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CREMATIONS
IN THE BRONZE
AND THE
EARLY IRON
AGES

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The custom of cremation and the Macedonians. Some thoughts on the occasion of the findings in the Aigai necropolis

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In the cemeteries of the Macedonians of the Early Iron Age (11th-7th c. BC) the usual burial practice is interment. This **of course** is also true for the area of Aigai. In the impressive Cemetery of the Tumuli¹, which lies to the north of the ancient city, but also in the cemeteries of the satellite settlements², the dead -rich and poor, men and women- are interred. Cremations are extremely rare and the very few examples that we know -they can be counted on the fingers of one hand- are humble funerary pyres of **unimportant** people³.

Cremation as a way of burying of the prominent people appears in the royal necropolis of the ancient Macedonian capital for the first time and in a very impressive way in the Archaic times. It is very tempting to connect the appearance of this custom with the assuming of power by the Temenids, in the 7th c. BC; however, any such thought is for the moment no more than an attractive working hypothesis.

To the southwest of the Cemetery of the Tumuli, which is the core of the ancient necropolis, we investigated from 1994 to 1996 a particularly interesting cluster of tombs, apparently belonging to a very prominent family of Aigai⁴. Two spacious pit-graves and six large built cist-graves have been found, four of which date to the second half of the 6th c. BC -they are the oldest burial buildings of Aigai known until now- and the other two to the 5th c. BC. All the graves had been looted, but their dimensions and mainly the remains of the grave offerings - golden sheets, bronze bottles, weapons, vessels etc.- confirm that they hosted some particularly rich burials.

Abundant remains of pyres found around and in the deposit of the graves attest that the dead had been cremated. Whatever comes into contact with the dead is impure, but at the same time sacred. This is **especially** true for the funerary pyre and whatever was offered **along**, with the result that its remains, all or at least the most important of them are, whenever possible, transferred from the place of the cremation and thrown in the grave, **in case** of course the cremation did not take place inside the grave pit itself.

This custom seems to be practiced with particular devotion in Aigai. **Thus**, next to one of the cist-tombs of the group (images 1-4), the objects that had been offered in the pyre of the dead have been found, carefully placed in a pile: the bronze helmet, very distorted by the flames, two swords -one *xiphos* and one *makhaira*- with handles bearing silver nails and covered with ivory, one dagger, unusually big spearheads, which introduce us to the precursor of the *sarissa*, pins, half-melted accessories possibly coming from a cuirass, pieces of a bronze *omphalos* bowl and a bronze *oenochoe* -vessels used in the **libations**⁵- and pieces of the rein of a small horse. The grave **had** been looted. A few fragments of

¹ See Andronikos 1969; Petsas 1961-62, 218 *et seq.*; *id.* 1963, 213 *et seq.*; Romiopoulou-Kilian-Dirlmeier 1989, 86-151.

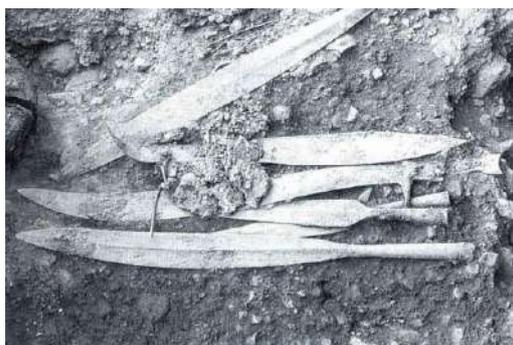
² See Kottaridou 1991 a.

³ See Andronikos 1969, 164.

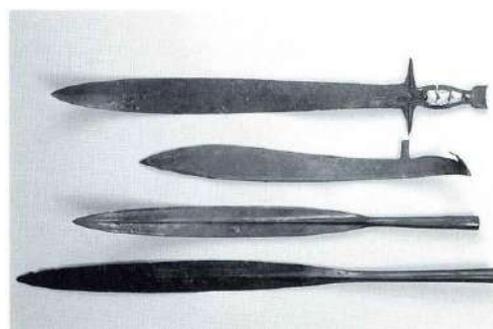
⁴ See Kottaridou 1996a, 90; *id.* 1996 b and *id.* 1998 b, 114 *et seq.*

⁵ The presence of these vessels, especially of the bowls, in large numbers in the graves of prominent people, and only in them, seems that it is characteristic of the particular function of these persons within the group (leader of sacrifices).

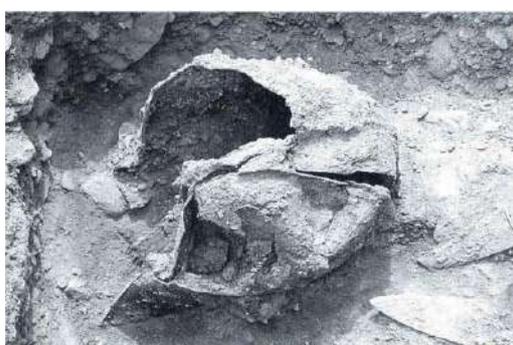
figurines allow us to date **this burial unit** to the early second half of the 6th c. BC.



