Prehistoric Crete

Regional and Diachronic Studies on Mortuary Systems



edited by

Joanne M.A. Murphy

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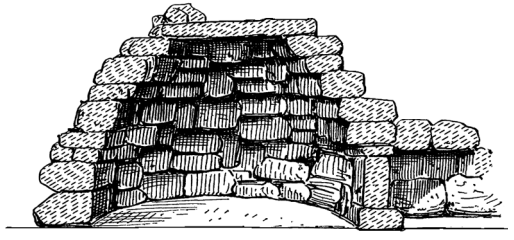

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Philip P. Betancourt, Gerald Cadogan, Melissa Eaby, Borja Legarra Herrero, and Katia Perna



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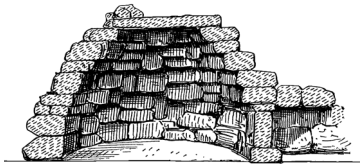

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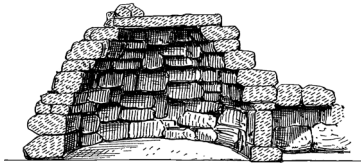

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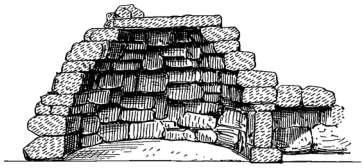

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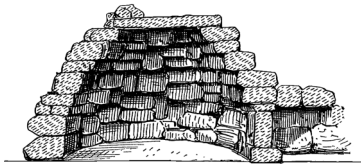
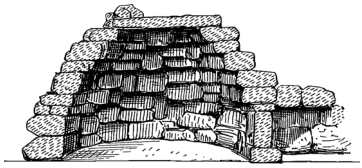


Abbreviations

Bibliographic abbreviations follow the conventions suggested in the *American Journal of Archaeology* 111.1 (2007), pp. 14–34.

ca.	approximately	inv. no.	inventory number
cm	centimeter	km	kilometer
EBA	Early Bronze Age	LG	Late Geometric
EIA	Early Iron Age	LH	Late Helladic
EM	Early Minoan	LM	Late Minoan
EO	Early Orientalizing	pers. comm.	personal communication
FN	Final Neolithic		
ha	hectare	pers. obs.	personal observation
MBA	Middle Bronze Age	PG	Protogeometric
m	meter	PGB	Protogeometric B
MM	Middle Minoan	SM	Subminoan
IA	Iron Age		



1 Introduction

JOANNE M.A. MURPHY

Since the inception of Minoan archaeology, studies pertaining to tombs and tomb deposits have played seminal roles in our understanding of Minoan culture and the reconstruction of Bronze Age society (e.g., Hall 1912; Seager 1912, 1916; Xanthoudides 1918, 1924; Marinatos 1930–1931; Levi 1961–1962). For several geographical areas and chronological periods of Cretan history, tombs are the most abundant source of data: for example, South-Central Crete in the Prepalatial period and eastern Crete at the end of the Bronze Age into the Early Iron Age. In addition to studies that explored one tomb type and traced it chronologically and to other works that examined tombs in one region in detail during a given period (Branigan 1970a; Soles 1973, 1992; Coldstream and Catling, eds., 1996; Relaki 2003), several scholars have produced synthetic works that examine Bronze Age Cretan tombs either from all of Crete or from one period or area (Pini 1968; Branigan 1993; Löwe 1996; Vavouranakis 2002). While many articles that focused on the different types of graves in different periods and areas have been published in various journals and edited volumes (Andreadaki-Vlasaki 1985; Alberti 1999, 2001, 2004; Agelarakis, Kanta, and Moody 2001; Perna 2001; Goodison 2004; Hatzaki 2005), there have been very few multi-authored volumes dedicated to the regional and diachronic diversity of mortuary practices

(for a rare example, see Branigan 1998). This lacuna in scholarship concerning mortuary practices, combined with fragmentation of the field induced by specialization, has resulted in a lack of communication between scholars working on death in different time periods and regions. Such divided scholarship further prevents beneficial discourse among colleagues confronting similar problems in different data sets and in historiographical issues in the field. The papers in this volume expand the current discussion by presenting scholarship that examines Cretan mortuary systems from diverse spatial, temporal, and theoretical perspectives.

