean Greece

The separation between the living community and the dead is achieved through the transformation of the corpse into bones and via the reintegration and redefinition of the mourning community that undergoes three stages of primary rites, mourning and secondary ritual acts (HERTZ 1960: 78; PARKER PEARSON 1999: 22, 50). The secondary funeral signals the end of VAN GENNEP's (1960: 146) third stage of the rites of passage during which the deceased is fully incorporated into the realm of the ancestors, an event celebrated with the performance of feasting and repeated ceremonies in honor of the ancestral spirits (GALLOU 2005: 112).

The systematic exploration of Mycenaean necropolises has brought to light sepulchers in which the final burials were either not found in situ or were totally absent, despite the fact that the blocking of the stomion was found intact with absolutely no signs of looting (CAVANAGH 1978: 171). Various explanations have been put forward, namely that the final burial was particularly subject to decay and had totally disintegrated, that the tomb was re-entered and prepared for a new burial that for some reason never took place, and/or that the bones were removed by animals or other agents (CAVANAGH – MEE 1998: 76). Such image of 'careless' deposition and removal of the *disiecta membra* has led scholars to wonder how a cult of the dead could have existed among people who treated the remains of their ancestors with such impiety (IAKOVIDIS 1970: 75(b): 425–426; KRYSTALLI-VOTSI 1998: 27; MYLONAS 1948: 70, 1951a: 99; 1961–62: 302, 318, 1966: 133–134; VASILIKOU 1995: 108; VERMEULE 1964: 300; WARDLE – WARDLE 1997: 29). A thorough study of the available data, however, led CAVANAGH (1978: 171–172) to conclude that "a separate ceremony was meant to be celebrated after each funeral, a second funeral custom".

CAVANAGH's (1978: 171–172) statistical analysis has demonstrated that secondary burial treatment was usually celebrated and that the tombs in which the

custom is attested, were finally abandoned before or after it had been performed for the last burial in the tomb. The Mycenaean conduct of secondary burial treatment might have involved the living far more than the dead, since the relatives of the deceased re-entered the tomb some time after the burial and interfered with his/her skeletal remains (CAVANAGH 1978: 171–172). The remains were probably removed from their original resting place in the chamber into the dromos, the bones were cleaned and perhaps wrapped in a new shroud and displayed to those attending the ceremony. Various threshold rituals might have been connected to the custom at this stage. The relics were then returned either to the main chamber or the side chamber, where available, of the tomb.

Apart from the intentional and ceremonial interference with the ancestral relics, the Mycenaean deferential attitude towards the disarticulated remains of their ancestors is further proven by the incorporation of bone repositories into the original plan of the tholos and chamber tombs and by the fact that “swept” burials were frequently neatly arranged (ANDRONIKOS 1962: 48–50, 1963: 268, 1968: 78; BLEGEN 1937: 246; FRÖDIN – PERSSON 1938: 188; NILSSON 1950: 619; KONTORLI-PAPADOPOULOU 1975: 412; WELLS 1990: 135). It is also a significant fact that the area reserved for the deposition of the *disiecta membra* was thoroughly maintained (GALLOU 2005: 114).

Instructive is the discovery of at least 72 disarticulated skeletons in a layer of lime at Tzanatta that has been interpreted as a dire measure against some sort of catastrophe or contamination (PAPADIMITRIOU 2001: 179; PAPADOPOULOS – KONTORLI-PAPADOPOULOU 2003: 229). The use, though, of layers of earth or argillaceous limestone for the coverage of disarticulated bones in several tombs in Attica and the Argolid overrides the catastrophe or contamination theories. Moreover, the presence of unusually large assemblages of disarticulated skeletons may hint at the exclusive use of specific sepulchers as ossuaries for the whole cemetery as in Galatas tomb A5 which accommodated only one primary burial and an exceptionally large number of secondary burials (KONSOLAKI-YANNOPOULOU 2001: 218).

Against the hypothesis that the disturbance noted in Mycenaean tombs is the result of looting and intrusion, WACE (1932: 128, 138–139) suggested that the reopening, clearing and preparation of the tomb for subsequent burials would have been undertaken by the family of the deceased who would have cared to carefully pack the bones of the earlier tenants as in the case of the bone pit in the dromos of chamber tomb 530 at Mycenae.

