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ELITE BURIALS IN EARLY IRON AGE AEGEAN. SOME PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS CONSIDERING THE SPATIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE TOUMBA CEMETERY AT LEFKANDI

The so-called Dark Age of Greece is a significant and complex period and certainly not Dark. Lefkandi is without doubt one of the sites which has contributed greatly to change the perception of its 'darkness'. Moreover, one of the richest cemeteries in the Aegean during this period is that of Toumba at Lefkandi (Popham *et al.* 1980; Popham – Lemos 1996). This cemetery – with its close association to the Toumba building – is perhaps one of the most fascinating and at the same time extensively discussed sites in Early Iron Age Greece.

While the publication of the text of Popham and Lemos 1996 is in progress, preliminary reports regarding some of the finds have already appeared in press (Ridgway 1997; Nightingale 2007; Lemos 2007; Kroll 2007). Here, we would like to present some preliminary observations regarding the spatial organization of this important cemetery.

Our aim is to follow the use of the cemetery in each chronological stage from the Middle Protogeometric period (MPG) – when the burial ground in front of the Toumba building was first used- to its abandonment in the Sub-Protogeometric III period (SPG). In order to achieve this, first the plan of the excavation was digitised showing the position of the burials and then transferred into a CAD program. We also plotted the dimensions of the tombs and *in situ* pyres to provide a 3D representation. This data is further explored in the final publication of the cemetery.

By using the above approaches, it was possible to trace the expansion of the cemetery

in each of its chronological stages. In this way we could assess the spatial organization of the Toumba cemetery during the course of its use and focus on issues related with the decisions taken by the local elite where to bury their dead within the cemetery. In this paper we only consider those burials which can be securely dated, excluding tombs and *in situ* cremations which cannot be assigned to a specific date or were found without finds (Fig. 1: all the excavated burials). In the final publication, we plan to address the problem of those burials which cannot be securely dated. For the dates used in this paper see Table 1. It should be noted, however, that the dates assigned to the burials in Toumba might be further modified in the final publication.

First, we want to stress the close association of the cemetery and the building. The cemetery started after the demolition of the building and the formation of the mound. This took place during the course of the MPG period. In fact, it has become clear that a number of tombs were cut after the erection of the mound above the building (Popham *et al.* 1993, 9, 99). Our attempt to reconstruct the mound might seem exaggerated, especially on its east side. The elevation of the mound above the building was reconstructed at 2 m high which was the preserved height of the south wall of the building (Coulton, in Popham *et al.* 1993, 53-56).

Figure 2 reconstructs the MPG phase of the cemetery. The most impressive tomb is the double burial in tomb T 49. The construction

of this tomb recalls that of the exceptional burials found under the Toumba building. It is interesting to note that both tombs have a similar timber lining and are of a large size (Popham *et al.* 1993, 18-21; Popham *et al.* 1988-1989, 118). T 49 is in fact the largest tomb in the cemetery. Moreover, one of the burials of this tomb was given jewels very similar to those offered to the female burial in the building (Popham – Lemos 1996, pl. 56). The proximity to the mound and building is clear and apart from one late MPG or Late Protoegeometric (LPG) burial in tomb T 18, the area around this tomb was left without other burials. (see **Fig. 3**). Moreover, it is possible to associate these burials with the horses buried in T 68, though this remains hypothetical since the horse burials cannot be dated with great security (Popham – Lemos 1996, pl. 35).

It is, however, the next period that allows us to make a number of important observations concerning the organization of the burial ground in front of the mound (**Fig. 3**). During the LPG period some twenty-six burials were made and another twelve in the transitional stage from LPG to SPG I. In addition to those buried in shafts, a number of burials were cremated *in situ* for the first time (eight burials with one more dated to LPG/SPG I, marked in black in **Fig. 3**)¹. Interestingly, Pyre (P.) 1 is located in front of the mound, while two more *in situ* cremations (P. 32 and P. 34) were noticeably located in the southern limits of the cemetery.

