

VEXILLUM

the undergraduate journal of
classical and medieval studies

Issue 2

2012

The Change in Rite: From Inhumation to Cremation During the Greek Dark Ages

ADAM DiBATTISTA
BOSTON UNIVERSITY

This paper is a re-examination of the cause of the widespread change in burial rite from inhumation to cremation during the end of the Mycenaean culture. Cremation had previously been explained as a function of Anatolian influence. This paper seeks to explain why internal societal influence is a more likely explanation for the cremation phenomenon. By examining the arrangement of grave goods, the extent of cremation, and textual evidence, I argue that previous Mycenaean practices were responsible for the emergence of cremation.

The years between the end of Mycenaean culture and the beginning of Archaic Greek culture are notoriously fraught with uncertainty. Many histories of Greece focus on Mycenae and the rise of the Greek city state, but completely ignore the years between. The lack of permanent settlements and increased pastoral life during the Greek Dark Age¹ resulted in far less archaeological data than previous and subsequent eras. However, the data which does exist shows some continuity with previous Mycenaean culture. Some of the best evidence of the Submycenaean period² came from the graveyards in the Dark Age settlements. The breakdown of the culture and the subsequent redistribution of the Greek population led to a change in burial practice that had some commonalities with previous Mycenaean society.

Cremation burial began during the Submycenaean and became the accepted standard by 700

¹ The Greek Dark Age is comprised of a group of historical periods between the end of Mycenaean culture and the beginnings of Greek city states in the 9th century BCE. Roughly 1200-800 BCE. William R. Biers, *The Archaeology of Greece: An Introduction*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987), 94.

² The Submycenaean period is a more specific period immediately following the breakdown of Mycenaean culture. Roughly 1100-1050 BCE. Mervyn R. Popham, *Lefkandi I: the Iron Age: the Settlement, the Cemeteries* (Athens: British School of Archaeology, 1979), xiii.

BCE.³ This shift is well attested and widespread, but the reasons for it are not entirely clear. During the early twentieth century the importance of the cremation shift was disregarded—folklorist John Lawson simply argued that the Greeks wanted the body to decay and that the method did not matter⁴. Since then, there has been interest in the change in funerary practice. Many theories have attempted to explain the sudden shift to an entirely new form of burial. The outdated arguments of archaeologists Anthony Snodgrass and Spyridon Iakovidis attempted to show the influence of Anatolian culture on Greek burial practice.⁵ Yet, they did not adequately demonstrate Anatolian influence on Attic⁶ society, nor did they effectively argue parallels between Euboean⁷, Chalcidian⁸, and Dodecanese⁹ cremation patterns.¹⁰ More recent arguments disputed their claims, and attempted to reexamine the issue of the cremation burial shift. One explanation of the impetus behind the sudden shift towards cremation burial was a change in ideology. Archaeologist Marina Thomatos speculated that “if one is to assume that some new ideology existed for the perception of the body, one may assume that this too was influenced from somewhere in the East.”¹¹ Yet, Thomatos, Iakovidis, and Snodgrass all ignored internal influence such as change in social stratification and previous Mycenaean rituals which may have influenced the seemingly newfound choice of cremation burial.

Thomatos disagreed with Iakovidis and continually asserted that the rite of cremation was not brought about by direct or indirect influence of a foreign group, although Thomatos did not offer a

³ Ian Morris, *Burial and Ancient Society: the Rise of the Greek City-state* (Cambridgeshire: Cambridge UP, 1987), 21

⁴ John K. Papadopoulos, *The Early Iron Age Cemetery at Torone* (Los Angeles: UCLA, 2005), 393.

⁵ Cremations occurred in Anatolia prior to their appearance in Greek archaeological record. According to archaeologist Marina Thomatos, the instances of Anatolian cremations are an unlikely influence on Greek cremations occurring on the Peloponnese peninsula because of a lack of material linking Anatolia and Greece during the Dark Age. Marina Thomatos, *The Final Revival of the Aegean Bronze Age: a Case Study of the Argolid, Corinthia, Attica, Euboea, the Cyclades and the Dodecanese during LH IIIC Middle* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2006), 174

⁶ Attica is the region of Greece situated on the Attic peninsula.

