

Burials in Geometric Athens

Ancestors Death & Burial



Background to Iron Age Greece

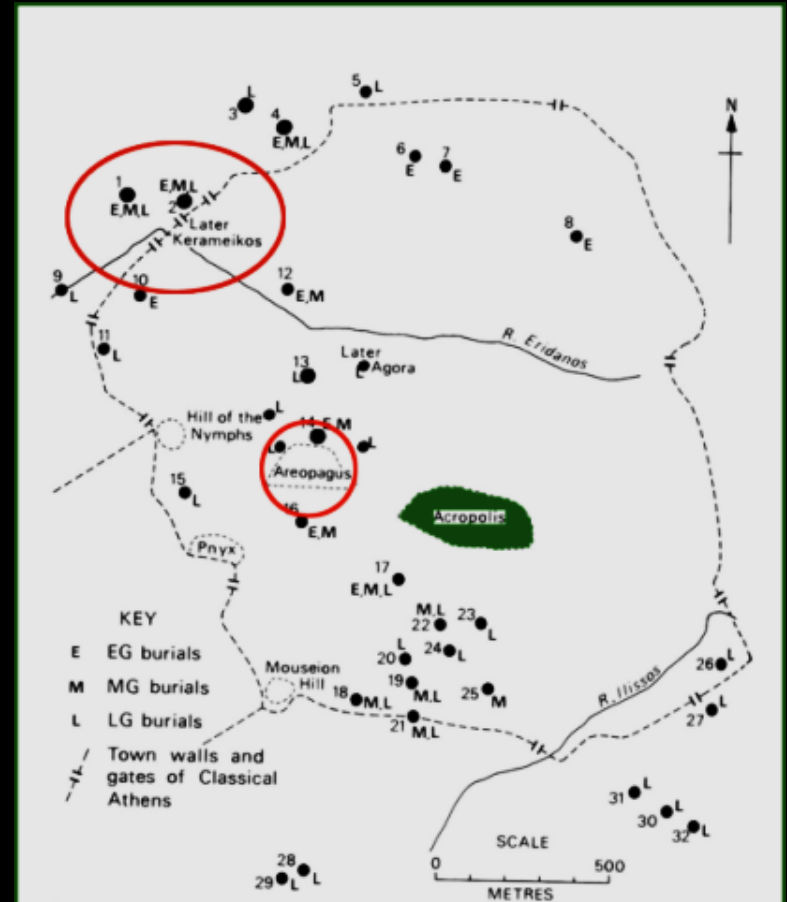
- Apparent “dark age”
 - Breakdown of long-distance trade with East Mediterranean
 - Loss of literacy
 - Decline in deposition of material wealth in the archaeological record
 - Rise of the polis
- Largely dependent on funerary remains
- (Athens) Geometric period:
 - EG: 900-850 BC
 - MG: 850-760 BC
 - LG: 760-700 BC



Aegean

Geometric Athens

- Burials are the only source of information
- Two main cemeteries:
 - Areopagus
 - Kerameikos
- Key themes that emerge:
 - Changing treatment of the body & rites of passage
 - Changing provisioning of the deceased
 - Monumentality & commemoration
 - Shifts in social structures by 8th century (rise of the polis?)



Iron Age Athens

Treatment of the Body

- Separation of the living from the dead: bounded cemeteries
 - Saxe Goldstein hypothesis
- Shifting patterns of inhumation & cremation
- Once buried the body is not disturbed
- Simple funerary structures:
 - Single graves or pits for cremation urns
 - Later examples might have grave markers