Im. 1. The burnt weapons as they have been found.



Im. 2. The *xiphos* with the handle bearing silver nails, the *makhaira* and two spearheads after conservation.



Im. 3. The burnt weapons as they have been found.



Im. 4. The bronze helmet after conservation.

In the same cluster, next to another **savagely looted and destroyed** cist-grave, the **location** of the cremation of the dead has been found, almost on the surface of present ground level⁶. A **large** number of the remains of the funerary pyre with fragments of clay vessels and bronze and ivory objects have been found thrown over the ruins; however most of them apparently remained in their **original location**, possibly covered by the tumulus that **stretched** over the whole grave⁷. **Among the finds that can be completed** are four large *pithamphorae*, at least one amphora with narrow bottom, one hydria, one *olpe*, two jugs **and** one ladle. There are also pieces of *kylikes*, *cotylae* and *arybaloi*, fragments of at least one **misshapen** bronze bowl and one bronze *oenochoe*, **as well as** one enormous iron double pin that would hold the heavy wool cloak of the dead warrior in place.

The **heavily misshapen** clay vessels, the colour and hardness of the soil reveal the **intensity** of the fire. The richness of the offers is reminiscent of the Homeric descriptions⁸. We still don't know the name of the warriors who died just before Amyndas I assumed power, however they were definitely nobles, "prominent over others", possibly also members of the Temenids.

⁶ A big part of the pyre had been **disturbed** and destroyed in modern times due to cultivation, however one part of it (of an area of about 10 sq. m.) has been found almost intact and this is the place where an important number of finds comes from.

⁷ This practice is attested already in Homer, *Il.* 24 797-801.

⁸ Homer, *Il.* 23 161-261.



Im. 5. The bronze *lebes*-urn with the fabric and the grave offerings.



Im. 6. The clay urn and the remains of the pyre as they have been found.



Im. 7. The clay *chytra*-urn.



Im. 8. Detail of the pile with the remains of the funerary pyre. The “deadened” *xiphos* can be seen.

In the same cluster belonged also two small **undisturbed** pit-graves, in which the urns have been found in their place. In one of them, the burnt bones, wrapped in a piece of fabric that is still preserved, were kept together with some grave offerings inside a bronze *lebes* (im. 5). Another large *lebes*, turned upside down, covered the other one. In the other burial, a clay *chytra* had been used as an urn (im. 6-7). **The golden ring of the dead has been found along** with the bones. On top of the *chytra* the burned weapons of the warrior had been placed, together with a half-melted bronze helmet, two spearheads and two swords, one of which had been “deadened”⁹ (im. 8). In all the archaic cremations that we have found until now, wherever it is possible to identify the sex, the dead are all men. Contrary to the cremated lords, the dead ladies of Aigai who descended to Hades dressed in gold and porphyry from head to toes were interred¹⁰, at least until the times of Alexander I (499-445 BC), a practice **reminiscent of** the case of the *heroon* found in Lefkadi, in Evia, where the dead hero-warrior was cremated and his wife interred¹¹.

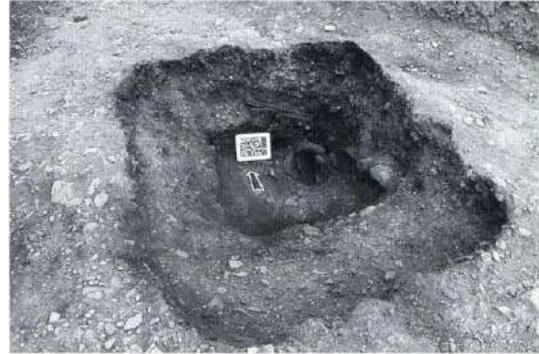
⁹ This practice is found also elsewhere in burials of the Geometrical era; cf. Kurtz – Boardman 1985, 53 *et seq.*

¹⁰ Cf. Andronikos 1988 and Kottaridou 1989, 1-11.

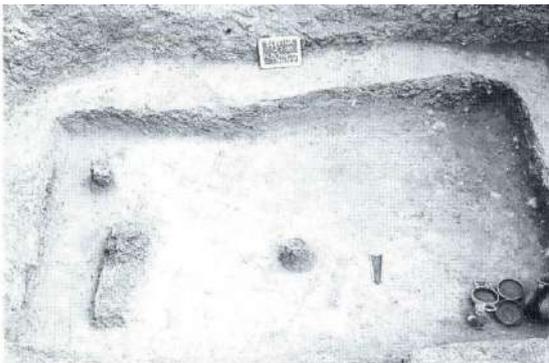
¹¹ See Lefkandi II.2, 18 *et seq.*



Im. 9



Im. 10



Im. 11

Im. 9. Burial pyre in situ.

Im. 10. Burial pyre in situ.

