

Staging Death

Staging Death

Funerary Performance, Architecture and Landscape
in the Aegean

Edited by
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DE GRUYTER

Undertaken with the assistance of McIntire Department of Art and the College of Arts and Sciences,
University of Virginia

ISBN 978-3-11-047578-4
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-048057-3
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-047919-5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;
detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at: <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2016 Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston
Printing and binding: Hubert & Co. GmbH & Co. KG, Göttingen.
Typesetting: jürgen ullrich typosatz, Nördlingen
♻️ Printed on acid-free paper
Printed in Germany

www.degruyter.com

Contents

Michael J. Boyd and Anastasia Dakouri-Hild

Staging Death: an Introduction — 1

Anastasia Dakouri-Hild

Getting to Funerary Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Death and Performance in the Prehistoric Aegean — 11

Performative Places: Movement and Theatricality

Maria Chountasi

Funerary Ritual-Architectural Events in the Temple Tomb and the Royal Tomb at Knossos — 33

Michael J. Boyd

Fields of Action in Mycenaean Funerary Practices — 57

Aleydis Van de Moortel

Politics of Death at Mitrou: Two Prepalatial Elite Tombs in a Landscape of Power — 89

Familial Places: Deathscapes and Townscapes

Kalliope Sarri

Intra, Extra, Inferus and Supra Mural Burials of the Middle Helladic Period: Spatial Diversity in Practice — 117

Kate Harrell

The Practice of Funerary Destruction in the Southwest Peloponnese — 139

Yannis Galanakis

A Roof for the Dead: Tomb Design and the 'Domestication of Death' in Mycenaean Funerary Architecture — 155

Placing Bodies, Embodying Places

Anna Lagia, Ioanna Moutafi, Raphaël Orgeolet, Despoina Skorda and Julien Zurbach
Revisiting the Tomb: Mortuary Practices in Habitation Areas in the Transition to the Late Bronze Age at Kirrha, Phocis — 181

Bill Cavanagh, Anna Lagia and Chris Mee †
Mortuary Practices in the Middle Bronze Age at Kouphovouno: Vernacular Dimensions of the Mortuary Ritual — 207

Ilse Schoep and Peter Tomkins
'Death Is Not the End': Tracing the Manipulation of Bodies and Other Materials in the Early and Middle Minoan Cemetery at Sissi — 227

Biographies and Memories of Place

Giorgos Vavouranakis
A Posthumanocentric Approach to Funerary Ritual and its Sociohistorical Significance: the Early and Middle Bronze Age Tholos Tombs at Apesokari, Crete — 253

Emily Miller Bonney
From Performing Death to Venerating the Ancestors at Lebena Yerokambos, Crete — 275

Angélique Labrude
Aegean Late Bronze and Early Iron Age Burials in the Ruins of Rulers' Dwellings: a Legitimation of Power? — 297

From Deathscapes to Beliefscales

Oliver Dickinson
Continuities and Discontinuities in Helladic Burial Customs During the Bronze Age — 317

Nikolas Papadimitriou
Structuring Space, Performing Rituals, Creating Memories: Towards a Cognitive Map of Early Mycenaean Funerary Behaviour — 335

Sam Farnham

**Pollution and Purity in the Argolid and Corinthia During the Early Iron Age:
the Burials — 361**

BIOS — 389

Index — 395

Acknowledgments

We would like to sincerely thank our contributors for participating in this project; the acquisitions editor of the Classical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at DeGruyter, Mirko Vonderstein, as well as Katja Brockmann, Kerstin Haensch, and Elisabeth Kempf for helping bring this volume to fruition; Matthias Hild and Evi Margaritis for their help and encouragement in various stages of the project; and the McIntire Department of Art and the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Virginia (especially Francesca Fiorani, Larry Goedde, and Tyler Jo Smith) for advice and financial support both in the direction of the colloquium upon which this volume is based and during the editorial process.

Kalliope Sarri

Intra, Extra, Inferus and Supra Mural Burials of the Middle Helladic period: Spatial Diversity in Practice

Introduction

The funerary landscapes of the Aegean Bronze Age are characterised by a wide variety of burial grounds, triggering communal memories and demonstrating the cohesive force of societies. Burial grounds redefined the future of a community based upon the traces of the past. They had their own connection with the past, linking society with the ancestral environment. Such links were brought about by means of monumental burial structures or by choosing burial places with specific significance, closer to or further away from the habitation areas, sometimes in close proximity or even coexisting with the latter depending on architectural planning and social group mobility. This contribution explores the so-called intramural graves of the Middle Helladic period. The spatial overlap between funerary and habitation areas has been given a range of ideological, cultural and economic explanations (largely exaggerated), resulting in this unusual funeral model. Unfolding excavations and the reevaluation of the data has opened up new perspectives. The phenomenon seems better explained by practical considerations and the relocation of activity space, rather than an underlying, peculiar burial practice. Nevertheless the use of former living spaces carries some ideological weight, signifying an intention to maintain important and meaningful communal memories.

The Middle Helladic period is traditionally considered a period of regression. Compared with the Early Helladic period, there is a decrease in the number of settlements, and the complex social organisation and the organised system of redistribution disappear (Forsén 1992; Maran 1998: 232–40; for more recent approaches, see Weiberg 2007). To many scholars, the Middle Helladic burial practices reflect a cultural setback, economic recession, poverty, sloppiness, lack of social stratification and a complete lack of religious beliefs (Dickinson 1977, 38; 2010). The practice of burying the dead within the settlements, both between houses and in the floors and walls of buildings, is observable at all Middle Helladic settlement sites. Much has been written about this strange custom that suggests at a first glimpse cultural regression, idiosyncratic beliefs, and superstitions and which has no exact analogies in the prehistoric Aegean. The few parallels come from the Neolithic period and from distant ethnographic evidence.

