

The Cemetery at Lagonissi in Attica (8th - 4th Centuries BC) - Typology of Tombs, Burial Rites* -

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Lagonissi is situated in southeast Attica (fig. 1) not far from Anavyssos (the ancient demos of *Anaphlystos*) and in the neighbourhood of the industrial area of Laurion (fig. 1/ B), where the wealth of Athens, the silver from the local mines, was produced during archaic and classical times. The plain of Olympos (fig. 1/ C) was one of the few fertile areas in Attica with land producing olives and olive oil, grapes and wine. In some more wet areas there were also other crops and as was the case until recently there were also some areas producing grains. From the very early geometrical period, when the city-state of Athens was ruled by an aristocracy, the land belonged to a few aristocratic families; this situation continued in the following years, even during the (classical period, when Athens was ruled by a democracy. During the 5th century BC, when the silver mines of Laurion were being heavily exploited, the region supplied with agricultural goods the great industrial colony. This region belonged to the land of the ancient demos of Thorai¹, a small agricultural settlement situated between the *demoi* of Lamptrai, Prospalta, Aigilia and Anaphlystos. Since the beginning of the 20th century an ancient cemetery has been known hut, till the eighties, no systematic digging has been undertaken. The only people "working" there were smugglers of antiquities². The most important find of this cemetery is *Kroisos*³, the *Kouros of Anavyssos*,

which dates from the last third of the 6th century BC. From 1996 the Second Ephorate of Antiquities (of the Greek Archaeological Service) began an extensive rescue excavation during which more than 260 tombs, dated from the middle 8th century BC to the middle of the 4th century BC, have been uncovered.

As can be seen from the number of tombs of each period in the cemetery, the region was most populated during the 5th century BC and was almost empty from the first half of the 4th century BC until Roman times. Typologically, the tombs of this cemetery could be distinguished into inhumations and cremations. Of the 260 excavated tombs there were only ten inhumations dating throughout the whole period of time mentioned above; the remaining ones were cremations or vessels used as ash urns⁴.

A. The types of inhumation tombs are the following:

1. simple pit (pl. 1/ 2, 3); found in all periods from late geometric to middle classical.

2. shaft grave covered with tiles (pl. 1/4); most common during classical times.

3. stone sarcophagus (pl. 1/5); after the middle of 5th century BC.

the same area, had been smuggled in illicit diggings and transported, in 1936, to the Louvre Museum in Paris from where the authorities of the National Museum of Athens collected it (Semni Karouzou 1984, 28). This *kouros* was standing over the tomb of a young man, a member of an aristocratic family; as the epigram on the base tells us he fell in war fighting in the first line.

⁴ The presence of well preserved human bones in this case undermines previous hypotheses that the lack or scarcity of bones is simply related to post-environmental factors.

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¹ Traill 1975, map 1.

² Karouzou 1984, 28-29.

³ National Archaeological Museum of Athens, inv. no 3851. This statue, as well as many other grave goods from

At a few inhumations some rites have been observed which may be survivals from older periods:

Some of the inhumations have a stone put over the chest of the dead (pl. 1/ 3). The grave goods given to the dead in the Late Geometric period were deposited either next to the head, or near the head; in one case, a small pit with smaller vessels has been found under the head. All the inhumations of the Late Geometric period were in long rectangular shaft graves (about 2 m).

The inhumations from the mid sixth to the 4th century BC were done in smaller, shallow shaft graves with the dead deposited lying on the back, in one case in the "defensive" position with raised hands (pl. 1/ 2) – in this case the feet, which were tied together, were cut off 5 cm from the sole of the foot. Anthropological research on three of the skeletons has shown that two of them had suffered from thalassemia and the third had two cranial drillings made before death. Only two inhumation tombs of this period had grave goods⁵.

B. The great number of tombs found till now is cremations. We did not find any place of common cremation (an *ustrinum*), but some places with concentrated individual pyres (cremations) (pl. 2/6) as well as single individual ones. We did not find any remains of the burnt body left in situ, and as a whole, in the place of cremation.