The issues addressed in the papers in this book are broad and varied. The theme for this edited volume is expansive in order to present a diverse sample of contemporary archaeological scholarship on Crete. The aim is not to present all tombs in all periods on Crete comprehensively, although much of the bibliography can be gleaned from the references. Neither the periods nor the regions of prehistoric Crete are represented evenly in this publication; there are three articles on the Early–Middle Bronze Ages (EBA–MBA), two that focus on Late Minoan (LM) Crete, and one that discusses mortuary practices from the Iron Age (IA). Three of the papers take a regional comparative approach; two others focus on tombs in East Crete, and one examines two cemeteries in South-Central Crete. This range of articles in the volume produces an overview and introduction to the various methodological and theoretical approaches currently used to interpret and re-create Minoan burials, and it contextualizes Minoan studies within broader archaeological research.

The History and Theoretical Development of Mortuary Studies

In the early years of Minoan archaeology, the publication of material relating to mortuary activity was most commonly structured into comprehensive catalogs of artifacts and tomb architecture (Paribeni 1904; Savignoni 1904; Evans 1906, 1914; Seager 1912, 1916; Forsdyke 1927). The goal of these publications, implied or stated, was to make the results of their explorations widely available to an international audience (Evans 1924, v). This tradition of publishing monographs or large articles containing the results of an excavation continues in recent years

(Demargne 1945; van Effenterre 1948; Hood, Huxley, and Sandars 1958–1959; Vasilakis 1989–1990; Sakellaraki and Sakellarakis 1991; Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellaraki 1991, 1997; Hallager and McGeorge 1992; Betancourt, Davaras, and Hope-Simpson, eds., 2002, 2003; Alexiou and Warren 2004; Davaras and Betancourt 2004). These publications provide detailed knowledge of the artifacts, or, especially in the earlier volumes, of the selection of artifacts that the excavator chose to keep and publish; their greatest asset to the field is in their description of the finds and the dissemination of excavation results. Interpretations of these data sets in the early publications were limited, and they often consisted of uncritical correlations between the type of grave or of artifacts in the grave with the social personae of the deceased. A tomb with rich artifacts was interpreted as the remains of a high echelon in the society burying elites or leaders, and a tomb with poorer artifacts was thought to be from the lower echelons.

From the 1960s, artifacts from the tombs were often included in separate publications focused on those types of objects rather than on a holistic view of the social context of the objects or of their place of interment (Branigan 1965, 1968a, 1968b, 1970b, 1971; Warren 1965, 1969; Pelon 1976; Wiencke 1981; Yule 1981; Betancourt 1985). These early publications established a foundation of detailed information about the artifacts in the tombs and about the architecture or construction of the tombs upon which the greater theoretical sophistication of later works could be built. Recent research on mortuary practices stresses the simplicity of earlier correlations between rich burials and the upper echelons of society; instead, the social processes behind the burials are examined and explicated, and the mechanisms that led to the creation and maintenance of an elite are questioned. This scholarship also draws attention to the diversity within elite structures and the sophistication in trade, religion, ideology, and landscape (Branigan 1984, 1987, 1991; Maggidis 1994; Wilson and Day 1994; Karytinos 1998; Murphy 1998; Sbonias 1999; Panagiotopoulos 2002; Bardsley 2004; Papadatos 2005).

