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Beyond the Grave: Biographies from Early Greece

SUSAN LANGDON

Abstract

Object biography is an analytical technique that traces the changing social meanings an object accumulates during its lifetime. This study of two Late Geometric pots from Argos and Thebes employs biographical methods to address the role played by material goods in contemporary social rituals. The decoration and burial context of both vessels attest discrete stages in the construction of the social identity of the deceased. A giant pyxis from Argos can be connected with the social maturation of the woman buried within it. A figured pithos from Thebes represents what may be an important festival of Apollo and can similarly be connected with the interred child. The biographical data of these objects and their ultimate owners necessitate reconstructing the social setting of goods within complex communities, including the often-marginalized young and aging adult segments of the population. By focusing on the intersections of biographies in the grave, these narratives emphasize the centrality of objects in shaping identity and social order in early Greece.*

Familiarity breeds neglect. There is a tendency for well-known objects of high aesthetic merit to lose their archaeological and cultural contexts when placed in the broad narrative of Greek art history. The so-called Polyphemus amphora from Eleusis, for example, occupies a coveted spot in most major textbooks used in Western art survey courses, yet rarely has it been noted to have served as a child's coffin (fig. 1).¹ This fact is but incidental to the vessel's role in the larger art historical drama of the expression of human experience, which ironically displaces the individual personality that lived and died with the object. The social focus of research on this vessel during the past two decades has demonstrated how retrieving its archaeological context offers new pathways for understanding the pot and

its Protoattic style. Indeed, the vessel has become a veritable poster child for the need to address social questions of early Greek pottery.² Nevertheless, popular perceptions of this and similarly significant works, shaped without archaeological context, enjoy wide currency, while more recent studies remain in the realm of experts on early Greece. These are pedestrian observations, to be sure, but they raise the important question of the place of exceptional objects within the sphere of material culture, as part of both the contexts in which they are found and the spectrum of social meanings acquired between manufacture and final deposition.

INTO THE INDIVIDUAL: OBJECT BIOGRAPHY

One effective way to recover these social contexts is through the construction of object biography. Introduced by Igor Kopytoff, object biography seeks to narrate the accrual of social meanings over the lifespan of an artifact.³ The approach is attractive for its narrative structure and postprocessual emphasis on the active nature of material culture. While carrying the same liabilities as human biography—a tendency to privilege the elite or atypical and to disconnect its subject from the greater historical context—in application, object biographies effectively intersect with and elucidate larger social narratives, such as colonial encounters or gender constructions. The relation of the individual object to the broader functional or “career” pattern inherent within its typology is very much at issue. The purchase of a Renoir painting by a museum or by a private collector is a typical career path for the object type. Its demise in an incinerator, Kopytoff suggests, would be as tragic a biography for the paint-

* This study was begun during the 1999–2000 fellowship year at the National Humanities Center, whose unstinting hospitality and support I gratefully acknowledge. I want to thank especially Carla Antonaccio, Tracey Cullen, Susan Einbinder, Sarah Morris, Carol Muller, John Papadopoulos, Paul Rehak, Tim Taylor, John Younger, and James Whitley for discussing or corresponding with me about these and related objects. My thanks also to my anonymous reviewers, whose insightful comments encouraged me to expand my earlier essay into its final form.

¹ Mylonas 1957; Morris 1984, 11–12, 43–6.

² Morris 1984 (use as a tomb); Osborne 1988; Morris 1993, 1998; Whitley 1994. So far no consensual view of this vase or of Protoattic iconography has emerged from these recent treatments. I will follow suit in adding to the sketchy proposals when I return to the pot below.

³ Kopytoff 1986. For more recent uses of this approach, see the issue of *WorldArch* devoted to the topic: *The Cultural Biography of Objects*, *WorldArch* 31 (2) (1999); Weiner 1992. For other studies of the life cycles of early Greek pots, see Crie-laard 1999, 65–7; Shanks 1999.

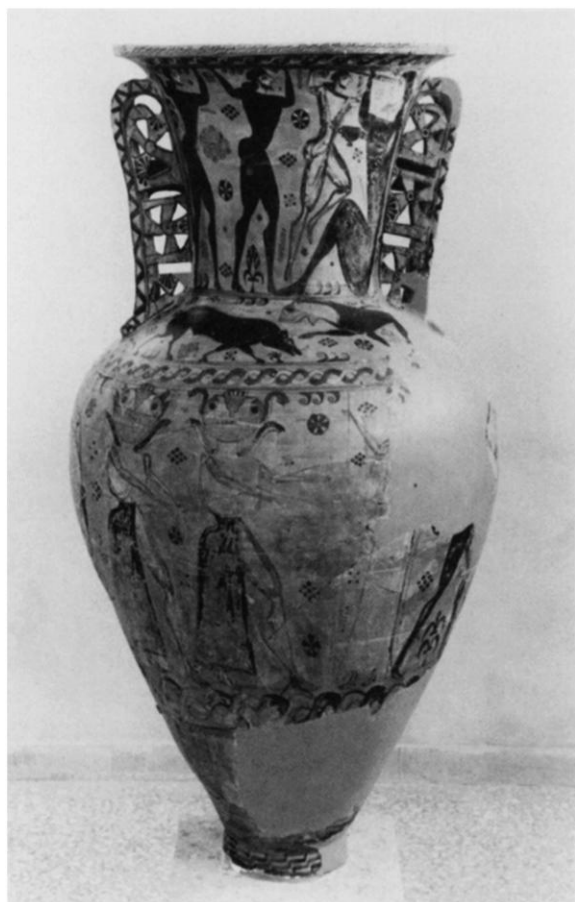


Fig. 1. The Polyphemus amphora from Eleusis. (Courtesy of the DAI Athens, Eleusis 544)

ing as murder for a person. For objects as for individuals, the specific biography is predicated on awareness of both the biographical possibilities within the society and that society's perception of an ideal life. The potential of the approach is tantalizing. Because the way a society constructs persons and the way it constructs things are fundamentally similar, in Kopytoff's view, "What one glimpses through the biographies of both people and things in these [smaller-scale] societies is, above all, the social system and the collective understandings on which it rests."⁴

When applied within carefully defined parameters, object biography can offer a useful approach to archaeological material. Time is emphasized as an essential dynamic of materiality for both human

and artifact lives. Not only are objects and their users transformed by the passage of time, but objects (especially in oral cultures) supply the necessary framework to measure and mark the rotations, durations, and events by which a culture organizes its social and physical world. Object biography prioritizes the inextricable link between things and people by focusing on the meanings constructed around objects.⁵ The contextually rich reading produced by such an approach provides occasion to consider those transcendent aesthetic qualities that can become lost in processual archaeologies, but whose recognition belongs to any study of social investment in objects. Finally, isolating and tracking the career of a single object can not only "make salient what might otherwise remain obscure," as Kopytoff notes,⁶ but also reveal contradictions in prevailing theories pertaining to types of objects and their use patterns within a culture. It can, for instance, reveal a contradiction that arises from the absence of significant information. An archaeologist might refer to this disjuncture between material record and ancient reality as "positivist fallacy"; a biographer as the "geranium mistake."⁷

This paper employs object biography to explore some missing information concerning the integral role played by certain decorated works of early Greek art as objects used in social rituals. I focus on two painted vases from the Early Iron Age, specifically the second half of the eighth century B.C. One of these vases figures prominently in scholarship of the Geometric period because of its exceptional artistic and aesthetic qualities and the singular absence of close parallels. The other vessel, no less striking, has gone almost unremarked in recent studies. These pots represent the artistic output of two distinct communities, Argos and Thebes, but share several essential features that point to broader cultural patterns. Both vessels were deliberately interred in graves as containers for the bodies of the deceased. Both were distinguished by high aesthetic quality and innovative treatment. The passage of time and shifting meanings will not always result in an object's physical modification.⁸ Yet in an archaeological context, shifts in meaning may be detected more readily when an object demonstrates movement in time or space through some visual sign of dislocation: a style far from home, a

⁴Kopytoff 1986, 66, 89.

⁵Rainbird 1999, 214.

⁶Kopytoff 1986, 67.

⁷Positivist fallacy: Snodgrass 1980, 126. Geranium mistake: An old man in a rest home believed that geraniums ate bread

at night because the crumbs he sprinkled on them in the evening were always gone in the morning. There was "a piece of information, about birds, that he did not seem to have" (Glendinning 1988, 53).

⁸Gosden and Marshall 1999, 170.

break mended or left unrepaired. In this light, both objects reveal something of at least two phases of their existence—before and at the time of their burial—when their social meanings were transformed. The grave is a behavioral context in which ideas, beliefs, and emotions guide the disposition of material. Our first view of the objects' lives is at the point of their last social appearance. Their use for burials provides the crucial human link, through the vital statistics of the deceased, that makes them ideal subjects for a biographical approach.

Interpretations of Early Iron Age grave goods often bypass the issue of whether funerary offering was the occasion for which an object was made or acquired. The archaeological record presents a fairly uniform picture: the majority of Geometric decorated pots, especially figural examples, have come from graves. While some scholars have doubted that this was their sole intended function, there has been a general tendency to refer to such pots as "grave amphoras" or "burial pithoi." Yet the known circulation of Geometric pottery in gift exchange, trade, and travel suggests greater complexity of its production and use.⁹ Recent work has examined early Greek pottery within strategies of self-identification, necessarily based upon funerary context and demographics.¹⁰ Objects that stand out as distinctly higher in quality or apparent value than those of surrounding graves are usually taken as signs of high rank or of some special role of the deceased, predicated on the reasonable idea that certain objects or assemblages are socially exclusive. James Whitley has directly addressed these issues for Geometric pottery from Attic graves. His statistical analysis considers not only total grave content but also shape, decoration, and size of vessel in correlation with grave type. His findings demonstrate a close relationship between vessel production and funerary use in the ninth century that breaks down in the later eighth while stylistic change accelerates, revealing an apparent paradox: the stylistic and iconographic enrichment of Attic LG II pottery that was viewed only briefly at a funeral and immediately buried.¹¹ While Whitley is surely right to tie stylistic change to social developments, buri-

al is the only social ritual he considers. When the presumed connection between art and burial breaks down, and pottery is no longer viewed as a primarily funerary accoutrement, he must conclude that style has been "divorced from particular social needs" and reflects a confusion paralleling the social disorder generated by the processes of state formation.¹²

Social hierarchy is only part of the story. The assumption that fine painted pottery was mainly intended for ostentatious funerary use shortchanges both the artists and the role of material culture in a society. Pottery painters, as Anthony Snodgrass and others have shown, were the leading artists of their day, influencing as often as borrowing from other crafts.¹³ Painted decoration offered the potential for complex expression found in no other medium and a larger social role than is usually assumed. The specific changes in iconography provide a valuable clue to understanding the changing roles of Geometric pottery and imagery. The new motifs in Attic LG II, including athletic contests, a variety of dances, acrobats, cult scenes, hunting, and riders, almost entirely depict non-funerary social situations.¹⁴ These suggest that status may have been one important concern in eighth-century society, but other factors also shaped its material components. In many traditional societies potters are uniquely integral to the ceremonies and routines of social reproduction. When it is time to marry or to bury, to pacify a toddler or placate a god, one goes to the potter. The author of the Byzantine *Geoponika* (85.20) describes the potter as the most necessary craftsman in the countryside. We should expect no less in Early Iron Age Greece, which was demonstrably attuned to the potentials of ceramic form and stylistic nuance. Where, for example, are the origins of such ritual types of pottery as *lebetes gamikoi* and wedding *loutrophoroi* to be found if not among the amphoras and kraters of Attic Late Geometric?¹⁵

Biography as Metaphor and Method

The challenge, then, is getting the right pots back out of the grave—that is, discerning which vessels might have been employed in other con-

⁹I.e., not solely funerary, see Courbin 1966, 472; Papadopoulos 1993; Boardman 1998, 264; on the pottery's role in gift exchange, see Coldstream 1983; cf. Papadopoulos 1998, 116; on circulation, see Crielaard 1999, esp. 59–62.

¹⁰Whitley 1991, 1994; Morgan and Whitelaw 1991; Morris 1993; Osborne 1988, 1998; Shanks 1999.