⁷ Euboea is the second largest Greek island. It is located in the northern Aegean.

⁸ Chalcidia is a region in the northwest Aegean.

⁹ The Dodecanese islands are located in the southern Aegean.

¹⁰ Thomatos, 174.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

substantial explanation for the change.¹² Thomatos based his argument against Iakovides on the strongly Greek cultural foundation of the cemeteries excavated. In addition, Thomatos argued that Anatolia had little to no influence on the Argolid¹³ during this period.¹⁴ In his examination of the excavation of the cemetery at Torone¹⁵, archaeologist John Papadopoulos also disagreed with Iakovides. Iakovides argued that Euboea had cultural influence over Torone and came to the conclusion that there were parallels between the cremation styles in both locations. Yet, Papadopoulos stated that burial patterns at Torone did not resemble other Greek cemeteries such as Lefkandi or any known Euboean site.¹⁶ He argues against external influence and turns to Mycenaean civilization. Papadopoulos writes, "If anything, the closest parallels for the Torone cremations are the [...] Submycenaean tombs of Athens."¹⁷

The question remains as to why the Greeks adopted the rite of cremation. The process of cremation was in no way economically beneficial. Archaeologist Mike Parker Pearson reported that Bronze Age burials in the Scottish Isles required about a ton of dry wood to successfully cremate a corpse.¹⁸ While Pearson's figure is a liberal estimate, it is not unrealistic. 19th century coke-fired¹⁹ cremators required 500 kilograms of fuel to get up to working temperature and 250 kilograms for each subsequent cremation.²⁰ While coke-fired cremators operate differently from Greek pyres, they illustrate the amount of fuel needed for a far more efficient cremation process. The open air cremations of certain Hindu sects are a much closer analog for ancient cremations. An environmental non-governmental organization reports that 400-600 kg²¹ of wood is used for a modern open air cremation.²² Therefore an estimate of between half and a full ton of wood is an appropriate estimate for an ancient cremation.

¹² Ibid..

¹³ The Argolis is a geographical region situated on the eastern part of the Peloponnese peninsula.

¹⁴ Thomatos, 174-177.

¹⁵ Torone is located in the central Macedonian region of Greece.

¹⁶ Papadopoulos, 394.

¹⁷ Ibid...

¹⁸ Mike Parker Pearson, *The Archaeology of Death and Burial*, (College Station: Texas A&M UP, 2001), 49.

¹⁹ Coke is a form of coal.

²⁰ Douglas J. Davies, "Cremators", (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 146.

²¹ 40-60% of one ton.

²² Mahendra Gaur, *Indian Affairs Annual, 2006*, (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2006), 30.

While there was some prosperity towards the end of Late Helladic IIIC period²³, the distribution of wealth during the Greek Dark Age “[spread] more widely, if more thinly, across the population base.²⁴” Based on evidence of many Dark Age graveyards, it is impossible to draw definitive connection between economic status and preference of cremation.²⁵ There was no economic impetus to choose cremation over inhumation, especially during the Dark Age. The amount of timber required would be an economic strain on all communities desiring to cremate any portion of their populace. Yet, restrictions on cremation only appeared when absolutely no timber was available. Moreover, the presence of timber itself was not necessarily a factor in the adoption of cremation. Greater Macedonia for example, was known for its desirable and copious supply of silver fir and pine trees, but practiced no cremation.²⁶

This shift in burial practice appeared most visibly in a few cemeteries in Greece. The cemeteries of Torone and Lefkandi provided ample evidence for the change in rite. These cemeteries all experienced a shift towards cremation which to some degree involved rites associated with inhumation burial. No known graveyard displays an exact chronology beginning with inhumation, followed by cremation burials treated similarly to inhumation, and ending with a pure form of cremation burial. Yet, each graveyard contains a general transition from inhumation to cremation burial with intermediate forms like a secondary cremation (Torone) or a cremation/simulacrum²⁷ burial (Lefkandi/Vergina/Assarlik).²⁸ While cremation did not become the dominant form of burial in each cemetery, after LHIIIC²⁹ cremation became the normal form of interment.³⁰

²³ The Helladic periods refer to the chronology of Mycenaean culture. The Late Helladic IIIC period immediately precedes the Dark Ages. 1190-1050 BCE. Biers, 60.