Another important development during this period is the formation of a passage which divided the burial ground into two parts, allowing access to both areas. It is clear that the earlier T 49 was located to the west of this passage and close to the mound. What is equally noticeable is that most of the burials, apart from the two mentioned above, were placed in front of the mound on both sides of the passage. What is less clear, however, is the reason for placing

the two *in situ* cremations in a peripheral area to the south. It cannot be because of the rite of cremating burials *in situ* since a number of such cremations were also made in the area in front of the mound. As we will see, however, this part of the cemetery hosted a number of important burials during the later stages of its use.

During LPG, a rich burial was placed in tomb T 63 (Popham – Lemos 1996, pls. 68-69). This was a female burial who was given a number of golden discs similar in technique and design but smaller than those found on the woman buried in the building. The burial in tomb T 63 also had elaborate gilt pins and spirals, and a golden pendant, the same set of jewels which were also given to the woman buried under the building (Lemos 2007). Pendants are not given to all rich female burials. For example, in the same period (LPG), T 71 was the tomb of another rich woman but she was not offered a golden pendant (Popham – Lemos 1996, pls. 72-73). This tomb is located near the southeastern edge of the LPG burial plot.

Another interesting LPG tomb is tomb T 39, perhaps another double burial (Popham *et al.* 1982, 217-219, 230; Popham – Lemos 1996, pls. 41-43; Lemos 2002, 165). If so, one of them was a child as the only osteological remains found in the tomb was the tooth of a six year old. The rich finds in the tomb combine offerings given to a woman (such as jewels and Near Eastern imports) and to a man (such as weapons). The size of the tomb is large enough to accommodate two burials (Popham *et al.* 1982, 217). Nevertheless we cannot be sure whether the child was the male or the female burial in the grave.

T 55 is the richest tomb in the transitional period LPG/SPGI and it is located on the eastern side of the passage (**Fig. 4**). This was another large tomb and it is possible that it contained a double burial: an inhumation and a cremation in an urn (Popham – Lemos 1996, pls. 15, 61-63). Noticeably, there is an empty space left in front of tomb T 55 (**Fig. 4**). The area has been investigated and no burials were found there.

1. It is, however, possible that P. 1 is dated to the MPG period as it was found partly under the MPG tomb T 17.

The possibility of another double burial in T 55 and the position of the tomb along the central axis of the mound and the building invites further speculation of the significance of this particular tomb and the status of the burials found in it.

In LPG/SPG I, one *in situ* pyre (P. 28) was located in the southern area of the burial ground. In the next SPG I stage, two female burials were made in the area in front of the mound (T 45 and 51 in Fig. 5). The most important development in the next stages of the use of the cemetery is that more burials were located to the southern area. This trend appears already in SPGI/II with tomb T 83 dated to SPGI/II, illustrating the expansion of the burial ground in this area. In the next SPG II stage, however, some of the richest in offerings burials were placed there (Fig. 6).

This is for example, the case of the so-called 'warrior-trader' buried in tomb T 79 (Popham – Lemos 1995). This was a secondary cremation of a man of high status. Close to this burial was T 80 dated to the SPG II/IIIa phase (Fig. 7). T 80 contained the burial of a woman together with a spectacular number of offerings, including a gold pendant (Popham – Lemos 1996, 80-85). It seems that the pattern of a man who was given the status of a 'warrior' and that of a richly furnished woman buried close to each other, was now also shifted to this area of the cemetery.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that these were the only rich burials in this period. Important burials were still made in the area in front of the mound. One such was in T 13 most probably of a female whose tomb was cut close to the mound (Fig. 6). T 13 is actually cut into the mudbrick used for the surround of the mound (Popham *et al.* 1980, 174). This tomb is dated to SPG II and it is contemporary with the *in situ* cremation P. 13 of a man who was given an amazing array of iron weapons and tools (Popham – Lemos 1996, pl. 48). These two burials, however, were not placed close to each other. P.13 is located in front of the

mound but at the eastern edge of the so far excavated burial ground. Yet, in the SPG IIIa period, another *in situ* cremation, P.14, is located in the northern end of the burial ground (Fig. 6). This was the cremation of another 'warrior' who took with him apart from his iron sword and bronze grater an amazing number of pendent semicircle skyphoi and plates which were thrown in his pyre together with his weapons (Popham – Lemos 1996, pls. 86-88). Is the location of his pyre an indication that another cluster of important burials was located at the other side of the cemetery? P.14 was above another 'warrior burial' in tomb T 50 dated to LPG and close to a very disturbed area to the north, where a rich female (LPG) burial in tomb T 63 was also located. Next to this tomb is the even more disturbed burial in T 60 and possibly yet another similarly disturbed burial was located near by. The latter, with very rich finds, might have been of a woman (Popham – Lemos 1996, pls. 92-95 where the pottery found in this area is illustrated).