The material finds could be classified in three categories:

1. The "primary" cremations, done either in a burning area in a private pyre or near the place, where the burnt remains were buried. The burning places were rectangular or oval pits cut in the bedrock (pl. 2/6). Most of them were shallow. In the rectangular pits an oblong channel was dug along the longitudinal axis (pl. 2/6, 7; 3/10). Some of them also had four shallow holes at the corners perhaps for ventilation to enhance the fire or, most probably, for the supports of the funeral bed (pl. 2/8). The pits were next to each other, sometimes cutting the older pits (pl. 2/6). We do not know where the remains of the dead burnt in each of these cremations have been buried. In

some of the cremation pits a few of the grave goods given to the dead were left (pl. 3/9); we did not find any remains of the burnt dead.

2. Combination of cremation and the burial of the remains in a pot deposited near or in the same pit as used for the cremation.

The ash urn, in this group of cremations, is deposited either over the layer left after the fire was beaten out (something which, in this cemetery, has been observed in the early and mid Archaic tombs), or is put in the fire pit, which was carefully cleaned after the fire (pl. 5/17). The shaft tombs, where fires and burials were performed together, were oblong with straight or semicircular edges, or oval-shaped. A third combination of cremation with burial is when the urn is deposited deeper near the pyre or in the same pit (pl. 3/10 and 4/13 a).

3. Ash urns for which we do not know where the cremation was performed; they are very frequent during the whole period of use of this cemetery. In a few cases the ashes were found in small pits, deposited there without any urn or grave goods. Most often the ashes and the remaining bones were found in ceramic, metallic or stone vessels which were deposited either in deep pits covering the whole vessel, or in shallow pits leaving a part of the vessel above ground. The most probable is that, in this later case, there was a low small tumulus over them but till now we have not found any traces of such structures. The most common cinerary urns from the Late Geometric to the Middle Archaic period were bigger or smaller *pithoi* covered either with a *lekane* (pl. 3/11) or with the flat bottom of a large plate (pl. 3/12) or with a large stone (pl. 4/13 a, b) or with a smaller vessel closing the mouth of the *pithos* (pl. 4/14). All the *pithoi* used as urns had a small oval drilling (hole) (especially intended for the burial?) near the neck zone (pl. 3/ 11).

From the end of the 6th century BC amphorae (pl. 5/16), beehives (pl. 5/17), and more often *larnakes*, (ceramic coffins, pl. 6/ 18 a, b) are used also as funerary ash urns. The *larnakes*, which are usually considered coffins for the inhumation of children⁶, were found in this cemetery

⁵ Discussed in the paper of D. Grigoropoulos and A. Lyrintis in this volume.

⁶ Kurtz, Boardman 1971; Charitonides 1958, 1 - 152.

containing ash, adult burnt bones and skulls (pl. 6/18 b) and many grave goods which hardly could be connected with offerings to a dead child⁷. That the *larnakes* were not used as coffins for inhumation is confirmed also by the fact that the space taken up by the grave goods leaves no room for a body even if it is the body of a child. In two cases the use of broken parts of *pithoi* and ceramic coffins (*larnakes*) to cover the ashes of the dead was also observed (pl. 5/15).

In one case a stone vessel with a lid, (*kalpis*) was found, inside which was the ash urn, a black glazed vessel wrapped in a piece of cloth (pl. 7/19). Also two bronze vessels used as ash urns were found, one of which is discussed in this volume in the paper of D. Grigoropoulos and A. Lyrintzis. The probability that a wooden chest was used as an ash urn is also discussed in the same paper.

When the cremation is not totally successful, and the skull has not been burnt, it is removed carefully and is deposited together with the grave goods. Very often the bones collected from the cremation are cleaned.

The grave goods offered to the dead are always in odd numbers – only in two cases they were even; may be because one of the original items was perishable. They can seldom be found in the cremation pit, having the signs of fire on them (pl. 3/9), but more often they are either inside the funerary urn, usually arranged in a circle (pl. 7/20), when the urn is a vessel, or in groups in the *larnakes*, or outside near the upper part of the vessel (pl. 3/11, 5/16, 6/18 a). The grave goods are mostly clay vessels, statuettes and only very few bronze objects. From the Late Geometric to the Middle Archaic period the clay objects are usually drinking vessels or jars for cosmetics such as amphorae, *hydriai*, *oinochoai*, *skyphoi*, cups and glasses, perfume pots and cosmetic boxes. From the middle of the 6th century BC the most used object is the black glazed and black figure *lekythos*,

together with other drinking vessels and statuettes. The statuettes are either gods, humans, or animals or birds⁸.