²⁴ Thomatos, 177.

²⁵ Papadopoulos, 397.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 394.

²⁷ A simulacrum burial contains a substitute for the dead which has been adorned as if it were a corpse. Popham cites graves which had no skeleton but contained earrings, pins, and bracelets. Popham, 212.

²⁸ Vergina, a cemetery located in the central Macedonian region of Greece, shows evidence of the same simulacrum phenomenon as Lefkandi. The site of Assarlik in Asia Minor, while less closely related to the other cemeteries, exhibits a similar pattern. Popham, 212-213.

²⁹ Abbreviation of Late Helladic IIIC

³⁰ Thomatos, 171.

The Iron Age cemetery of Torone displays an almost perfect chronology of the shift from inhumation to cremation in the sense that there is no evidence of an “inhumation tomb contemporary with or later than a cremation tomb of the later period of use of the cemetery.”³¹ Papadopoulos’s dating gave accurate approximations of tombs relative to one another, but not within a wider chronological context. This means that the final inhumation tombs were between LHIIIC and the Early Protogeometric.^{32 33} Torone was significant because of the cremation style that occurred there. As in Athens, a “secondary cremation” occurred, in which the corpse was burned outside of the grave with the ashes collected in a vessel. After 700 BCE, “primary” cremation became the dominant form of burial. The deceased was burned on a pyre within the tomb itself.³⁴

Like Torone, the Attic cemetery of Perati also showed “secondary cremation” burials. In his excavation of Perati, Iakovides noted eighteen cremation burials. The cremations occurred at all phases³⁵ of cemetery. In terms of Mervyn Popham’s chronology of Lefkandi, the first two phases were LHIII, while the third was Submycenaean.³⁶ The burials were of both sexes, and occurred in all age groups—including children. Iakovides determined that there was no pattern in the cremations, and therefore no conclusion could be drawn based on who was buried—the cremations at Torone were also of all ages and sexes.³⁷ Due to the lack of foreign material, Iakovides ruled out direct foreign influence. He also noted that because young children were cremated, it was unlikely that the idea for cremation spread through members of the Attic population traveling abroad.³⁸ The pottery in the graves of the cremated children

³¹ Papadopoulos, 359.

³² Ibid..

³³ Early Protogeometric is the first division of the Protogeometric era. This period dates 1050-900 BCE. Popham, xiii.

³⁴ Morris, 21

³⁵ A phase is a demarcation of time created by the archaeologist based on human occupation or habit. The cemetery at Perati had three phases. The first of which ended in 1190/1185 BCE. The final phase ended in 1075 BCE. Spyros Iakovides, *Excavations of the Necropolis at Perati* (Los Angeles: UCLA, 1980), 10, 110.

³⁶ Popham, xiii.

³⁷ Iakovides, 10; Papadopoulos, 395.

³⁸ Iakovides, 10.

was of a local variety, making it likely that the cremations were not foreigners.³⁹ Iakovides came to the conclusion that “cremation had been known and practiced in several regions of Anatolia from the early Bronze Age [...] It was then adopted by Mycenaean settlers in the cemetery at Muskebi.”⁴⁰ The cremations of Perati were not as complete as other Greek cremations which occurred around the same time. The bodies were burned for far less time than the cremations of Lefkandi and Torone. Iakovides comments, “This incomplete cremation meant that the same body might be partly charred and partly calcinated.”⁴¹ Iakovides also mentioned that the bone fragments were bluish in color.⁴² According to Jonathan Musgrave, gray-blue coloration of the osteological material indicated that the bones were “very poorly burned: some organic content still present.”⁴³ Musgrave acknowledged that a variety of sources can be the source of skeletal staining, citing “green = bronze, purple = cloth of Homeric hue and quality.”⁴⁴ Yet, Musgrave did not list any grave goods or organic material that could cause bluish staining. Judging by Iakovides's report of shorter cremations, it is fair to say the cremations of Perati were a “fair/poor-average/variable” on Musgrave's *DGCREM* (*degree of cremation*) scale.⁴⁵ In a separate examination of Dark Age cremation, Musgrave wrote that the skeletal material was in general “heavier, and, for want of a better work ‘chunkier.’”⁴⁶ He argued that “this may reflect a change in technique or tradition; or indeed both.”⁴⁷

The Dark Age site of Lefkandi, like Torone, was composed almost entirely of graves that had cremated remains. Only five burials were confirmed inhumation graves, while twenty more were

³⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁴¹ Ibid., 10.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Papadopoulos, 245.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 246.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 245.