Im. 11. Pit-grave with cremation. The burnt bones had been kept in a wooden larnax and the grave offerings are in the place where they were found.

Cremations of dead women appear in the second half of the 5th c. BC -the lady of the grave with the white *lekythoi* had been cremated- however cremation, a practice that is more expensive than the simple burial, continued in Aigai to be a privilege of the rich and powerful, of the *Hetairoi* and of course of the kings and their family.

In the 4th c. BC the custom of cremation becomes more popular also in lower social classes. In the time of Philip II (359-336 BC) more cremations of simple people appear (7-8% of the total number of excavated graves), **namely** Macedonian citizens who, judging by the grave offerings, don't seem to **have been** particularly wealthy. These dead, usually men, are **typically** cremated **along** with **any** funerary gifts inside the burial pit itself (im. 9-10) and the offerings that accompany them -spears, strigils, clay vessels- **don't** differ in quantity **or in** quality **from** those of the contemporary pit and brick-built graves in which the majority of the common people are buried. In a couple of cases, the dead had been cremated **elsewhere** and their bones, put in a wooden larnax¹² together with the bronze or iron ring-seal that the dead used to wear, with Charon's coin and a bronze gilded funerary wreath had been placed in the burial pits, (im. 11) where the usual clay offerings have been also found. In these cases, remains of the funerary pyre (charcoal and ash) have been found scattered in the deposit of the grave.

¹² Cf. Kottaridou 1998 a (under publication).



Im. 12

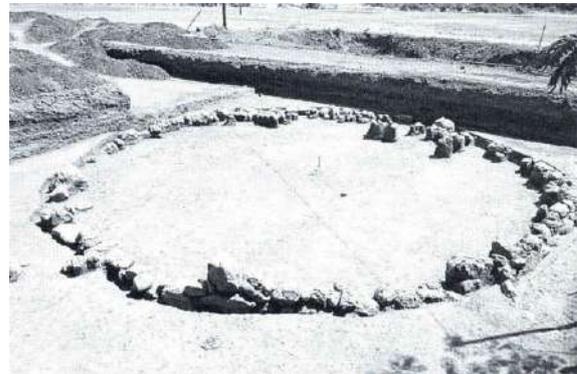


Im. 13

Im. 12. Late Hellenistic burial case with urn and grave offerings incorporated in a circular enclosure.

Im. 13. The clay *chytra*-urn and the Macedonian amphora as they were found.

Im. 14. Late Hellenistic burial enclosure that defined the limits of the earth tumulus.



Im. 14

Cremation is a particularly convenient practice **for** people who **meet their death** on the battlefield, away from home. The constant wars of Philip and the campaign of Alexander created **the appropriate** external conditions for **this practice to spread** among the Macedonians.

According to Diodorus "Ptolemy, after he had cremated the dead -soldiers of Perdiccas, who had invaded Egypt- and ordered **for them to be given** a proper funeral, sent their bones to the families and their friends..."¹³ thus earning the favour of the Macedonians, a fact revealing the importance of respecting the funerary customs, but also the generalisation of the practice of cremation that tends now to be the rule for the Macedonians who were found dispersed around the Eumene.

This development left its traces in the necropolis of the ancient royal city, which now lived in the margin of history. From the 3rd c. BC onwards cremations increase **in number** (about 40%). There are still cremations that take place inside the burial pit itself -actually on one occasion the dead probably was a woman- though usually the burnt bones are found gathered inside **unpainted** clay *chytrae*, which together with the characteristic offerings of that time -Macedonian amphorae, *unguentaria*, ladles- are **enclosed** in small built cases (im. 12), usually constructed next to the position of the funerary pyre. Sometimes these graves-cases are incorporated in the stone circular enclosures (im. 13-14), which surround the pyres and define the position of the tumuli that, by covering the case and the pyre, marked the position of the graves.

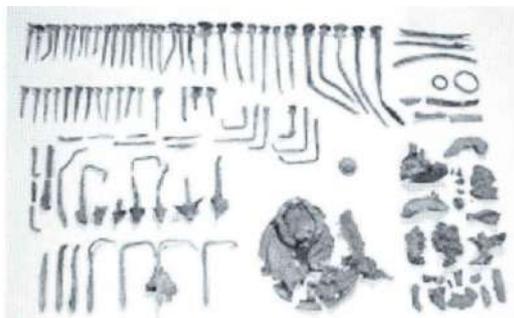
¹³ Diod. 18.36.



Im. 15



Im. 16



Im. 17



Im. 18

Im. 15 The remains of the Late Hellenistic burial pyre as they were found, poured beside the burial enclosure.

Im. 16. Vessels-offerings to the burial pyre after conservation.

Im. 17. Iron nails and elements from the decoration of the gate to the wooden "mortuary house", in which queen Eurydice was cremated.

