



Labour mobilization and social change in the North Cemetery at Ayios Vasilios, Greece

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Abstract

In this seminar we present our research on Early Mycenaean (1700-1450 BC) labour investment and labour mobilization, to be published in an edited volume on Construction Economies in the Ancient World. It is based on a 2017 EAA conference session at which we were asked to reflect on human investment in large-scale constructions, to find ways to measure labour input, and to discuss the impact of building projects on economic and social relations.

While most discussions of labour investment focus on monumental structures, we propose to pay attention also to more modest constructions, especially those carried out in periods when the division of labour and the circulation of resources undergo radical change. We argue that the initiation of building projects is an important component in the transformation of reciprocal, segmentary, kin-based social networks to asymmetrical, centralized and competitive political entities, moving beyond architectural energetics approaches based on absolute measurements and towards a new methodology based on relative measures.

Our discussion will be based on the North Cemetery at Ayios Vasilios, southern Greece, which predates the Mycenaean palace on the same site. The Early Mycenaean period witnesses pervasive changes, expressed mostly in the mortuary practices: extramural, formal cemeteries replace intramural burials; larger, deeper, and more complex built graves replace simple cists and pits; multiple graves replace earlier single inhumations; richer offerings accompany the dead. It is generally accepted that these changes are part and parcel of the transformation of the mainland societies, i.e. the emergence of social asymmetries and political hierarchies. We focus on variation in the size and construction of the tombs. Indeed the tombs in this period show substantial labour input in the quarrying, transporting and rough working of different types of stone. Our aim is to reconstruct the labour input in the tombs and the cemetery as a whole, and to attempt to reconstruct changing social and kin relations.



Interior of a cist grave

Poststraat 6 - Lecture Room

Tuesday 8th May - 3.30PM

