

BURIAL PRACTICES IN GEOMETRIC ERETRIA

The Geometric period (900-700 BC) is a critical period in Greek history which saw the emergence of a new form of political organisation, that of the *poleis*. Scholarship dedicated to this period has aimed at understanding how the Greeks invented a new communitarian framework, where authority is no more held by a single individual or small elite, but divided amongst members of the community. Eretria enjoys a privileged position in the studies devoted to the birth of the Greek *polis*, since it is one of the few sites in Greece where Geometric remains from various contexts have been unearthed: dwellings and workshops, sacred areas as well as burial places. Therefore, it is possible to study the formation of the city using different angles of research.

The burial customs, the architecture of the tombs, the offerings as well as the choice of the burial place are keys to understanding the organisation and evolution of society. Finds from graves, which are generally better preserved than the objects found in domestic contexts, inform us about the local productions as well as the relationships of the community with its close and remote neighbours. Anthropological analyses provide unique information about the nature of the population (age, sex, and health).

Up till now two studies have been devoted to Eretrian funerary practices: an article published by K. Kourouniotis in 1903, after he discovered the first tombs of the Geometric period from the south-western part of the site (the *Hygeionomeion*); C. Bérard's *Eretria* III volume, published in 1970 and entitled «L'Hérôon à la Porte de l'Ouest.» The rapid urbanization of the modern village of Eretria in the late 1960's has led to the increase of rescue excavations. Remains of the Geometric settlement have been unearthed in the process, but these numerous discoveries have rarely been the subject of an exhaustive study. The catalogue of graves has been established from disparate sources; it is however too limited, too uneven and too chronologically widespread for applying statistical methods, as in the case of the Athenian cemeteries. On the other hand, comparisons with the neighbouring sites (Lefkandi, Kyme-Vigliatouri, Oropos) replace the Eretrian discoveries in the larger framework of Euboean funerary practices, and beyond with the sites of Pithekoussai and Kumai in southern Italy.

The first five chapters of this study are devoted to the topography of the site and the location of the burials in relation to the settlement (chap. I), the architecture of the tombs (chap. II), the objects (chap. III) and the animal bones (chap. IV) deposited in it,

and the different stages of the funerary ritual (chap. V). The last two chapters address the social structure of Eretria (chap. VI) and the evolution of the site between the 9th century and the beginning of the 7th century BC (chap. VII).

I. DISTRIBUTION OF THE BURIAL ZONES

Based on the catalogue of the Geometric burials a new distribution of the funerary areas can be mapped. After the discovery of the necropolis of the Heroon, it has been stated that two distinct necropolis existed in the Geometric period: one for the ordinary people and another for the aristocratic class, located respectively to the south-east and north-west of the settlement. This model is now outdated: the evidence shows numerous burial zones disseminated around the dwelling space. The aggregation of the tombs in small groups corresponds to the structure of the settlement: nuclei of houses are spread out over a large surface without any organisation. One can observe that these burial zones move centrifugally, probably following the expansion of the city.

II. TYPES OF BURIAL AND FINDS

How the dead are buried differs according to their age and status within the community. Children only a few months old are buried in vases and mostly without offerings. The anthropological analyses carried out by M. A. Porro allow us to establish that the dead-born babies were also buried in vases. The child is thus recognised as an individual human being and a member of the family from the day of its birth. On the contrary though, the child is not a member of the community yet; therefore, it is buried in the immediate neighbourhood of the house and not in the specific burial zones. It is only at the beginning of the 7th century BC that the graves tend to be separated from the dwellings, and that children are buried in cemeteries. The burials discovered in Oropos display similar characteristics.

The grown-up children are generally inhumated in pits with or without offerings, in the burial zones situated at a distance from the settlement. Three categories of finds deposited in these graves can be distinguished according to the age at death (based on anthropological criteria):

- vases that are too big to have been used by children, therefore interpreted as offerings;
- small drinking vases like skyphoi, cups and baby's bottles, whose dimensions are adapted to the age of the child and which were certainly used whilst the child was alive;
- miniature vases of generally poor quality or token cut in decorated vases, which can be interpreted as toys.

Besides small open vases (essentially cups), jewellery was deposited in children graves. The dimensions of these ornaments show that they were made for adults, who deposited them in the tomb as an offering.

Adults who were full members of the community were buried in pits or on funerary pyres and their bones were placed in urns. Both types of burials are always located at a distance from the settlement. The cremation of adults involves large vases, weapons (swords, spear-heads) and jewellery in precious metals (gold, electrum, silver). Kraters were common among the funerary offerings, unlike in the tombs of Lefkandi and Pithekoussai.

The burial types do not vary only according to the age of the deceased but also according to its social status. An important group (the tombs of the necropolis of the Heroon) has adopted cremation in a bronze cauldron, a type of burial which requires a large deployment of means and has strong heroic links, reminiscent of Patroklos's funerals as described in the *Iliad*. It is important to underline that in the Heroon women were also buried in cauldrons, while elsewhere in Greece this type of burial is apparently reserved for male adults. This practice granted to women can probably be interpreted as a means of strengthening the unity of this particular family group. The deceased of the Heroon necropolis were buried with a large number of metallic objects: offensive weapons for men, adornments for women. Pottery is mostly absent. Other burials were more modest. The deceased was cremated on top of a pit with pottery offerings and some metal objects (a sword or some iron spear heads). The locus of the cremation corresponds to the burial place, which is not the case for those buried in cauldrons. Finally, a third group of adults is buried in pits showing neither care nor offerings. These modest burials have been found at close distance of the tombs of cremated adults. They probably belonged to individuals who did not enjoy full citizen rights.

