

Ancestors, Death and Burial



Introduction

About the module

- Looking at how people in the Bronze-Iron Age Aegean & Cyprus dealt with death & interacted with their ancestors
- Considers how death should be thought of a gradual social process
- Explores how very different experiences of death are rooted in social & cultural worlds



Reconstruction of Kalavassos Tomb 11

About the module

- Case studies:
 - Bronze Age Cyprus
 - Mycenaean Greece
 - Iron Age Greece
 - Homeric Burials
- Themes:
 - Ancestor cults & manipulation of bones
 - Identity: gender, wealth & status,
 - Identity: hybridity
 - Commemoration & memorialisation



Detail of Griffin Warrior Tomb,
Pylos

Assessment 1

- 20 minutes: oral presentation and discussion of an article
 - A mini lecture outlining the aims & objectives of the author(s), detailing their material or case study and how they used this to answer on the research question
 - You should reflect upon how effectively the author has used this material to further our knowledge & understanding of burial practices and/or belief systems in the Bronze-Iron Age Aegean and Cyprus or in the Homeric context
 - You will need to be able to answer questions as part of the presentation
 - You may use PowerPoint, handouts or other visual aids

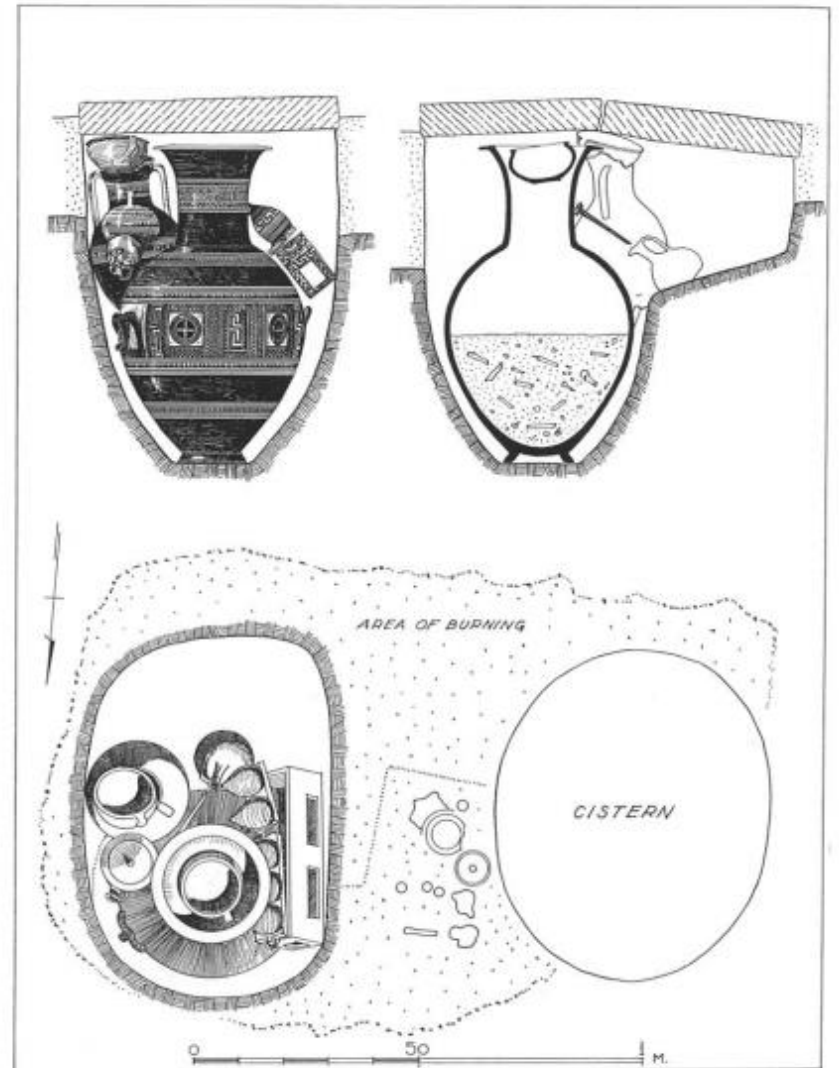
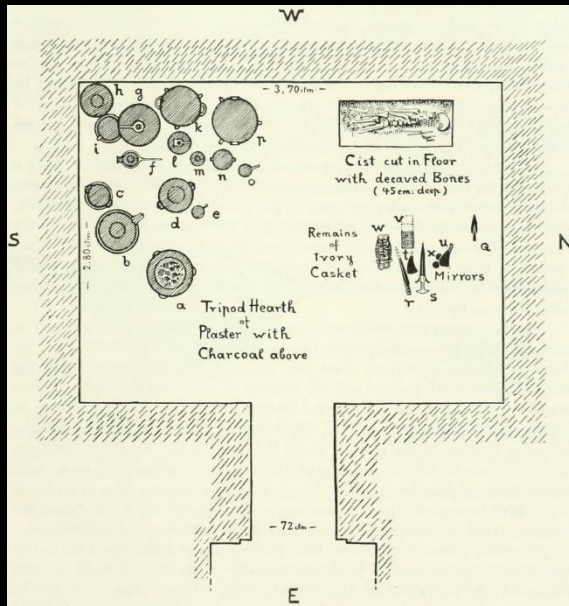
Assessment 2