It is not very easy to correct information from the excavation on the rites performed before the cremation and burial. However we found one vessel illustrating how a ceremonial procession could have taken place: mourning women forming a procession are illustrated on a *pyxis* (pl. 7/21).

Where the post burial ceremonies are concerned we had the opportunity to find the remains of a funerary banquet (*nekrodeipnos*), which had taken place over the tomb. We found a mass of sherds of clay vessels (pl. 8/ 22 a) which after conservation proved to be eating and drinking vessels (pl. 8/ 22 b, c).

As we pointed out at the beginning of this paper the cemetery was used only until the early 4th century BC. This is primarily due to the decrease of work in the neighbouring area of the silver mines of Laurion, but also to the opening of the international markets for agricultural products; grain was imported from the Black Sea region, olive oil was much cheaper coming from Asia Minor or from the Peloponnesus. The cost of cultivating the not so fertile Attic soil was prohibitive in these conditions and, especially after the conquest of Alexander the Great and the formation of the Hellenistic kingdoms until the first centuries of roman rule, the population of Attica was concentrated in the *asty* (the city) and in Piraeus and was occupied more with manufacturing than with agriculture.

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⁷ Mylonas 1975. Grave goods found in some of the *larnakes*, covered either with a ceramic lid either with slab stones are presented in the paper of D. Grigoropoulos and A. Lyrintzis in this volume.

⁸ See the paper of D. Grigoropoulos and A. Lyrintzis in this volume.

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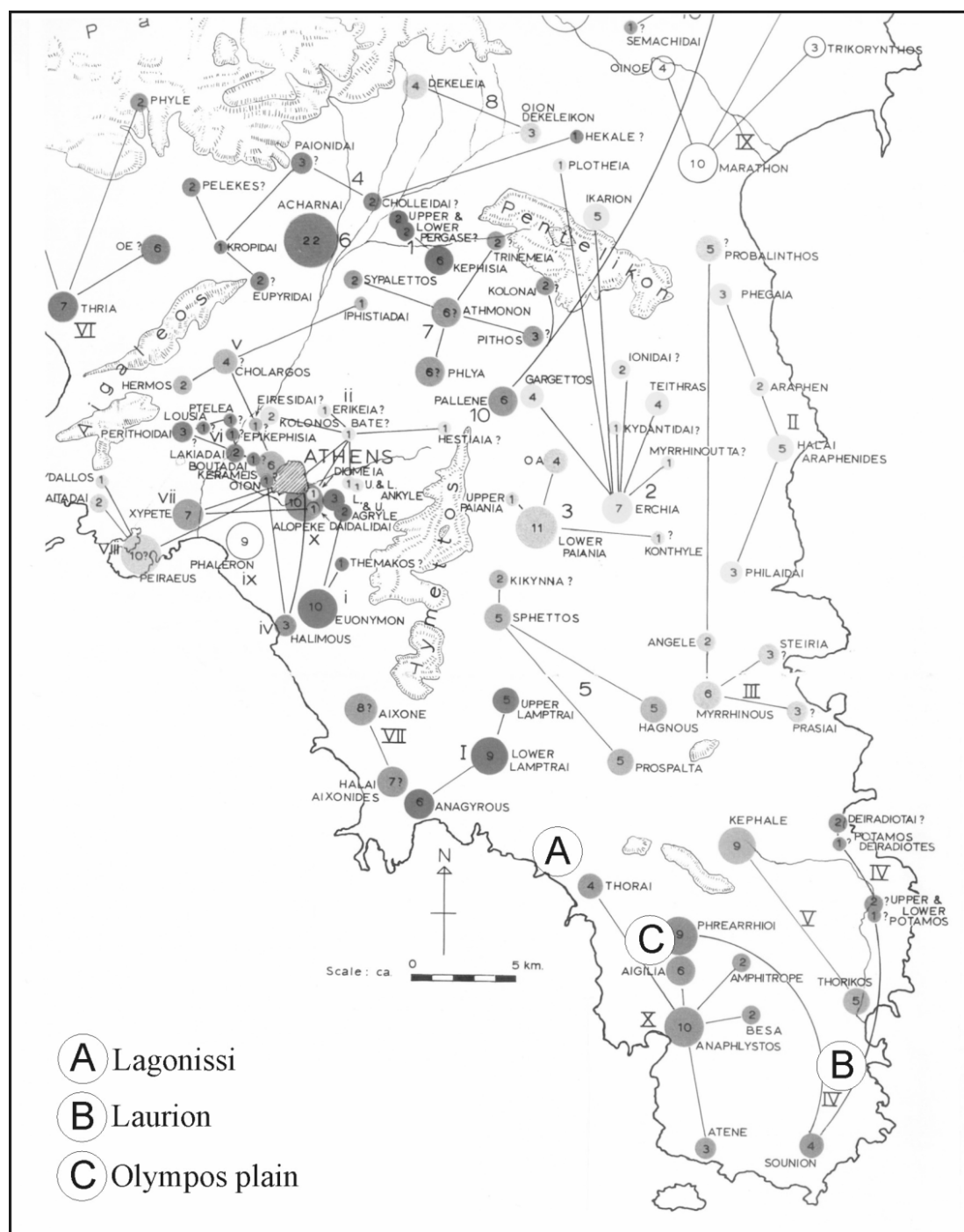