An interesting observation related to the female burials at Toumba is that although there are a number of rich burials in each chronological stage, only a small number of them were offered an golden pendant. In MPG, this is the female buried in the building. The woman buried in the building was given the exceptional heirloom pendant dated to 1600 BC (Popham *et al.* 1993, pls. 13, 15). T 63 in LPG is the tomb of another female burial with a pendant (Popham – Lemos 1996, pl. 69). Two more pendants are dated to the SPG II and SPG IIIa stages: one was found in the SPG II/III burial in tomb T 38 (Popham – Lemos 1996, pl. 40) and the other in tomb T 80 (Popham – Lemos 1996, pl. 85). T 38 is located in an area very close to the mound, while T 80, as we have already noted, was located in the southern part of the cemetery. Finally, another pendant came from the disturbed area of tomb T 59 (Popham – Lemos 1996, pl. 136a). Thus, we would like to propose that this particular jewel was given to female burials whose status was considered higher than that of oth-

er rich women buried in Toumba. We may further suggest that these women were often buried close to men who were given the status of a 'warrior'. If this is the case, the woman in the building is clearly associated with the man found cremated next to her, while the LPG burial in T 63 might be associated with another inhumation in the area, that of a 'warrior' in T 60. This burial is given an iron sword and differs from other 'warriors' in that he was most probably inhumed (Popham – Lemos 1996, pls. 66-67). Another inhumed 'warrior' was found in tomb T 26; this was the burial of a man who was given an iron sword and arrow heads (Popham *et al.* 1980, pls. 182-184; Musgrave, in Popham *et al.* 1980, 437). The only female burial without a male burial located near by is that in tomb T 38. This area, however, has been heavily disturbed by ploughing and we may have lost burials located to this particular part of the cemetery (Popham *et al.* 1982, 214). Finally, the woman in T 80 could be associated with the male burial in T 79. Although the above discussion can only be considered speculative, the analysis undertaken in this paper urges us to consider such possibilities.

We know that children were buried in the Toumba cemetery and in some cases they might have been included in double burials such as in tomb T 39. Other burials might have belonged to children because of the size of a tomb or because they were given miniature vases (Lemos 2002, 165-166). One area in particular appears to have a concentration of small sized graves. This is located in the north-western edge of the cemetery and rather close to the extend of the mound in this area (Popham *et al.* 1988-1989, 118). It should be noted, however, that an *in situ* cremation was also located in this area (**Fig. 1**). Interestingly, another cluster of small sized tombs was located at the south-western edge of the mound. Is this a coincidence or were these clusters at both sides of the mound devoted to child burials?

Additional information can be also gained from the location of the other two ground plots

at Lefkandi. It is possible to suggest, for example that the Palia Perivolía burial ground which is located some 80 m to the east of the Toumba cemetery could have been part of the same cemetery. The analysis of the finds and rites there, however, do not allow such an affiliation. But what must be significant for the group buried in this cemetery is that the orientation of the graves follows the same radial pattern as observed for the MPG and LPG burials in the Toumba cemetery; they appear to be aligned or perpendicular to the axis of the mound. Palia Perivolía was also established in the MPG period acquiring more burials in the LPG. On the other hand, the Skoubris cemetery belonged to a group which does not appear to display any connection with the Toumba cemetery and the mound nor to acknowledge their location. Skoubris is, at present, the earliest burial ground excavated, but tombs in the Khaliotis area must have been even earlier as Late Helladic IIIC finds located there are associated with tombs (Popham – Lemos 1996, pl. 2). This area, however, which lies even further to the east and closer to the direction of Xeropolis, has not been excavated yet.