- Pinterest board: Analyse the archaeological evidence for one of the following:
 - Funerary rituals & beliefs
 - identity
 - Status
 - Wealth
 - Commemoration
- Provide a short analytical commentary for each image, contextualising it in relation to academic scholarship
- Upload the URL together with a short reflexive document (200 words) to contextualise your board. You should also include references

Assessment 3

- Either write a 1000-word gobbet on Homer's Iliad 24.776-803 (translation by Murray, loeb series, Harvard University Press)
- Or analyse one of the provided images, highlighting what it might tell us about funerary ritual, the treatment of dead, & possibly about the associated belief system. You should consider tomb/grave type, placement of the body/bodies, associated grave goods, etc. Also consider the type of image, how the burial is represented & how this affects your understanding of the burial(s)

Choice of images for assessment 3



Why Look at Death and Burial?

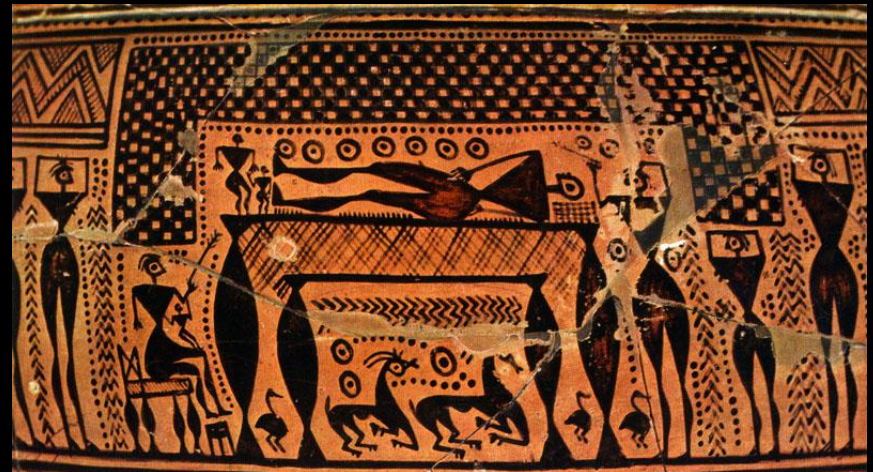
- Very practical concern: removal of a human body from the living space
- Inevitability: something we all experience
- How we treat the dead defines what it is to be human
- Represents personal loss, but people are also faced with their own mortality