Intramural burial is not the only funerary practice of the period, but one of several attested patterns. There are also small burial clusters and extensive cemeteries either

near the settlements or attached to their boundaries, while some unbuilt areas within the settlements appear to have been used as grave islets. The coexistence of intramural burials and external cemeteries has raised the question of whether there was ranking (age, social status or ethnicity based) among individuals or groups who were buried in the different areas (Voutsaki 1997). There is growing evidence that in the last phases of the Middle Helladic, burials took place in the ruins of abandoned settlements, a phenomenon that appeared almost simultaneously at many sites (Nordquist 1987: 95; Dietz 1991: 27, 275; Maran 1995; Cavanagh & Mee 1998: 24–5; Boyd 2002: 33–6; Milka 2010). This diversity complicates our understanding of the evolution of Middle Helladic settlements and the management of living space, increasing the risk of misinterpreting the cultural development, human activities and ideological background of Middle Helladic society.

This paper explores Middle Helladic intramural burials in their contexts for two purposes: to demonstrate the diversity of burial strategies by region, and to determine whether the phenomenon of Middle Helladic ‘domestic’ graves requires a spatial, chronological or cultural interpretation. The review of the data is followed by a reconstruction of the burial pattern of the period and suggestions on how the reconstruction might contribute to a better understanding of Middle Helladic society.

Middle Helladic burial practices: the data

Already in the 19th c. some burial groups were known at Thorikos, Aphidna, Elateia and Sesklo (Stais 1895; Wide 1896; Soteriades 1902; Tsountas 1908). These pioneering excavations revealed basic features of the Middle Helladic period. It was characteristic of these early discoveries that mortuary remains were detected long before settlements of the period and that the earliest examples were external cemeteries in the form of burial mounds.

Orchomenos

The first discovery of Middle Helladic graves within a settlement was at Boeotian Orchomenos where in 1903 the Bavarian Academy uncovered an extensive settlement with three successive building phases, making possible the first stratigraphic comparison of a Greek site with Troy (Bulle 1907). Excavation revealed 50 graves of children and adults among architectural remains of the Middle Bronze Age. Pithos burials, slab and built cists, and simple pits were found, sometimes in groups and sometimes dispersed over the settlement from the hilltop down to the churchyard of Skripou [Fig. 1]. Being unprepared for such findings, the excavators only briefly recorded the results of the first excavation season and although in the second year they kept a more careful record of the stratigraphy and the burial contexts, they

were uncertain of how to interpret the domestic burials (Bulle 1907: 67). Noting that the graves were at the same level as some of the house walls, they interpreted the graves as contemporary with the settlement, but noted that study of the stratigraphy by Reinecke had given him the impression that the graves had been constructed after the abandonment of the settlement (the early publication of excavations at Orchomenos contains some rare stratigraphic drawings of a Middle Bronze Age site: Bulle 1907: 23, pl. V). Recent restudy of the site's stratigraphy indicates that most of the graves are positioned higher than the latest Middle Helladic floors and were cut nearly contemporaneously after the Middle Helladic occupation (Sarri 2010: 52–3). The presence of layered, sometimes circular, stone platforms around many of the graves and the fact that these follow the same stratigraphical and morphological pattern over a large area extending from the hilltop to the plain, supports the hypothesis that this is a cemetery, presumably containing stone paved tumuli (Sarri 2010: 52–3, 199–200, 210–1), the remains of which are more clearly visible in Trench P [Fig. 1].

The image of the intramural burial practices described by Bulle was adopted by many subsequent excavators and scholars researching the Middle Helladic period, although the data were not supporting this view. The Lianokladi stratigraphy, depicted in one of the very rare cross sections of the Middle Helladic period, shows clearly that cist graves are found at a higher level than the remains of a house [Fig. 2]. Tsountas, for example, interpreted the findings from Dimini to include graves located within the ruins of houses (Tsountas 1908: 131). At Korakou, Blegen excavated a pithos burial containing two children under Late Helladic walls and another intramural child burial surrounded by Grey Minyan pottery within a wall angle (Blegen 1921: 100–1). Mylonas emphasised the significance of new burial customs as evidence for the arrival of the Indo-Europeans (Mylonas 1930: 6; for discussion of Early Helladic intramural burials, see Forsén 1992: 237–40; Cavanagh & Mee 1998: 15). The study of Middle Helladic burials by Blegen and Wace (1930) focused primarily on types and elements of construction and, although they referred to the burial customs and to cultural continuity from the Middle Helladic period into the Late Helladic period, they did not comment on the spatial relationship of the graves with the living space.