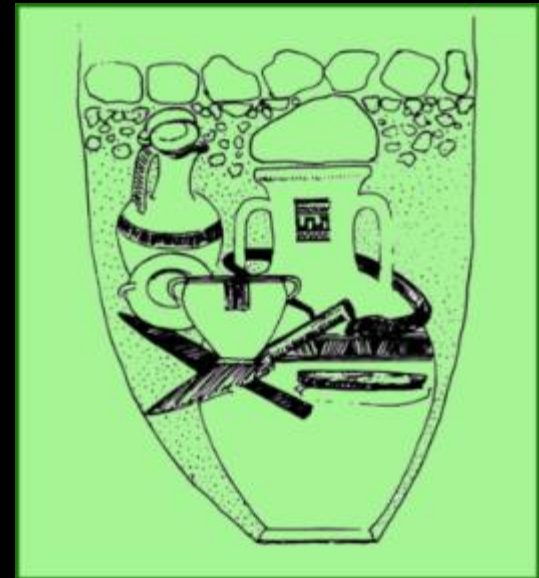
Late Geometric burials, Kerameikos

Early Geometric

- Introduction of cremation for burial of adults
- Funerary feast & provision of food for after-life
- Distinction between male & female funerary ritual
- Cremation urns & grave goods:
 - Wealthy male burials: warrior equipment
 - Female burials: pottery & simple personal adornment



Areopagus cremation



Early Geometric

- Occasional wealthy child burials (inhumations)
 - Girl buried with jewellery (2 bronze bracelets, faience beads) & pair of clay boots
 - Boy buried with skeleton of piglet, 2 seashells & 6 miniature pots
 - Later 9th century: grave surrounded by oval enclosure & associated with array of votive offerings
- What does this tell us about Athenian society in 9th century?



Clay boots Areopagus

Early Geometric

- Development of bounded cemeteries:
- Very little wealth removed from circulation & placed in tombs
 - Some differentiation of grave goods
 - High quality decorated pottery
 - Certain investment in terms of funerary ritual: cremation & feasting
- What do these practices tell us?
- Athens largely isolated:
 - Possibly some links with Cyprus



Grave goods from Kerameikos

Early-Middle Geometric

- c.850 BC major social changes:
 - Aegean sea communications
 - Greater exchanges with East Mediterranean
 - More material wealth
 - Shift from pastoral to agrarian economy?



Pyxis from the Areopagus

Rich Lady of the Areopagus

- c.850 BC wealthy female burial with lavish funerary display:
 - Cremation urn
 - 34 decorated vases (all but 9 smashed on funerary pyre)
- Young woman – died in pregnancy
 - Is her wealth her dowry wealth?



Cremation urn

Rich Lady of the Areopagus

- Access to imported luxuries:
 - Ivory seal
 - Gold earrings
 - Faience necklace with bead of variegated glass
- Markers of wealth, status & gender



Jewellery

Rich Lady of the Areopagus

- Clay pyxis (Jewellery box) might indicate source of wealth?
- Granary model representing the **pentakosiomedimnoi**



Clay pyxis

Rich Lady of the Areopagus

- Burial: display & conspicuous consumption
- Contacts with East Mediterranean
- How much control over wealth did she have?
- Wealth of the family based on land/agriculture or trade?
- First clear signs for emergence of the Athenian Iron Age aristocracy (**aristoi**)
 - Using funerary display to signal position in society



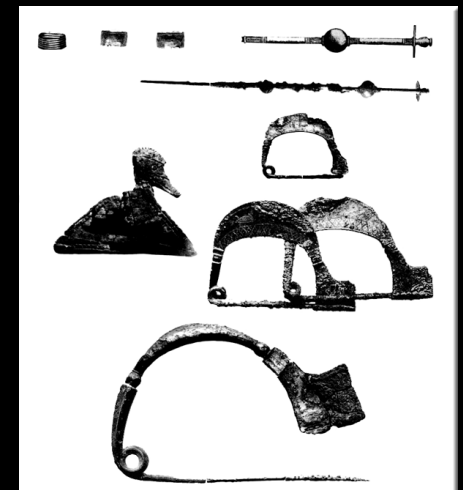
Middle Geometric

- Increasing funerary display:
 - Decorated pottery: cremation urns & grave markers
- Kerameikos: high status male & female burials
 - Personal adornment: gold diadems of sheet gold (oriental)
 - Ivory seals
 - Weapons
 - Phoenician bronze bowl