The Mycenaean deferential attitude towards the ancestral remains is noticeable in tomb 10 at Dendra (PERSSON 1942: 59). Pit I at the rear of the burial chamber contained the skeletal remains of one individual and pit II the burial gifts. Additional gifts had been placed to the left and to the right of the entrance, and by the rear wall several other vessels stood to the left of bone pit I. WELLS (1990: 135) has suggested that this symmetry had been created, by deliberation or chance, with the human remains as focal point. Despite the fact that the tomb contained only one burial, the stratification of the dromos and of the stomion packing indicates that the sepulcher had been entered at least twice. In the Athenian Agora Tomb with the Bronzes (tomb III), three pots associated with a heap of skeletal remains could perhaps comprise a supplementary offering (IMMERWAHR 1971: 171). It is noteworthy that the positioning of burial furnishings on the lids of several clay sarcophagi at Tanagra may suggest that funerary gifts were deposited not only at the time of the burial but also whenever the tomb was re-entered on the occasion of a fresh interment (SPYROPOULOS 1969: 10; 1971: 8).

Characteristic is the case of chamber tombs T.19, T.24 and T.49 at Ialysos on Rhodes that feature an antechamber (GEORGIADIS 2003: 78). T.19 and T.24 contained only secondary burials in the main chamber, while whole pots (stirrup jars, jugs, piriform jars, a three-handled cup and probably a brazier) were placed in the antechamber. The main chamber of T.43 accommodated only one primary burial, but the tomb was probably cleared in order to be reused in LH IIIC, whilst only sherds were reported from the antechamber. There seems to be a close relationship between intact vessels and secondary burial ritual practiced in the main chamber. The pots may be suggestive of their repetitive use in ritual acts associated with the deceased, long after the burial. Hence, the existence of antechambers could be seen as an architectural elaboration of the rituals associated with the secondary burial treatment and, consequently, with the reverence of the dead. Alternatively, if the dromoi were left uncovered during their period of use, then these antechambers could have functioned as chapels for the veneration of the ancestors, either by their families or by larger social or kin groups.

The careful packing of the remains of at least three skeletons into a shallow shaft in Dendra tomb 6, the placement of one skull in the middle of the pit, the offering of burial gifts and the pit's careful sealing attest to the performance of a special ceremony dictated by the respect of the living towards the dead (PERSSON 1942: 23; WELLS 1990: 135). The offering of supplementary offerings would have definitely been facilitated by the presence of a pair of grooves in the tomb's stomion. At Makelli on Karpathos the bones from the secondary burial were

placed above the bronze weapons in an attempt to associate the ancestor with its warrior status (GEORGIADIS 2003: 77).

In several cases the skull and the long bones were the only skeletal parts to be kept and displayed as in Prosymna tombs IV and XXIX (BLEGEN 1937: 76–79, 155). It is noteworthy that *disiecta membra* or merely skulls as in tomb 115 were occasionally deposited in clay sarcophagi at Tanagra whose painted decoration refers to the Mycenaean underworld and/or to rites connected with the third stage of the rites of passage and the cult of the dead (GALLOU 2005: 119). Undoubtedly, the final publication of the cemetery will give a definite answer to the question whether this is mere coincidence or an indicium of a conscious choice on behalf of the living community at Tanagra.

Of significance is the symbolism attached to the retention and display of the skull in several Mycenaean funerary contexts. Following the performance of the appropriate secondary funerary rites, the skull of the deceased in Kalogrios T.1 on Rhodes was emphasized by being placed above a whetstone and a razor (GEORGIADIS 2003: 81). In a cist in the chamber of the royal tomb at Megalo Kastelli a single skull was furnished with an ivory pyxis of exceptional craftsmanship (SPYROPOULOS 1973). Along the same line of respect and display, a skull was uncovered in the dromos of tomb 7 at Tiryns, surrounded by a circle of stones (CAVANAGH – MEE 1998: 72).