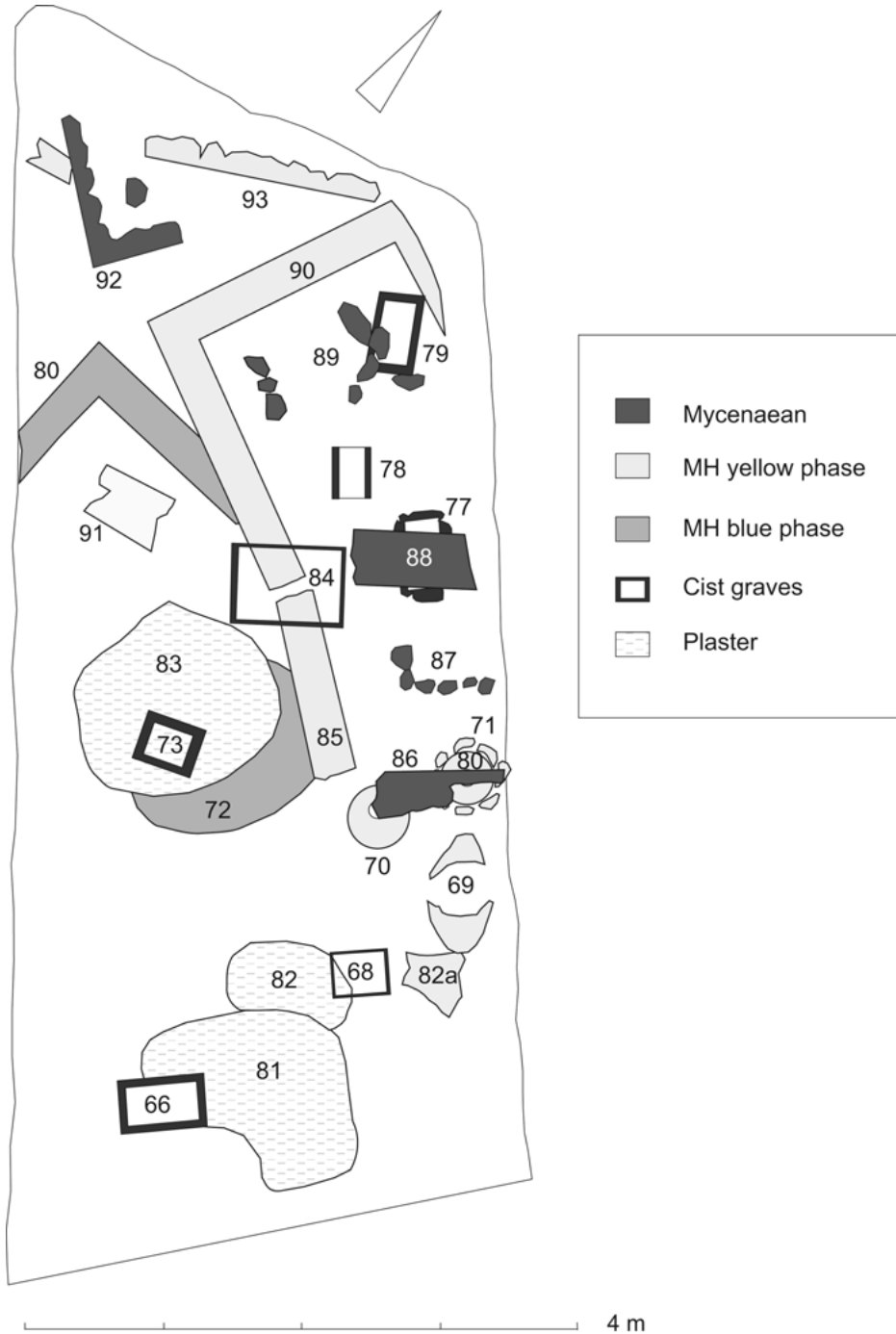


Fig. 1: Orchomenos. Middle Helladic walls and graves in trench P (adapted from Bulle 1907: figs. 15–6).

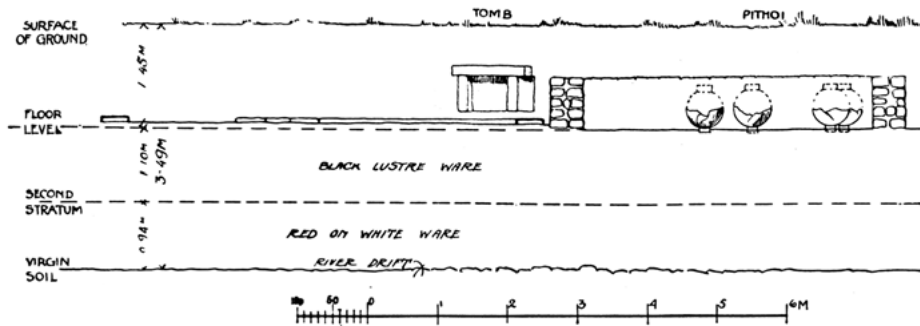


Fig. 2: Kirrha. Middle Helladic burials in trench A (after Dor et al. 1960: fig. VIII).

Eutresis

Goldman followed the same interpretive model in evaluating similar intermingling of buildings and burials in Eutresis (Goldman 1931), where 24 pre-Mycenaean graves were uncovered, two of them probably belonging to the Early Helladic period. Goldman appears to have been convinced that burying the dead within the limits of the settlement was typical for both the Early Helladic and Middle Helladic (Goldman 1931: 221). She notes, however, that apart from two child graves, these graves were not contemporary with the architectural remains in which they were found (Goldman 1931: 224), on the evidence of several stratigraphical observations: a) the walls were often destroyed by the graves, b) the graves were located at floor level or only a few inches below it, c) in some cases the graves were covered by a mound of soft soil up to 0.60 m in height and d) the floors which were disturbed in order to construct the shafts of the Middle Helladic graves were nowhere repaired. In spite of these precise stratigraphical observations, Goldman seems to conclude that burials and walls were contemporary, ultimately proposing that the inhabitants' beliefs and highly emotional states brought on by the deaths of children led them to bury their infants and children within and between the buildings (Goldman 1931: 223).

Lerna

In excavations of the American School at Lerna in the 1950s, where more than 200 intramural graves were discovered, the excavators concluded that the inhabitants buried their dead within the village (Caskey 1958: 144). Caskey considered the introduction of this burial practice to be the most significant change made in the Middle Bronze Age period, comparing it to similar Neolithic practices, and noted its relevance for the study of migrations during the Middle Bronze Age (Caskey &

Blackburn 1997: 14). He conjectured that the inhabitants might have kept their deceased children nearby out of a sense of superstition or because the small size of the tombs made the practice feasible (Caskey 1973: 135). Blackburn's analysis of the Middle Helladic burials at Lerna (Blackburn 1970: 9–12) and their general distribution in the settlement, while providing a clear picture of burials inside the architectural remains, showed that it was difficult to detect the layer in which the Middle Helladic graves were constructed [Fig. 3]. Zerner's later contextual analysis of Middle Helladic graves of Lerna indicates that the earliest child and infant graves are within the village, and as an explanation of this practice she mentioned the possible interest in keeping the burials of children close to family and particularly to their mothers (Zerner 1990: 23).