Im. 18. The half-melted bronze knocker of the wooden door

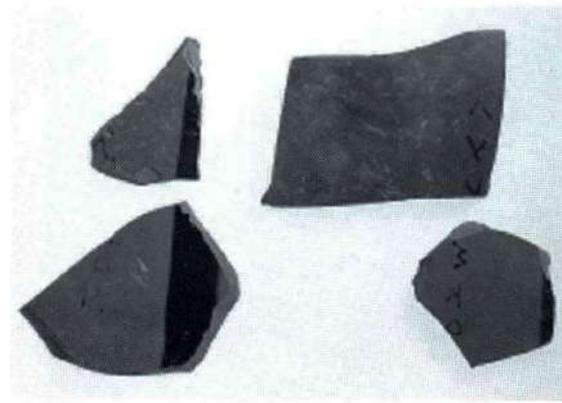
These circular late Hellenistic enclosures find their direct ancestor in Aigai, in the enclosures of the Cemetery of the Tumuli, while the way of their development around the burial cases and pyres invokes with impressive accuracy the Homeric description:

*τορνῶσαντο δέ σημα θεμειλία τε προβάλοντο
αμφί πυρήν' εἶθαρ δέ χυτήν ἐπί γαΐαν εχευαν,
χεύαντες δέ τό σημα πάλιν κίον...*¹⁴

¹⁴ Il., 23 255-257. (TN: "Then they traced out the dimensions of a mound, using stones to mark its base around the pyre, and then piled earth on top.")



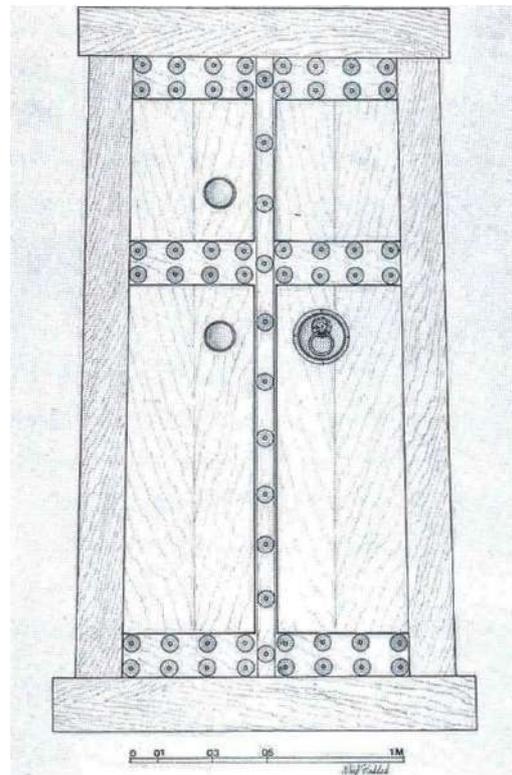
Im. 19. Shards of Panathenaic *amphorae* from the burial pyre of queen Eurydice.



Im. 20. Shards of Panathenaic *amphorae* with the name of the well-known lord Lykiskus.

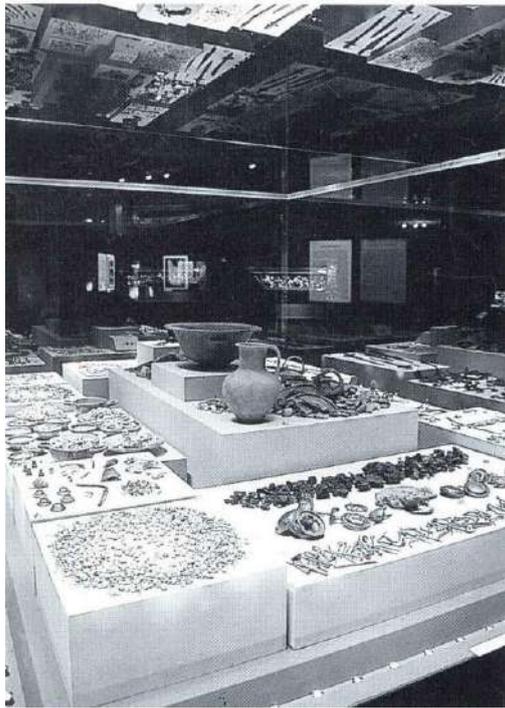


Im. 21. The reversed marble larnax fallen beside the throne on which still lies the vessel's cover, as it was left by the grave-robber.



Im. 22. Representation of the wooden door of the "mortuary house" in which queen Eurydice was cremated.

The humble offerings that accompany these burials reflect the **general** situation of the old royal city, which, after the **dissolution** of the kingdom **by** the Romans (168 BC), is in total decline. However, in the burial pyres of the humble late Hellenistic tumuli of Aigai gifts of considerable value had been offered; **plenty of pottery** -jars, glasses, plates, lanterns and *unguentaria*- objects that are useful in the symposia of the realm of the dead, even *pyxides* for the jewellery and the cosmetics of women (im. 15-16). These late funerary **pyres and burials** - an interesting find of last summer- seem to preserve a distant memory of the magnificent holocausts that the royal necropolis **had** seen in the years of its glory.