Detail of painting on Tanagra larnax: laying out the dead

Social Impact of Death

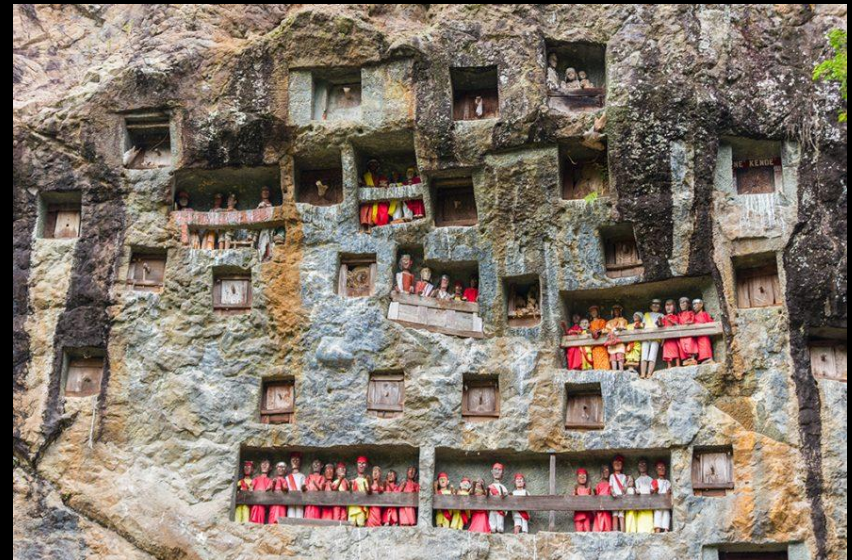
- Loss of an individual potentially represents a significant social loss
- Funerary ritual: important arena in which human social identities & ideologies are played out
 - Unique view on how past human societies were structured
 - Unique view on belief systems: afterlife, ancestors



Late Geometric detail of prothesis scene

Experiencing Death

- Universality of death as an experience
- But ways of negotiating death are not universal:
 - Myriad culturally constructed responses
- Ethnographies rich source of evidence for different practices
 - Ucko: outlines problems in using ethnographic analogy simplistically to interpret archaeological evidence



Tana Toraja, Indonesia

Death as a Process

- Death “not as a singular event but as a gradual social process”
 - Swazey – TED talks
- Burial rites = the “ritual enactment of the end of life”
 - Swazey – TED talks
- Van Gennep’s rites of passage



Reconstruction of LBA tomb in Cyprus

Rites of Passage

- Van Gennep ([1909] 1960) identified three key stages:
 - Separation
 - Marginalisation
 - Incorporation
- Funerary ritual:
 - marginalisation**
 - Liminal phase: mourners polluted through association with death
 - Performance of ritual allows deceased to pass to realm of ancestors...



Detail of mourners on
Tanagra larnax

Rites of Passage

- As people progress through life they pass between different stages
- Literally move over thresholds into different social states, which are marked as key stages of life:
 - Birth
 - Puberty
 - Marriage
 - Death
- Different societies mark these events with specific rituals



Pyrgos jug, Cyprus

Exploring the Mortuary Domain

- Death disrupts the fabric of society & social relations
- At the boundaries of society:
 - **Liminality**
 - **Commensality**: bringing communities together & creating a break with the deceased
 - **Heterotopia**: a place of different order, disrupted from rhythms of daily life
 - Affective & highly charged (sensorial) performances around death a means for renegotiating social relations



Kotsiatis model

Communitas

- Shared embodied & spiritual encounters & lived experiences **outside** of normal social practices
- An achieved emotional & spiritual state, rooted in turmoil:
 - The natural order is upturned
 - Identities are mediated & tradition is reinforced



Detail of dance model, Kamilari

Summary

- Universality of experience but myriad ways of negotiating death & the afterlife
- Transition between states of being alive & dead:
 - Biological process
 - Social process, mediated in many ways by different cultures
 - Rites of passage
- The physical & conceptual place of death:
 - Heterotopia
 - Communitas