⁴⁶ Musgrave, Jonathan. “Dust and Damn'd Oblivion: A Study of Cremation in Ancient Greece.” *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 85 (1990): 275

⁴⁷ Ibid...

possibly inhumed.⁴⁸ Lefkandi did not necessarily show the first transition from inhumation to cremation so much as it showed an intermediary form of cremation burial representative of the Greek Dark age. In 117 graves at Lefkandi, there was no trace of skeletal material found. Many of these tombs were sealed cist⁴⁹ graves which contained traces of clothing. Yet excavators did not find discoloration of the soil indicative of decayed bone. In addition there were a few inhumation graves in which the bones did not indicate decay on the scale needed for the entire corpse to disappear. The soil itself was not acidic enough to cause decomposition of an entire skeleton.⁵⁰

While an inhumed corpse could not have disappeared without a trace, the small bone fragments left after a cremation could have decomposed unnoticed.⁵¹ Tombs that lacked skeletal material and contained earrings, pins, or bracelets laid out in the style of an inhumation burial began in the Submycenaean period and continued into the Protogeometric. Archaeologist Petros Themelis' interpretation of the vast number of tombs lacking skeletal material, some of which were in the style of inhumation tombs, was that a "secondary cremation" must have taken place. Themelis also looked at the data from the pyres found at the graveyards at Lefkandi. Excavators found small groups of bones in the pyres which Themelis asserted were the result of bone collection after the cremations took place.⁵² Themelis' interpretation was that the corpses were not buried in the pyre itself, but their remains were collected and buried after. The statistical data also supported this point because there was a rough one-to-one ratio between tombs and pyres at the Palia Perivolia graveyard at Lefkandi.⁵³

The associated grave goods also distinguished the few inhumation graves at Lefkandi. In a Protogeometric grave at Lefkandi, ten arrow heads and an iron sword were entombed with the corpse.

⁴⁸ Popham, 211.

⁴⁹ A cist is a stone enclosure of a grave. Cist graves are sealed with a fitted lid. Popham 212.

⁵⁰ Popham, 211.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*,.

⁵² Bone collection is the process of taking bone fragments from the funeral pyre and placing them in a cremation urn. Themelis records four definite cases of bone collection occurring at Lefkandi. Popham, 210.

⁵³ Popham, 212.

Themelis considered this and another inhumation grave to be “warrior graves.”⁵⁴ The rite of inhumation generally grew rarer in the years leading up to Geometric and Classical periods in Greece. Yet, two of the five definite inhumation graves were considered warrior graves, one of which was buried during the Protogeometric. Themelis considered this statistically significant and worth examining. He discussed a possible interpretation of the inhumation burials, arguing the possibility that these graves contained warriors buried in an older Mycenaean style, as if to hearken back to the days of palatial prosperity. He acknowledged that this interpretation assumes the Dark Age population possessed a working knowledge of culture prior to the Mycenaean collapse. Themelis ultimately found this interpretation too speculative and lacking data. But other theories concerning the shift from multiple to single burials argued for the continuity between the cultures of the Middle Helladic⁵⁵ and Submycenaean period. The idea of a Submycenaean society that possessed a notion of Middle Helladic burial practice is not unbelievable.⁵⁶

The significance of inhumation burial at Lefkandi was inextricably linked to ceremony because of the presence of war-related grave goods. If there was symbolic importance for inhumation at Lefkandi, the same was true of cremation. The difference in burial style at Lefkandi directly contradicted Lawson's statement that, “at no period [...] have the Greeks regarded inhumation and cremation as means to different religious ends.”⁵⁷

This so-called “secondary cremation” style indicative of Lefkandi may have appeared in other Dark Age sites. When the site of Vergina was initially excavated by Manolis Andronikos, he considered inhumation the normal burial type because of the arrangement of grave goods. However, like at Lefkandi, there was almost no skeletal material, with only a few teeth at most. Andronikos attributed the lack of skeletal material to the acidity of the soil. This explanation was problematic because the soil at

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁵⁵ The Middle Helladic is the period of Mycenaean culture prior to the Late Helladic. 2000-1550 BCE. Biers, 60.