Im. 23. The remains of the burial pyre of Philip II.



Im. 24. Bronze nail heads from the wooden door of the “mortuary house” that was burnt with the dead body of Philip II.

Over the roof and in the backfill of the “tomb with the throne”¹⁵ -of the oldest known Macedonian tomb that seems to be one of the first, if not the first monument of this kind ever constructed and that, the more our knowledge about Aigai grows, the more I am sure it belongs to queen Eurydice- the remains of the burial pyre were found spilled according to the custom.

The same **occurs in** the tomb of Philip II. One huge pile of half-burnt bricks, ashes, charcoal and hundreds of burnt objects covered the whole arch. Its presence, which **constitutes** the decisive evidence for the identification of the dead¹⁶, since it eliminates the association with Philip III **Arrhideus**, gives us an image of the most majestic funerary burial pyre¹⁷ that Greece has known in historic times.

In the time of the powerful monarch, who brought his kingdom from the margin to the centre of history, the old burial custom -having its roots in the heroic tradition of the epics, nourished by ambition, power and wealth- will gain new glory. Philip II will take care that his mother, this remarkable woman who **wielded power** on the most crucial moment, be buried with honours that apparently surpassed all precedent.

Hundreds of iron nails and the bronze armour of an elaborately decorated double door (im. 17-18) attest that the funerary burial pyre of Eurydice **had no equal until that time** -at least **none** to our knowledge. An entire monumental wooden house had been built in order to be **consumed by the** flames together with the dead. Along with her plenty of offerings were burnt: silver vessels, **pottery** filled with foods and fragrances, but also Panathenian amphorae filled

¹⁵ See Andronikos 1987, 81 *et seq.*

¹⁶ For the question of the identification of the dead cf. Andronikos 1984, 227 *et seq.*; Kottaridou 1996b; Saatsoglou-Paliadeli 1998, 37-48 (with detailed bibliography).

¹⁷ About the royal pyres of the necropolis of Aigai see Kottaridou 1996 b.

with oil in order to feed the fire, which **enable us** to date this event to 344/3 BC¹⁸ (im. 19-20).

The burnt bones of the dead, wrapped in a purple-dyed fabric, carefully kept in a marble urn, will be placed for eternity on the richly decorated throne¹⁹, a trophy in the arms of Persephone (im. 21). The tomb -which from the outside is not different from the other traditional cist-tombs except for the size-, becomes a majestic underground **chamber**, where everything is built for the eternity, while the **gates** of Hades exists as an architectural element in the space.

The concept of the Macedonian tomb²⁰, of the imperishable underground residence of the prominent dead, reminiscent of a palace and a temple, is born - **and** with it, the idea of the funerary pyre in the form of a monumental building (im. 22) that would burn in flames accompanying the dead to the other side **as well**. In the entourage of the Herakleid ruler, who placed his image next to those of the twelve gods²¹, the idea of **heroizing** the **select** right after his death finds fertile ground. In the **frontier land of** Macedonia, **left** outside of the evolutionary process of the Greek city-states of the south **with** its ancient customs and traditions **still preserved**²², the idea of the divine descent of the king -never totally forgotten- comes **to the fore** again.

Even more impressive will be the burial of Philip II himself. Here also the funerary pyre (im. 23-24) had the form of a monumental building, possibly similar to the tomb, built **of** wood and bricks. Inside it, **laid** on a **gold and** ivory *kline* (im. 25-28) **with** the valuable oak wreath (im. 29) on his head, the king was **delivered** to the flames **accompanied by precious offerings**; one armour -gorget, cuirass, shield, swords and spears- strigils, costumes, gilded funerary wreaths made of bronze, various pieces of furniture and vessels, one bronze *oenochoe* (im. 30) for the libations, amphorae filled with honey and oil, *unguentaria* and **numerous** clay vessels containing foods, fruits and nuts. Seeds of grapes **were found** -it was September when Philip was murdered-, **as well as** almonds, wheat, bones of fishes, poultry, rabbits, lambs and goats, cattle and pigs.

In the funerary pyre of their lord, dogs -his companions in hunting- and four horses, whose presence evokes the victories of the Macedonian ruler in Olympia, were also sacrificed. And the most precious of all: it seems that in the flames Philip was accompanied by one of his younger wives, who at the time of **her** death would be around 23-27 years old²³. Since the stratigraphic study of the road backfill reveals that the door of the tomb was closed never **to be** opened again, the two burials -male and female- **occured** at the same time²⁴, meaning that the dead woman **cannot** be Cleopatra²⁵, who died a little later.

¹⁸ This dating is also supported by the rest of the ceramics found in the pyre, but also by the two *arybaloid lekythoi* of the painter of the Eleusinians found in the chamber of the tomb.

¹⁹ For the scene of Persephone and the symbolism of the decoration of the marble throne *cf.* Kottaridou 2000 (under printing).