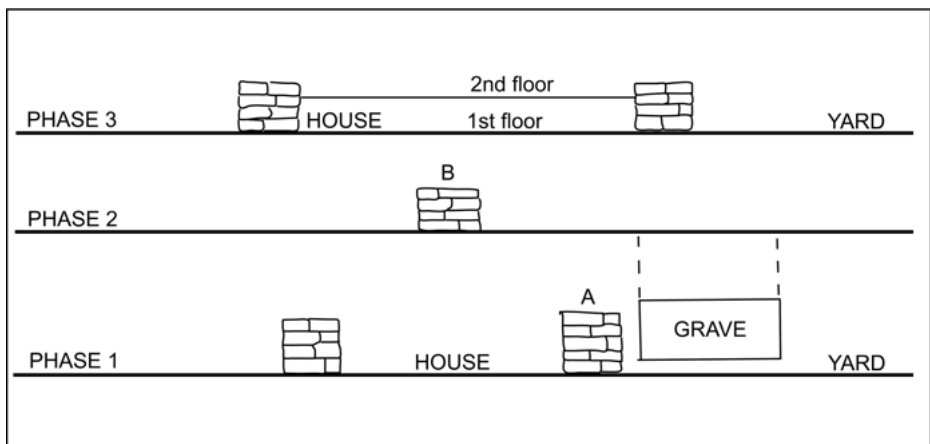


Fig. 3: Lerna. Hypothetical cross section of a grave (after Blackburn 1970: fig. 2).

None of the available stratigraphic drawings from Lerna indicate the depths of the burials. Doubts about the synchronising of the late Middle Helladic graves with the houses at Lerna have been expressed by Dietz, who proposed that, on the evidence of the mortuary data of the Argolid, the settlement of Lerna appears to have been abandoned after the Middle Helladic IIIA period and to have been turned into a cemetery (Dietz 1991: 175). In 1997, the revised version of the Lerna site guide stated that the dead of Lerna V were buried inside the settlement, but that many of the graves dating from the middle of phase V and into phase VI were clustered to form a sort of cemetery (Caskey & Blackburn 1997: 24). Milka proposed that Lerna had three successive periods of burials contemporary with domestic use of the settlement space, and that intramural burial was typical of only the Middle Helladic I period, the earliest of the three (Milka 2010: 352). Recent reinterpretation of the Lerna burial evidence indicates that the burnt House 100 served as a cemetery (Voutsaki et al. 2013: 139). Outside Lerna, in the wider area of Myloi, the tombs and cemeteries of the Middle Helladic III to Late Helladic I phase show no relation to any settlement (Dietz & Divari-

Valakou 1990), which further challenges the image of contemporary use of houses and intramural grave clusters.

Caskey's interpretations of Middle Helladic burial practices remained widespread throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s. Vermeule, in her overview of the Aegean Bronze Age, appears to have been convinced about the contemporaneity of Middle Helladic buildings and graves within various sites, remarking that intramural burial had long been known in the East (Vermeule 1964: 79). She expressed doubts, however, about some of the anthropological interpretations, noting that at some sites where large numbers of infant graves were found close to houses, many adult graves had also been uncovered. In a slightly later survey on burial customs Vranopoulos (1967: 291) writes that the dead of the Middle Helladic period were undoubtedly buried in the floors of houses and in jars between buildings. Vranopoulos was in agreement with Mylonas that strong changes in customs and lifestyle from the Early Helladic to the Middle Helladic suggested tribal invasion. Howell in his study of the origins of Middle Helladic culture did not focus on interpretations of the burial practices, but he states that some burials had been found beneath floors and others against walls (Howell 1973: 75). The latter observation usefully focuses attention on the elevation of the burials, a matter to which we shall return below.

Kirrha

The settlement of Kirrha yielded 40 tombs within the inhabited area. The excavators followed interpretations that had previously been made at Orchomenos, Dimini, Asine, Eleusis, Malthi, Lerna and Argos (Dor et al. 1960: 49). The findings at Kirrha were clear: Early Helladic pithos burials are followed by Middle Helladic pits and cist graves [Fig. 4]. No drawings from the old excavation show the exact level of the graves but the photos show a large number of burials at a depth that is the same or slightly lower than the foundations of the walls (Dor et al. 1960: pl. XIX). The 17 Middle Helladic tombs in Area D were constructed in open spaces between the houses and belong to the last phase of the settlement, while in Area A the large and rich cist graves seem to belong to the settlement's elite (Philippa-Touchais 2013 (replaced in the bibliography)). Maran has argued that the settlement of Kirrha was abandoned in Middle Helladic III and was turned into a cemetery (Maran 1995: 70).