In other cases, the skull was found lying in the centre and around it were neatly arranged the rest of the bones, e.g. Deiras tomb XVI and Schoinochori, or all skulls were collected together and beside them the rest of the remains were placed, e.g. Deiras tomb XXVI (GALLOU 2005: 119). The case of Deiras grave 8 is exceptional since the shaft contained exclusively the skeletal remains of a headless horse, two human skulls and a jug (DESHAYES 1966: 69–70, pl. LXX:3). CHARLES (1963: 67) attributed the perforations observed on four skulls from Argos – two Mycenaean and two Geometric – to a post mortem rite associated with a cult of the skull, following the decapitation of the body or the complete decomposition of the corpse (see, though, CAVANAGH 1977: 176 n. 87).

On the other hand, the skulls are occasionally totally absent among the disarticulated bones in several Mycenaean tombs, e.g. the removal of the skull from a child secondary burial at Mycenae/Kapsala tomb I (SHELTON 2000: 45), the placement of the skulls in a bone pit away from the otherwise intact skeletons at Chalandritsa/Achaia (KYPARISSIS 1928: 113) and the total absence of skulls in Prosymna tomb XIII (BLEGEN 1937: 194–195). This practice is reminiscent of the ritual deposition of headless animal carcasses in Late Helladic funerary locales,

as in shaft grave 8 at Deiras, or merely of animal skulls, e.g. the dog skull in Asine I:1, and could be attributed ritualistic and, possibly, eschatological significance (GALLOU 2005: 119).

The respect shown by the Mycenaean living community towards the dead is definitely proven by instances when, in the course of opening a new tomb, the builders came across an earlier grave. According to BLEGEN (1937: 234), “that the dromoi of the chamber-tombs sometimes did actually encroached upon earlier graves was clearly shown by the discovery of our Middle Helladic grave IV (Prosymna) at the outer end of the dromos of tomb XV; although in this instance the older burial seems to have been treated with respect and to have been subjected to a minimum of disturbance”. On the occasion of fresh interments in graves Θπ4, Θπ2 and Θπ8 at Eleusis, the Late Helladic people carefully transferred the *disiecta membra* and the burial furnishings of the earlier Middle Helladic occupants in pits in the floor of the chamber and then performed their burials (MYLONAS – TRAVLOS 1952: 64, 66). Such instances definitely reject MYLONAS’s theory (1951a: 99; 1975: 228) that “the remains of previous burials were treated summarily and unceremoniously” by the Mycenaean.

The Mycenaean funerary art and the archaeological evidence suggest that secondary burial treatment did not involve merely the deferential and ceremonial handling of skeletal remains by the family but it was further elaborated with ceremonies that involved, in many cases, the participation of the entire community. Therefore, the objective of the following section is to present and discuss the evidence for two rites closely connected with the custom of secondary burial treatment, namely fire and burnt offerings and the performance of feasting involving libation and sacrificial rites, commemorating meals, employment of fire and funerary games.

Fire rituals and burnt offerings in honour of the Mycenaean ancestors

The use and importance of fire in the Late Helladic religious ritual is proven by the presence of thick ashes, charcoal and traces of burning in sacred locales. Traces of burning, ashes and charcoal are frequently attested in funerary locales from Middle Helladic times onwards and their presence has been considered purificatory when associated with rites before or during the burial, and sacrificial when traced over the grave (CAVANAGH – MEE 1998: 112). During the excavation of Grave Circle A, Schliemann reported “grey ashes of burnt animal matter” at the base of the funerary stelai, whereas the grey ashes discovered at the base of

stela III contained a gold-plated button (Schliemann 1880: 92–93). The ritualistic use of fire in the same area is further verified by the stratified layers of ashes in the hollow excavated by KERAMOPOULLOS (1918: 52).

The evidence from Grave Circle A is consistent with the discovery of fire, ashes and charcoal, and of paraphernalia associated with fire (incense burners, lamps and scoops) in the dromos, the stomion and/or the chamber of Mycenaean tholos and chamber tombs, the bulk of evidence attested in the Argolid, followed by Boeotia and Euboea (GALLOU 2005: 120–123). Vessels filled with ash, charcoal and/or animal bones have been uncovered in the chamber or near the stomion of several tombs, e.g. Megalo Kastelli/Thebes, Thebes tombs 3, 5 and 26, Tanagra tomb 76, Prosymna tomb XLI, Deiras tomb XXIV and the Tomb with the Bronzes (Tomb III) in the Athenian Agora (GALLOU 2005: 121). The relative rarity of traces of burning in the Mycenaean funerary record led CAVANAGH – MEE (1998: 112–113) to argue that fire rituals were connected with the adoption of collective burial in the chamber tomb and constituted a significant, albeit sporadic, parameter of Mycenaean funerary ritual.