¹¹Whitley 1991, esp. 162–80.

¹²Whitley 1991, 179–80.

¹³Snodgrass 1998, 44–9; Vickers and Gill 1994, 110–12; Boardman 1998, 267; Crielaard 1999, 51–2.

¹⁴Rombos 1988, 35–7. Whitley (1991, 196) did not factor in iconographic changes for reasons that are cogent but surmountable; ignoring the iconography unnecessarily foregoes a valuable source of information.

¹⁵Ginouves 1962, 276–82; Oakley and Sinos 1993, 6–7.

texts prior to burial and what those contexts were. Biography, it should be acknowledged, is as much metaphor as method, and while it offers a theoretical relationship of people and things in mutual transformation, its application must be appropriate to the culture under study. The concept takes on a very literal meaning in Pacific ethnographies, for example, where objects are seen as extensions of or even as “detached parts of people circulating through the social body.”¹⁶ The idea that one’s standing is enhanced through valuable possessions because of who else has owned them may be a particularly Melanesian concept, but Homer offers glimpses of such deeply personalized objects that had accumulated a significant history, a chain of givers, owners, and stories. So, for example, the boar’s tusk helmet given to Odysseus by Meriones, the silver krater given to Telemachus by Menelaos, and Agamemnon’s scepter are all described by their illustrious biographies (*Il.* 2, 100–108; *Od.* 4, 615–619; *Il.* 10, 260–270). At the very least such Homeric prestige goods suggest that theorizing the central, active nature of objects in early Greek social relations is sound. Homeric works of art are never isolated wonders but function in life situations. In Nikolaus Himmelmann’s astute observation, “The aristocratic character of property and its social meaning in the Homeric world are among the essential underlying principles of Greek art.”¹⁷ Somewhere between the property of the elite and the ceramic essentials of daily life lies the province of Geometric vessels used in important, cyclical occasions—the ceremonies of marriage and maturation, the feasts and festivals that define a community.

Recognizing the complex and active role objects play in culture is a familiar theoretical stance in postprocessual approaches to archaeological material.¹⁸ Equally clear is the need for interpretive constraints.¹⁹ The application of biographical methods to artifacts as to humans involves a certain amount of reconstruction, but does not license the interpreter’s unrestrained subjectivity. The conventional (pre-postmodern) wisdom sees the biographer as “an artist under oath,” who has a duty to both fact and reconstruction.²⁰ The juridical tone of the phrase is appropriate for archaeological application as well. The approach must be grounded in standard archaeological procedure: understand-

ing an individual object depends on established parameters of the typical in size, material, form, decoration, function, symbolism, use contexts, and depositional patterns. The following case studies are not used simply as springboards for alternative narratives. Rather, they were specifically chosen because conventional interpretation leads to unresolved contradictions: a tomb that is both “rich” and “poor,” pots considered solely funerary that attest previous use. Similarly, interpretive possibilities are grounded in a network of evidence drawn from numerous sources, including iconography, texts, and later parallels. The ultimate goal of this study is to generate, through empirically rich contexts reconstructed by biographical data, a framework within which a broader analysis of the social role of Geometric pottery can be undertaken.

To this end the following strategies are employed. Since any anomalous object or context may simply represent random occurrence, the comparison of two (more are indicated later) case studies having significant points of correspondence can support a larger pattern not previously revealed by the conventional evidentiary approaches. In these cases, large vessels of innovative decoration, unparalleled in their cemetery contexts, contain bodies and reveal evidence of prior use. This study focuses on exceptional objects for two reasons. First, from their outward signs of scale, fine craftsmanship, innovation, and labor-intensive production one can presume some notion of value and significance above that of standardized, common pottery. Such vessels exhibit what Henry Glassie calls a rich “display of purpose” through the embodiment of value.²¹ Second, the exclusivity of the burial context can be challenged more readily through exceptional objects than through the standard ceramic fare of typical assemblages. The problem is straightforward: do atypical grave goods constitute idiosyncratic objects placed in unexceptional funerary contexts or idiosyncratic biographies—that is, standard objects used in an unusual way? These biographical case studies address the issues of type and stylistic parallel from this viewpoint. The presence of an atypical or anomalous object (as defined by type, size, imagery, quality) in a grave may be explained not because it marked a special status for the deceased within the community, but because it had a prior role in the life cycle rituals that created the

¹⁶ Gosden and Marshall 1999, 173.

¹⁷ Himmelmann 1998, 49.

¹⁸ Shanks and Tilley 1987; Hodder 1989, 1991; Robb 1999; Sørensen 2000, 94–5.

¹⁹ Thomas 1995; Trigger 1998, 27–30.

²⁰ Glendinning 1988, 53.

²¹ Glassie 1999, 18.

social persona of the deceased, and its deposition in the grave resulted from this association.

This study makes two assumptions in reconstructing social rituals: that basic rites existed in early Greece, and that material objects were used in their performance. These premises allow us to break open familiar patterns formed by purely functional typologies. The presence of social rites can hardly be doubted.²² Transitional life cycle events such as birth, death, age-group initiations, betrothal, and marriage constitute the machinery of cultural reproduction, the pulse of the social organism.²³ The prominence of objects in such rites of passage, whether as ritual equipment, products, or gifts, is ubiquitous in the ethnographic literature.²⁴ Mary Douglas succinctly argued their efficacy:

Without some conventional ways of selecting and fixing agreed meanings, the minimum consensual basis of society is missing. . . . [R]ituals serve to contain the drift of meanings. Rituals are conventions that set up visible public definitions. . . . Some are purely verbal rituals, vocalized, unrecorded, but they fade on the air and hardly help to limit the interpretive scope. More effective rituals use material things, and the more costly the ritual trappings, the stronger we can assume the intention to fix the meanings to be.²⁵

The recognition of such material in the archaeological record, especially for a primarily oral society, is a problematic but essential challenge. The centrality of gift exchange within the social and economic world of early Greece suggests that life cycle rituals not only created new social personae but were significant occasions to establish or reaffirm relationships among the members of family, kin groups, and community. As a result, ritual events would entail the exchange of gifts, goods, and services among the participants.²⁶ Extended across a lifetime, these bonds structured the lives involved and may have become equally a matter of economic as of social consequence. Passage rites and similar social events might leave little archaeological trace, but pottery likely figured among the objects and imagery that equipped rituals (in which consumption, purification, and offering are typical ritual fea-

tures) or served as gifts or markers of achievement. Pottery lacks the intrinsic value of artifacts, usually metal, whose precious materials made them suitable for gift exchange.²⁷ Yet distinguished by size or aesthetic treatment, common pots might acquire high prestige and value proportionate to the labor and skill they represent. The striking and flexible modes of ceramic decoration are in fact ideally suited to actions and exchanges surrounding rites of social passage.

The interpretation of Geometric iconography is a richly contested subject. Past study has tended to polarize debate in terms of epic/mythic and contemporary "real-life" representations. Few researchers have taken very strong stands at either end of the spectrum, and most identify certain images as mythological and locate the rest in eighth-century realities.²⁸ The source of the debate arises not from the ambiguous imagery but from the modern notion of such a dichotomy. Taking a cue from the success of Geometric style and its developments through a period of evident social upheaval, we can assume that the basic content of Geometric figural work is structured by contemporary social concerns. The imagery is often, but not always, overtly veiled in heroic guise. Real social types and actions filtered through myth and ritual helped the eighth-century Greeks to order and comprehend their world, using images not so differently from their Classical descendants.²⁹ The Geometric qualities of ambiguity and generality, which can leave images of warriors dueling or a man claiming a woman open to multiple identifications, allowed the ancient viewer to participate in the social configuration and behaviors grounded, through heroizing elements, in mythic authority.³⁰ As approaches to decoration varied among different local painting traditions, however, our interpretations must take into consideration local concerns and conventions. A logical extension of the idea that pottery could play a significant role in ritual because of its flexible and descriptive decoration is that such objects were created as totalities, their decoration not ran-

²² The existence and nature of rites of passage in classical Greece, after rather extensive support in past decades (Brelich 1969; Vidal-Naquet 1981; Dowden 1989; Calame 1997), remain controversial. Difficulties stem partly from an uncritical application of van Gennep's formula (1960) to a wide scope of myths, institutions, and literary works with little textual support or social analysis (Calame 1999).

²³ van Gennep 1960.

²⁴ E.g., van Gennep 1960; Mauss 1990; Strathern 1988; Weiner 1992.

²⁵ Douglas and Isherwood 1996, esp. 43–7.

²⁶ Cyphers Guillén 1993, 281; Morris 1986, 1989; van Wees 1992, 104. See Garland 1990, 95 on the social value of gifts in postnatal rituals.

²⁷ Finley 1980, 120–3; Appadurai 1986, 19–21, 38; Mauss 1990; Morris 1986, 1989; Kurke 1999, esp. 10 and n. 21.

²⁸ See Fittschen 1969; Rombos 1988, 19–33; Ahlberg-Cornell 1992 for extensive bibliographies. Snodgrass (1998) dismantles the maximal epic view.

²⁹ For similar approaches, see Bérard et al. 1989; Beard 1991.

³⁰ Langdon 1998, 269–70.



Fig. 2. Late Geometric pyxis C.209 from Argos tomb 23. (Photo by Emile S  raf,    EFA)

dom but keyed to shape and function in the broadest sense. Vessel and image worked together to define social identity, cohesion, and transformation.

The two objects examined here began their lives as gifts or ritual equipment within the system of material symbols that mediated gender, age, and status in the community, and became associated with specific families or individuals. The task at hand is to demonstrate that these unusual pots—a giant Argive pyxis and a decorated Theban pithos—were created for rituals among the living. For the pyxis, the well-documented Argive burial customs and the vessel's own formal qualities support the argument. The iconography of the Theban pithos offers surprising evidence for contemporary ritual activity despite the relative obscurity of local burial contexts. The terminus of both objects in a grave signals a clear decision to remove them from the world of the living and forego alternative use as gift, heir-

loom, or votive offering. In the one case, over a long lifespan a vessel may have become so intimately associated with its owner as to render future exchange undesirable. In the second, for a child the pot might have served to signify the life stage last attained, or to bring an incomplete social state to posthumous closure. Such interpretations emphasize how objects might have articulated identity and social order in early Greece.

THE GREAT ARGOS PYXIS

Argos tomb 23 was excavated in 1953 in the Bakaloiannis plot in the southwest sector of the modern city. The burial (hereafter T.23) consisted of a large globular pyxis (C.209, fig. 2) with tripod loop feet; it was found lying on its side with its mouth oriented to the west and closed by a krater.³¹ Interred within the pyxis were long bones judged by osteological analysis to be those of a woman about 35 years old.³² Excavation revealed that the side of the vessel had been sliced by Roman terracing, but the interior was sufficiently preserved to assure that it held no grave goods.³³ The pyxis stands 1 m high and is decorated with a veritable compendium of the Argive painters' repertoire during the Late Geometric I phase, ca. 750–730 B.C. Motifs and composition here reach fuller development than in some examples of LG I pottery, and its date might thus be narrowed to about 740/735 B.C.³⁴ The dense textile-like scheme of metopes and continuous bands depicts a tripartite world in which water, land, and air are evoked through animal imagery (three different bird types that resemble hefty Great Bustards, long-necked storks, and sinuous marshbirds; various types of fish; snakes) and the human realm (tethered horses; a pair of wrestling men, unique in Argive painting, tucked beneath each handle, fig. 3). Some viewers might also find the scheme of sky, earth, and sea continued in the sunwheels, quatrefoils, and stacked zigzags of the linear motifs.³⁵ The ambitious scope of design is matched by painstaking execution. The pyxis mouth was stoppered by a large krater (C.210) that was, when whole, equally impressive within its own class of vessel (figs. 4–5).³⁶ The krater, now missing its foot and lower body, originally would have stood 0.5 m high; its paired stirrup handles and broad body were covered in a web of figural and geometric de-

³¹ Courbin 1954, 178–80, pl. 6G; 1974, 34–5.

³² J.L. Angel cited in Courbin 1974, 34; cf. Charles 1958.

³³ Courbin 1954, 178–80; Foley 1988, 37.