⁵⁶ Thomatos, 169.

⁵⁷ Papadopoulos, 393.

Vergina could not possibly be acidic enough to have dissolved an entire skeleton.⁵⁸ Themelis suggested that a similar phenomenon occurred at both Lefkandi and Vergina. In addition he made a comparison between Lefkandi and another site. At the site of Assarlik, excavators found full-length cist graves with no definite traces of burning as well as no traces of skeletal material. This cist grave might be a parallel to both Vergina and Lefkandi, although the arrangement of grave goods was not well documented, and therefore impossible to tell whether they were arranged in an inhumation-style burial.⁵⁹ The burial remains at both Lefkandi and Vergina suggested that a simulacrum may have been buried as the primary burial, followed by cremation as a secondary form.

The Dark Age cremations which occurred at Lefkandi, Vergina, Assarlik, and to some extent Torone and Athens had roots in symbolism. The arrangement of the grave-goods in the simulacrum burials at Lefkandi, Vergina, and Assarlik gave them incredible significance. The secondary cremations at Torone and Athens demonstrated a culture that seemed to be experimenting with a new form of burial and symbolism. Yet, all these anomalies and significant features still do not provide evidence for the reasons behind the change in rite. The Anatolian argument of Iakovides lacked evidence and cannot properly explain the presence of cremation in most regions of Greece. The general lack of evidence for the period as well the low number of sites make it hard to create a convincing model for the shift.

During the end of Mycenaean culture all of Greece was experiencing a restructuring of society. The newly formed social stratification may have accounted for a shift in burial practice because the power of the elite had diminished. During LHIIIA-IIIB⁶⁰, there were almost no cremation burials and the elites were "in a position to determine what types of burials were 'allowed.'"⁶¹ As the power of the elite class changed, so did their ability to control burial practice. As a result, the changing lower class may have desired to display their wealth through a costly cremation. There is textual evidence to support the

⁵⁸ Popham, 213.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ IIIA and IIIB are more specific breakdowns of the third Late Helladic period.

⁶¹ Thomatos, 177.

idea that cremation burials were a sign of status. In *The Iliad* there are a few descriptions of large pyres. In one scene Homer wrote, “those who were about the dead heaped up wood and built a pyre a hundred feet this way and that; then they laid the dead all sorrowfully upon the top of it.”⁶² While Homer is not known for his historical accuracy, Ian Morris argued that Homer's descriptions of burials were “unattended evidence” and contained some truth relevant to culture.⁶³ He argued specifically the size of the mound used in the cremation of Patroclus connected the concepts of cremation and status.⁶⁴ William Furley took it further and argued that “Homeric piety” is “to burn as many animal thigh-bones as possible, [and], regarding corpses, to give them their 'ration of fire.'”⁶⁵ The works of Homer made many references to cremations and made them appear as if they were common for the period. While this is not true, the stories undoubtedly have basis in truth.

Regardless of whether a changing social structure allowed cremations to occur commonly, the religious or ritualistic purpose remains unexplained. However, a possible explanation for the appearance of cremation in the Dark Age was the need for purity. The Greek conception of impurity of the flesh was a continuous and widespread belief. The dead body was viewed as the epitome of impurity. In the Classical period, mourners dealing with a corpse were briefly shut off from society. Those who visited the house of the mourners purified themselves afterwards.⁶⁶ During the Archaic period,⁶⁷ rotting flesh was just as unappealing to the Greeks. Once a body had been entombed, it was only handled after the flesh had decomposed. One exception was tomb Σ3 at Perati; the bones had in fact been moved before decomposition, but a secondary offering of seashells was placed on charcoal where the body had been positioned. This was assumed to have happened because the body had been moved, revealing the

⁶² Homer, *The Iliad of Homer*, (New York: Classics Club, 1942), 354.