MYLONAS (1948: 74, 1951a: 96, 1966: 181) summarized the use of fire in Mycenaean funerary locales as follows; a) fires were used to fumigate and purify the burial chamber before a new burial took place, b) the span of time elapsed determined the extent or lack of traces of fire in a grave, c) offerings were burnt in honour of the “disturbed” ancestral spirits, especially on occasions when the re-opening the tomb had occurred at short intervals, and d) fire was not used in the context of a Mycenaean cult of the dead.

Several scholars have suggested that the traces of burning and the charcoal observed in several Late Helladic chamber tombs came from the ceremonial burning of sacrificial victims, clothing and other offerings in honor of the dead (EVANS 1929: 3; FRÖDIN – PERSSON 1938: 159; NILSSON 1950: 597–599; TSOUNTAS 1888: 134; TSOUNTAS – MANATT 1897: 139, 147–148). Therefore, the burnt animal bones in pits in several chamber tombs at Mycenae and in the Athenian Agora tombs I and III have been associated with sacrificial rites in honor of the ancestors, whereas the occurrence of animal bones in front of the stomion or above the entrance of the tomb as the remains of funerary feasts (TSOUNTAS – MANATT 1897: 148–150; IMMERWAHR 1971: 101, 159; KONTORLI-PAPADOPOULOU 1975: 504).

The ritual destruction of offerings by fire as suggested by the presence of beads, buttons and ornaments of various materials mixed with ashes and charcoal, e.g. Mycenae and in pit IV in the Dendra tholos, is also appealing (PERSSON 1931: 13; TSOUNTAS – MANATT 1897: 134). In T.21 and T.61 in the Langada burial cluster

on Kos burnt clay buttons were uncovered among ashes (GEORGIADIS 2003: 83). On the other hand, due to the absence of traces of burning on several of the artifacts associated with clothing, e.g. buttons, pins or looms, and the fact that they frequently occur in layers or piles of "black earth", which could in fact be decomposed organic matter, it could be suggested that garments were not always ritually consumed by fire but, on different occasions, they would have been placed in the tomb and would eventually have rotted away (GALLOU 2005: 122).

For several scholars, the small traces of burning and charcoal was the result of the action of torches lit in order to illuminate the dark interior of the burial chamber (KARAGEORGHIS 1986: 22–26; KARANTZALI 1999: 290; KERAMOPOULLOS 1917: 195; KILIAN 1986: 152–166; TSOUNTAS 1888: 131; TSOUNTAS – MANATT 1897: 138–139). WACE (1932: 140–141) and BLEGEN (1937: 251) argued that traces of burning in tombs could be connected with ritual purification and/or with the cleansing of the tomb on the occasion of a new burial. The burning of aromatic substances in incense burners would have ameliorated the interior of the tomb and could have dispelled the stench of putrescence (BLEGEN 1937: 250; WACE 1932: 140).

Undoubtedly, purification by fire and the burning of incense in front of the stomion or in the chamber of the tomb would have purified the atmosphere in the tomb and would have protected those coming in contact with the skeletal remains from various health risks. In several cases, though, the black marks on the walls, the ceiling and the floor of the chamber resulted either from the damp conditions in the tomb, e.g. Nauplia, or from decomposed organic matter (KONDAKIS – KASTORCHIS 1878: 199). Noteworthy is the fact that inside T.25 and T.57 in the Langada cluster on Kos traces of burning are attested at the back of the chamber (GEORGIADIS 2003: 83), hardly an area for fumigation that is usually practiced close to the stomion, possibly signifying an act of purification most probably connected to secondary burial treatment. Moreover, fire would have consumed any remains of flesh on the skeletons, especially if the need for re-opening the tomb had arisen in short intervals. However, as WACE (1932: 40 note 2) noted, blackened bones cannot always be safely employed as indicators of fire use since discolouring may also result from dampness or some other internal agents in the tomb (GALLOU 2005: 122).