Fig. 1. Map of south-east Attica from J.S. Traill, *The political Organization of Attica*, Hesperia, Suppl. 14, Princeton, 1975.



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Pl. 1. Lagonissi, Attica: The cemetery. Inhumation in simple long pit grave. 2 - The hands of the dead are "raised" and the feet are cut with a sharp tool; 3 - A great stone put over the breastplate of the dead; 4 - Inhumation in simple pit grave covered with ceramic tiles; 5 - Inhumation in stone sarcophagus.



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8



Pl. 2. Lagonissi, Attica: The cemetery. 6 - Concentrated individual cremations in shallow pits cut in the rock; 7 - Cremation pit (there is an oblong channel dug along the longitudinal axis); 8 - Details of fig. 6: in one of the cremation pits four shallow had been cut at the corners.



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Pl. 3. Lagonissi, Attica: The cemetery. 9 - Burnt grave goods (ceramic *lekythoi* and bronze mirror) found in the cremation pit; 10 - A *pithos*, used as funerary urn, is deposited in a pit dug at one end of the cremation room; 11 - *Apithos*, used a funerary urn, "toped" with a *lekane*. The smaller opening which can be seen on the shoulder is made with a drilling tool. Near the neck of the vessel are deposited the grave goods; 12 - *Apithos*, used as a funerary ash urn, "toped" with the bottom of a large plate.



13 a

13 b



14

Pl. 4. Lagonissi, Attica: 13 a, b - Two pithoi, used as funerary urns, "toped" with large stones; 14 - The interior of the neck of phithos used as funerary urn, "plugged" with another vessel (an oinochoe) of which only the foot can be seen.



15

16



17

Pl. 5. Lagonissi, Attica: 15 - An amphora (chian, late 6th c.BC) used as a funerary ash urn. The grave good (a small black glazed bowl) is deposited on the neck; 16 - A beehive used as a funerary ash urn, deposited in the cleaned cremation room; 17 - Broken parts of *pithoi* and *larnakes* put in a tomb over the ash of the dead. There are at least four incomplete *pithoi* and two *larnakes*.



18 a

18 b



Pl. 6. Lagonissi, Attica: 18 a, b - Larnax used as funerary ash urn: a) covered with identical larnax and some grave goods deposited outside; b) the interior of the larnax. Together with the grave goods, which are filling almost the whole space, there are also some unburned remains of the dead, bones and skull.



19



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Pl. 7. Lagonissi, Attica: 19 - Marble *calpe* in which the ash urn, a black glazed vessel, was wrapped in a piece of cloth. Remains of the cloth can be observed on the lid of the ceramic vessel; the lid is put upside down; 20 - Grave goods deposited in a circle in the funerary ash urn; 21 - Corinthian *pyxis* found in a tomb.

22 a



22 b



22 c

Pl. 8. Lagonissi, Attica: 22 - a) Remains of a funerary banquet *in situ*; b, c) Some of the vessels of the funerary banquet after conservation.