Although this is a preliminary study of the spatial organization of the cemetery, it becomes clear that there were patterns in the way burials were located in the cemetery. There was, as we noted before, an extension to the southern area of the cemetery which received some prominent burials. At the same time important burials were also made in front of the mound. We could compare the burials in P. 13 and P. 14 located in the area in front of the mound with that of the so-called 'warrior-trader' in the southern area of the cemetery (in T 79). Could we assume that two or even three different elite groups were using these two areas of the cemetery to bury their members? Such suggestions require more detailed analysis of the available data in order to conclude that such patterns in the spatial organization of the cemetery could reflect specific strategies in burying the members of the local elite.

It is clear, however, that a detailed analysis of the spatial organisation of the cemetery combined with a full study of the offerings given to different genders and ages buried in the Toumba

burial ground will illuminate further the study of this cemetery which evidently did not belong to a Greek 'dark age'.

MPG	LPG	LPG/SPG I	SPG I	S SPG I-II	SPG II	SPGII-IIIa	SPG IIIa	?date	empty
12b	1	23a	25	2	4	24	19	9	6
17	3	29	15	27	5	38	31	43	11
49	7	37	45	52	13	80	32	53	20
62b	12a	40	51	83	22	P. 21	33	60	21
	14	41		P. 3	23		36	68	30
	18	42		P. 8	28		74	75	34
	26	50			47		P. 14	P 5	35
	39	55			78		P. 23	P 18	56
	44	59			79		P. 27	P 22	61
	46	66			P. 13		P. 31		65
	48	69			P. 33				67
	54	P. 28							72
	57								73
	58								76
	62a								77
	63								81
	64								82
	70								P. 6
	71								P. 9
	P. 1								P. 15
	P. 2								P. 16
	P. 4								P. 17
	P. 7								P. 24
	P. 12								P. 25
	P. 19								P. 26
	P. 32								P. 29
	P. 34								P. 30

Table 1. Toumba tombs and Pyres by chronological stages (as in Popham – Lemos 1996).

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Fig. 1. The Toumba cemetery.

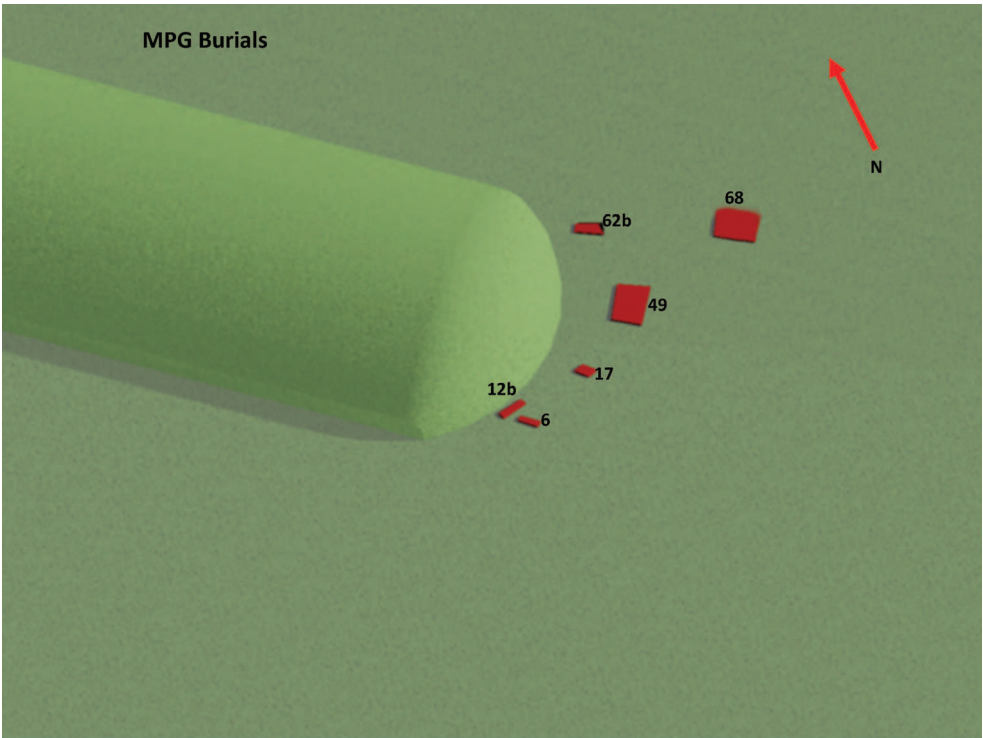


Fig. 2. MPG burials in the Toumba cemetery.