The co-occurrence of ash, carbon, animal bones and potsherds in secondary burial contexts may refer to the performance of commemorative rites accompanied by sacrificial rites and the cremonial consumption of food and drink. The presence of vessels filled with ash, animal bones and offerings could denote

the accumulation of ash and animal bones – possibly post festum remains of sacrifice and ritual dining and/or food offerings to the ancestral spirits – and their placement in the tomb as an act of perpetual offering.

Feasting and the Mycenaean deathscape

The early excavations in the grave circles at Mycenae have produced valuable evidence for the performance of ritual dining in honor of the ancestors. In particular, the fills of certain shaft graves in Grave Circle B contained shells and animal bones (MYLONAS 1973: 22, 38, 82, 158, 177, 187), whereas stone slabs might have served as tables for the performance of burial or post-funerary feasting (MYLONAS 1973: 110, 122, 158). The ashes and the animal bones uncovered at the base of the funerary stelai in Grave Circle A have been interpreted as post festum remains at the time of the re-arrangement of Grave Circle A in Late Helladic IIIB times (LAFFINEUR 1995: 90; SCHLIEMANN 1880: 92–93).

Moreover, the funerary stelai in the grave circles at Mycenae would have facilitated the repeated commemorative visits at the graves and, more importantly, the performance of the customary rites; the importance of these tombstones is stressed by the fact that their random re-positioning was also incorporated in the renovation scheme of Grave Circle A in Late Helladic IIIB times.

The significance of tomb markers in Late Helladic III tombs

Tomb markers are rarely identified in the Mycenaean archaeological record due to the fact that they were made of some perishable material, most probably wood, or that they were not fixed securely enough to stand in situ for long intervals, or even because in a number of cases simple piles of stones might have been employed (ANDRONIKOS 1961–62: 167; 1968: 116–118; BLEGEN 1937: 237; IAKOVIDIS 1969: 124, 1970: 27; KONTORLI-PAPADOPOULOU 1975: 24; MYLONAS 1948: 65–66, 71–72, 1961–62: 163; PERSSON 1931: 113–114; TSOUNTAS – MANATT 1897: 153; WACE 1932: 124; WIESNER 1938: 84–85).

Noteworthy are the seven stone markers recovered in the Makria Vounara burial cluster at Ialysos on Rhodes, namely in T.27, T.48, T.50, T.51, T.54, T.55 and T.59, all in use during the Late Helladic IIIA2 period (GEORGIADIS 2003: 70–71). Most of them are found collapsed inside the chamber or in the dromoi, but the stone marker of T.54 was recovered above the stomion. They are mainly rectangular in shape bearing geometric signs, rectangular and/or simple or

crossed circles. The stone marker in T.27 is exceptional in its irregular shape and holes and it has been interpreted as an anchor reused in a burial context (BENZI 1992: 229; McCASLIN 1980: 18–20). The markers' concurrent use, their close and prominent location and the similarity in signs, especially if the circular shape is to be symbolically associated with the sun, emphasize their special character. Thus apart from allowing the identification of the tomb in a practical way, they also convey a cultic message to the viewer (GEORGIADIS 2003: 70–71).

A large number of discoid tomb markers have also been reported from the cemeteries at Kephlovryso Portes and Vounteni in Achaia (ArchDelt. 53 [1998] B 268–269), whilst others come from Pylos T.E6, T.E8, T.E9 and T.K1 (CAVANAGH – MEE 1998: 66). Most of the tomb markers in the Peloponnese come from Prosymna, where often boulders from the nearby streams had been positioned at the inner end on the upper level of the dromos, or almost directly at the highest point of the entrance (BLEGEN 1937: 237). STAMATAKIS (1878: 271) reported the occurrence of a stela in the debris of the Heraum tholos. The cemeteries at Mycenae have yielded to-date only three proper stelai – one with curved curvilinear and chevron designs, and two others plastered and decorated with animal and human figures – from tombs 51 and 70 respectively (TSOUNTAS 1888: 127, 1896: 1; TSOUNTAS – MANATT 1897: 152, fig. 53; XENAKI-SAKELLARIOU 1985: 130–131, 203–204).