Amphora



Personal adornment



Middle Geometric

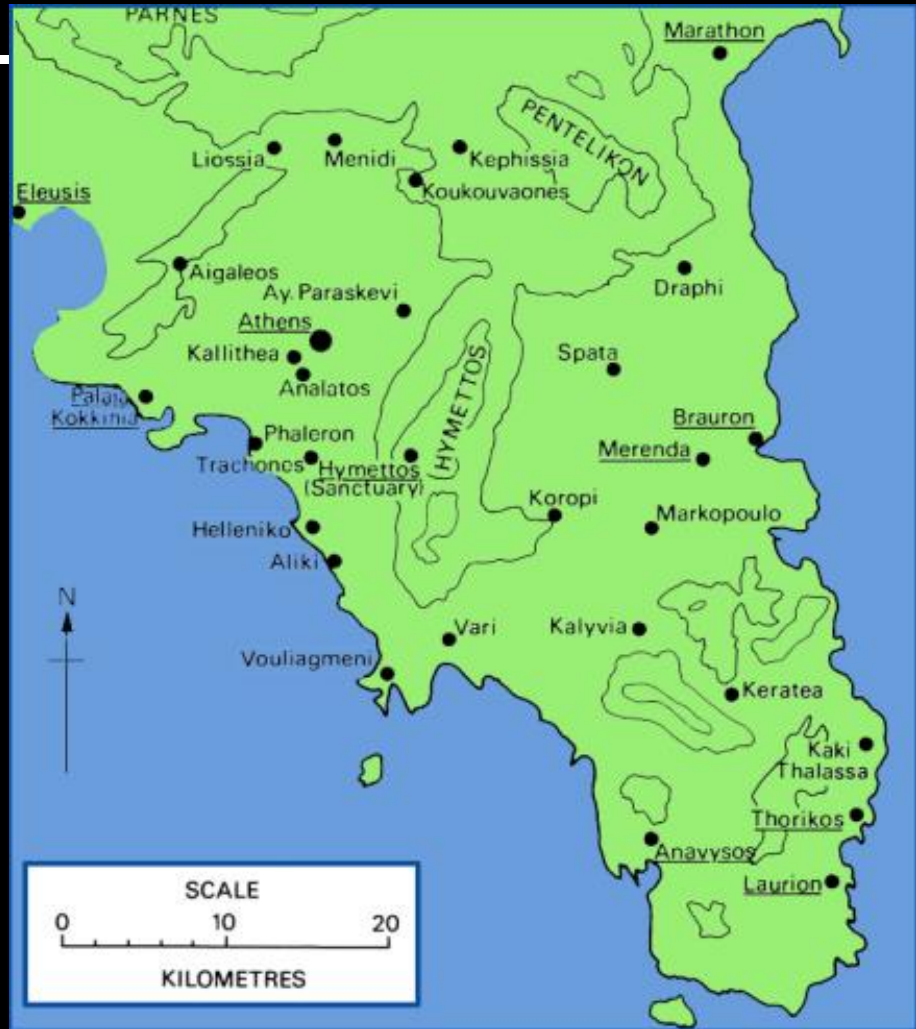
- Greater deposition of material wealth
 - Trinkets & crafted objects from the Near East
- High regard of Phoenician (Sidonian) craftsmanship
- Possible movement of craftsmen
 - Greeks relearning artistic techniques from Phoenician craftsmen



Imported Phoenician bronze bowl

Late Geometric

- Increase in population & increasing exploitation of Attic hinterland
 - Agrarian economy
- Fascination with heroic past
 - Hero cults at Mycenaean tombs
- Increasing interaction with the East Mediterranean
- Increase in disposable wealth deposited in graves
- First temples & rise of the polis