In the past few decades the archaeology of death on Crete, like most other areas of archaeological inquiry, has been changing under the influence of the paradigmatic and philosophical shifts in the academy. Up until the 1960s, archeological reconstructions of the past assumed

that societies were populated by elites and plebs in a strictly evolutionary model with little variation in modes of hierarchy. This world view had largely been derived from Victorian ideals and the remnants of the work of Spencer (1860, 1876–1896), Tylor (1903), and Morgan (1877). Since the 1960s, archaeologists have become acutely aware of the disparity between their knowledge of the past as it was lived and the veracity of the past as they had been re-creating it. Clarke's (1973) *Loss of Innocence* summarized the increased variety of new technologies and theories available to archaeologists since World War II, which had altered the way archaeologists classified, questioned, and interpreted past patterns and behaviors; contemporary with Clarke's revolutionary work in Europe, scholars in the United States were also emphasizing the complexity and inadequacy of the archaeological reasoning behind reconstructions of the past (Willey and Philips 1958; Binford 1962, 1971, 1972; Watson, LeBlanc, and Redmond 1971).

In the past half-century, the results of this close scrutiny of archaeology during the 1960s and early 1970s have combined with a growing interest in the archaeology, sociology, and anthropology of death to produce a large body of scholarship on different approaches to death and diverse theories on methodologies for the analysis and interpretation of mortuary activities. Many of the developments in mortuary theory derive from—and coincide with—major shifts in the academic paradigm from modernism to post-modernism. According to the seminal work of Huntington and Metcalf (1979), the scholarship of the 1960s pushed death into the forefront of academic focus. Included in scholarly literature from the 1960s was the English translation of Hertz's 1907 paper on collective representations of death. Hertz, a follower of Durkheim, had stressed the complexity of death, giving examples of societies that do not see death as instantaneous, but as part of a process of dying. Turner (1967, 1969; see also Goody 1962; Miles 1965; Bloch 1971) expanded Hertz's acknowledgement of the social depth and complexity of death and incorporated the ideas of van Gennep (1909), who had emphasized death as a rite of passage and the rituals surrounding death as a means to control the biological inevitability of death. Durkheimian sociology, through its reintroduction to the study of death in the 1960s via the works of Hertz (1907, 1960), inspired studies of death that emphasized the solidarity and sustenance of society in the face of death. Archaeologists argued that

social structure and hierarchy were reflected in rituals relating to death that functioned to recreate society.

Drawing on sociological theories and anthropological functionalism, cultural anthropologists discussed death and the use of the rituals around death by communities to control social bonding and expressions of emotions (Raddclife-Brown 1964, 32; Durkheim 1965, 385–392). Huntington and Metcalf (1979, 27) criticized such static and universal interpretations of death and rituals because they removed them from the actual cultural context, thereby suggesting that context was not important. Huntington and Metcalf disagreed with Durkheim and Radcliff-Brown, who claimed that one could either explain all ritual solely as a means of social bonding or as sentimental response. Huntington and Metcalf argued that while both interpretations may be partially valid, they are not entirely sufficient nor universal; the symbolic and sociological contexts and cultural particulars of the corpse must be studied to achieve a fuller appreciation of it.

In tandem with the increased use of ethnography both to generate generalizing social principles and to provide parallels for ancient societies, critical admonitions against simplistic applications of ethnographic analogy were also published during the 1960s and 1970s. Ucko (1969) presented scenarios in the fields of both interpretation and analogy that would constitute an archaeologist's nightmare. For example, he cited the varying practices of the Ashanti tribe in western Africa (Ucko 1969, 273), who lay out some bodies facing the village in the belief that they will turn to face the forest after the burial, but orient others facing the forest, and he criticized the common assumptions that burial practices are synonymous with religious beliefs and that the wealth or poverty of the grave goods reflect different statuses and wealth within the society. Binford (1972) illustrated the weaknesses in the supposition that similarities in burial practices in different geographical areas reflect their cultural inter-relationship. Similarly, Hodder (1989) warned against liberal and simplistic use of analogies between cultures since similar objects may be used in similar ways, but each group may attach a different meaning to those objects. Huntington and Metcalf (1979, 122) critiqued the assumed correlation between energy expenditure at the funeral and in post-funerary rituals and the social position of the deceased, noting the kings of Saudi Arabia who are buried simply with a pile of stones over them. Huntington and Metcalf (1979, 34, 44) also argued against the Durkheimian (1965, 385–392) view

that funerals universally act as a means of social cohesion, citing the Nyakyusa of Tanzania, where funerals frequently disrupt the community and break bonds rather than reinforcing them.