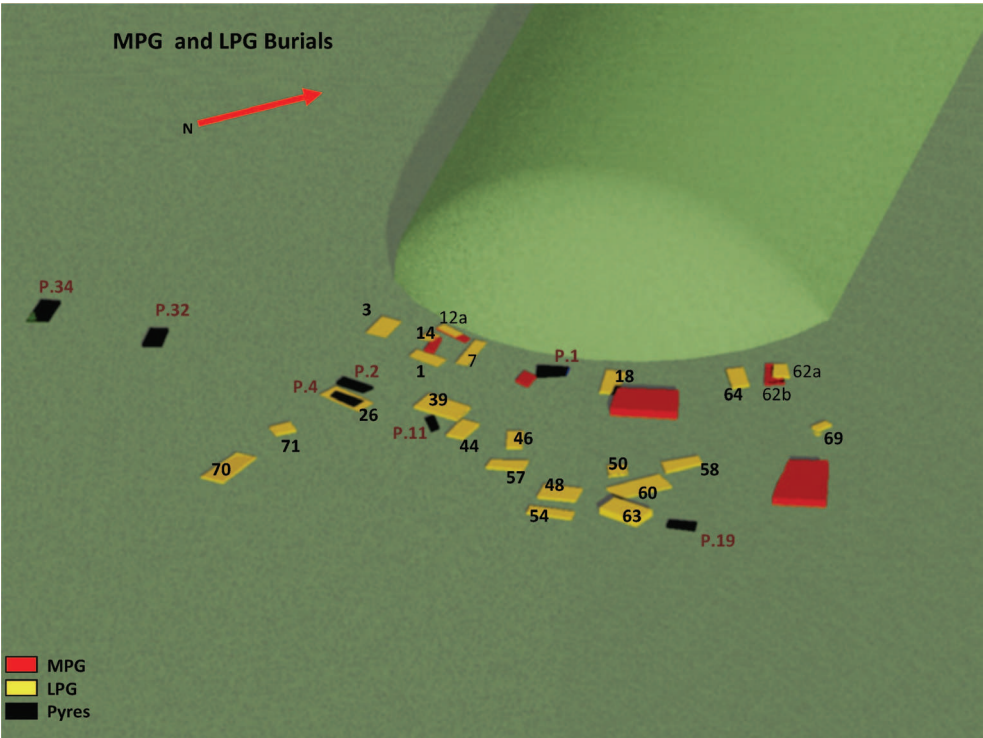


Fig. 3. MPG – LPG: MPG to LPG burials.