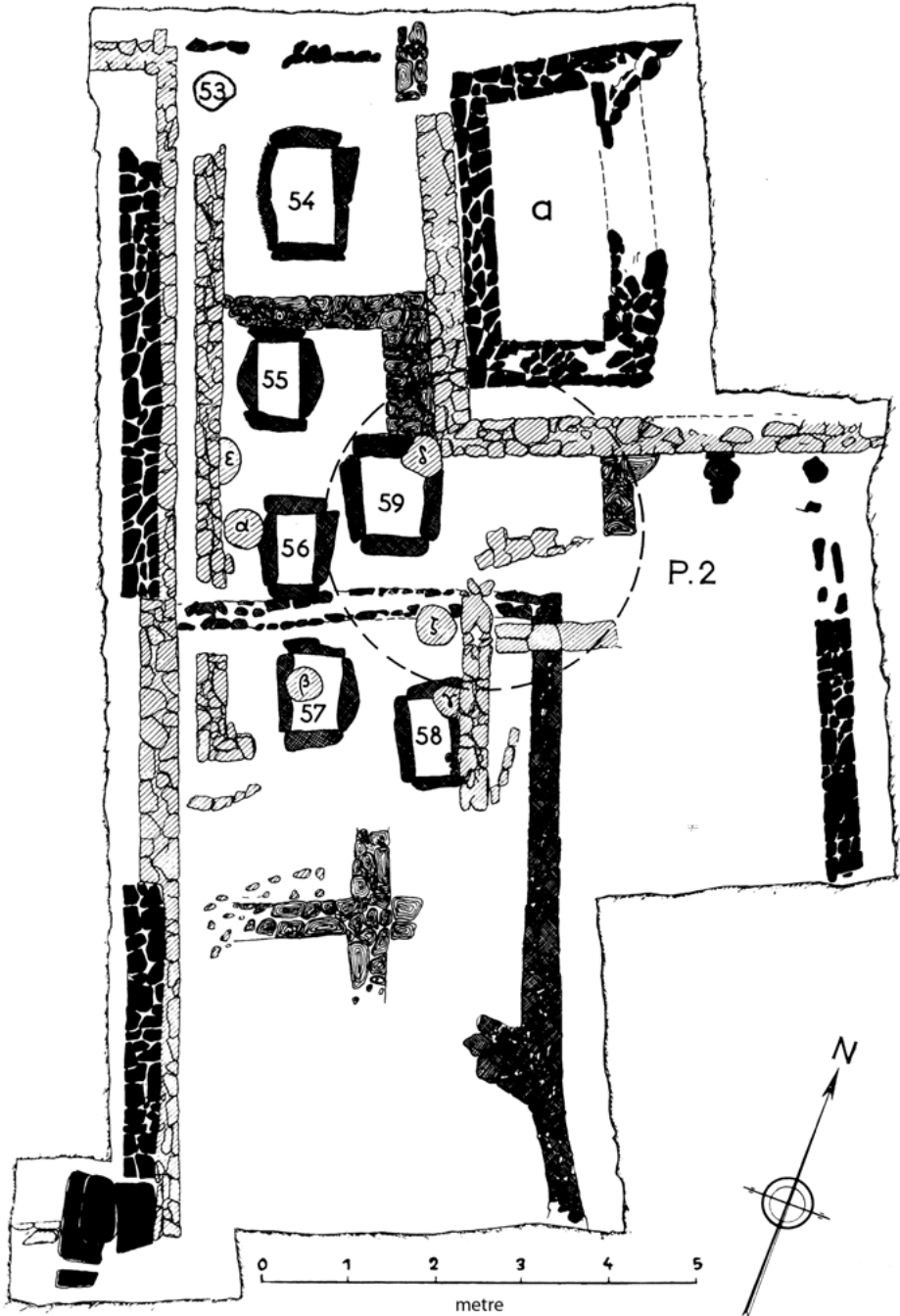


Fig. 4: Lianokladi. Plan and section of a house (after Wace & Thompson 1912: fig. 137).

Attica

Differentiation by age is not in evidence in the West Cemetery at Eleusis where adults and children were buried in 43 Middle Helladic graves of various types (Mylonas 1975: 318). Excavation of the settlement at Eleusis in the 19th c. had yielded a large number of graves almost all of which contained child burials. All four adult graves were constructed on an open plateau, and in only one instance in a floor, inside an abandoned house (Cosmopoulos 2014). In the Athenian Agora among the rich Middle Helladic settlement finds, no burials were uncovered. Expecting a coexistence of burials and houses, Immerwahr interpreted the complete absence of burials as a result of later disturbances (Immerwahr 1971: 52), but the absence more likely indicates that the burial ground is located in another area. The tumuli at Aphidna and Marathon also attest a separation of the domestic and burial environment (Forsén 2010; Papadimitriou 2010: 248).

Asine

The discovery of the East Cemetery of Asine in the 1970s provided the first clear evidence of intramural burials and cemeteries coexisting at a single site (Dietz 1980). Asine yielded a third model of Middle Helladic burial practice at Barbouna hill which, after its abandonment in the Middle Helladic IIIA period was occupied by graves (Nordquist 1987: 91). Overall at Asine 147 graves were found, most of them in the lower town. The grave types were pits dug into earth or rock, built graves, cists and jars. Jar burials recovered at Asine are dated to the beginning of Middle Helladic I-II (Voutsaki et al. 2009: 8–9) and might be seen to continue the practice of Early Helladic intramural child burial attested at the site (Pullen 1990). Stratigraphic sections which could clarify the contemporaneity of buildings and graves at Asine are not published (Dietz 1991: 246, 275). The intramural burials of Asine are mainly child burials, which led early excavators at the site to conjecture that the burial site might have been chosen in anticipation of reincarnation (Frazer 1933: 18). These early excavators also discussed hygienic problems that would have resulted from keeping burials in the domestic area, proposing that antiseptic media and embalming substances such as honey might have been used (Frödin & Persson 1938: 351). The complexity of the burial customs in Asine is seen in Nordquist's reconstruction of the character of Middle Helladic society. She notes that complexity in Middle Helladic burial customs, rather than uniformity, is a feature of small communities, while the choice of an external cemetery may signify the existence of an elite (Nordquist 1987: 98–101; 1990: 38–9).

The most recent findings at Asine in combination with the Pefkakia sequence and the early building activities at Tiryns attest diversity of Middle Helladic burial practices (Kilian 1987). Maran has questioned the existence of intramural burials for at

least the last phase of the Middle Helladic period and has attributed the dispersal of burials in the living space to a more general abandonment of settlements in the latest phase of the Middle Bronze Age (Maran 1995). Nevertheless, in their overview of Bronze Age grave customs, Cavanagh and Mee (1998: 23–36) point to the abandonment of organised cemeteries and the prevalence of intramural burials as evidence of drastic change from the Early Helladic to the Middle Helladic. In regards to age differentiation they state that intramural burials are confined to child burials, and that adults are buried in the immediate vicinity of the settlement, both in small groups and in extensive burial grounds, which at some sites include tumuli. The phenomenon of cemeteries constructed on top of abandoned settlements is highlighted more recently by Milka (2010), who shows that only a few Middle Helladic burials are really intramural. She proposes that the model of successive episodes of building activities, destructions, abandonment and construction of burials that she detected at Lerna might also apply at Aspis (see below).

Thebes

In rescue excavations at Thebes, a total of 150 Middle Helladic graves have been reported at various parts of the Kadmeia (Aravantinos & Psaraki 2010). The burials are located in three extensive cemeteries, in several smaller clusters and in some isolated graves. At the western edge of the East Cemetery isolated child burials were found; in the North Cemetery many Middle Helladic graves were situated near some earlier graves and one later grave; and in the West Cemetery burials were found in both the Early Helladic and Middle Helladic habitation layers. All of the pithos burials were recovered outside of the cemeteries. Also outside of the cemeteries, a number of jar burials were recovered, in which adult burials are more numerous than those of children. There is great variety in the correlation of graves and buildings. In the north group no Middle Helladic architectural remains were found, in Area A graves were very close to buildings and in Area D graves were constructed after the buildings were no longer in use. Although initial excavation reports had identified the find spots of individual graves and grave groups as being under house floors and inside walls the stratigraphic evidence indicates that the contemporaneity of the houses and graves should not be taken for granted (Aravantinos & Psaraki 2010: 389). According to the authors, there are as yet no stratigraphic drawings showing the relation between graves and domestic structures, and final assessment of the evidence awaits full publication.