A broken conglomerate grave marker was erected at least three times above the stomion of tomb XL (“the tomb with coffins”) in the Athenian Agora, whereas a stone slab from tomb XXIV might once have marked its position at ground level (IMMERWAHR 1971: 102, 221, 242, 246). Likewise, a grave marker and two upright slabs would have marked the position of chamber tombs 1 and 8 at Alyki, Attica respectively (CAVANAGH 1977: 12; PAPADIMITRIOU 1954: 86). Finally, large stones marked the position of graves Θπ5, Θπ14, Λπ1 and ΛΘ3 at Eleusis, a custom that seems to have existed in the region since Middle Helladic times as indicated by the evidence from grave Θπ9 (MYLONAS 1975: 227). A cut on the surface of the natural rock at the south end of the passageway of Deiras tomb XXIV may be an indication of the position of a grave marker (DESHAYES 1966: 65).

Another type of tomb markers is suggested by the existence of stone walls blocking the outer ends of the tombs' dromos. In some cases, they served to retain the dromos open, whilst others might have served no functional purpose. In either instance they denote the position of the tomb and, more importantly, they demarcate the liminal space between the realm of the living and the dead. Moreover, they could have served as focal points for the deposition of offerings

and/or the performance of libations. Such stone walls do not only occur in large and elaborate tholoi as those of Atreus and Klytemnestra, Menidi and Dimini (MYLONAS 1966: 118–119; TSOUNTAS – MANATT 1897: 140–141), but also in chamber tombs as at Dendra, Asine, Megalo Kastelli/Thebes and T.1, T.2, T.8 and T.9 at Apsaktiras on Rhodes (GEORGIADIS 2003: 72; KONTORLI-PAPADOPOULOU 1987: 154).

Nevertheless, the positioning of the tombs within the cemeteries, the nature of Mycenaean multiple burials and the requirements of funerary and post-funerary ritual would have necessitated the existence of funerary stelai mainly for identification reasons. More importantly, these tomb markers would have served as loci for the deposition of offerings to the dead and, in a manner analogous to later Greek customs, they might even have been glistered with oil as symbols of the dead who, like the living, are wreathed on festive occasions (CAVANAGH – MEE 1998: 110; BURKERT 1985: 72).

Mycenaean commemorative meals

Due to preservation and recovery obstacles, food remains do not easily survive in the archaeological record (CAVANAGH – MEE 1998: 111; HAMILAKIS 1998: 119). The occurrence of animal bones in Mycenaean tombs does not merely imply the offering of food to the dead but, more importantly, animal bones constitute the archaeological evidence for the performance of feasting and related rites associated with the offering and consumption of food in honor of the dead. Although mortuary feasting was certainly practiced in Mycenaean funerary locales, its intensity, character and scale of participation are not always easy to ascertain. Moreover, as CAVANAGH – MEE (1998: 111) have suggested, it is possible that the *totenmahl* might have been frequently held at the house of the deceased and not at the grave.

Firm evidence for the performance of ritual dining has been recently recovered in the dromos and the chamber of Mycenaean tombs at the sites of Apatheia and Magoula at Galatas (KONSOLAKI-YANNOPOULOU 2001: 217–219). The occurrence of shattered drinking vessels and the leg of a tripod cauldron in front of the stomion of chamber tomb A1 have been interpreted as the remains of ritual drinking and dining (KONSOLAKI-YANNOPOULOU 2001: 218). In chamber tomb A5 where only one primary burial and an unusually large number of secondary burials were uncovered, and in both tholoi at Magoula, the large deposits of food waste and animal bones suggest the ritual deposition of food, ritual dining or

both (HAMILAKIS 1996: 153–166; KONSOLAKI-YANNOPOULOU 2001: 218–219). Interestingly, the presence of pig bones in the chamber of tholos 1 is consistent with the pig-headed rhyton and the predominance of juvenile pig bones in the nearby Mycenaean sanctuary at Aghios Konstantinos, Methana (KONSOLAKI-YANNOPOULOU 2001: 214–215). Less elaborate but equally significant are the remains from the dromos of T.3 at Aspropilia, where goat or sheep bones along with few sherds were recovered amid the stone wall of the stomion, while even more sherds were found in the dromos fill (KARANTZALI 2001: 17).