Attica

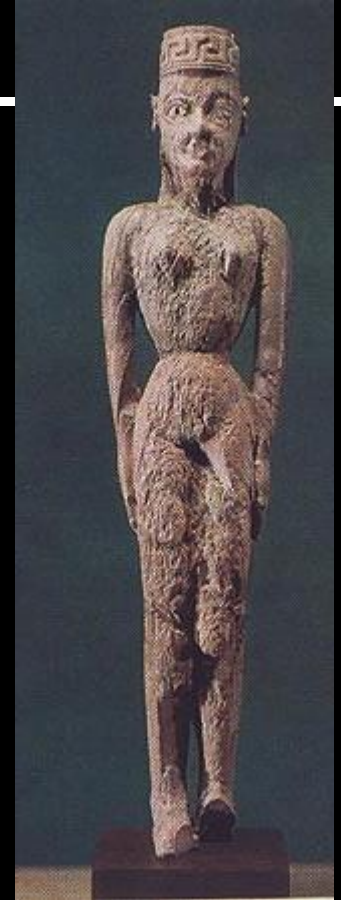
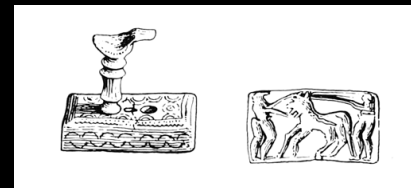
Late Geometric

- Kerameikos continues to be used
- Inhumation replaces cremation for adults
- The body is laid out on its back in rectangular wooden coffins (only traces survive)
- Grave goods: typically pottery
- Ash with burnt sherds & animal bones: debris from funerary feast



Late Geometric

- Increasing disposal of wealth:
 - Gold jewellery
 - Bronze cauldrons (male)
 - Ivory seals & figurines (female)
- Parallels with offerings at sanctuaries
- Increasing wealth differentials:
 - A smaller number of wealthy burials



Late Geometric

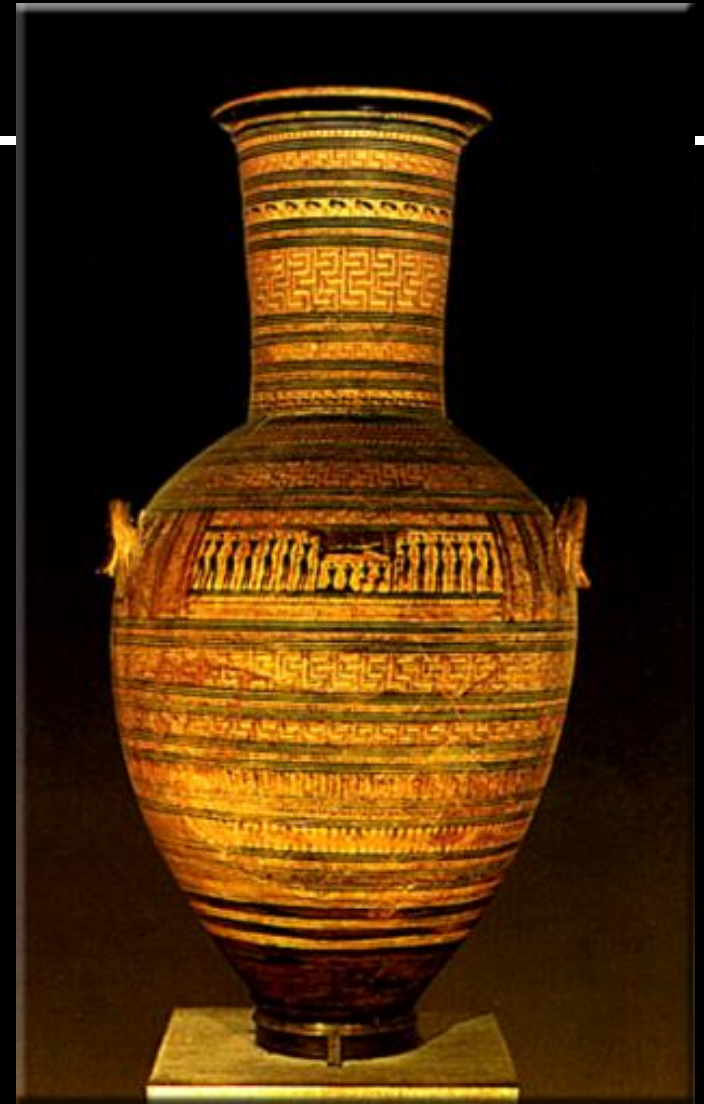
- Gender differences continue
- Male:
 - Bronze cauldrons
 - Funerary monuments
- Females:
 - Display of family wealth
 - Pyxides
 - Ivory seals