³⁴ Argos C. 209, H. 1.04 m. Courbin 1966, 177 for dates, pl. 100–104; 1974, 34, pl. 28; Coldstream 1968, 126, 330, pl. 26;

1977, 141, 143, fig. 45a.

³⁵ For the significance of Argive motifs, Courbin 1966, 473–95; 1992; Boardman 1983; Langdon 1989.

³⁶ C.210, pres. H. 0.39 m. Courbin 1966, 177, pl. 41; 1974, 34–5, pl. 28; Coldstream 1968, 139–40.

signs. Taken together with the pyxis, the Argive figural tradition is fully represented: in four panels a man leads a horse, in two more a man stands between horses, and four panels carry lines of five or six dancing women, possibly the earliest in Argive painting.³⁷ A continuous frieze of reclining deer, a rare motif in Argive Geometric runs under the rim.

While the aesthetic merits of this spectacular pyxis have been celebrated in the scholarship of early Argos and of Geometric art (being called, e.g., “the zenith of the local style at its grandest and best” and “the apex of Argive Geometric”³⁸), its discovery in a burial greatly increases its interest by introducing two biographical clues. The first has to do with the specific type of burial in a ceramic container. The vessel shape is derived from small covered pyxides. Yet when enlarged to meter-high scale, the pot is more akin in construction, shape, and function to a pithos, and T.23 is thus customarily classed with pithos burials.³⁹ A second biographical clue is its chronological complexity. The burial is given a terminus post quem of about 715 B.C. (LG IIb), not by the pyxis but by the krater, which was made some 25 years later than the pyxis.⁴⁰

It should be noted that T.23 was a single-use burial, not reused in LG IIb. Plentiful evidence for both accidental and intentional reopening of tombs in Argos supports a general respect accorded the earlier deceased: their bones tend to have been reinterred and sometimes given new offerings or other placatory treatment.⁴¹ The lack of offerings or other skeletal material in T.23 as compared with the few documented successive pithos burials, such as Argos T.190, argues against prior funerary use. In fact, successive interments rarely occur in pithoi and characterize less than 10% of ceramic container burials in the entire plain.⁴² The burial can be considered a primary interment with vessels of differing ages.

A brief survey of the burial patterns of Late Geometric Argos provides context for T.23.⁴³ In addition to smaller ceramic containers, cist and pit graves constitute the other common tomb forms. Within Argos certain customs, such as grave groupings, the

non-segregation of child burials, tombs with multiple occupants, and the dispersal of these groups throughout the central habitation area, support kinship as the fundamental structuring factor in the community's burial practices. Certain developments in the second half of the eighth century are shared with the other communities of the plain: an increasingly westerly orientation of tombs and the rising predominance of pithos burials at all sites, which catches on in Argos only shortly before 700 B.C. But specific to Argos alone is the appearance after 750 B.C. of bigger and richer cist graves with numerous gifts and often successive interments. Burial types at Argos show a limited degree of segregation, with cists clustered in the central area of the modern city, and pithos and pot burials more frequent in the north, west, and southwest areas.⁴⁴

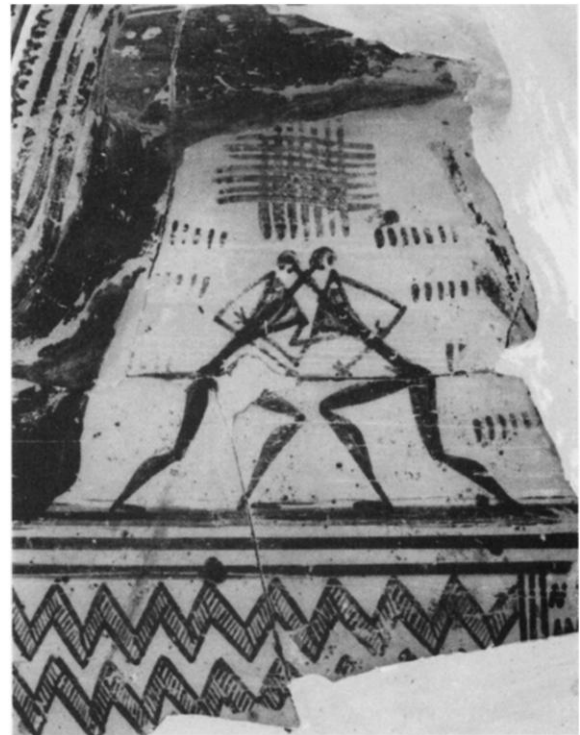


Fig. 3. Wrestlers, detail of pyxis C.209. (Photo by Emile Séraf, © EFA)

³⁷ Coldstream 1968, 141. Courbin disagrees, dating the Panoply grave that contained krater C.229 with dancers to LG IIa (1957; 1966, 177).

³⁸ Coldstream 1968, 127; Foley 1988, 56.

³⁹ For shape, see Courbin 1966, 246; Coldstream 1968, 126. As a pithos burial, see Courbin 1974, table p. 5; Hägg 1974, 140.

⁴⁰ For absolute date of krater C.210 within LG IIb, see Courbin 1966, 177.

⁴¹ Courbin 1974, 143–7.

⁴² Hägg 1974, 148–9.

⁴³ On Argive burial customs, see Courbin 1974, 1977; Hägg 1974, 1983, 1998; Bommelaer 1977; Morris 1987, 183–5; Foley 1988, 1998; Whitley 1991; Morgan and Whitelaw 1991; Touchais and Divari-Valakou 1998. Asine is an exception to many of the patterns, Hägg 1998.

⁴⁴ On the center of ancient Argos, Hägg 1974, 33, 39; but see Courbin 1977, 327–8. For segregation of tomb types, see Foley 1998, 138–9.



Fig. 4. Late Geometric II krater C.210 from Argos tomb 23. (Photo by Emile Séraf, © EFA)

Nevertheless, the intermingling of tomb types is a significant feature of Argos and their segregation should not be exaggerated. Tomb 23 lay in the vicinity of some notably wealthy neighbors—several cist graves including T.106 and the Panoply tomb—in the southwest part of the modern city.

Pyxis C.209 signals several anomalies in T.23 as compared to other Argos graves. It is unparalleled as a LG I monumental decorated (i.e., non-pithos) ceramic tomb, which along with other evidence discussed below suggests that it was not originally made for funerary use.⁴⁵ The pyxis was interred in LG IIB, at a time when the rich cist graves attest new interest in demarcating groups through competitive burial display.⁴⁶ Contemporary pithos burials with few or no gifts appear as outliers to this elite set, yet in this case two of the finest products of the Argive pottery tradition form a tomb that has more in common with the poorer burials.

Decisions that governed the stratified burial typology in Argos are far from clear. Two factors not

fully understood are gender and ethnicity, although the questions have been raised. The suggestion that pithos burials reflect ethnic affiliation has been convincingly dismissed by Jonathan Hall, who finds irregularities in all the perceived patterns and emphasizes that persons of different ethnic affiliation rarely share burial space.⁴⁷ More attractive is the idea of a gender-specific association of pithoi and women, but here as well difficulties arise. Whitley has observed that at Argos the LG II richly endowed cist tombs became principally associated with males marked as warriors. Restricting the use of ceramic-container burials primarily to women and children effectively excluded these groups from the pageantry of high status burial.⁴⁸ This pattern may relate more strictly to class or kinship than to gender, for two men and a woman were interred successively in pithos T.190, while at least two women shared cist tombs with men who predeceased them (T.14, 173).⁴⁹ In other words, family trumps gen-

⁴⁵ The other two known large Argive vessels with loop feet found in graves, both amphoras, are later in date, and at least one is significantly smaller than the pyxis. Nauplion Archaeological Museum 10006, H. 68 cm; Coldstream 1968, pl. 28D; Charitonides 1966, 127 from Argos, found near the OTE. Courbin 1966, 246 and pl. 105 cites other fragments of large decorated loop feet, none identifiable as LG I.

⁴⁶ See *supra* n. 37 for the close contemporaneity of T.23 and T.45 (the "Panoply Grave"); Hägg 1983, 1998; Foley 1988, 37.

⁴⁷ Foley 1988, 38; 1998; Hall 1997, 122–8.

⁴⁸ Whitley 1991, 190; similarly, Hägg 1974, 136.

⁴⁹ Courbin 1974, table p. 5 uses osteological evidence, which is occasionally updated in the text with newer studies by J.L. Angel and R.-P. Charles.



Fig. 5. Late Geometric krater C.210, other side. (Photo by Emile Séraf, © EFA)

der, but visibility is attached to the male for whom the cist was made.

Tomb 23 hardly qualifies as an “invisible” pithos burial, with its pyxis standing in direct contrast to those undecorated specimens. Nevertheless, linking the choice of ceramic burial with the gender of the deceased raises the anomaly of the krater. In Geometric Athens, as in Homeric epic, kraters define the realm of men. Their exclusive sympotic associations allow kraters, whether of metal or ceramic, to circulate within the social bonds of gift exchange.⁵⁰ The same associations designated kraters as the visual markers of deceased elite males in the Kriezī Street and Dipylon cemeteries.⁵¹ Outside Athens the pattern is less clear. In Boeotia, for example, a notably wealthy grave of an adult woman at Lake Paralimni included a magnificent Boeotian krater along with Attic horse pyxides, seals, bronze figurines, many vases, gold and bronze jewelry, and two infants.⁵²

In the Argive plain, kraters have a particular presence as a favored shape that is also the main bearer

of imagery. Krater C.210 is especially rich with its orientализing deer and unusual combination of horseleaders and female dancers. Both motifs appear regularly on kraters and drinking cups. In the aristocratic horseleader the religious, social, and economic interests of the Argolid are personified; in dance the community acts in concert. Together they express collective identity and cohesion through social types that in their generic form mediate the protection and well-being of the land. Behind every horseleader shimmers the image of Poseidon, in the maiden dance the protecting Danaïads.⁵³ In juxtaposition, however, they suggest more than in isolation. The contrast between the maiden cohort in their number and replication and the individuality of the horse-master has implications for the construction of gender in Argive society.⁵⁴ Bridled horses and belted maidens set within the domain of the horseleading icons of husbandry: juxtaposed on ceremonial kraters they possess a force of cultural, even divine, authority, a vision of gendered, hierarchical social order.

⁵⁰ Luke 1994. On kraters in gift exchange, see Coldstream 1983; on gift exchange in Early Iron Age Greece, see Morris 1986, 1989.

⁵¹ Boardman 1988; Whitley 1996, 221–3.

⁵² Spyropoulos 1971, 7; Demakopoulou and Konsola 1981, 57.

⁵³ Boardman 1983; Langdon 1989, 1998.

⁵⁴ Like the collectivities of mythic heroines (e.g., the Danaïads), the Argive dancers, changeable in number but identical in features, imply subordination; see Calame (1997, 30) for mythic collectivities. By contrast, the horseleader is occasionally duplicated for purposes of symmetry, but remains singular within his frame.