Proof for the preparation and consumption of food in Mycenaean tombs is not exclusively provided by the recovery of animal bones. The occurrence of cooking vessels in the dromos or the chamber of the tomb, frequently blackened by fire or resting on top of charcoal and ashes and occasionally mixed with shattered pottery, offerings and animal bones, could provide further evidence for the performance of feasting in honor of the ancestors, e.g. the Berbati tholos tomb, Epidaurus tomb 2/1998, Kolonaki/Thebes 4 and 12, Pharaklas/Thebes tomb 1/1967, Tanagra tomb 76 and Routsis/Myrsinochori tholos (GALLOU 2005: 124 with further references).

In correspondence to the stone slabs from Grave Circle B at Mycenae, a rectangular slab, possibly a table supported by four wooden legs as indicated by corresponding holes on the floor of the chamber, from a chamber tomb at Megalo Kastelli (PHARAKLAS 1967: 228, 1996: 216) and a slab featuring six cavities from the Atreus treasury (ANDRONIKOS 1961–62: 171; LINDSTEN 1944: 198) could have functioned as tables for the performance of ritual dining. An analogous function would have been fulfilled by the benches featured in several Late Helladic tombs; in particular, those that run along the two or three sides of the chamber would have facilitated and provided additional space for the performance of ritual feasting.

The preparation of meals shared during the commemoration feasts denotes a conscious choice on behalf of the mourning community and serves the redefinition and reintegration of the living community and, concurrently, the contact between the living and the dead, since such rites are equivalent to those of hospitality, incorporation into the clan, adoption, etc. (BENDANN 1930: 147–171; HAMILAKIS 1998: 127–128; SOURVINOU-INWOOD 1981: 31; THOMAS 1991: 48–49, 67; VAN GENNEP 1960: 165). Moreover, the performance of post-funerary rituals as contrasted to funerary meals is a scheduled and repeated matter; however, their intensity and mode of performance may be much dependent on expressions of socio-political superiority, claims of authority and display of wealth surplus (GALLOU 2005: 125).

Funerary games and the cult of the dead in Mycenaean times

Funerary games are originally depicted on the sculptured stelai from the Grave Circles A and B at Mycenae (HEURTLEY 1921–23; MYLONAS 1973; YOUNGER 1997). With reference to the stelai's decoration, MYLONAS (1951b: 142) argued that several of the chariot scenes refer to races in honor of the dead and as such were considered appropriate themes for the decoration of funerary monuments. WRIGHT (1987: 175) has pointed to the fact that "the iconography of the scenes carved on the stelai announces in an explicit manner something about the behaviour contemporaries were to associate with those interred". For PROTONOTARIOU-DEILAKI (1980: 175, 1990: 83), actual martial contests took place immediately after the death of the leader and might have served claims over political authority. Moreover, she stressed the fact that all major ancient athletic centers were inextricably linked with the worship of a Mycenaean hero as at Olympia, Nemea and Isthmia (PROTONOTARIOU-DEILAKI 1980: 175; 1990: 83).

Instructive are the scenes of bull-leaping and a fencing duel in which chariots are participating depicted on the long sides of a clay sarcophagus from Tanagra Tomb 22 (SPYROPOULOS 1969: 14, pl. 13a, 1974: 22). The depiction of bull-leaping is striking, especially since analogous scenes are relatively rare in large-scale painting from the mainland. Pace Mylonas's suggestion that bull sports were devoid of religious context in Mycenaean society, the Tanagran artistic repertoire suggests that bull-leaping might have been associated with sacrificial rituals as implied by the scenes decorating the front panel of the same larnax (GALLOU 2005: 127).

SPYROPOULOS (1974: 22–24) has suggested that the depicted chariots are participating in the communal ceremonies in honor of the dead and stressed the significance of athletic contests in the performance of Mycenaean tomb cult. CAVANAGH – MEE (1995: 50) have noted that the chariots may represent the funerary procession or the games held in honor of the heroes. Correspondingly, the Late Helladic IIIB2 krater from Tiryns depicts an enthroned figure raising a goblet and, before him/her, chariots participating in the funeral games (KILIAN 1980; WRIGHT 1995: 304).