²⁰ Which is nothing else than the realisation of the platonic conception of the form that the graves of the leaders in the ideal state should have; *cf.* Plato, Laws 947d-e. For the origins of the Macedonian tombs see Andronikos 1987, 1-16 (with bibliography).

²¹ Diod. XVI, 91-94.

²² *Cf.* Stambolidis 1996 for the magnificent pyres of the aristocrats of the geometrical Eleutherna.

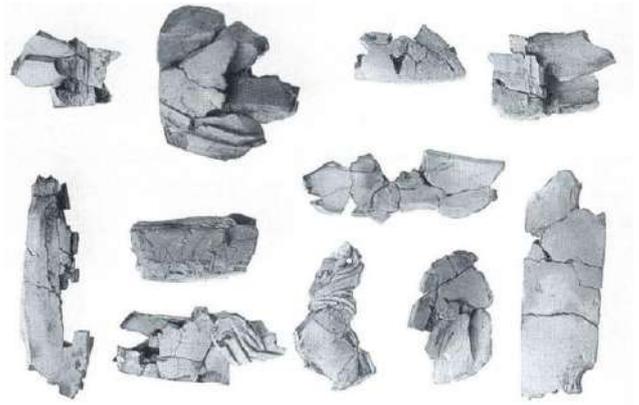
²³ See Andronikos 1984, 228.

²⁴ This is the view expressed by the observations of K. Zambas in relation to the construction of the tomb arch, see Zambas 1999 (to be printed).

²⁵ *Cf.* Andronikos 1984, 231.



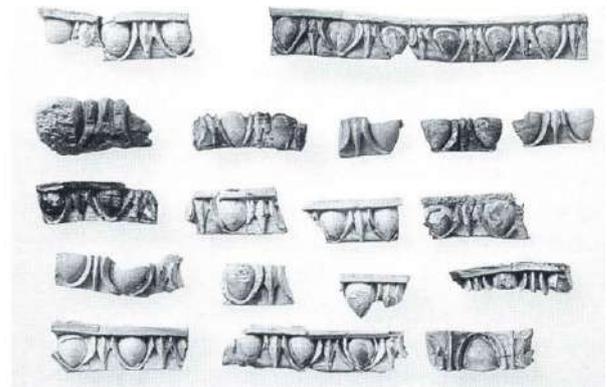
Im. 25. Ivory head.



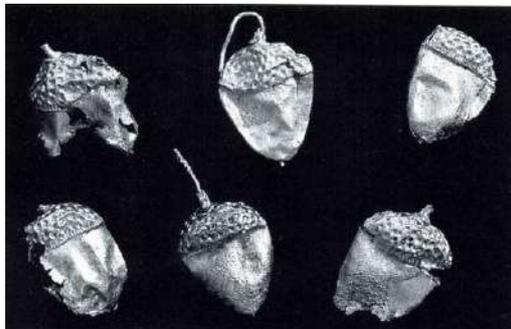
Im. 26. Shards of ivory figures.



Im. 27. Shards of *astragali*



Im. 28. Shards of Ionic *cymatia* from the decoration of the golden ivory *kline* that was burnt with the dead Philip II.



Im. 29. Golden acorns from the wreath that was placed together with the bones of the dead in the cinerary larnax of Philip II. These acorns, which have melted and dropped from the wreath during the cremation, were found fallen over the tomb's arch together with the rest of the remains of the burial pyre.



Im. 30. Bronze *oenochoe* from the remains of the burial pyre of Philip II.

It remains that this could be Meda, the Thracian princess whom Philip married **while returning** from his campaign in Scythia, four years before he died. According to the customs of her homeland²⁶, this young woman followed her **lord and husband** to the flames of the funerary pyre **-sharing** the king's bed in Hades **for all eternity**. Her action, even if it was dictated by the absolute necessity of the unwritten law of the Greeks, it could only be compared to the exemplary conjugal virtue of the legendary heroines and this seems to be the reason that the new king **venerated her greatly**, offering her, for this journey with no return, gifts of mythical value: two of the most beautiful ornaments of the ancient world preserved to our days²⁷, a golden larnax used as an urn, almost as valuable as the one of Philip, and the magnificent **gold and ivory kline**, which was even more richly decorated than the *kline* of the king.

The burial of Philip II **may have been** the **richest and** most magnificent funerary ceremony that Greece of the historic times has ever known. The unique grandeur of the funerary pyre, the wonderful mural and the richness of the grave offerings do justice to the testimony of Diodorus **that** "*τῆς ταφῆς του γονέως τὴν ἔνδεχομένην ἐπιμέλειαν ποιησάμενος κατέστησε τὰ κατὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν πολὺ κάλλιον ἢ πάντες προσεδόκησαν*"²⁸.

The funerary pyre of the aristocrat buried near Lete **possibly echoes** the funerary houses of Aigai, **as does** the magnificent pyre lit at the end of the 4th c. BC in Salamis of Cyprus, in honour of Nikokreon and of his tragically lost family²⁹.