Kraters are not generally associated with female burials in Argos. Examples have been found in numerous male cist burials of LG IIa and IIb date, and others served as containers for four (unsexable) infants in LG IIc.⁵⁵ Besides T.23, the only other osteologically sexed female burial linked with a LG krater occurs in a cist where the presence of an earlier male inhumation complicates the picture: the krater may have been offered to the earlier deceased whose remains were disturbed.⁵⁶ A krater is not a standard lid for pithoi, which are more often closed by stones and sherds. In Argos T.316 a krater with a broken-out base topped a pithos burial and seems to have protruded above ground to mark the grave and perhaps to receive *spondai*.⁵⁷ Jean-François Bommelaer found support for such ritual in a possible funerary libation depicted on a Subgeometric krater, and he noted the great number of funerary kraters with intentionally broken bases.⁵⁸ It is not clear whether the bottom of C.210 was purposely removed or was lost during Roman terracing. Still, the evidence for ritual alteration of kraters suggests that their social and symbolic associations figured in their role in tomb construction. The combination of a female-associated ceramic vessel burial with the male-associated krater C.210 complicates the gender identification of T.23. In fact, the pyxis shape itself signals female identity. Paul Courbin has noted that in Argive Geometric graves pyxides are generally associated with women rather than with men.⁵⁹

That the pyxis was not originally intended for funerary use is best supported by the fact that it was made some 25 years prior to the earliest possible date for the grave. While the lack of parallels in Argive graves was noted above, the deeply rooted contention that it is a funerary vessel is worth refuting on other grounds as well. These include the suggestion that it was a grave marker later recycled as a coffin. The intentional reuse of tombs implies

a marking system, as attested by slabs and the krater of T.316, but there is no direct evidence for monumental vessels used this way.⁶⁰ The very form of the pyxis argues against this. The stability of tripod feet on an earthen surface accounts for neither the loop form of these feet nor their completely decorated surfaces.⁶¹ They are relatively fragile as supports, but could be threaded with a rope and so maneuvered, tipped, and transported.⁶² Courbin believes that very few Argive vessels were made exclusively for burial, and most of those found in graves can be assumed to have had a prior use. Certainly the occurrence of lead joins on some burial pithoi attests earlier, presumably domestic, use.⁶³

If not made for the grave, then for what was the pyxis used for the 20 or 25 years between manufacture and burial? Here the questions of style and its social role in the Argolid become crucial factors. Catherine Morgan and Todd Whitelaw have demonstrated that the region was marked in the later eighth century by intensifying social differentiation negotiated through increased material display. Newly elaborate decoration and elitist iconographic motifs in pottery played an active role in this phenomenon throughout the plain.⁶⁴ The overtly competitive imagery of paired wrestlers (among the first Argive human representations) puts the pyxis in the vanguard of this effort. Its visual power and recognizable style would have advertised a family's high rank in the social strata of Argos, as distinct from other communities. Accordingly, a much greater variety of figural motifs appears in sanctuaries than in graves: in the ground, the effect is mute; in the house or sanctuary, it is powerfully deployed. The relatively few published sherds from the Argive Heraion attest themes unrepresented in Argos graves: warrior frieze, Siamese twins, boxing match (cf. the C.209 wrestlers), chariots, sea battle, lion hunt, kithara-player. Indeed, Robin Hägg has observed that the deposition of fine decorated pot-

⁵⁵ Kraters in male cist burials: T.6/2, 175, 45, the Theodoropoulos plot; infant burials: T.38, 43, 131, 195; indeterminate cist: T.1, Courbin 1974; Deilaki 1973, 99. The use of kraters for infants, a practice that apparently begins in LG IIc, is a separate topic.

⁵⁶ Courbin 1974, 71–2, T.173.

⁵⁷ Bommelaer and Grandjean 1972, 165; Hägg 1974, 146, 147 table 34 on lid types for ceramic graves.

⁵⁸ Bommelaer 1972, 245; Hägg 1992b. Boardman (1988, 176) finds the alteration of a krater for such a ritual unnecessary. The question arises whether Bommelaer correctly identified intentional perforations, but accidental breakage that left the entire upper krater wall and rim intact would probably be rare.

⁵⁹ Courbin 1974, 127; cf. Strömberg 1993, 102 for a similar

pattern in Athens.

⁶⁰ C.209 as funerary, Bommelaer 1977, 331–2; as possible marker, Hägg 1992b, 173, n. 11 without addressing how it came to be used as a coffin. For evidence of markers, Hägg 1974, 154–6; Courbin 1974, 140; 1977, 329.

⁶¹ In fact most vessels with tripod loop feet are small and quite varied, ranging from open bowls to pithoi, jars, and amphorae; Buchholz 1983.

⁶² Courbin 1966, 263. This explanation is not necessary for small vessels with loop feet of more formal tradition than functional use.

⁶³ Courbin 1966, 472 n. 6; 1974, 150. For lead joins, see Hägg 1974, 146; for an example from Bertzeletos plot, Argos, see Charitonides 1952, 416 n. 1.

⁶⁴ Morgan and Whitelaw 1991.

tery in shrines and sanctuaries was instituted as a new feature of cult practice starting about 750, and suggests that the high quality drinking vessels, kraters, and monumental vases might have played the same role of status display as tripods, for example, at Olympia and Delphi. Monumental decorated vases are known from sanctuary deposits on the Larissa and the Aspis, where among the poorly published material are reported finely decorated sherds 15 mm thick.⁶⁵ Pyxis C.209 was never dedicated in a sanctuary and so suggests domestic use.

Pithoi were standard domestic furniture for storing bulk items like oil, grain, wine, or water, and even this giant pyxis with its delicate loops could be stabilized for storage.⁶⁶ On the other hand, the intrinsic value suggested by its labor-intensive painted decoration belies such prosaic usage and recalls its origin in the globular pyxis form. With their much smaller scale, elegant patterns, and rims made to accommodate lids, pyxides were intended to contain dry goods, often of an inherently valuable nature: jewelry and other small objects, perhaps precious substances such as dried herbs and powders. Their sumptuary links made them the perfect gift boxes.⁶⁷ The giant pyxis was decorated and shaped like these small fine containers, but with a tremendous advantage in capacity and ostentatious display. It is best suited for the storage of items of more bulk than weight whose significance was commensurate with their presentation in such a container. Fine ceramics not used on a daily basis, for example, might have been nested in the pyxis.⁶⁸

Pursuing a line of reasoning that connects the standard uses of the pyxis more closely with the occupant of the tomb adds elements of family history and lifespan to the biography. If the krater C.210 was relatively new when buried ca. 715, the deceased must have been born around 750.⁶⁹ The pyxis

would have been made when she was in her very early teens—that is, when she reached puberty.⁷⁰ This biographical parallelism, with the pot and the woman perhaps sharing much of their respective lifespans, raises questions about when and how the woman's family obtained this valuable vessel. The creation of the pyxis around the time of her coming of age raises the possibility that it was acquired by her family to hold something that she would bring to her marriage. The textile-like appearance of the pyxis surface has often been noted. It might suggest that the pyxis held the worked wool or even the very textiles the deceased and her mother had been weaving since her childhood, and that she was expected to bring to her new home. The production of cloth would have dominated her married life as well. Weaving as familiar metaphor for marriage was objectified in the vestments given as a gift from the bride to the groom and in her *pherne*, to be understood as a trousseau rather than a dowry.⁷¹ Not only the creation of fine textiles but also their safe storage for display and distribution as guest gifts were among the important responsibilities of aristocratic women.⁷² Although Homeric women usually retrieved these garments from wooden chests, a stupendous lidded storage vessel decorated like the very textiles it contained is not difficult to imagine. A ceramic container would have offered more effective security from rodent and insect pests than basketry. Indeed, an image on a small Archaic Corinthian aryballos depicts women at looms, and shelving beside them that appears to hold lidded jars—containing perhaps wool thread?⁷³ Homer's audience was familiar with the idea of weaving as women's proper activity parallel to war (or discussion) as men's work; Penelope's virtues are encapsulated in the single image of her weaving.⁷⁴ As a striking domestic centerpiece, the giant pyxis would

⁶⁵ Hägg 1992a, esp. 11, 21. For pottery from the Argive Heraeum, see Waldstein 1905, 112, pls. LVI, LVII; from the Aspis and Larissa, see Roes 1953, pls. XXIV, XXV, XXIX.

⁶⁶ On standard uses of pithoi, see Devos et al. 1999. For stabilization, the pithoi built into benches in the houses at Zagora, e.g., Cambitoglou et al. 1988, 80, H 19.

⁶⁷ The most famous example is Pandora's gift from Zeus, which Hesiod calls a pithos (*Op.* 94). Homer cites Zeus's two pithoi containing gifts (*Il.* 24, 527). On pyxides and other containers associated with women, Lissarrague 1995.

⁶⁸ As a possible parallel, pithoi filled with pottery in the Ulu Burun shipwreck; Bass (1986, 279) compares pithos KW 251 to a modern "china barrel."

⁶⁹ A terminus post quem is no guarantee of date, but in the absence of stratigraphical context to the contrary, the date can be provisionally accepted.

⁷⁰ On age of puberty and marriage, see Dean-Jones 1994,

47–8; Foxhall 1998, 125; Ingalls 1998, 21 n. 31. Dean-Jones notes that while first menarche was not ritually marked in classical times, social puberty was recognized at age 14.

⁷¹ Redfield 1982, 194–5, 199 n. 15; Scheid and Svenbro 1996, 53–82. On *pherne* as trousseau rather than dowry, see Vernant 1988, 67. Solon's interest in limiting, as part of his sumptuary reforms, a bride's *pherne* to three changes of clothing and small household items bespeaks the lavish parades of weavings and other goods that had become customary (Plutarch, *Solon* 20, 4).

⁷² Jenkins 1985, 109–12.

⁷³ Barber 1994, 241 fig. 10:2. Some of the pithoi at Pessinus were found to contain remnants of textile production, although the excavators question whether this was their original use (Devos et al. 1999, 97).

⁷⁴ *Il.* 6, 490–492; *Od.* 1, 356–359.

have interwoven statements of ideal feminine industry and familial prosperity that integrated the owner's identity as daughter, wife, and woman of a particular status in Argos.⁷⁵

The marshbirds, watery zigzags, and bridled horses of C.209 exemplify the conventional reading of Argive iconography as elaborating the world of the horse-rearing, "thirsty" Argive plain. Into this world the vigorous little wrestlers tucked beneath the handles (fig. 3) introduce a combative note nearly missed in the bustle of pattern and panel. It slips without difficulty into a generalized aristocratic vision of competitive excellence in keeping with the ostentatious status-making object on which it appears. It is equally possible, however, to see a more relevant interpretation for a young woman's pyxis. The contest of physical prowess was also part of the discourse of betrothal and marriage much attested in early Greek poetic and historical consciousness. Penelope's suitors or Kleisthenes' construction of a wrestling floor for his daughter Agariste's suitors offer parallels. In Argos one might recall the story of the much sought-after daughters of King Adrastus, who awarded them in marriage to Tydeus and Polyneikes when he came upon them wrestling in the palace, thus fulfilling a prophecy. This event, which initiates the Theban cycle, belongs to an aetiological type of bride-contest tale.⁷⁶ The symbolism of the bride contest is another expression of a family's social power and identity. The point here is not that one can always invent a plausible interpretation, but that shifting the focus to a social interpretation of Geometric imagery sets up a new model to be tested across the corpus of material.

These conclusions can be drawn: that the grave is a single unit, that the pyxis was not made originally for funerary use, and that it had previously functioned in a domestic space where it marked the elite status of the family. The pyxis form conjures up a world of female activity that may relate to textile production as well as domestic prosperity,

thus doubly signifying family status and feminine industry (and virtue), possibly linked in its owner's life course with the achievement of a stage of social maturity. The intersection of lives—the woman's and the pot's—remains central. Having come to her at a critical juncture in her young life, perhaps at the time of puberty or betrothal, this exceptional vessel played a significant role in the creation and maintenance of her new social persona and was inextricably associated with her.

It remains to understand the presence of the krater. At 35 years of age, the deceased would have been one of the middle-aged women in the community.⁷⁷ Although she was still within the child-bearing years, she was also of the age at which a woman's social relationships began to shift through such events as widowhood and the arrival of a third generation.⁷⁸ The latter aspect is particularly relevant. Greek thought constructed ideas of life experience and social identity around the concept of generations, factored by both time of life and ancestry.⁷⁹ Standardized as early as Homer and Hesiod, generational identities rested on cohort solidarities and belief in universal age-linked behavioral characteristics against which individual experience was measured. The experiences of a middle-aged woman would have been defined in part by her relationships, especially to the younger generations. The typical Greek marriage pattern by which a young woman was married soon after puberty to a significantly older husband—the ages of ca. 14 and 30 are the classical norm, perhaps ca. 18 and 30 in the eighth century—led to different experiences of male and female aging. Men, for one thing, had a statistically smaller chance of participating in the upbringing of the third generation in their family. If the couple's first child was a daughter, her mother could become a grandmother in her early to mid-30s, when her father would be approaching 50. Should they have only sons, the age disparity with their first grandchild would be much greater.⁸⁰ Al-

⁷⁵ On weaving as a wife's ideal and proper industry, see Redfield 1982, 194–5; Jenkins 1985, 109–12; Barber 1994, 273–7; Reeder 1995, 200–2.