Pyxis, Kerameikos

Memorialisation

- Monumental figured vases used as funerary monuments:
 - Cremation urns, grave markers & marking route to cemetery
 - Especially commission for burial of **aristoi**
- Decorated with scenes illustrating funerary ritual:
 - *Prothesis, ekphora*
 - Chariot races, mourners
 - Scenes from Homeric epic



LG funerary vase

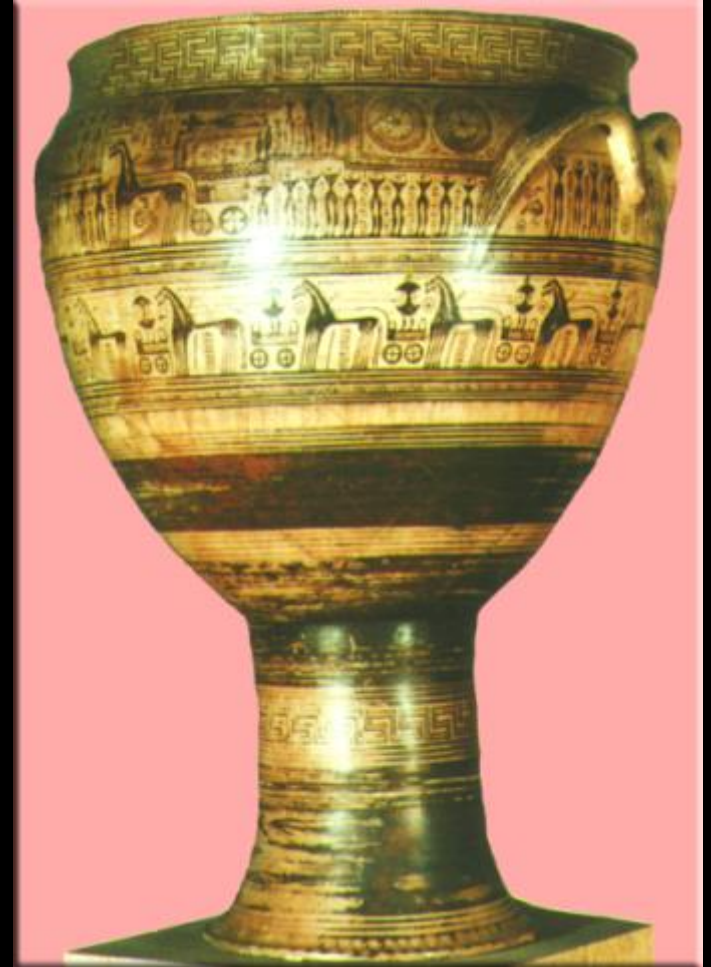
Late Geometric Ritual



Prothesis



Ekphora



Ekphora & chariot race

Summary

- Death is physical process
- Funerary ritual brings together the very materiality of death with more ephemeral emotions & concepts of life & death
- Iron Age burials: materiality of the body
 - Cremation or inhumation
 - Graves, pyres & pots
- Pottery: grave goods, funerary urns & commemoration
- Materiality of identity: age, gender, status