⁶³ Morris, 45.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶⁵ William D. Furley, *Studies in the Use of Fire in Ancient Greek Religion* (New York: Arno, 1981), 2.

⁶⁶ Walter Burkert, and John Raffan, *Greek Religion Archaic and Classical* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1985), 79.

⁶⁷ The Archaic Period saw the development of the Greek city state and written culture. It began in the middle of the 7th century and ended with the defeat of the Persians in 479 BCE. Biers, 148.

importance attributed to the impurity of the flesh.⁶⁸

While the phenomenon of tomb reuse is a separate issue in the archaeology of the Late Helladic period, it is related to the change in rite. Archaeologists William Cavanagh and Christopher Mee theorized that in multiple inhumation graves from LHIIIC, older burials were cremated before new burials were entombed.⁶⁹ Cavanagh said, “the flame consumes the corrupt flesh leaving the grave chamber clean and the bones white.”⁷⁰ Thomatos rejected Cavanagh's theory because of a lack of evidence. Yet Cavanagh's theory touched upon the concepts of secondary burial, fire, and purification. The concept of a fire ritual attached to a re-internment seems almost obvious. Carl Blegen theorized that a purificatory ritual would have the practical purpose of countering the stench of decay.⁷¹ Blegen, Cavanagh, and Mee all shared the theory that multiple burials were the impetus behind a fire ritual in burial.⁷²

During the earlier Mycenaean periods there was a definite connection between sanctity and fire ritual. Sacred hearths as well as ashen remains were present in the megaron⁷³ structures. There were consistent traces of burning at all strata at Ayia Irini,⁷⁴ as well as lanterns and braziers at the sanctuaries of Phlyakopi⁷⁵ and Mycenae.⁷⁶ Textual evidence related to ritual existed in Linear B tablets from Pylos. In the Pylian tablets there was mention of the “pu-ka-wo” or “fire-tender”/“fire-kindler” in association with religious acts.⁷⁷ In the Middle Helladic period “layers of fire, ashes, charcoal and traces of burning are frequently attested in funerary locales...and their presence has been considered purificatory.”⁷⁸ Blegen, Cavanagh and Mee all shared the view that the fire rituals were a response to multiple burials, but all

⁶⁸ Thomatos, 168.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ William G. Cavanagh, and Christopher Mee, *A Private Place: Death in Prehistoric Greece* (Jonsered: Paul Åströms Förlag, 1998), 112.

⁷¹ Chrysanthi Gallou, *The Mycenaean Cult of the Dead* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2005), 121.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Biers defines the megaron as “perhaps the most conspicuous and distinctive feature of Mycenaean architecture is the central hall, or megaron.” The megaron contains a permanent hearth surrounded four columns. Biers, 66-7.

⁷⁴ Ayia Irini is a Mycenaean settlement on the Cycladic Island of Keos.

⁷⁵ Phlyakopi is a Mycenaean and Cycladic settlement on the island of Milos.

⁷⁶ Gallou 120.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

saw the practice as lacking supporting evidence.⁷⁹ Yet, excavations of many tombs in the Argolid showed evidence of some type of burning: chamber tomb⁸⁰ 10 had a thin layer of ashes, and a wall with burn marks. Other tombs like the Dendra tholos⁸¹, Dendra tomb 13, Asine I:1, Asine I:7, Berbati I, Berbati III, Deiras I, and Prosymna VII contained “human skeletal remains and offerings [that] were accidentally blackened, scorched, and even calcinated.”⁸² In addition to ashen layers within the tombs, archaeologists have discovered burnt objects throughout palatial period graves.⁸³