⁷⁶ Robertson 1991; Gantz 1993, 509–10. On the significance of the Proitid genealogy (to which Adrastus belongs) in Argive ideology, see Hall 1997, 89–107. Courbin (1966, 492–3) entertains a mythological interpretation of the C.209 wrestlers as Epeios and Euryalos of Il. 23, 687–688 only to discard it for lack of identifying detail in the figures; Odysseus and Ajax wrestle a few lines later with a similar description, Il. 712–713. For Kleisthenes of Sikyon and his daughter's suitors, Hdt. 6, 126–130.

⁷⁷ Charles (1963, 74–6) sets the life expectancy for women in the Early Iron Age Argolid, as in the Mycenaean period, at around 40. Angel (1971, 66–7, 70 table 2) yields similar find-

ings in his small sample of Geometric period skeletal material from Lerna. Cf. Morris 1992 and Chamberlain 1997 on the inherent problems in paleodemographic studies.

⁷⁸ Dean-Jones (1994, 105–8) notes that even with a relatively early average age of death at 36–37 for Classical Greek women, menopause would still have occurred at approximately 45–50.

⁷⁹ Nash 1978. See also Finley 1981, Falkner 1989, Garland 1990. Following classical authors, modern scholarship on Greek generations and their characteristics has dealt exclusively with men's experience.

⁸⁰ Golden (1990, 136) offers these odds: "about 65% of the mothers of firstborn daughters and about one-half of their fathers could expect to see at least one grandchild by them. . . . About 40% of mothers and 22% of fathers could

though Argive customs are unknown, the advice of Hesiod with respect to age at marriage supports this pattern as an ideal in some parts of Greece already by the late eighth century.⁸¹ Whatever her own reproductive status, a 35-year-old woman was old enough to have grandchildren and therefore had crossed a new generational threshold.

This generational structure can be archaeologically investigated through the anthropological concept of “social age,” the cultural construction of age that entails behavioral norms and gender expectations apart from, but also utilizing, physiological realities.⁸² Its material correlates may take symbolic or ideational as well as practical form. There is evidence that in Argos certain middle-aged women were accorded a recognition of status at burial that corresponded with a “social age” distinct from that of younger women producing families. The dispersal patterns of Late Geometric kraters and other status symbols presented by the sexed Argos graves are striking. Cist tombs, kraters, obeloi, and horseleader symbolism are elements that have been loosely linked with male identity and/or warrior burials—*loosely* because all have occurred with females as well.⁸³ Yet a closer look reveals that these female exceptions are all around 35–45 years of age. The sample of osteologically sexed Argos graves is admittedly small: 46 burials in Argos ranging in date from EG to LG IIc have been osteologically aged and/or sexed, and usually both for the 31 adult burials (13 female, 18 male). Of the 13 adult female burials, seven fall into the 30–45 range (none is older). Four of these graves (T.14/3, 106/2, 173/2, and our T.23), all LG, stand apart from the rest: the women are in cist tombs (except for pyxis tomb 23), three have kraters, two have pottery with horseleader motifs, and one has an obelos.⁸⁴ None of these items is documented with a woman under ca. 35 or in a non-cist female grave (other than T.23).

The question arises whether kraters, obeloi, and horses when attached to older women still carry

“male” associations, a subjective and contemporary but still useful concept. In the cist these three Argive middle-aged women “look” like men. In many cultures advanced age brings a person into a phase of gender ambiguity, when elderly women may acceptably pursue activities traditionally designated as “male.” In fact, cross-cultural studies of societies from simple to more complex have shown that women generally experience increased freedom and authority with the onset of middle age. This time of life when one has (or one’s cohorts have) adult offspring tends to bring with it reduced behavior restrictions, new powers of authority over kinfolk, and increased status beyond the immediate household.⁸⁵ In Classical Greece this increase of freedom was partly based on a biological perception. In Aristotelian science, the cessation of menstruation “dries out” and assimilates a woman’s body to that of a man. In cultural terms, an older woman by virtue of her nonreproductive body might enjoy “greater authority and freedom because her behavior posed less of a threat to the integrity of the *oikos*.”⁸⁶ The applicability of Aristotelian views to Early Iron Age society may be questionable (and the menopause explanation is probably not applicable to the occupant of T.23), but there is a more positive way to perceive the vital role played by older women in early Greece. Lin Foxhall argues that because of a woman’s relatively early marriage and maturity and her intimate association with family rites and history (as opposed to public, long-term, male-controlled history), her authority over kin and household could increase until she “held sway over three generations of family.”⁸⁷ The influence of this older generation as repository of wisdom and knowledge would be especially viable in a preliterate society with no alternative written sources.⁸⁸ With kinship as a structuring principle in Argos burials, it appears that women of a certain age, perhaps finished with their own childbearing and possibly heading households and kin groups, overseeing the history and rituals of two or three generations, achieved a

expect to see a son’s child . . . fewer than six in ten men who became grandfathers at 65 would still be alive when their grandchild reached five years of age.”

⁸¹ *Op.* 695–699. See commentary by West 1978, 327–8.

⁸² Sofaer Derevenski 1997b. For other archaeological studies that address age as a factor of gender and social construction, see Whitley 1996; Gilchrist 1999, 105–8; Sofaer Derevenski 1997a, 2000.

⁸³ Similarly, see Whitley 1996 on the adult male symbolic system, and the lack of one for women, in Early Iron Age Greece.

⁸⁴ Statistics from Courbin 1974 with modifications from Charles 1963: cist burial 14/3, 30- to 35-year-old female, with part of an obelos and numerous vessels; cist burial 106/2, 40-

year-old female with reused EG krater and LG skyphos with horseleaders; cist burial 173/2, 40-year-old female with krater.

⁸⁵ Brown 1982, with commentaries.

⁸⁶ Dean-Jones 1994, 108.

⁸⁷ Foxhall 1998; Gilchrist 1999, 88. This generational concept is stated by Nestor, who claims to be “now ruling over a third generation” (*Il.* 1, 250–252; *Od.* 3, 245).

⁸⁸ Nestor, the prototypical “voice of experience,” draws his advice and wisdom directly from his memories of his youth, e.g., *Il.* 1, 259–274; but see Finley’s qualification, 1981, 164. Garland compares the differing respect accorded the elderly in “largely illiterate” Sparta with that of literate, progressive Athens from this angle (1990, ch. 6, esp. 286).

new level of social identity. This status was represented by material associated with the world of power and knowledge more usually appropriated by men.⁸⁹ Comparison with male graves at Argos may uphold this assessment. Men in their 20s to early 40s have the full range of status markers, but the three LG graves of men aged ca. 45–55, although cist interments, are poorly equipped. One has a single cup, one a pair of handmade pots. A third, while sharing a cist with a contemporary 30-year-old male who has a wealth of goods, has nothing.⁹⁰ This pattern recalls a generational scheme less familiar in Homer than in Hesiod, where an older man is defined by physical debility and the cessation of military involvement in the community, with a corresponding decline in status.⁹¹

In practical terms it is not difficult to understand how a middle-aged woman's social stature might increase as she entered this new generational bracket. The specific definition of this Argive female social group, however, is not revealed by the archaeological material. Class is certainly implicated, but grandparent status, the temporary or permanent absence of a male head of household, particular religious or ritual office, or certain lineage connections may all be factors. The archaeological pattern has interesting implications for comparison with contemporary Athens. Whitley has noted that unlike other regions of Greece, Athens has richly furnished female graves throughout Geometric, and he postulates that middle-aged women might in particular have received special burial treatment.⁹² Consideration of the specific use of symbolic elements, however, may be a more effective way to discern female (or male) status than analysis based on the richness of graves. The Argive female graves examined above are not particularly wealthy, but granting women at a certain life stage access to the male symbolic system may signal increased social status. This approach can usefully be extended to Athens, where certain male-linked items or combi-

nations of items, such as kantharoi and oinochoai, may be found to correlate with graves of older females.⁹³ The occupant of T.23 and the middle-aged women in the Argos cist-tombs reveal that in Argos as in Athens women may have participated in the competitive display of status-making objects and imagery. What the present interpretation of T.23 offers is a way to interpret a change in female gender that is not directly linked with reproduction, through the acquisition, at least at death, of the marks of status among a group of women that brackets both childbearing and post-childbearing women. Carrying the badges of two stages of femininity, the chronological complexity of T.23 in this way reflects the biographical texture of a full female life.

A PITHOS FROM THEBES

Construction workers in the Pyri suburb of Thebes in 1966 unearthed a pithos of 720–700 B.C. containing the bones of a child. Over 0.5 m tall, the cylindrical vessel was covered with painted geometric ornamentation and some striking figural imagery (fig. 6).⁹⁴ Two (unpublished) vessels found nearby, a lekanis and a kalathiskos, are thought to belong to the burial. In contrast with Argos T.23, it is difficult to contextualize this burial within a larger Theban, or even Boeotian, funerary pattern. This is particularly true of Pyri, which is best known for the extensive looting and dispersal of its material to European museums in the late 19th century. The present pithos burial is thought to come from the same cemetery as so much of the Boeotian pottery provenanced only as “near Thebes” and acquired by museums in the 1880s and 1890s.⁹⁵ In 1985 Sarantis Symeonoglou noted three sites of Geometric graves in Thebes, all north of the Kadmeia, to which can be added the site of Agia Eleousa in Pyri, discovered in 1975 to contain over 40 burials ranging from LG to the fourth century B.C.⁹⁶ Pithos burial was common for adults as well as children and seems to have been the rule in Late Geometric

⁸⁹ Perhaps with access to rituals as well. Recent studies of iron spits in LG warrior graves at Argos connect them with a ritual meal; see Strøm 1992.

⁹⁰ Courbin 1974, T.171, 68–70; T.173/1, 71–2; T.190/3, 87–93.

⁹¹ Falkner 1989, 49–52, 57–60.

⁹² Whitley 1996, using CLUSTAN analyses from his 1991 study. There are some problems, however, in that the “Rich Athenian Lady” was analyzed by Angell as 24–40 years of age, and no age has been published for the cremated remains of Kerameikos G41 with which Whitley compares her (1996, 221, 227). His observations hold for female graves, but he does not distinguish older from younger women by definition or analysis.

⁹³ For example, kantharoi are closely linked with men, but

appear in two female burials: the RAL tomb (possibly middle-aged) and the intriguing VDAK 1 which has other strongly male-associated items, Strömberg 1993, 71, Cat. 12, 125.

⁹⁴ Excavation report: Touloupa 1966, 197–8, pl. 202 a–b; Michaud 1970, 1034, 1035 fig. 313. Pithos: Thebes Museum BE 469, H. with handle 0.665 m. Ruckert 1976, 91 Cat. Pi 1, pl. 16:3–4; Demakopoulou and Konsola 1981, 57, pl. 28; Boardman 1998, figs. 105:1–105:2. The bones, which Coldstream called an infant (1977, 201), are identified by Demakopoulou and Konsola as a small child (1981, 57).

⁹⁵ Boehlau 1888, 325; Ruckert 1976, 10, 12, and n. 14.

⁹⁶ Symeonoglou 1985, 84–6, 262, 265, sites 71, 74, 87. At Agia Eleousa (Andreimenou 1976, 119–20) more than 40% of these tombs were infant/child inhumations in pots dating mostly to the seventh to sixth centuries B.C.



Fig. 6. Pithos from a child's tomb, Pyri, Thebes. (Courtesy of the DAI Athens, 73/2444)

Thebes.⁹⁷ Inhumation was standard practice in Boeotia, although the pit graves at Rhitsona and tumuli at Paralimni show that specific grave types varied. The Agia Eleousa excavations show that at least by the seventh century infants and children were sometimes clustered together in a cemetery, but as an isolated find the Pyri pithos cannot be associated with a larger grouping of child burials.

