

Image analysis of artistic interpretation of Kalavassos-Ayios Dhimitrios Tomb 11

Theodora Brown



Image one.¹

Death throughout the ancient world has provided archaeologists and anthropologists intriguing material culture, although interpretation can be elusive, it offers reflecting interpretations of societal belief systems, ritualism and social organisation.² After all, archaeology does not deal with death itself but burials³ limiting the scope of explanation.

The documentation of archaeology has expanded exponentially in the digital era of photographs, videography and digital scanning, leading to more concise documented evidence. However, this luxury was not available to earlier excavations and physically

¹ Illustrator: unknown. Image retrieved from: Alison South CAARI lecture: *Voices from the Grave: a Late Bronze Age Population from Kalavassos and their Tombs*, CAARI Cyprus, 2021, https://youtu.be/J_JW4qWwAMw?si=dN0UvlVoGDvrOnV0 <Accessed on 24/02/2025>

² Peter, J. Ucko, *Ethnography and Archaeological Interpretation of Funerary Remains*, World Archaeology, Vol. 1, No. 2, Techniques of Chronology and Excavation, 1969, Pg. (?) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/123966> <Accessed on 24/02/2025>

³ Colin Renfrew, *The Archaeology of Immortality in the Ancient World*, CARTA, Awareness of Death and Personal Mortality, Implications for Anthropology, University of California Television (UCTV), 2017, <https://youtu.be/aitzE63UEqw?si=mjs5ecPnKxW8S-19> <Accessed on 24/02/2025>

drawn plans had to suffice, risking inaccuracies. However, such projects allow archaeology to 'come to life' with artistic interpretations and imaginations actualised.



Image two.⁴

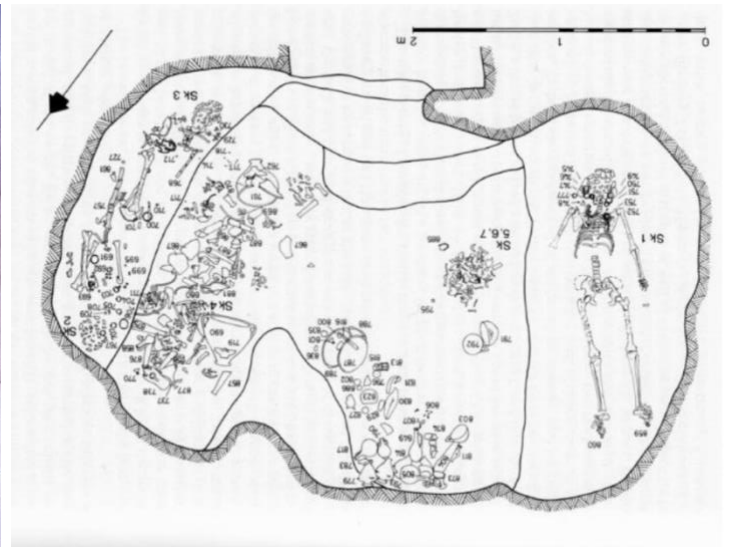


Image three, rotated 180°.⁵

Image analysis: Kalavassos-Ayios Dhimitrios Tomb 11

The image above is an artistic interpretation and reconstruction of the drawn plan Late Bronze Age rock cut chamber Tomb 11 located in Kalavassos-Ayios Dhimitrios, Cyprus. It is depicted from a birds-eye view (like the original plan⁶, albeit rotated 180°). There is an arrow provided in the top left corner to indicate the direction of north and also includes stratigraphic lines within the tomb's surfaces just like the original tomb plan, giving one a better imagination of the tomb's morphology.

The artist uses the medium of watercolour, the texture soft and the leaky watery edge makes the tomb dreamlike. The tomb is presented bright, the neutral earth colours contrast to the vibrant primary colours of the blankets and vessels which bring a vibrancy within the tomb.

Representation of the deceased(s)

The blankets bring attention to the viewer due to their vivid colour, on the right-hand side we see a freshly (presumed) deceased women laid on her back and on the left blanket two incomplete manipulated skeletons (calculated through the post cranial

⁴ Illustrator: unknown. Image retrieved from: Alison South CAARI lecture: *Voices from the Grave: a Late Bronze Age Population from Kalavassos and their Tombs*.