By the beginning of the 1970s, there was a major shift in the appreciation of the complex information about ancient societies that archaeologists could glean from studying tombs and mortuary rituals. Tombs were increasingly viewed as accessible reflections of many aspects of the related society. Several major works addressed such issues as ancestors, ranking, and social cohesion through burials during this period. The now-renowned work of Saxe (1970), which was developed by Goldstein (1976, 1980) and somewhat refined by Morris (1991), played a major role in changing the appreciation of the wealth of social/cultural information that could be gained by anthropologists and archaeologists from studying mortuary activities. Saxe's dissertation, which focused on the relationship between the dead and the living and on the value of the former to the latter, introduced into the archaeology of death hypotheses about the use of formal disposal areas for the dead by agricultural groups to legitimize rights to critical resources. His dissertation promoted consideration of the ancestors and their importance to the living in the application of theoretical models to archaeological data. Since Saxe's work, ancestors have been seminal to the reconstruction of many societies by archaeologists. Discussions of the expression of the social ranking of individuals through their burials also became prominent in the 1970s (e.g., Binford 1971; Brown 1981; O'Shea 1981). Binford (1971) examined the variables in the funerary remains of a society in order to reveal divisions within the society. These variables may be equated to the social persona of the deceased. By virtue of their membership in the structural components of a social system, individuals acquire social identities and statuses—father, brother, chief, teacher (Tainter 1978, 106–110)—and these multiple personae are expressed through the rituals surrounding their death (Tainter 1975, 1978). Social ranking of the deceased in tombs was also discussed during the 1970s in a critical and theoretical manner and the processes involved in the causes for hierarchies were elucidated (Brown 1971; Peebles and Kus 1977; O'Shea 1984).

Beginning with Chapman, Kinnes, and Randsborg's (1981) publication on the archaeology of death, there has been a plethora of publications and

conferences on this topic. Several of these volumes fruitfully questioned the assumptions and arguments that had been prevalent since the 1960s. In this renewed interest in the archaeology of death since the 1980s, archaeologists have emphasized the multifaceted nature of death and the rituals involved with it. The realization that death rituals are carried out by the living for the living and that the disruption to the existing hierarchy by a death provides an opportunity for the living to re-position themselves in society have been particularly influential. A current and well-received body of archaeological scholarship posits that death rituals do not simply reflect and reproduce society, but they instead are employed in the active creation of ideologies and of socially, politically, and economically desired positions (see Bartel 1982; Hodder 1982a, 1982b; Pader 1982; Parker Pearson 1982, 1999; Carr 1995). As Hodder demonstrates, the deceased, through the elaboration of the funerary and post-funerary rituals, may gain a status and position in death that they never held in life (Hodder 1982c, 142). Barrett (1990, 179) proposed that ". . . material culture does not so much reflect social conditions as it participates in the structuring and transformation of those conditions." Incorporating post-modern explorations of rituals as modes of communication, Arnold (2001) underlined the attention they bring to the living, who are the participants and agents of action in the ritual, in contrast the more traditional academic focus on the dead; it is the living that wish to recreate society through the displays and activities at the cemetery. Since the 1980s the relations between archaeological theory and cultural anthropological theory have also shifted. In the 1960s and 1970s archaeologists derived much of their theory from cultural anthropology and sociology, and, since the 1980s, most of the theories used by archaeologists have been generated by archaeologists.