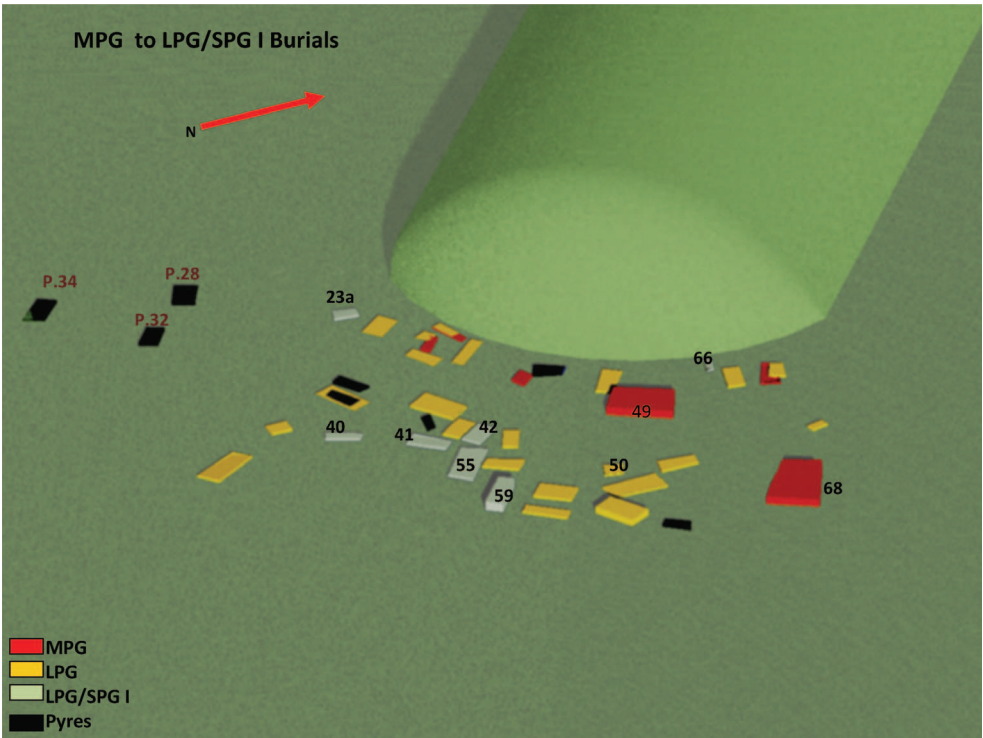


Fig. 4. MPG – LPG/SPG I: LPG to SPG I burials at the Toumba cemetery.

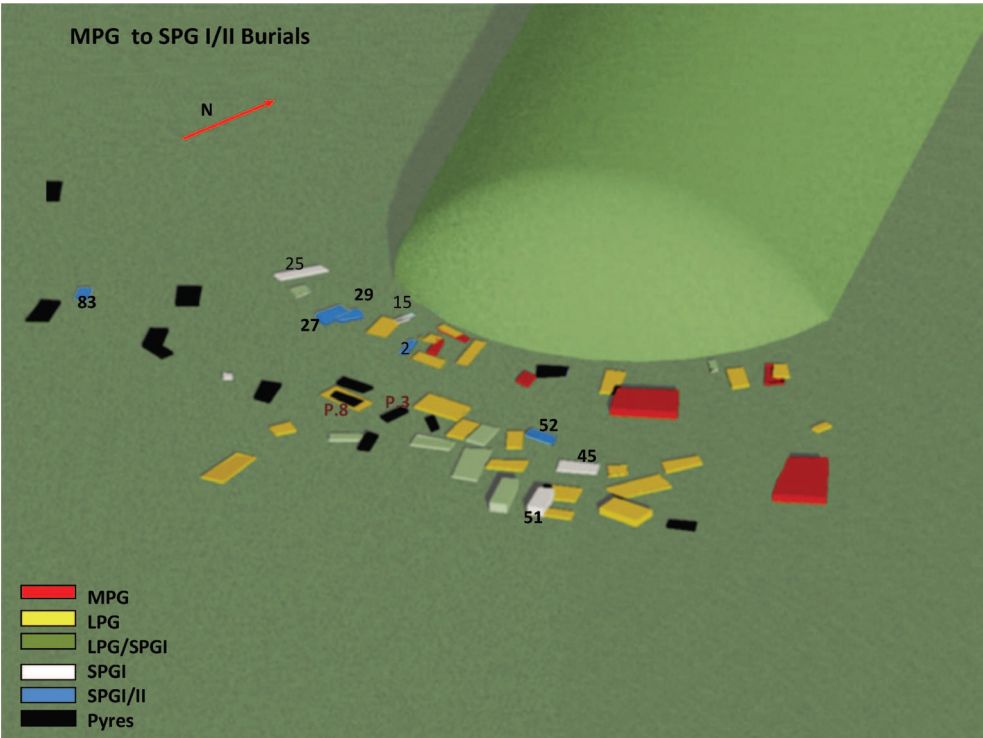


Fig. 5. MPG – SPG I/II: MPG to SPG I/II burials at the Toumba cemetery.