⁵ Elizabeth Goring, *Death in everyday life: aspects of burial practice in the Late Bronze Age, Early Society in Cyprus*, Ed. Edgar Peltenburg, Edinburgh University Press, 1989, Pg. 99

⁶ IBID

remains.) This depicts that Late Bronze Age tombs can be communal and with the age discrepancies between the deceases that they can be used again over a considerable amount of time, supporting the theory that the manipulation of remains took place after 'the lapse of an interval of appropriate memory.'⁷ Meaning when the soft tissues decayed the body/bones assumed a different value and could therefore be disturbed or removed, making the primary burial not the permanent disposition.⁸

The purposeful manipulation of skeletal remains whenever as a simple part of tomb maintenance or through ritual burial practice it is clear there was a ritual agency for such behaviours and was viewed as normative.⁹ Due to the intimacy of the practice it is safely presumed to be done by kin, creating and legitimising an exclusive territorial ancestral space accessible (by the living and dead) by kinship only.

Although one cannot sex the skeletons visually through the image with the presence of a female body the audience could assume tomb segregation by gender.

Material Culture

The woman is presented in a long plain dress and gold jewellery in the form of earrings, a necklace and a ring. There are many suggestions as to why she would be buried with gold such as a symbol of authority¹⁰ with the expenditure of wealth or her own personal adornments in life that she can continue to wear in the afterlife and potentially to be used as exchangeable currency.¹¹

The artist has chosen to dress the lady in a plain gown, however is the colour choice of white an influence on our modern concept of death and mourning? In modern ethnographic evidence we see white being the non-negotiable funerary colour in predominantly eastern countries (such as China) and religions (Hinduism, Judaism and Islam bury their dead in a simple white cloth). Whereas in the West, black is the predominant colour for mourning associated with funerals. Is this influence an insight into the artist's cultural background?

The tomb looks relatively spacious, with grave goods including bones and vessels scattered across the floor. The back central wall morphs inside creating a natural divide. With objects on either side, this boundary suggests to whom the vessels were dedicated to. Various multiple clay vessels are littered on the floor, suggesting a requirement of

⁷ John Robb, *The Early Mediterranean Village. Agency, Material Culture, and Social Change in Neolithic Italy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, Pg. 64.

⁸ Jennifer M. Webb & David Frankel, *Social Strategies, Ritual and Cosmology in Early Bronze Age Cyprus: an Investigation of Burial Data from the North Coast*, Levant 42(2), 2010, Pg. 194.

⁹ IBID.

¹⁰ James Brown, *The search for rank in prehistoric burials*. See Chapman et Al.. 1981. 25-37.

¹¹ Elizabeth Goring, *Death in everyday life: aspects of burial practice in the Late Bronze Age*, Pg. 104.

such objects in the afterlife and with animal bones scattered along the floor further suggest ritual feasting taking place upon depositing the deceased and/or repeat visiting of the tomb. Leaving items used within funerary feasting can suggest that due to its association with death it is therefore polluted and cannot be brought back into 'living' spaces.

In conclusion, the artistic version of Tomb 11 provides an imaginatively vivid burial with the fresh deposit of a deceased female in an already occupied tomb. This suggests that once the body was deposited the tomb was sealed, therefore no longer being manipulated by human hands. The image provokes maybe a different culturally constructed concept of death to ones own however, the women's body and facial expressions present the universal funerary emotion of being 'laid to rest.'

The narrative woven is that of a wealthy burial due to the social organisation it requires to construct a tomb and the large volume of high value deposits (vessels and gold). Moreover, the visual construction of body preparation, bone manipulation and ritual feasting depicts funerary agency involving rites of passage¹² performed by the living onto the deceased to acknowledge or permit the social stage of death on an individual from being alive to deceased, or furthermore an ancestor within the tomb space. This is further artistically suggested with the watery boundaries of the tomb giving the impression one is looking through another realm of reality.

¹² Arnold Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, University of Chicago Press, 1961.

References:

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Colin Renfrew, *The Archaeology of Immortality in the Ancient World*, CARTA, *Awareness of Death and Personal Mortality, Implications for Anthropology*, University of California Television (UCTV), 2017, <https://youtu.be/aitzE63UEqw?si=mjs5ecPnKxW8S-19> <Accessed on 24/02/2025>

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Image references:

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Image three: Elizabeth Goring, *Death in everyday life: aspects of burial practice in the Late Bronze Age*, Early Society in Cyprus, Ed. Edgar Peltenburg, Edinburgh University Press, 1989, Pg. 95-105.