

THE "RICH ATHENIAN LADY" WAS PREGNANT THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF A GEOMETRIC TOMB RECONSIDERED

ABSTRACT

Recent reexamination of the cremated remains in the celebrated tomb of the "rich Athenian lady" brought to light the presence of a fetus four to eight weeks short of full term and established that the adult female died during pregnancy or premature childbirth. The physical anthropology of mother and child is reviewed and a facial reconstruction of the deceased woman presented. Other examples of pregnancy and death in the Greek world are discussed. The discovery of a fetus together with the adult female fundamentally changes the interpretation of this tomb and highlights the importance of skeletal evidence in the study of demography and social structure.

Birth, puberty, marriage, and death are, in all cultures, marked by ceremonies that may differ in detail but are universal in function. Arnold van Gennep was the first to note the regularity and significance of the rituals attached to the transitional stages of human life, and his phrase for these—*rites de passage*—has become a part of the language of anthropology and sociology.¹ Death is only one of the rites of passage described by van Gennep for an individual, a *social persona*, and it is, ironically, the most archaeologically visible. Archaeologists rarely view birth, puberty or initiation, and marriage with the same immediacy, although numerous scenes on Athenian and other local Greek styles of black- and red-figure pottery of the

1. See van Gennep 1960; see also Bell 1992. In the process of studying for final publication all of the material from the Early Iron Age tombs in the area of the later Athenian Agora, one of us (Papadopoulos) invited the other (Liston) to locate and study, or restudy, the human remains from the cremation tombs of the period, including those that had been previously analyzed by J. Lawrence Angel, and the few that had come to light since then. Such a study was deemed all the more impor-

tant since few of Angel's observations on the human remains of the Early Iron Age tombs in the Agora had ever appeared in print, and none were systematically presented. Moreover, significant results had been obtained from the restudy of Early Iron Age inhumations (e.g., Little and Papadopoulos 1998) and, as such, we thought that the cremation tombs might offer potentially new information on the physical anthropology of Early Iron Age Athenians. In the presentation of this

article we were mindful to incorporate the physical anthropology with the archaeology in the main body of the text rather than relegate it to an appendix or technical report at the end. Liston was largely responsible for the section on the physical anthropology of the "rich Athenian lady" and the fetus/neonate cremated with her, and Papadopoulos for the remainder, but both authors read each other's sections and worked closely together.