In this case, the container rather than the grave provides a basis for biographical analysis. It is unique as a Late Geometric figure-painted pithos, with iconography that is equally unparalleled.⁹⁸ On either side of the vessel, a panel near the top depicts a gathering. On the front side a man holds

a lyre and faces a line of six long-skirted females, behind the last of which winds a vertical, dotted serpentine line (fig. 7). Between the man and the women, filling the space below the lyre, stand two small figures, a male and a shorter female, turned toward each other. The small male figure reaches up to the hand of the first woman in line. On the back panel a solitary woman on the right faces a line of eight women much like that on the front (fig. 8). All have reserved eyes and short spiky hair and wear long robes. Where the torsos are better preserved, short vertical strokes on either side of their chests seem to represent the dress rather than breasts. This treatment, however, is not unlike the short angled strokes, some quite thin, that mark breasts on the belted but otherwise nude female dancers on a pyxis in Vienna.⁹⁹ Clearly the small figures represent children and not space-cramped adults, as some have suggested. The girl is no small imitation of the larger females, but in contrast to them is depicted without hair or breasts. While the slightly larger youth is distinguished from the man only by size, his pairing with the younger female suggests that both are children.

The few discussions of this vessel either interpret the overall scene as a dance or view the (incomplete) line behind the women as a snake, a representation of *Totenkult*.¹⁰⁰ The women's regular spacing, identical posture, and attention to the musician are familiar from the lines of female dancers in Boeotian Geometric painting. Unlike those examples, the women on the pithos do not hold hands, and the stately congregation of men, women, and children found here are unparalleled in dance scenes from Boeotia and other regions. Prothesis scenes, by contrast, sometimes include children. Indeed, the only preserved Boeotian prothesis, on a hydria in the Louvre, involves a number of children differentiated from the adults by their appearance and gestures (fig. 9).¹⁰¹ In light of this funerary parallel, the chthonic snake motif, and the terminal use of the pithos for burial, an obvious conclusion is that it was created specifically to contain a child's remains. Imagery suggesting a funeral ceremony within a household of women mourn-

⁹⁷ Spyropoulos 1971; Coldstream 1977; Symeonoglou 1985, 94.

⁹⁸ The only other published Boeotian example of this form is the slightly later Subgeometric pithos in Brussels, Ruckert 1976, pl. 16:2, 5 Pi 2. Its figurative friezes are heavily influenced by Protocorinthian and Protoattic work, and stand outside the local Geometric tradition of the Pyri pithos.

⁹⁹ Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum IV 3458, Ruckert 1976, FP8, pl. 21, 6.

¹⁰⁰ For interpretation of the scene as dance, see Fittschen 1969, 22 A 10a; Demakopoulou and Konsola 1981, 57. As *Totenkult*, see Ruckert 1976, 50. Outside of Athens the chthonic snake symbol need not carry only funerary implications. Most snakes on Argive pottery, for example, have come from sanctuaries (Courbin 1966, 484–5).

¹⁰¹ Hydria Louvre A 575 (CA 639), CVA 17, pl. 4, 4–5, pl. 5, 1–4, p. 12 fig. 3; Ruckert 1976, 91 Hy5, pl. 15, 5; Ahlberg 1971, 216–8, fig. 52a, b.

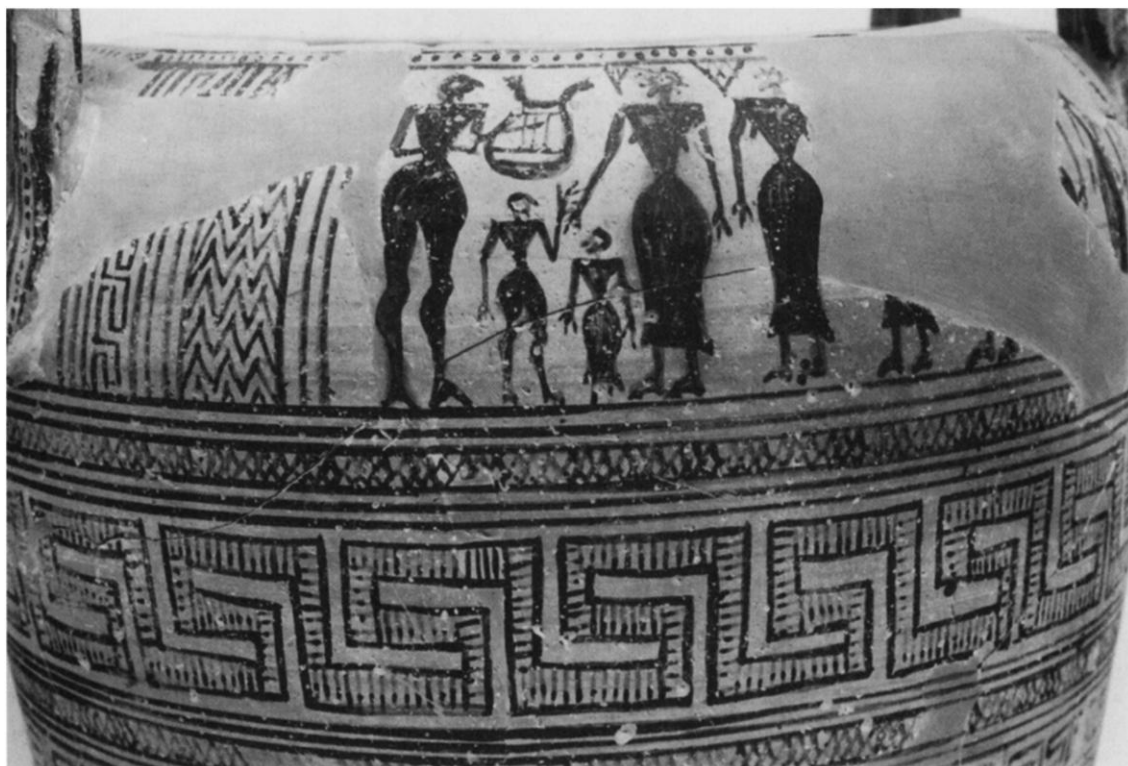


Fig. 7. Pithos from Thebes, detail. (Courtesy of the DAI Athens, 73/2447)

ers and including both a boy and a girl renders the vessel suitable for a child of either sex.

The Pyri pithos also shows signs of ancient breakage and repair on the lower body, and this opens the door to a richer object biography with earlier and later stages of the vessel's life. Detaching it from a purely funerary function invites a new interpretation of its imagery. The lack of parallel among Boeotian dance scenes has been noted, but it is significant that no two Boeotian Geometric dance images correspond in figures' dress, posture, props, sex, or number. Men dance with swords, led by a lyre player; women dance in skirts or nude, with branches or with hands clasped, with a musician-leader or without.¹⁰² These might all seem to be random scenes unlinked to specific events, until taking into account the influence of other pottery styles, which are sometimes evident among these scenes. A trio of skirted, belted, branch-wielding women on the neck panel of a Theban belly-handled amphora might have come straight from Argos, except for their presence on a pot of this shape.¹⁰³ A kantharos with nude women dancing

with garlands and a wreath to the accompaniment of a lyre looks more Boeotian except for their probably Attic-inspired juxtaposition with boxers on the reverse side.¹⁰⁴ Borrowed motifs need not lack local meaning but likely were adopted because they resembled Boeotian dances. These standard formulations throw into higher relief the local inventions, including the Pyri pithos. In local imagery particular features seem intended to identify rituals, such as the unusual gesture of the women who raise clasped hands around the skirt of a bell-idol, or the oddly belted but otherwise nude females who circle the body of a flat pyxis.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps most indicative that these scenes represent specific types of events is the fact that they vary according to their pottery context. Each different Boeotian dance appears on a different kind of vessel—belly-handled amphora, kantharos, flat pyxis, lidded krater, bell-idol, and pithos—whose functions and personal connections would likewise have differed.

Within the boundaries of Boeotian tradition, the Pyri pithos scene may be seen as a non-funerary group performance. The image is undoubtedly

¹⁰² E.g., Wegner 1968, 75 cat. 61, pl. IIIb; Ruckert 1976, pls. 6:2, 21:6, 26:3, 29:4.

¹⁰³ Ruckert 1976, pl. 6, BA3.

¹⁰⁴ Ruckert 1976, pl. 26, Ka 6. Compare with the Copenhagen

kantharos NM 727, Ahlberg-Cornell 1988, 56, fig. 1a–b.

¹⁰⁵ Ruckert 1976, pl. 29, Te 4; pl. 21, FP 8. For another specific dance, cf. the Crane Dance oinochoe (Coldstream 1991, 54–5).



Fig. 8. Pithos from Thebes, detail of reverse side. (Courtesy of the DAI Athens, 73/2448)

ceremonial, with the combination of male musician and throng of females suggesting a public gathering. The focal point is not the musician but the youth, who stands before the musician yet does not look at him, as if he were performing to the man's lyre accompaniment. In this case the presence of the girl requires explanation. This particular configuration of ages and genders in ceremonial performance strikingly anticipates the Theban Daphnephoria described in a partheneion fragment by Pindar, a report in Pausanias, and Proclus's *Chrestomathia*.¹⁰⁶ The Classical festival can be reconstructed as follows. Every eight years at the festival in honor of Apollo Ismenios, a chorus of girls carried laurel through Thebes and across the River Strophia to the nearby sanctuaries of Apollo Ismenios and Galaxios. A boy of noble family who was *amphithales* led the procession; he was made priest of Apollo for a set period of time (Pausanias says a year) and bore the title *daphnephoros*. A close adult male relative of the boy carried the *κοπιώ*, a log wound with laurel, flowers, cloth, and small objects. The young daphnephoros served

as choregos, a role he shared with a young girl (πρώτα), and the two headed a maiden chorus that sang praises, first of the daphnephoros and πρώτα, then of Apollo, while walking in procession rather than dancing. Early scholarship on the festival, particularly by Martin Nilsson and Lewis Richard Farnell, focused on parallels for the log-carrying procession, the kopophoria. Akin to the Plataean Daidala and other early Boeotian log festivals, it was derived from a northern European type of annual maypole celebration. The view synthesized by Ludwig Ziehen is generally accepted now: the classical festival conflated at some unknown date two earlier, separate processions, the kopophoria and the daphnephoria proper.¹⁰⁷ The origins of these two distinct rites and the order of their introduction at Thebes remain controversial. Apparent contradictions and vagueness in the ancient sources suggest that their integration was never complete. Proclus, glossing Pindar, describes the festival originally as a laurel-bearing celebration of Apollo, but he does not address how the log became part of the ceremony.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Pindar *Fr.* 94b, Pausanias 9.10.4, Proclus, *Chrestom.* in Phot. *Bibl.* 321 a 35–b 32; sources discussed in Ziehen 1934; Schachter 1981, 83–5; Calame 1997, 59–63.

¹⁰⁷ Ziehen 1934 summarizes the earlier scholarship.

¹⁰⁸ Severyns 1938, 51–3.



Fig. 9. Hydria from Thebes, Louvre A 575 (CA 639). (After CVA 17, 12 fig. 3, with permission)

Albert Schachter has usefully shifted the focus to their specific relation to Thebes. He plausibly connects the kopophoria with the Kopais, through both etymology and the setting of its aition, as reported by Proclus. Two warring neighboring groups were told by an oracle to settle their disputes by gathering laurel from the slopes of Helikon and the River Melas (the margins of the Kopais) for a joint festival of Apollo.¹⁰⁹ Together the story and the adorned log procession, according to Schachter, point to the kopophoria as a “non- or pre-Apolline” rite originating elsewhere and only later imported into Thebes. He considers the Daphnephoria proper, the Apolline ceremony, to have been introduced to Thebes under Delphic influence.

Although the textual sources are late, differ widely in time, and cannot be fully reconciled in all details, one consistently represented feature of the festival is its generational aspect, and this provides the most important point of correlation with the Pyri image. The age and gender roles of the Daphnephoria participants are clearly represented. The boy’s gesture to the first woman signifies his role as choregos. The musician may be his father or the adult male relative, although specific relationships are difficult to extract from the sources.¹¹⁰ According to the sources, at least one and possibly two adult men

assisted the boy choregos (carrying the κωπῶ, conducting the chorus, playing the lyre), while the woman who prepared the πρῶτα is also specifically named. Among these adult male and female assistants and the required living parents of the daphnephoros, many identifications are possible for the man and first woman in the pithos scene. Some scholars have assumed the main adult participants in the procession were in fact the parents of the daphnephoros. The chorus in the image is composed of maidens of apparently similar age. Their disparity in size and treatment from the smaller female is notable—usually a female choregos is a contemporary of, if not slightly more mature than, the chorus—and the differences here effectively and meaningfully separate her from the procession she leads.