Dakouri-Hild has shown that in the excavated units of the Kadmeia, at least in the early and middle stages of the Middle Helladic when the burial ground cannot be distinguished from the areas of habitation, there is no border between intramural and extramural graves (Dakouri-Hild 2001: 115). Intramural burials of infants, children and adults appeared in clusters related to certain buildings, while concentrations of

child burials were observed in three loci of the settlement. Cists were the most prevalent type of grave, and were used for all ages, while children were buried in pithoi and pits. The funeral clusters appeared at the end of Middle Helladic as organised cemeteries.

Argos

The rich Middle Helladic remains throughout modern Argos and from the hill of Aspis testify to an extensive and densely inhabited settlement throughout the Middle Bronze Age (Touchais 1998: 71). The most systematically examined mortuary data come from rescue excavations of a burial complex at the foot of Aspis containing approximately 100 graves and designated by its excavator as a tumulus cemetery (Protonotariou-Deilaki 1980). No monumental features are preserved in these graves, except in the so-called tumulus Γ, where the concentration of cist burials and pithos burials might form a burial tumulus with graves placed in a circle (Sarri & Voutsaki 2011: 437, fig. 3). The rest of the graves were found at the same depth, sometimes in very dense clusters. None of them was related to domestic buildings, and they might be part of a very extensive, well-organised cemetery which is now vague in form due to later disturbances. Of a total of approximately 100 burials, only one was located under walls and even that burial is not to be interpreted as intramural, since the grave and the building belong to very distinct stratigraphical phases (Protonotariou-Deilaki 1980: fig. B2.3).

On the Aspis hill which preserves rich building remains from all Middle Helladic phases some 16 burials have been found (Voutsaki et al. 2006: 615; the recent 2013 is more relevant Philippa-Touchais 2013), most of them assigned by the excavators to a later phase of the Middle Bronze Age. The basis of their dating is unclear, because only a few of them contained grave goods; although some of them appear to be associated with buildings or other graves, the level at which they are constructed is unknown (Voutsaki et al. 2006: 617). C-¹⁴ dating of four of the skeletons indicated that two of the graves belong to Middle Helladic III and two others to the Middle Helladic I-II period (Voutsaki et al. 2006: 624, fig. 1). The latter group cannot be regarded as intramural since it was constructed deeper in the bedrock than the buildings. The three graves found outside and below the level of apsidal buildings belong to the Middle Helladic IIIA period. Another two graves were found in the extension of a damaged wall, which was perhaps destroyed by their construction. The southeast sector of Aspis preserves some graves with a proximity to walls, but in my opinion they are not chronologically related to the buildings, since they are found either in open spaces or in damaged buildings or were constructed in layers much deeper than those buildings.

In the wider area of the Argolid, the extensive cemetery of Prosymna (Blegen 1937), the Middle Helladic burial circle within the North Cemetery of Corinth (Rutter 2003: 78) and Circle B at Mycenae (Mylonas 1973) provide clear examples of the

Middle Bronze Age separation of funerary and domestic grounds, even though they preserve no intramural contexts.

Pefkakia

At Pefkakia, a few graves of children and adults have been uncovered in Trench EF VIII within the Middle Helladic settlement, but it is uncertain in which layers they were constructed (Maran 1992: 34–5). On the basis of current evidence, there is no pattern of intramural burials of any date at Pefkakia and the excavated graves were constructed after the last Middle Helladic building phase (Maran 1994: 209).

Messenia and Laconia

Research on the burial customs of Messenia conducted by Boyd (2002: 33) has documented burials both in cemeteries and in settlements. The site of Malthi yielded 32 Middle Helladic burials of which 31 were found within the settlement (Valmin 1938: 192). These included a large number of child burials placed in the masonry of walls. Some of the burials at Malthi postdate the buildings in which they are located, while others were found at the same depth as the floor of the associated building and might be contemporary with or postdate the building's use. At Ayios Stephanos, 74 Middle Helladic graves of various types were found, most of them of adults, many of them disarticulated (Taylour & Janko 2008: 142). From the available information it appears that these graves were most likely placed in abandoned structures of the settlement. Boyd (2002: 35) proposed that intra-settlement burials such as those seen at Ayios Stephanos arise from the desire to retain affinity with ancestors.

Keos and Euboea

Ayia Irini on Keos provides the main comparative evidence from the Cyclades for Middle Helladic practices (Overbeck 1989). There are three successive burial areas outside the settlement IV (Overbeck 1989: 205, pl. 3). A total of 25 graves from these areas were jar burials, cist graves, stone-built structures and simple pits surrounded by stone platforms (Overbeck 1989: 184, figs. 18–22). The one intramural burial that has been securely identified in the settlement is furnished with ceremonial facilities, which points to organised funerary celebrations. The burials at Ayia Irini IV are infant and child burials while the cemetery of adults has not yet been discovered. Remains of adults that have been found so far have included only scattered bones recovered in various locations within the settlement (Overbeck 1989: 189). Within the habitation area of Kaloyerovrysi on Euboea a small complex of Middle Helladic graves sur-

rounded by stone paving made of large slabs has been uncovered at the edge of the excavated area, but according to the excavator it cannot be considered part of the settlement's cemetery (Sampson 1993: 155, figs. 23–4).