The burial of the father was surpassed in majesty, continuing the same tradition, by the burial of the companion of the world ruler³⁰. The funerary pyre of Hephaestion that he **built** in Babylon cost 10,000 talents and was the work of a brilliant architect, Stasicrates. One multi-storey pyramid with a height of over 60 m. was **staged**, richly decorated with all sorts of **gilded** figures, warrior archers, boat prows, animals, hunting scenes, **centaureomachy**, lions devouring bulls and sirens **-through which came the sounds** of mourning and lament. We also learn about offerings that the *hetairoi* **threw** in the fire, **even** ivory portraits among them. Hephaestion was worshiped as a hero immediately after his death. Alexander himself established his **cult** and 10,000 animals were sacrificed at the king's orders.

The magnificence of the ceremony **captivates** the crowd. The funeral of the **select** becomes a **joint** affair, the common grief, the mourning, the suffering shared by everyone leads to collective catharsis. The **departed** becomes a role model, a point of reference, **the focus for the reattachment** of the group members. And the games **organised by** the companions in honour of the dead leader -an integral part of the funerary ceremony of the heroic epic, still alive in Macedonia **even** at the time of Cassander³¹- **reawaken** the lust for life **by** reminding its joys.

Yet irrespective of the ceremony's wealth, irrespective of the social **status** of the **departed**, even irrespective of the chosen burial practice, the essence of the burial is that the dead body, delivered to the flames or to the decaying into the earth, is forever vanished from the world of the living. What remains is the sign, the mark of memory. For the soul **-however** anyone **perceives** it- to **be able**

²⁶ This is the view that first was expressed by N.G.L. Hammond, Philip II, Alexander the Great and the Macedonian Heritage, 1982, 111 *et seq.*

²⁷ For the golden myrtle wreath and the very valuable tiara found in the ash-containing urn see Andronikos 1984.

²⁸ Diod., 17.2.1.

²⁹ Cf. V. Karageorgis, Salamis in Cyprus, 1969, 151 *et seq.* with bibliography.

³⁰ Diod., 17.115 and Arr. *Anab. Alex.* 7.23.5 and 26. 6-7.

³¹ Diod., 18.52.5.

to find after death its place in the **hereafter**, the body must **dissipate** from the world of the living.

The burial of the dead is for the ancient people a sacred and inviolable law, the unwavering foundation that supports the **world order**. Its violation is punished by gods and **men alike**. The history of Antigone and the fate of the Athenian generals after the naval battle of Arginusae prove it.

Only for him who reached the human boundaries has the law been abolished³². Before even Alexander had **slipped away**, the ceremony of prosthesis took place. But the king's body that the **soldiers** saw lying on the bed - that would become his deathbed- was still **breathing**...

When the army leader died, the aspiration for power made the *hetairoi* forget for a moment their most sacred duty "...τῶν ἡγεμόνων στασιασάντων ἔφ' ἡμέρας πολλάς ἀθεράπευτον τό σῶμα κείμενον ἐν τόποις θερμοῖς καί πνιγώδεσιν... ἔμενε καθαρὸν καί πρόσφατον". Finally his body was embalmed and, **if the sources are taken** into account, it was placed on the throne along with the **regalia**.

The funeral procession started two whole years after his death, the time required to complete the funerary carriage, a construction that was something between a Macedonian tomb and a temple and seems that astonished contemporary people.

The aim of the journey that started from Babylon was to carry the Body of the Temenid to Aigai³³, where -according to the **ancestral** customs- it would be buried in the royal necropolis. This march that resembled the triumphal procession of a sacred icon³⁴ -besides, Alexander was already a god for many of his subjects- never reached its destination. The possession of the body became a sign of power for the generals, a requirement of authority. The challenge was won by Ptolemy. Perdikkas, who lost the Body, found death³⁵.

Lying in its golden -later glass- sarcophagus, the Body found its place in the sanctuary built for that purpose in the centre of the city that worshiped Alexander as a god-founder³⁶. Centuries after his death, the Body of Alexander was still among the living and could be seen behind the glass, more present than ever before, accepting offerings and gifts, a tangible sign of divine blessing³⁷. The Alexandrians preserved from decay and kept among them their god's Body, **which ensured for** them prosperity and protection from any harm, the Body that was **to** them what the relics of saints would later become for the Christians.

Both the Sign and the Body were apparently destroyed when the fanatic crowd of the Christians burnt the temples, the Serapeum, the neo-Platonic school and whatever had remained of the Library. Seven centuries after his death, the flames that marked the end of the ancient world became a funerary pyre worthy of the **invictus**³⁸.

To keep his wife Melissa warm in Hades, Periander³⁹ asked all the women of Corinth to give one *chiton* each. One big fire was lit and the clothes were burnt for the **departed** to take **along**. Fire has the power to transmute. Passing through the flames, perishable objects become useful and can be given back to the one who passed to the other side.