Fire ritual had been an integral part of Greek funerary ritual since the Middle Helladic period. The stress placed upon the impurity of dead flesh also existed simultaneously throughout Greece. Models attempting to explain the shift to multiple burials have argued that fire ritual had practical uses during the Middle Helladic. Ashen layers discovered in many tholoi and cist graves from the Middle Helladic also strengthened this concept. The idea of palatial-era fire ritual existing into the Protogeometric period is therefore not unbelievable. If the fire ritual associated with purification of the tomb was applied to the corpse, the natural outcome would be a cremation. The Dark Age cemeteries like Perati, Torone, Lefkandi, and Vergina all displayed forms of cremation which were not the fully realized “primary cremations” seen after 700 BCE. The Dark Age cremations combined rites that were typical of inhumation burials (Vergina) or displayed cremations of a lesser quality (Perati). These cemeteries could have applied older fire rituals and created a new form of burial. In the process, intermediate forms of cremation were created which involved elements of inhumation.

The paucity of evidence, geographical scope, and difficulties in precise dating have made satisfactory models of the change in burial practice nearly impossible. For there to be a single theory

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁸⁰ Biers defines a chamber tomb as consisting “of a rectangular chamber cut into the side of a hill and approached by a long entrance passage...” Biers, 335.

⁸¹ The tholos is a beehive shaped chamber tomb constructed during the Mycenaean era. Tholoi also are cut into the side of a hill and have a long entrance passage. Biers, 71.

⁸² Gallou, 120.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

which explains the shift to cremation following the collapse of Mycenaean civilization is unlikely. However, the shift to cremation appears to be from an internal source, rather than foreign influence. The new practice was likely derived from two societal factors present during the collapse of palatial civilization. These factors were the change in societal structure and previously held Mycenaean beliefs. The change in social structure is obvious in the archaeological record, while the Mycenaean beliefs are evident in textual sources like Homer and the Pylian tablets. The fire rituals that began in the Middle Helladic period were well attested in various tholoi and chamber tombs. These ashen layers have been used to explain multiple internment burial. The Greek conceptions of impurity of dead flesh could have very well led to the use of fire to destroy everything but the bones of a corpse. As this ritual became more widespread it underwent changes in style. The secondary inhumations present at Lefkandi, Perati, and Torone were one form. While the “simulacrum” burials at Lefkandi, Assarlik, and Vergina were another. Through the combination of ritual and societal change the process of cremation was standardized and primary cremations became the dominant form of burial after 700 BCE.

Bibliography

- Biers, William R. *The Archaeology of Ancient Greece: An Introduction*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987.
- Burkert, Walter, and John Raffan. *Greek Religion Archaic and Classical*. Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1985.
- Cavanagh, William G., and Christopher Mee. *A Private Place: Death in Prehistoric Greece*. Jonsered: Paul Åströms Förlag, 1998.
- Davies, Douglas J. *Encyclopedia of Cremation*, 1st ed., sv. "Cremation Process" Burlington: Ashgate, 2005.
- . *Encyclopedia of Cremation*, 1st ed., sv. "Cremators" Burlington: Ashgate, 2005.
- Furley, William D. *Studies in the Use of Fire in Ancient Greek Religion*. New York: Arno, 1981.
- Gallou, Chrysanthi. *The Mycenaean Cult of the Dead*. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2005.
- Gaur, Mahendra. *Indian Affairs Annual, 2006*. Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2006.
- Homer, Samuel Butler, and Louise Ropes Loomis. *The Iliad of Homer*. New York: The Classics Club, 1942.
- Iakōvidēs, Spyros. *Excavations of the Necropolis at Perati*. Los Angeles: Institute of Archaeology, 1980.
- Morris, Ian. *Burial and Ancient Society: the Rise of the Greek City-state*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987.
- Musgrave, Jonathan. "Dust and Damn'd Oblivion: A Study of Cremation in Ancient Greece." *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 85 (1990): 271-99
- Papadopoulos, John K. *The Early Iron Age Cemetery at Torone*. Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, 2005.
- Popham, Mervyn, Hugh Sackett, and Petros Themelis. *Lefkandi I: The Iron Age: the Settlement, the Cmenteries*. Athens: British School of Archaeology, 1979.
- Thomatos, Marina. *The Final Revival of the Aegean Bronze Age: a Case Study of the Argolid, Corinthia, Attica, Euboea, the Cyclades and the Dodecanese during LH IIIC Middle*. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2006.