KERAMOPOULLOS (1917: 111) was the first to suggest that a ceremonial way ran along the hill of Megalo Kastelli at Thebes and, influenced by the Homeric and Hesiodic narration, argued that it would have served the communal customary rites and games in the context of a Mycenaean cult of the dead (also GALLOU 2005: 126–127). The excavations brought to light a stepped formation on the

rock that has been interpreted as an exedra opening off a large area from where the spectators would have watched the ceremonies and the games (SPYROPOULOS 1973: 256, pl. 208c). It is also noteworthy that the course of the way and the exedra were linked with the “royal” tomb on Megalo Kastelli, and the construction of this peculiar installation coincides with the construction phases of the royal tomb (GALLOU 2005: 127 and n. 1409). Nevertheless, this permanent installation, being a processional way, an athletic installation or both, is indicative of the Mycenaean Thebans’ desire to establish an official locus where repeated commemorative ceremonies and games of heroic character were performed. This initiative fits well in the broader context of regionalism witnessed in the Mycenaean funerary agenda; whilst the Thebans built a permanent installation for the performance of games in honor of their ancestors, the Tanagrans included athletic scenes in the artistic repertoire of their sarcophagi decoration, whereas open spaces were created before the tholoi at Mycenae in order to serve similar purposes (GALLOU 2005: 127).

Apart from chariot races, bull leaping and fencing, other games such as foot race, boxing, wrestling, javelin throwing or archery, might have also taken place during such commemorative ceremonies, as suggested by artistic representations on Mycenaean pictorial pottery. Proof for the performance of archery games or for the symbolic volley of arrows for the exorcism of death and evil spirits, is provided by the recovery of arrowheads in the dromos or the chamber of several Mycenaean tombs in Messenia, Achaia and the Argolid (DEMAKOPOULOU 1990: 122; KONTORLI-PAPADOPOULOU 1995: 118; KORRES 1982: 96; MARINATOS 1956: 205). The high social context of chariot races and bull-leaping suggests that their performance might have occurred at fixed intervals and in great intensity, possibly during festive and offering ceremonies in honor of the ancestors in correspondence to religious mentions in the Linear B administrative documents.

Conclusions

What do the remains of post-funerary treatment reveal about the relationship between the Mycenaean living community and its departed members? The contextual assessment of the available data highlights the privileged position of the dead within the cosmological perceptions of the living communities in late Helladic times. Nevertheless, the practice of multiple burial “is in itself a refutation of Mycenaean abhorrence of death and purification...” and “it...means that people lived with death as an integral part of their lives in the same manner

people have lived with it until quite recently even in the western world" (WELLS 1991: 138).

The desire of the individual communities to perceive themselves as members of the Mycenaean koine and, concurrently, to differentiate themselves in terms of cultural identity was expressed through the adoption of a universal idea and custom, i.e. the ceremonial handling of the remains of their ancestors, while differentiation is observed in matters of detail, e.g. bone pits versus bone heaps, display or total absence of skulls and long bones, long scale feasting, performance of athletic contests, etc.

The notion that the relics of their ancestors were of no value to the Mycenaean definitely requires re-examination. The Mycenaean deferential attitude towards the dead is proven not merely by the care taken for the placement of the disarticulated remains in specially prepared areas, but also by the special attention paid to the retention and display of certain parts of the skeleton as well as by the performance of ritual feasting in order to commemorate the departed members of the community. The emotional state of those performing the ceremonies, diverse eschatological tenets and possible expressions of surplus wealth and status would have shaped accordingly the conduct of the rites.

The differences observed between regions, cemeteries or even individual tombs in Mycenaean times should not come as a surprise. The Mycenaean funerary context is rich in eschatological, religious and social beliefs and values that are differently perceived and expressed by the local community or even family. Single burials coexist with multiple burials, as much as the deceased with the ancestors. Maybe not all dead were considered equal and possibly the ceremonies associated with death were not indiscriminately common. Regionalism, if not localism, can be clearly attested, but it does not point to separate eschatological beliefs or practices. The Mycenaean burial tradition was a large unified field, multi-level in character featuring many parallel regional traditions and beliefs as well as different expressions. Only through its synthesis it is possible to trace and apprehend the common elements and the importance of the funerary context in the Mycenaean society.

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