The pithos does not, of course, illustrate a Pindaric daphnephorikon, for it clearly lacks both laurel branch and decorated log. Such variance may reflect an early version of the Apolline festival alone, without the kopophoria and without depicting the laurel. Indeed, the sources variously describe the laurel as attached to the log, worn on the head, or carried, although Schachter believes that in the Daphnephoria “no one involved actually carries or wears laurel,” at least until the two rites were later conflated.¹¹¹ More important than justifying an ab-

¹⁰⁹ Schachter 1981, 79, 85.

¹¹⁰ Calame 1997, 60–2 n. 156.

¹¹¹ Schachter 1981, 84–5 and n. 6. The chronological rela-

tion of the rites is controversial; Nilsson believed the kopophoria to be the later element (1960, 171–2).

sence is understanding the artist's emphasis of the lyre. The instrument is rendered with remarkable detail compared with the rather casual treatment of the human figures around it. A survey of lyres in Geometric art shows that the number of strings (here, three) was not meaningful, and the most common form, a round-bottomed instrument with parallel arms of equal length, could vary widely.¹¹² By the late eighth century, the *chelys* and the *kithara* appear in art, and from this point the *phorminx* (the round-bottomed form) becomes more distinct. The Pyri version includes not only the S-curve of the arms but the lower horizontal line representing the string-fastener, or more likely the top of the sound box. Most lyres in Geometric art occur in the context of a dance or a procession. The few examples that appear alone may take on a symbolic connection with Apollo or Artemis, as in the small bronze votive lyres from the Amyklaion, Mavriki, and Tegea, or the *pyxis* fragment from the Amyklaion.¹¹³ A strong association of Apollo with the *phorminx* is already established in Homer and develops further in the seventh century, perhaps enough to see the fine *phorminx* of the Pyri scene as evocative of the god and his worship.¹¹⁴ As visual representation of the hymns, the lyre effectively expresses the choral nature of the festival, while its processional program is evoked by a chorus that does not hold hands, that is, it does not dance in the usual circular manner. In view of the chronological distance between the literary sources describing this evolved ritual and its prehistory captured on the pithos, exact points of comparison with the texts are less important than the similar structures of a youth, accompanied by a man, and a girl who together lead a procession of girls singing *paean*s and supplicating hymns to Apollo.¹¹⁵

The visual correspondence linking image and ritual provides only half the argument for connecting this pithos with the Daphnephoria. The other half comes from the social meaning and function of the

festival itself. The associations of the Daphnephoria with springtime renewal together with Delphic elements of segregation, supplication, and purification signal a rite of initiation for the young people involved.¹¹⁶ Claude Calame has examined the festival's initiatory aspect from the point of view of the maidens, noting that their hymns of supplication are part of a general initiatory pattern of propitiation and expiation found in other cults of Apollo and Artemis. The group leaves the civilized space of the city and crosses the *Strophia* to go to the River Ismenos (the "snake" in the painted scene?) and thus remains in a liminal space (and state) until their return as maidens prepared for their next transformation, into marriage.¹¹⁷ Focusing on the *daphnephoros*, Ken Dowden suggests that the concept of a boy-priest, that is, a priest too young to perform the usual priestly duties, is an adaptation of an age-group ritual.¹¹⁸ Stressing the *kourotrophic* role of Apollo in this cult, François de Polignac observes that the rule of the *amphithalic* status of the boy leading the procession ensures "vertical integration," the accession of the young participants to the status of adult members of the community. He sees close connections between the Daphnephoria and the Delphic festival of the *Stepterion*. At this *daphnephoric* event, adolescent boys led by an *amphithales* progressed through trials that mimed Apollo's struggle against Python and his subsequent wanderings, purification, and return.¹¹⁹ Might the so-called snake on the pithos even represent Python?

Archaeological evidence and historical arguments support an origin for the Theban Daphnephoria in the late eighth century. Excavations at the Ismenion in 1910 revealed traces of a Late Geometric temple of wood and mudbrick on stone foundations erected on a terrace. Both the terrace and the destruction layer of the building contained large amounts of Late Geometric and Protocorinthian pottery. A second temple was constructed on the site shortly after the destruction of ca. 700 B.C.¹²⁰

¹¹²Wegner 1968, 2–18; Maas and Snyder 1989, 9–14, esp. 11 on number of strings. Two other lyres in Boeotian Geometric art: *kantharos* Dresden 1699, Maas and Snyder 1989, fig. 11 and *krater* in Basel, Wegner 1968, pl. IIIb.

¹¹³For a votive lyre from Amyklai, see Maas and Snyder 1989, 9, fig. 3D where it is called *Mycenae*; Demakopoulou (1982, 73–8) has redated it to Geometric. For Mavriki and Tegea lyres, see Voyatzis 1990, 201–2, pls. 143, 144, and for a *pyxis* fragment, see Maas and Snyder 1989, fig. 12. A LG seal from the sanctuary of Apollo Maleatas at Epidauros depicting a man with a lyre may begin the long association of Apollo and the lyre at the site, as attested by classical bronze figurines; Lambrinoudakis 1977, pl. 122b–c; 1978, pl. 98c; 1982, 51 fig. 2.

¹¹⁴Maas and Snyder 1989, 26–7. There are no real grounds

for interpreting the man as Apollo or the nine women on the reverse as the Muses. Geometric art represents very few gods, and the ordinary appearance of these figures suggests no particular effort to introduce new iconography.

¹¹⁵For songs of supplication as described by Proclus, see Calame 1997, 103 n. 42.

¹¹⁶Brelich 1969, 413–20; de Polignac 1995, 63–4; Calame 1997, 101–4.

¹¹⁷Calame 1997, 103–4, 127.

¹¹⁸Dowden 1989, 131.

¹¹⁹de Polignac 1995, 64 n. 78; Calame 1997, 101–3.

¹²⁰Keramopoulos 1917, 66–79; Symeonoglou 1985, 236–9; Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 242, 312.

Apollo Pythios is securely attested at Thebes in the first quarter of the seventh century by an inscribed bronze lebes rim fragment.¹²¹ The institution or elaboration of a daphnephoric Apollo cult at this time makes historical sense in view of the concurrent rise to prominence of Delphi. In the last quarter of the eighth century the Delphic oracle was established, and the number of nonregional votives (including Boeotian) swelled dramatically as emergent poleis, led by Corinth, adapted the sanctuary to serve their interests.¹²² By associating itself with Pythian Apollo, the Theban cult would have gained status and perhaps even attracted traffic from outside the region. Perhaps a measure of competition was also involved: the Ismenion oracle seems to have been established at this time. A late eighth-century date for the founding of a suburban Apollo sanctuary at Thebes is best understood in the context of polis development. According to the patterns observed across Late Geometric Greece, an extra-urban sanctuary served the dual functions of defining the territory of the city and providing a regional focus and meeting place for the smaller towns.¹²³ The Daphnephoria would have integrated the Theban community and reinforced its social structures through its initiatory aspect even as it expressed religious and territorial sovereignty through its Delphic association.

Participation in the Daphnephoria seems to have been an event of real social importance. Pindar's daphnephorikon pays homage to the house of Aioladas, his son Pagondas, and numerous relatives. Pindar supposedly composed a hymn, now lost, for his own son on the occasion of his being daphnephoros. Such hymns permanently commemorated these offices.¹²⁴ Both Pausanias and Proclus note that at some point the dedication of a tripod by the graduating daphnephoros became customary. Pausanias (9.10.4) reports seeing a tripod at the Ismenion sanctuary dedicated by Amphitryon in honor of Herakles for the latter having officiated as daphnephoros at the festival. Antonios Keramopoulos has suggested that the laurel wreath worn by a warrior on a grave stele excavated in Thebes signifies that he had been daphnephoros.¹²⁵ The boy and

girl chosen for the leading roles in such an important festival were accorded a particular social identity that would follow them through life, augmenting their aristocratic standing in the community, which was a prerequisite for such roles.

The hazards of analyzing Early Iron Age imagery through historical texts are well known. In this case the approach is justified because the image conveys a social (not epic) event that is supported by both the vessel's biographical elements and the structural correspondence with the texts. First, the burial of the pithos with a child and the evidence of use, damage, and repair suggest a specific connection between the pot with its imagery and the deceased. Second, the iconographic features selected for emphasis correspond with a child-related festival whose function was to create a social identity through age-group initiation, which was fixed and commemorated by event and object. The men and women these children are to become are modeled in the adult companions.

In the same way that T.23 evoked the layered identities of a mid-life woman in Argos, so the Pyri burial offers evidence of the social role of children in early Boeotia. Children are known archaeologically in Geometric Greece only through their graves. Their proximity to adult burials, and consequently their visibility, varies considerably throughout the period, and a short-lived integration of child graves among adult burials at the end of the eighth century in Athens has been linked to a rising egalitarian ethos.¹²⁶ A cultural constant throughout Greece is their symbolic distinction from adults in material goods and funerary ritual. Whitley has defined in Athens, for example, a symbolic system structured on the dichotomy of adult male and child, such that men are marked by weapons and the abstraction of the body through cremation, children by greater concretization through models and the intact, inhumed body.¹²⁷ Similarly, recent archaeological discussions of children associate them with women and nature, from which their social maturation gradually separates and redefines them.¹²⁸ Geometric child burials usually are not clearly gendered male or female, suggesting that gender was

¹²¹ Jeffery 1990, 91, 94 no. 2, 402, pl. 7, 2. She has also suggested that the bronze "Mantiklos Apollo" statuette comes from the Ismenion (1990, 90–1).

¹²² Morgan 1990; Schachter sees a pattern of developing poleis in search of an urban religious focus choosing Apollo Pythios as patron god of gatherings and divination (1992, 37–9).

¹²³ Schachter 1992, 29; de Polignac 1995, esp. 79–80 on the Ismenion.

¹²⁴ Pindar *Fr.* 94c; Ziehen (1934, 1549) pointed out that Pindar would himself have carried the κοινόν, an attractive glimpse of the poet as father and local festival-goer.

¹²⁵ Grave stele, Schachter 1981, 85 n. 5.

¹²⁶ Snodgrass 1983; Morris 1987, 1992, 1998, esp. 25; Whitley 1991, 1994.

¹²⁷ Whitley 1996.

¹²⁸ Moore and Scott 1997; Gilchrist 1999, 88–94.

not strongly ascribed at birth but only achieved at certain life stages. The Pyri burial seemingly offers a glimpse into such a process. The kalathiskos form suggests that the deceased was a girl. The strong association of women with kalathoi, wool baskets, and ceramic models begins early in the Geometric period. In Athens from Protogeometric through Late Geometric ceramic kalathoi belong exclusively to female graves. Alternatively, Geometric model kalathoi could be offered to female deities such as Demeter and Kore at Corinth and Hera at Perachora. Through their connection with weaving, kalathoi later serve iconographically to indicate women's spaces and activities. The kalathiskos in the Pyri grave might have marked an emerging female identity.¹²⁹

The imagery of the Pyri pithos suggests that children can be important social actors in their own right, beyond these achievements of gender and social status. The Boeotian hydria in Paris offers a ritual parallel (fig. 9). Here the funerary rites of the deceased woman involve as many as 18 people, nearly half of which are children. Five small figures beneath the bier and two or three in the dance above are gendered by dress and marked as children by their short hair and behavior. The hands-to-head mourning gesture is restricted to adult men and women. By contrast, the children touch the bier: four boys grasp its legs and the girl reaches to the side(?) of the couch. If the specific action is somewhat obscure, it is interesting that both the restrictions placed on mourning gestures and the children touching the bier occur also in Attic prothesis scenes.¹³⁰ The six figures dancing in the upper range include boys performing acrobatic moves, a dance form also paralleled in Attica.¹³¹ The Paris hydria and the Daphnephoria scene demonstrate that in Boeotia children were very much a part of the ritual life of the community. Distinguished from adults in appearance and roles, they participated in public social rituals through their own independent and specifically prescribed actions, thus fulfilling roles that an adult could not. In the Daphnephoria the worship of Apollo through complementary adult and child roles helped define the specific identity of Thebes as a religious and social entity.