Challenges to the intramural burial model

The hitherto reviewed data provide no indisputable examples of simultaneous use of intramural graves and houses of Middle Helladic date, and for that reason, I propose that the question of the contemporaneity of Middle Helladic domestic and intramural funerary remains should be reconsidered. A conclusive answer will require accurate description of the contexts, the use of a consistent terminology and stratigraphic information documenting the process of grave construction, the elevations of graves, foundations and floors, possible disturbances and the character of the grave fills. Some recent discoveries and studies (Nordquist 1987; Maran 1995; Hielte-Stavropoulou 2004; Milka 2010) have already revealed problems with the traditional model of intramural burials. Some of the difficulties with the intramural model can be characterised as follows:

Stratigraphical considerations

- Burials within the masonry of stone foundations (Malthi).
- Graves inside houses and incorporating parts of the house masonry as one or two of their sides (Kirrha, Malthi), which would be visible to the house residents.
- Pithos burials and burials covered by jar fragments at the same depth as the house floors (Orchomenos), which would sometimes project into the living space.
- Graves constructed at a much greater height than the house floors (Orchomenos, Lianokladi).
- Graves covered by piles of soil, stones, gravel or successive pavings (Orchomenos, Eutresis, Ayia Irini, Kaloyerovrysi), sometimes with markers that projected as much as 0.50 m above the graves (Lerna).
- Graves constructed much deeper than the architectural remains (Orchomenos, Lerna, Aspis, and the so-called tumulus B in Argos).

Spatial considerations

- Lack of consistency of grave location in respect to the settlement pattern (Sarri 2010: 52).
- Lack of orientation of graves in relation to the house plan, particularly in respect to funerary ceremonies and the use of the living space.

- The scarcity of the intramural burial pattern with respect to the many extensive and well-preserved house contexts of several architectural phases.
- An excessive number of graves inside houses, for example as many as nine in one room at Peristeria.
- The existence of multiple and complex spatial models, at least three for the same social group, specifically graves in house interiors, built in architectural structures and in open areas of the settlement (Asine, Argos, Eleusis).
- Concurrent use of intra-settlement burials and external cemeteries (Eleusis, Asine, Argos, Ayia Irini, Thebes) and the attested continuity of burying in Early Helladic cemeteries and tumuli (Asine, Thebes, Lerna, Kastroulia, Corinth).
- Lack of age differentiation between settlement burials and cemeteries (Eleusis, Prosymna, Argos), most notably the presence of child burials in both locations.
- Lack of social status differentiation between internal and external cemeteries (Eleusis, Asine, Argos), attested by the presence of many graves without any offerings next to rich burials.
- The existence of burial grounds in open spaces of the inhabited areas (Asine, Kirrha, Lerna, Barbouna, Thebes), without differentiation by age or status.
- Establishment of new burial grounds within the ruins of settlements and the expansion of cemeteries into the sites (Orchomenos, Barbouna, Pefkakia).

Hygienic considerations

For reasons of hygiene, it would be unexpected for a burial to be placed in a living space in unsealed floors unless chemical agents were used to prepare the body. To address this problem posed by intramural burial, there have been suggestions that the bodies might have been embalmed (see above; Frödin & Persson 1938: 351) and that after burial the houses might have been abandoned and left to the dead (Rose 1925: 128). Difficulties are presented by suggested parallels that are not stratigraphically and contextually comparable, such as examples from the Aegean Neolithic (Perlès 2001; Triantafyllou 2008), and from contexts located far away from the Aegean region (Naumov 2007).

Cultural considerations

The practice of widespread intramural burial has no parallel in Aegean prehistory, neither from earlier nor later periods. Neolithic examples are comparably few, do not form a specific spatial pattern and have been called into doubt (Perlès 2001). Proposed ethnological parallels have been drawn from communities at different cultural stages, with lifestyles that were probably closer to nature, sometimes nomadic (Mellaart 1967: 204), in dissimilar climates or interacting with buildings of a cultic character (Wide-

ngren 1969: 411–2). A direct comparison of the Middle Helladic burial practices with ethnographic data has not been attempted.

If we were to accept the intramural model, the development of the Middle Helladic societies into those of the Mycenaean era would present an apparent reversal: the well-organised Early Helladic cemeteries with family tombs would have been replaced by disordered burials inside living quarters in the Middle Helladic, a period of increasing wealth and developing social stratification which led to the establishment of elites in the last Middle Helladic phase. In the Middle Helladic period the strongly built and large buildings arranged in quarters around communal spaces, the roads, and occasionally fortifications reveal a spatial hierarchy and planning with proto-urban features.

Chronological considerations

No intramural burials with grave goods have been conclusively dated to the middle phase of the Middle Helladic. This gap is difficult to see in such regions as the Argolid, where Matt-Painted pottery continues to dominate from Middle Helladic II to Middle Helladic III with a new shape repertoire. In Boeotia, on the other hand, where some of the most extensive Middle Helladic settlements like Orchomenos, Eutresis and Thebes have yielded rich architectural remains and some hundreds of graves, it is clear that the classical Minyan phase (Middle Helladic II) is missing from the settlement burials. At these Boeotian sites, at least, burials of the main, middle or classical Middle Helladic II phase are likely to be found in external cemeteries.

Conclusions

The model of Middle Helladic intramural graves has been puzzling and disputed in some aspects, and has led to inconsistencies and controversial statements in the scholarly literature. In the light of new observations and discoveries, intramural burials today seem paradoxical and in my opinion they should be treated more critically, if not completely dismissed.

The most crucial flaw in the analysis of Middle Helladic burial data is that information about the locations of the graves is based mainly on ground plans, and the third dimension is usually ignored or neglected. Stratigraphic drawings which would clarify the relationship between buildings and graves are often unpublished. A number of scholars have felt compelled to accept the intramural model despite stratigraphic or logical problems it entails. Once the model became dominant, scholars expressed little concern about the idea of dead children placed inside masonry or in pithoi and pits inside houses.

The invasion of tribes into Greece is a topic often brought into studies of Middle Helladic burial practices. It is likely, however, that assumptions about the introduction of burial practices from outside Greece were developed in support of the ‘arrival of the Indo-Europeans’ which was placed at the beginning of the second millennium BCE (Mylonas 1930: 6). There has also been a reluctance to raise the topic of burial mounds because of a concern that it would lead to a revival of the Kurgan hypothesis (Gimbutas 1956) and the arrival of people from the Pontic steppe (Korres 2011: 586). At Voidokoilia and Lerna, the establishment of Middle Helladic tumuli on top of the Early Helladic settlement may reflect a tradition of covering abandoned settlements with burial mounds, potentially a symbolic practice intended to create collective memory. This Early Bronze Age phenomenon persists in the Middle Helladic, when tumuli are found in the earliest phases of the period at sites which have been identified as secondary centres in the Late Helladic (Cavanagh & Mee 1998: 35).