In the past 30 years the application of the developments in archaeology have revolutionized the methods for interpreting the role and function of mortuary data in the related society. Recent archaeological scholarship has acknowledged and explored the cultural dependability and variability of each community's reaction to the inevitability of death (Reid, Schiffer, and Rathje 1975; Peebles and Kus 1977; Chapman, Kinnes, and Randsborg, eds., 1981; O'Shea 1984). This contextual approach to archaeology advocates not just removing artifacts from seriations of similar data, but placement of the whole scene within the social context

and examination of it as an area for the display of the drama of social behavior (Shanks and Tilley 1987a, 1987b). Since the 1990s, archaeologists have begun to interpret cemeteries as arenas for the performance and the display of social strategies and as mechanisms for the negotiation of social roles and power (Miller and Tilley 1984; Parker Pearson 1993; Beck, ed., 1995; Chesson, ed., 2001). They argue that at cemeteries and tombs related communities make multi-dimensional and multi-scalar cultural statements about the dead and the living through the objects buried with the dead or used in the rituals, the building and topographical locations of the burial place, and the funerary and post-funerary activities (Barrett 1994; Rainville 1999). In the past 20 years, various prominent themes have also penetrated mortuary studies, including gender (Arnold and Wicker 2001), agency (Flannery 1999; Dobres and Robb, eds., 2000), landscape, and memory (Barrett 1990; Knapp and Ashmore 1999; Silverman and Small, eds., 2002; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003; Williams, ed., 2003). Incorporating post-modern understandings of the material world, these studies demonstrate the communication of cultural ideas through material culture and the landscape and their involvement in the processes of social reproduction (Hodder, ed., 1982; Tilley 1999).

During this period of growth and awareness in archaeological theory, a perceived division emerged between archaeologists trained in classics departments and those from anthropology departments. Clarke's work (1973) along with contemporary works by Binford and others fuelled the perception of a distinction between anthropologically trained archaeologists and classically trained archaeologists, which was named the "great divide" by Renfrew (1980). In his article "Archeology as Anthropology," Binford (1962) argued that archaeology is anthropological and is scientific in the sense that it generates hypotheses to be tested against collected archaeological data, it explicitly formulates theories, and it clearly states its assumptions; these procedures became the norm in the anthropological archaeology. While Binford argued that anthropological archaeologists approached their data with explicit, theoretically-shaped questions and methods, it was suggested that classically trained archaeologists approached the data in order to organize them into clear categories so that patterns would emerge from the data

almost as if bidden. Renfrew (1980) suggested that Greek archaeology differed from other archaeologies because, in the Greek world, most of the archaeological reasoning was inductive and the data was allowed to "speak for itself." In this distinction between anthropological archaeology on the one hand and Greek/classical archaeology on the other, archaeologists working in Greece were criticized as too focused on data and too limited culturally on the grounds that they had not attempted to place the Greek world into larger frameworks of similar or different societies (most recently, see Galaty and Parkinson, eds., 2007, 1–3, 21–23; see also Morris 1994). Whatever validity this polarization of archaeologies had in the third quarter of the twentieth century, many recent compendia in Aegean archaeology, partly as a defense against such attacks, have focused on distinctly theoretical issues (see, e.g., Spencer 1995; Hamilakis 2002; Galaty and Parkinson, eds., 2007). The papers in the present volume indicate that many Aegean scholars are incorporating newer theories in their work; other scholarship provides close readings of the data and presents valuable detailed information on the types of material found at their sites/regions on which further analysis may rely.

With the introduction of New Archaeology, post-modernism, and post-processualism into the archaeology of death in Greece, archaeologists have explored the complexity of cultural functions and ideological statements expressed through burials. Initially the literature on mortuary systems addressed the use of tombs in legitimizing and maintaining the rights of the living (e.g., Morris 1987; Antonaccio 1995; Murphy 1998); but recently, the creation of power and rights for the living through the burial of the dead has been discussed (e.g., Voutsaki 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1998; Preston 1999, 2004a, 2004c). The impact on Cretan studies of this theoretically explicit and developed style of scholarship is visible in the themes discussed in the archeology of death: rituals and social cohesion (Branigan 1991), feasting (Hamilakis 1998), ranking and elites (Blasingham 1983; Soles 1988; Maggidis 1994, 1998; Karytinos 1998; Dimopoulou 1999; Preston 2004a; Papadatos 2005), and mortuary systems and their various roles in social negotiations and performances (Preston 1999, 2004a, 2004b; Borgna 2003; Relaki 2003).