The discovery in the West Quarter of monumental vases (1.5 m high), which are comparable to the ones discovered in the Keramikos necropolis in Athens, suggests an emulation between different elite groups at the end of the 8th century BC. Not far from the future agora (O.T. 689) a primary cremation was accompanied by an abundance of fine pottery, which is of a very remarkable quality.

It is important to underline the similarities between the burial types used by the elites of Eretria, Lefkandi as well as Kumai—the first Euboean colony in the west. On these three sites we notice the use of bronze cremation urns, a taste for imported offerings and the deposit of weapons.

III. THE ANIMAL REMAINS IN THE TOMBS

The analysis of the animal bones (carried out by the archaeozoologist I. Chenal-Velarde) did not reveal funerary common meals nor the deposit of food offerings. Worth mentioning is the discovery in 1903 by K. Kourouniotis of a horse grave near Geometric burials. It is hard to tell if the animal was sacrificed on the occasion of a funeral. Nevertheless, this equine tomb belongs to a long tradition from the Protogeometric period onwards; it is well attested in Lefkandi and elsewhere in the Greek world.

IV. THE FUNERARY RITUAL

The analysis of the finds shows that objects such as the diadems and other jewellery (earrings, bracelets, rings) were worn during the exhibition of the body (*prothesis*) and then taken off for the cremation before being deposited in the grave. Other objects, considered to be more personal and undoubtedly non-transferable, have been voluntarily damaged. In the case of the swords—which are only found in cremation burials—the blade has been deliberately twisted. This practice, which appears first in Attika, is also attested in Lefkandi and then in Eretria.

Subsequently to the *prothesis* and the *ekphora* an important part of the ceremony takes place around the pyres. These remain largely unknown because they are difficult to identify on the field. Ethnology provides very useful points of comparison. The representation of a race of *apobates* on a gravestone could suggest that funerary games took place after the burial of prominent members of the community, as echoed in the Homeric poems and Hesiod.

V. THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF ERETRIA

The binary interpretation, which was put forward after the groundbreaking discovery of the Heroon necropolis and based on the opposition Heroon / elite and *Hygeionomeion* / ordinary people, has endured despite the new discoveries. It is now clear that the earliest cremations of the necropolis of the *Hygeionomeion* do not correspond to the ordinary type of burial as has been suggested.

If we compare the data from Lefkandi and Eretria we note a clear social evolution. The double burial under the monumental apsidal building of the *Toumba* cemetery suggests a major change in the Middle Protogeometric period. The cremated bones deposited in the Cypriote amphora of the 13th century BC certainly belong to a man enjoying absolute power recognised by the whole community. No other graves from Lefkandi or even in Greece can compete with this outstanding display of wealth. Nevertheless, the funerary symbolism is adopted and henceforth imitated by the group which buries its dead near the royal tomb (*Toumba* cemetery). In between the Middle and the Late Protogeometric periods the power thus probably passed

from the hands of the king to a group of aristocrats. As from the Subprotogeometric period onwards the situation changes noticeably: the distinction between the *Toumba* graves and the neighbouring necropolis becomes less clear. Secondary cremations, weapons and *exotika* appear in graves located outside the *Toumba* necropolis. Gradually the system loses its internal coherence and eventually disappears around 825 BC. The appearance in the 9th century BC (SPG II) of a warrior grave in Eretria is better understood in the context of the rivalry between different factions of the community of Lefkandi. One can suppose that certain groups, whose status in Lefkandi remains obscure, left to settle in other regions of the coastal plain. It is not a coincidence that the occupation of Theologos, Malakonda, Eretria and nearby Magoula date precisely to the Subprotogeometric period.

VI. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITE

Until now, the Geometric period has been regarded as a single phase mainly because data were scarce. The study of the burials allows us to map three successive plans of the archaeological remains and to reconstruct the development of the site following three phases: the 9th century, the first and second halves of the 8th century BC.

Different narratives have been put forward to explain the genesis of Eretria. The main issue concerns the nature and duration of the occupation during the Early Geometric period. A tomb discovered *in situ* is attested near the Sanctuary of Apollo. Other groups of graves were discovered at Magoula, Malakonda as well as Theologos. These tombs testify to the existence of several communities in the plain. This evidence, although modest, suggests a more scattered occupation than in Lefkandi. Furthermore, contrary to the common opinion according to which Eretria appeared only when Lefkandi declined, one can assume that the latter spread out or that her prosperity favoured the emergence of several communities in the coastal region. The discoveries made at Oropos favour a similar interpretation.

The Middle Geometric II saw the foundation of the city and the emergence of the cult of the tutelary god, Apollo Daphnephoros. Between the 8th and the beginning of the 7th century BC one notes an evolution in the location of graves belonging to small children: instead of being buried near the houses as in the 8th century BC, they are buried in the same graveyards as the adults from the beginning of the 7th century BC onwards. The exclusion of the graves from the settlement is an indicator amongst others that the city is growing.