Fire dissolves the **mortal** body; through the holocaust, the dead is

³² About the funeral of Alexander the Great see Kottaridou 1998b, 113-120.

³³ Pausanias, 1.6.3.

³⁴ Cf. Kottaridou 1998b, 119 and note 30, 31, 32.

³⁵ Diod. 18.

³⁶ Diod., 18.28.6.

³⁷ Strabo 17.1, 8, 794; Suetonius, *Vitae* 7 and 18; Dion Cassius 37, 52; Ael., *Herod.* 4.

³⁸ See Kottaridou 1998b, 120 and note 41.

³⁹ Herodotus, 5.92.

purified. The Gods of the Underworld demand holocausts⁴⁰. The sacrifices are laid on the chthonic altar to **bleed dry** and then **burnt to ashes**. The dead, **their** bodies “consumed” in the pyre, share the fate of the sacred victims and become themselves **offerings** to the Lord and the Lady of Hades.

The mythical archetype of cremation is the death of Hercules⁴¹. At the end of his cumbersome journey, the god’s mortal son prepared his **thanksgiving** sacrifice, himself **being** the ultimate offering. The flames of the altar will be his **fiery** grave. The holocaust will be for him the end and the beginning. In Hades only his shadow will remain. Himself, accompanied by Hebe, will rejoice in the banquets of the **Immortals**...

The hero, **depicted on 4th century BC pottery** coming to Eleusis⁴² **with a supplicant’s** branch to become the first mystic, is the founder of the family of the Temenids and the kings of Macedonia do their best in order to remind their relation with their ‘*progenitor Hercules*’⁴³. Kraters, *hydriae*, *larnaces*, but mainly *chytrae* and *lebetes* are the favourite urns of the Macedonians. In the **mystic** myths these objects play an important role⁴⁴. The essence of Dionysus, **none** other than Hades, is wine⁴⁵. Water is dominant in ceremonies; the sources of Lethe and Mnemosyne define the geography of the Underworld⁴⁶. In the **cist** of the mystics **lays** the power of life **hidden**, the snake, the phallus, the newly sprung shoot, the beautiful boy once kept and loved by Persephone. The *lebes* is where the **offerings** end up, the **sacrifices** that reconcile mortals and immortals ensuring blessing. In the boiling *chytra* the pieces of the departed “come to life” again and the hero resurrects from inside the *lebes* younger and more handsome than before⁴⁷. Demeter, Thetis, Medea try to make the sons of man immortal by passing them through the flames⁴⁸.

In the Great Mysteries, the goddess gave to men -valuable gift- the knowledge that defeats death⁴⁹. Through the holocaust the mortal is offered to **the deity**. The mystic returns to the womb of the goddess, of the **formidable** Persephone “a kid drowned in the milk”⁵⁰. Purified by the fire the **heroes**-dead can begin a new life in the **blissful hereafter**, in the asphodel meadows of the Elysium.

⁴⁰ Cf. Burkert 1993, 417 *et seq.*, 149 *et seq.* See also: *Od.* 11, 31; Rohde 1894, 148 *et seq.*; Stengel 1920, 105-124; Harrison 1922, 1-31.

⁴¹ Hesiod. excer. 25.20-33; Bacchyl. *Dithyr.* 16; Sophocles, *Trach.*

⁴² E.g. Apulian helix-shaped *krater* of the painter of Darius, Princeton, University Art Museum A.D. Trendall, A. Cambitoglou *The Red-Figured Vases of Apulia*, (suppl. 1983) 74, 78 n. 41a, table 12. Cf. Schneider 1957-58, 661 *et seq.*

⁴³ The use of the head of Hercules on royal **coinage** is indicative, as well as the two inscriptions referring to the “Hercules progenitor” from the Vault of the Aigai palace.

⁴⁴ About the mysteries in general see Burkert 1994 with extended bibliography and sources.

⁴⁵ Heracl. VS 22 B 14.

⁴⁶ Plato *Pol.* 621 a, *Orph. Hymn.* 77,9. Plato *Phaedr.* 250 a, *Gorg.* 493c. Cf. the texts of the orphic tablets: G. Pugliesse Carratelli, *La Parola del Passato* 29 (1974) 108-26, M.L. West, *ZPE* 18 (1975) 229-36, G. Zuntz, *WST* 10 (1976) 129-51, S.G. Cole *GRBS* 21 (1980) 223-38.

⁴⁷ Cf. Kottaridou 1991b, 174 *et seq.* with bibliography and 196 *et seq.*

⁴⁸ Cf. Kottaridou 1991b, 124 *et seq.* with bibliography and sources.

⁴⁹ *Hymn to Dem.* 280-2, Pind. excer. 137a, Sophocles excer. 837 (Pearson-Radt) from Triptolemus, Isocrates *Panegy.* 28.

⁵⁰ G. Zuntz, *Persephone*, Oxford 1940, A1, A4.