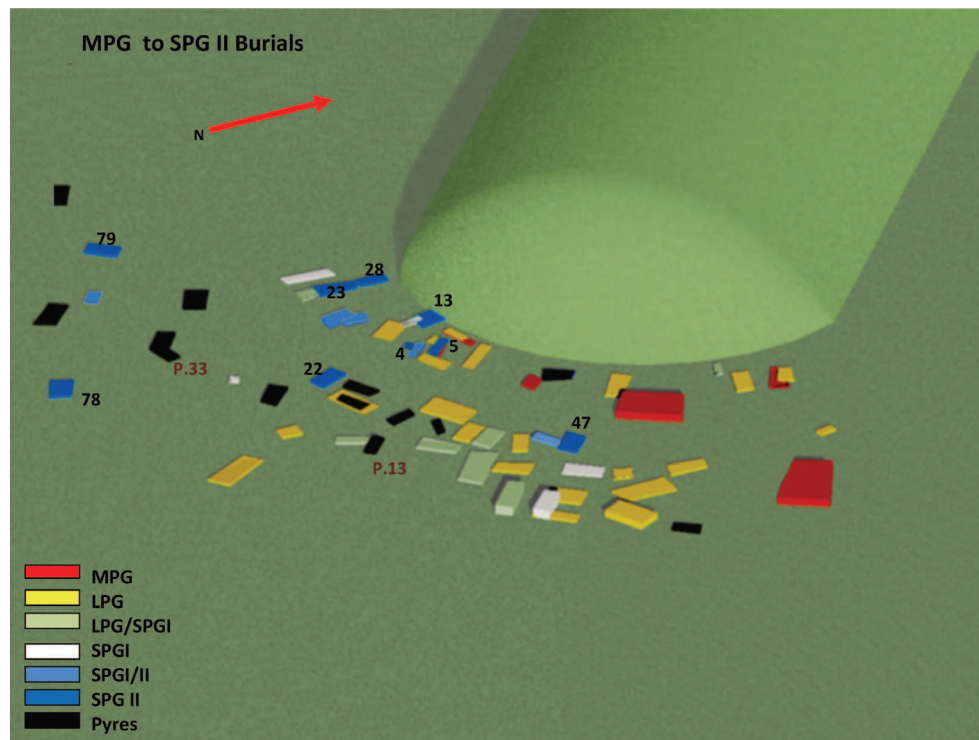


Fig. 6. MPG to SPG II burials at the Toumba cemetery.

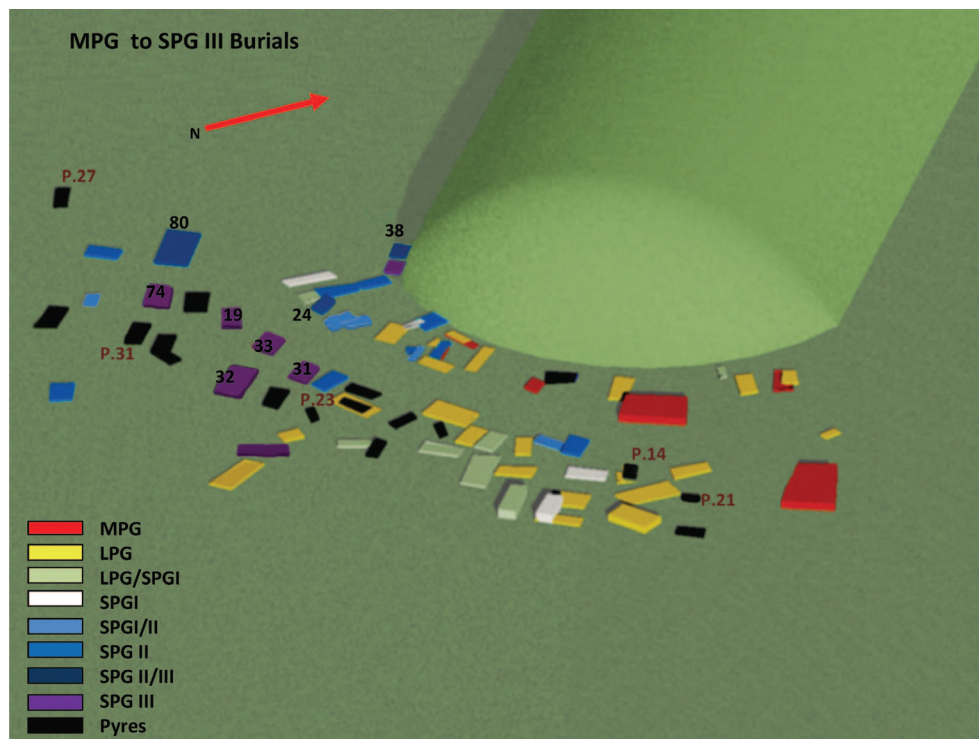


Fig. 7. MPG – SPG III burials at the Toumba cemetery.