The generational concept may once again offer a way to understand archaeological material associ-

ated with children. It has been shown that Hesiod's myth of the five races employs a conceptualization of life stages as constructed and valued in Boeotian society, at least through the poet's representation.¹³² At its heart is the ideal of (masculine) maturity (both Golden and Heroic), the only age credited with inherent moral and physical excellence, against which the other ages, especially childhood (Silver) and old age (Iron), are defined through deficiencies and weaknesses. In the world of Hesiod's peasant *oikos*, the child can only be seen as an unproductive drain on resources. The negativities of "useless immaturity" expressed by the poet may reflect in some measure a cultural predisposition to devalue childhood.¹³³ The evidence of ritual participation seen in Boeotian Geometric vases offers some adjustment to this largely negative picture. Nevertheless, the poetic construct might provide a useful way to understand the material "completion" of a child's life stage through grave goods as a way of according her a higher social value. To record her (immanent, unrealized) maturity was a greater boon than to recognize her actual status.

The importance of children in the configuration and corporate identity of early Thebes is underscored by the elaborate decoration of the pithos on behalf of a child. How the bucket-like vessel was originally used is unknown. The inturned rim and broad shoulder limit its use to containing dry substances, which could be tightly secured with a green stick run through its handles over the now missing lid. Perhaps it held objects used in the ritual, food-stuffs for an offering or meal, or the laurel itself. The burial of the child with a kalathiskos and within a pithos bearing a commemorative image marked both a stage of life and a stage of gender—a social persona attained, or perhaps not attained but ascribed at death.

CONCLUSION: BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL

For all its logical coherence, the biographical method is no more than a heuristic device. The multiple threads of these objects' lives reveal the limitations of exclusively funerary interpretations and open the way to explore their prior social roles. The process involves some judicious reconstruction that must be tested in a broader-based analysis

¹²⁹ An association perhaps from birth: Hesychius noted that the birth of a girl was announced by hanging wool at the doorway of her home (Golden 1990, 23). For ceramic kalathoi and iconography, see Strömberg 1993, 49, 50, 85–6; Lissarrague 1995, 95–6.

¹³⁰ Ahlberg 1971, 99–100.

¹³¹ Ahlberg-Cornell 1988, 63–7.

¹³² Falkner 1989, with earlier bibliography on this interpretation.

¹³³ Falkner 1989, 60; similarly, Finley (1981, 159–60) notes the need for speedy maturation in a peasant society. Ingalls (1998, 31–2) sensibly cautions against trying to reconcile conflicting ancient views of children.

of evidence. Osteological evidence, for example, carries some ambiguity.¹³⁴ A larger database of more precisely aged and sexed remains from Theban and Argive burials might undermine the proposed connections between the deceased and their pottery (for instance, if young women were found buried with kraters). Further iconographic study will be crucial to linking these objects with social rites and identities. An investigation of material evidence for Early Iron Age social rituals must ultimately be framed within the entire system of material and social practices as revealed by the distribution of artifacts in all types of context.¹³⁵

The biographical method nevertheless produces several significant results, all with broader implications for the study of early Greece and classical material culture in general. First, it reveals evidence of social rituals and object use that might otherwise remain undetected. Questions about who gave these objects and what reciprocity was won are not specifically addressed, but viewing life cycle rituals as economic events offers a broader understanding of the dynamics behind the creation and distribution of fine ceramics and metalwork. The approach thus adds another social dimension to the political and economic aspects more often emphasized in models of guest gifts and exchange.¹³⁶ The Argos pyxis further provides glimpses of women's roles in the social apparatus of hospitality and reciprocity. The presence of a large, rich, female-associated pyxis in a domestic space presents a striking counterpoint to the walls hung with weapons and shields more normally associated with the aesthetics of the early Greek household.¹³⁷

Second, the biographical method challenges traditional interpretations of grave goods, especially those regarding anomalous objects in funerary assemblages. The point is not that the Greeks were concerned with representing the individual at death, but that these objects were interred with the deceased because of a prior association that broadly defined a social persona. Biography addresses the interconnectedness of behavioral contexts that articulate an individual's life and help create the funeral assemblage. The T.23 krater may or may

not have belonged to the deceased during her life but apparently constituted a social view of her at death. Moreover, the model of non-funerary social ritual offers an important theoretical approach for understanding other exceptional objects and images. The well-known Lefkandi centaur, for example, was broken in two parts and buried with a child and an adult; it can be linked with boys' initiation rites.¹³⁸ Our starting point, the Protoattic Polyphemos amphora from Eleusis, can be similarly considered (fig. 1). Like the Argos pyxis and the Pyri pithos, it goes beyond the merely distinctive to constitute a statement of extraordinary iconographic and stylistic complexity amid the dullness of the surrounding pots and gifts in the cemetery.¹³⁹ Whitley has noted significant patterns in the use of Protoattic pottery style for "liminal occasions," particularly elite burials. Consideration of ritual linkages to Protoattic imagery might add a new dimension to this reconstruction. The belly of the Eleusis amphora carries a graphic depiction of Perseus slaying Medusa, a myth that Michael Jameson has connected with dramatized adolescent rites of passage.¹⁴⁰ The vessel was ultimately transformed from a previous use or intention into a coffin for a child 10–12 years of age.¹⁴¹

Finally, this method forces us to reconstruct the social setting of goods within complex communities that integrate all ages and gendered identities. Two biographies have become four—two pots, two persons—and perhaps here the parallel with conventional literary biography ends. The current interest in archaeological object biography may in part result from recent theoretical concerns with individual intentionality that perceive objects as extensions of a person's agency.¹⁴² Whatever the virtues of that approach, the ultimate goal here is not to construct communities through individuals, but to uncover normative practices in cumulative, routine negotiations of gender and age through objects. The focus on constructed meanings reveals that the symbolic associations of pyxis, krater, and kalathos with gender, social behavior, and boundaries were actively deployed and deepened by their funerary use. The close examination of burials

¹³⁴ For problems, Morris 1992, 72–90. Hodder (1997) sees all earlier analyses as culturally biased.

¹³⁵ Snodgrass 1980; Whitley 1994, 54–7; Morris 1998, 6–7.

¹³⁶ Finley 1980; van Wees 1992; Donlan 1998.

¹³⁷ van Wees 1998, esp. 363; Ahlberg 1971, figs. 46, 49 for weapons hanging in house.

¹³⁸ Lebesse 1996.

¹³⁹ Morris 1984, 12; Morris 1993, 31.

¹⁴⁰ Jameson 1990; similarly, Marinatos 2000, 59–65. Jameson

does not mention the Polyphemos amphora in his study of the Perseus cult at Mycenae, but I extend his conclusions here.

¹⁴¹ On its alteration, Morris 1984, 12. Mylonas (1957) identified the deceased as a boy, although such young bones are probably not sexable, but they are clearly not infant remains, as has been stated (Whitley 1994, 64).

¹⁴² Hodder 1991; Meskell 1996; cf. Barrett 1987; Sørensen 2000, 47–51.

makes it possible to challenge what has been described as the “still prevalent and reactionary notion that rich female and child burials reflect nothing more than male wealth and prestige.”¹⁴³ Biography exposes the need to address the construction of social identity as a lifelong process shaped by ritual and material signs. Social reconstructions that attempt to link this material with static binary categories of male and female, without concern for age differences, can mask as much as they reveal.¹⁴⁴ An analysis of social age and generational identities offers a useful theoretical perspective. For the Greeks, generational structure provided a basic social stability through its categorical and predictive qualities.¹⁴⁵ For the researcher, this structure may signal significant changes through time and space that reflect the impact of cultural, political, and economic developments.

The use of object biography also raises questions. For example, if social rituals were important, why is the associated material not more readily apparent in graves, sanctuaries, and habitations, and why did these institutions not give rise to specific classes of artifact? Several possible answers emerge from associating these items with other significant objects in early Greek culture—fine metalwork and heirlooms—that served the living better than the dead. They link generations, create social bonds, and are made transcendent by their past associations while conferring identity and distinction on successive owners. For this reason it is unlikely that the best of Late Geometric artistry was made for graves. Exclusively funerary pottery (e.g., amphorae with plastic snakes) was still being made in the late eighth century, but by then the deposition of fine pottery in graves had become more random, tied to individual attachments, emotions, and other archaeological imponderables. The typical treatment of ritual-related artifacts may have been to keep them above ground as family heirlooms and exchange goods until offered as votives or accidentally destroyed. Habitations are still the most problematic context for Early Iron Age Greece, and continuous settlement of major sites has obliterated much of their early remains. The finest Geometric art in fact is found in sanctuaries, the other terminal context, where the opportunity for reciprocity with the gods may have been the most fitting destination for precious goods and heirlooms.¹⁴⁶

These case studies highlight another dimension of the well-documented shift in offering patterns and funerary ritual that occurred around 750 B.C. and accelerated after 725 in most major communities. The general decline in grave goods and concurrent increase in sanctuary dedications are connected processes, as Ian Morris has argued, in a “reordering of the whole ritual system.”¹⁴⁷ “Goods are neutral,” Mary Douglas contends, “their uses are social; they can be used as fences or bridges.”¹⁴⁸ One way to characterize the changes in material culture from the ninth to the later eighth centuries is a shift from the exclusionary, fence-raising role of the monumental grave markers to the more broadly distributed, more inclusive materials of LG II—the bridge-building objects and images that help to articulate and consolidate a community. Among the diverse strategies for creating a social system were a new value and visibility attached to the rituals that guide individuals through ordered sequences into adulthood and marriage to ensure stability in changing communities. Decorated pottery may have served as an especially valuable tool for, in Douglas’s words, “selecting and fixing meanings.”

Finally, one should distinguish between special possessions and more mundane objects used in rites of passage. The latter may in fact be very much in evidence if one approaches the material with this question in mind. The unusual objects discussed here provide ready access to questions of social meaning and function, but not only the exceptional can be considered in this light. Since neither pyxis C.209 nor the Pyri pithos is unique in all respects, one might be able to generalize the results. Should all large tripod vessels or Boeotian pithoi be linked with social rites, and need they be severed as a class from funerary productions? The answer must be no in both cases. An important contribution of the biographical approach is to challenge convenient but rather abstract categories of type and function. Contexts create meaning but are never exclusive. Meanings attached in an object’s prior life still resonate at the graveside. A culture works with a finite material corpus to accommodate all social circumstances. References to social rituals remain, permeating the pots, figurines, and tripods of early Greek communities.

¹⁴³ Chamberlain 1997, 250.

¹⁴⁴ This is a drawback of Strömberg’s 1993 study, which assumes unchanging constructions of gender.

¹⁴⁵ Nash 1978, 11.

¹⁴⁶ Morris 1986; Langdon 1987; Parker 1998; Bremer 1998.

¹⁴⁷ Morris 1992, 26; 1989; 1998; Snodgrass 1980.

¹⁴⁸ Douglas and Isherwood 1996, xv.

The most important application of a biographical approach to archaeological material must be to uncover the details and linkages with which to frame broader analytic questions. The meanings of the objects examined here, like the larger material culture to which they belong, are contextually constituted. Rich in embodied values, such material mediates the basic components of social identity—gender, social age, ethnicity, status. For Early Iron Age Greece the task begun here is to reconstruct the missing context of transformative social rituals by recovering the meanings in objects. A broader approach must engage the interplay of iconography and shape, type and function, later parallels, textual evidence, and deposition patterns: the wider and more complex the network of interconnections, the more evidence to uphold the hypothesis. Equally important is the indirect verification provided by other approaches, for example, the systemic and processual studies that indicate movement away from the primacy of the funeral as focal symbolic activity in the later eighth century, and hence the greater need to seek an understanding of Geometric pottery developments in other contexts.¹⁴⁹ These considerations can open up other classes of Geometric Greek material to more socially embedded interpretations.

The principal objects discussed here—giant pyxis and commemorative pithos—should be understood not as unique items preserved by archaeological accident, but as survivors of object types whose more customary biographies were lived above ground in the realms of ritual and heirloom. Their role in an individual's final rite of passage transformed their social meanings once again. Each of these objects is unlikely to have spanned more than a person's lifetime, but their inalienable association with the deceased attests a process of mutual biography that illuminates the role objects played in early Greek society.

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¹⁴⁹ Snodgrass 1980; Whitley 1991; Morris 1987, 1998.

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