The prevalence of intramural child burials should be disassociated from the issue of the existence of intramural burials. The demography of the human society and the society of the dead are not exactly parallel, which means that one cannot expect that the same population groups (age, gender and social class) are reflected in burial grounds. The high frequency of intra-settlement child burials can be explained by increased child mortality or by the custom of burying infants and children in special locations, and it could also coincide with the rise of particular social roles for children, who were as a consequence buried in graves set apart from those of adults (Nordquist & Ingvarsson-Sundström 2005: 164). This image is supported by the wealth of grave goods in child graves during the Shaft Grave period (Lebegyev 2009: 28). The strong presence of child burials within a settlement is still a puzzle, but there is an Early Neolithic analogy of uncanonical child burials situated at the boundaries of settlements. In her study of the Neolithic burials, Perlès came to the conclusion that our view of Early Neolithic intra-settlement burials has focused on exceptions to the rule (Perlès 2011) and I tend to believe that the same could hold true for Middle Helladic burials.

New interpretations of Middle Helladic intramural burial

While there are some regional differences in the frequencies and spatial patterns of Middle Helladic burials, the evidence does not support the interpretation that intramural burials were the main burial custom of the Middle Helladic period. The model proposed is that the dead of the Middle Helladic were buried in external cemeteries as in the Early Helladic period and quite possibly at the same locations. Graves located very close to buildings belong to mortuary complexes in open spaces, and burials usually interpreted as intramural are extensions of inhabited space onto burial grounds or vice versa extensions of the cemeteries onto former living quarters.

Middle Helladic communities may have had practical as well as symbolic reasons for selecting old built areas for new burial grounds. Ruined settlements provided

building material that facilitated the construction of burial mounds, burial markers, and cist graves, allowed for better drainage by consolidating the soils and preventing erosion in the case of simple pits opened into soft earth. Moreover, the deceased buried within the settlements may have been associated with the site of their burial during their lifetime (e.g. place of residence or birth). An emotional connection with place and its history, and ancestral worship created a desire to maintain the community's traditions, which were mirrored in the choice of the burial grounds. Collective identity and memory was likely enhanced when the living and the dead 'met' at ancestral places which served as cross-generational links.

Directions for future research

While the use of proper terminology is important for the study of burial practices of the Middle Helladic period, it is also necessary to evaluate the life trajectory of the Middle Helladic settlements and their 'conversation' with associated burial places. The current indistinct picture has led us sometimes to wrong dates and has not helped our understanding of Middle Helladic communities and their activities just before the Late Helladic period. The testimony of a general abandonment of settlements in the last phase of the Middle Bronze Age in particular deserves further attention. Possible causes of the abandonment include the lack of security and the concentration of power by elite groups in efforts to ensure peace and prosperity during the Middle Helladic III-Late Helladic IIA period. After the abandonment of the settlements the old habitation spaces were used as burial grounds and the inhabitants may have fled to the central authority of the Mycenaean citadels. This scenario would provide an explanation of why we can rarely identify intramural burials of the Middle Helladic II period in spite of the large number of Middle Bronze Age intra-settlement burials. The usual explanation is that these graves did not contain any grave goods, but it could also be the case that there were no intramural burials during the Middle Helladic II period and that settlements were used only for the living. In respect to the new model proposed here, graves of the Middle Helladic II period must have been contained in external cemeteries or in open areas of the settlements. If these Middle Helladic cemeteries or their Early Helladic predecessors took the form of tumuli, they may have been situated in different locations on hilltops, on slopes or at the base of hills near the plains (Pelon 1976: 99).

In contrast with the great regional variation of Early Helladic funerary practices, those of the Middle Helladic show a general homogeneity from Messenia to central Greece and up to Thessaly and Macedonia. In all regions there are intramural burials, external cemeteries, and tumuli as well as funerary grounds constructed on top of the ruins of settlements. The prevalence of some types over others is probably related to the stage of research at each site. The reconstruction presented here contributes several new proposals to the understanding of the Middle Helladic period:

- There is a solid cultural continuity from the Early Helladic period, since the use of cemeteries and tumuli continues to the Middle Bronze Age (Thebes, Asine, Corinth, Kastroulia).
- Middle Helladic settlement burials are not associated with a peculiar burial custom requiring a complex interpretation, but with the general abandonment of settlements and the converting of previously inhabited areas into cemeteries during Middle Helladic III-Late Helladic IIA.
- There is a close linkage between the community and the former inhabited space, and the spatial symbolism acquires great significance for the strengthening of social cohesion.

As to the question of why and where the inhabitants of many settlements moved at the end of the Middle Bronze Age, one possible hypothesis is that they moved into premises which met the requirements of the new era in regards to social organisation and security. These new habitation areas were likely to have been the earliest buildings on the Mycenaean citadels. The remains of these citadels, situated under the later Mycenaean ruins and to a great extent destroyed by them, have not been sufficiently explored. By reviewing the scholarship concerning Middle Helladic burial customs, we can see interpretations trying to create a single entrenched image of a society characterised by stagnation and primitivism. Our present views of the burial practices and the history of the Middle Helladic settlements allow an alternative picture of the social fabric which appears less exceptional, more quickly developing than before, gradually introducing new forms of better organised burial spaces. In conclusion, it is difficult to see the domestication of death in Middle Helladic society as something more than the product of scholarly misunderstanding.

Acknowledgements: I owe many thanks to Anastasia Dakouri-Hild and Michael Boyd for including this paper in the present volume. I am grateful to Michael Cosmopoulos, Soren Dietz, Anna Lagia, Ioanna Moutafi and Raphaël Orgeolet for reading earlier versions of the paper. Many discussions on Middle Helladic burial customs with colleagues over several years led me to the conclusions expressed in this paper. I owe many thanks to Oliver Dickinson, Josef Maran, Sofia Voutsaki and Anna Philippa-Touchais for their time and for sharing their views with me.

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