

Traces of ritual in Middle Helladic funeral contexts including an assessment of geographical location

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Introduction

RESEARCH IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY has helped to understand the structure of ritual as a rigidly performed sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects. Rituals and their performance may in many cases seem enigmatic, but studies on the theory of symbolism helps (Turner 1985:32).¹ By exploring the rituals of the African Ndembu, Victor Turner could map a rich structure of symbolism. An actual ritual procedure involves not only one symbolic object, but a series of them in a sequence.² Like a piece of music or a sequence of words, it must have a syntax. The combination and arrangement of the symbols form the message. Collectively enacted dramas have private and unconscious meaning (Keesing and Strathern 1998). A religious system may be seen as a 'cluster of sacred symbols' (Geertz 1957:424). Rituals are often sophisticated exercises in the meaning of words and sentences and display a subtle mechanism of elusive symbols (Gerholm 1988). The obvious aspects of rituals are formal actions (Rappaport 1979), with a compulsory air to them and a definite correct way of performance. To explain the practical reasons for the existence of rituals, I tend to Horton's straightforward definition (1982) as a means of acting on the world, bringing about and controlling things.

How then can we study ancient rituals of the Bronze Age? Of the hierarchy of sources, suggested by Ian Morris,³ only points 3 and 4 are possible options. Artistic

- 1 For example, the royal scepter is not only a phallic symbol (Freud) or only a symbol of the power of the state, but the combination of both is what makes it work; *i.e.*, that it has this double symbolism.
- 2 The symbol is the smallest unit of ritual (Turner 1967:19).
- 3 1. Direct observation/participation in the rituals; 2. Verbal testimony, oral or written, describing or explaining the rituals; 3. Artistic representations of the rituals; and 4. The material remains of rituals (Morris 1992:10).

representation of rituals (point 3) are found for instance on the Tanagra larnakes (coffins) from Boeotia, on the larnakes from Crete and the Ayia Triada sarcophagus, but they are all from the Late Bronze Age and in that sense too late for this study. That leaves us only with point 4, 'the material remains of rituals'.

Rituals during the Early Bronze Age on Mainland Greece seem mainly to have been conducted within the settlements, in open public areas and outside houses, as miniature vessels reveal. There are also traces of ritual inside some of the houses at for instance Eutresis in Boeotia (Goldman 1931) and at Lithares (Tzavella-Evjen 1984). Some of the buildings have been interpreted as possible sanctuaries because of the presence of hearths and zoomorphic figurines (Caskey 1990). There were also benches, that could have been used to display sacred objects, and deposit-bothroi filled with possible remnants from earlier rituals. Since relatively few burials from the inner Mainland have been found, we do not really know if rituals were also conducted in funeral contexts. The study of grave goods within Early Bronze Age tombs is hampered by their subsequent re-use (Pullen 1990). On the other hand, cemeteries on the fringe of the Mainland, the so-called R-graves at Steno on Leukas with connection to the Adriatic cultures⁴ or those on the seafront to the Cyclades as for instance, Aghios Kosmas in SW Attica⁵ and at Tsepi in the Gulf of Marathon,⁶ together with Manika on Euboia,⁷ give some indications of rituals but are outside the scope of this paper.

The Middle Bronze Age on the Mainland, the so-called Middle Helladic period (*ca.* 2050/2000–1680 BC),⁸ is marked by diminishing or total abandoning

- 4 The R-graves with partial cremations covered by 33 tumuli built like round platforms, often very near one another (Dörpfeld 1927). Most of these grave circles have so-called cremation areas, in some cases without human bones in. Some of them are now believed to be of a somewhat later date than the Early Bronze Age II period. Perhaps some date toward the beginning of Middle Bronze? In the neighbourhood have also been uncovered the so-called Familien-grab F in a rectangular enclosure and Familiengrab S, both complexes dating to the Middle Bronze Age. Can the neatly built platform-shaped round R-graves have functioned as a ceremonial area as well as a place for burials?
- 5 Of the 39 stone-built graves, many were provided with symbolic doorjambs and door openings (Mylonas 1959:65).
- 6 At Tsepi, 22 stone built graves with multiple burials where excavated in 1970 (Marinatos 1970). The graves had dromos and grave-openings, although new interments must have been lowered down from above by removing a cover plate. M. Pantelidou-Gofa continues the excavations (Pantelidou-Gofa 2000).
- 7 Manika with 189 chamber tombs (Sampson 1985).
- 8 Suggestions for an approximate chronology (based mainly on Rutter 1993:756): Helladic = the Bronze Age culture on the Greek Mainland. Early Helladic I–II *ca.* 3150 BC–2200/2150 BC; EH III *ca.* 2200/2150 BC–2050/2000 BC; Middle Helladic I–II *ca.* 2050/2000 BC–1750/1720 BC; MH III *ca.* 1750/1720 BC–1680 BC; Late Helladic I (Early Mycenaean) *ca.* 1680 BC–1600/1580 BC; LH II *ca.* 1600/1580 BC–.

of settlements at the same time as elaborate graves in the form of tumuli develop and dominate the landscape. There are signs that rituals have been conducted inside and around these monuments and at other graves, and one can speculate whether the ritualistic expression of religion during the Middle Bronze Age took place in the natural environment and around extramural graves instead of, as earlier, within settlements.

Grave architecture and contents of the graves have always been of great archaeological interest. But in concentrating perhaps too much on the artefacts found inside the graves, we may have overlooked information about what can have been going on at the grave openings and in the surrounding area; such information could perhaps have told us more about these prehistoric peoples' ideas of the Other world.

The first part of this paper will give brief samples of some possible indications for rituals found in Middle Helladic funeral contexts.⁹ Since most of these could have taken place in the open and humans—women, men and children—are the actors in rituals, the second part of the paper will present a conceptual model (fig. 1), of how to look at landscapes in a symbolic perspective.¹⁰

As representative sites for presenting possible indications for rituals, I will mainly use what is for me well-known material from Aphidna¹¹ and Vrana in East Attica. The cemetery of Vrana, with up to seven tumuli, was first explored by Spyridon Marinatos in the year 1970 and are notable for their grave structures. The material is unfortunately only available through preliminary reports by the excavator and others.¹²

Later, when considering the landscape, I will put special emphasis on Malthi in Messenia on the south-west Peloponnese. This site was excavated by the Swedish Messenia Expedition in 1933–1934 (Valmin 1938:5) and has—in my view unfairly—

9 For a more complete account I recommend to the reader Protonotariou-Deilaki 1990 and Nordquist 1990.

10 It is worth noting that study of nomadic hunter-gatherers has shown that the humans see themselves as a part of nature, an organism in the ecological system. Fredrik Barth (1980) has through his anthropological research found that nomadic hunter-gatherers did not have constructed rituals. The cyclic wandering around in the nature, with men a part of the ecological system, was a ritual in itself. But what about earlier agriculturalists if they, forced by environmental circumstances, returned to these older forms of subsistence?

11 Aphidna is a Middle Helladic tumulus excavated by S. Wide in 1894. In 1988 I received permission from the Greek Authorities to study the material, with the aim of re-publication. From 1994 I have invited a colleague, Dr Michael Wedde, to join me in this project.

12 The Vrana material is available through preliminary reports in Marinatos 1970a, 1970b, 1970c, 1972, Brook 1972 and Marinatos 1973. A final publication is planned by M. Pantelidou-Gofa. In preparing for my re-publication of the Aphidna material I first studied these preliminary reports on the neighbouring site of Vrana, which resulted in Hielte-Stavropoulou 1994.

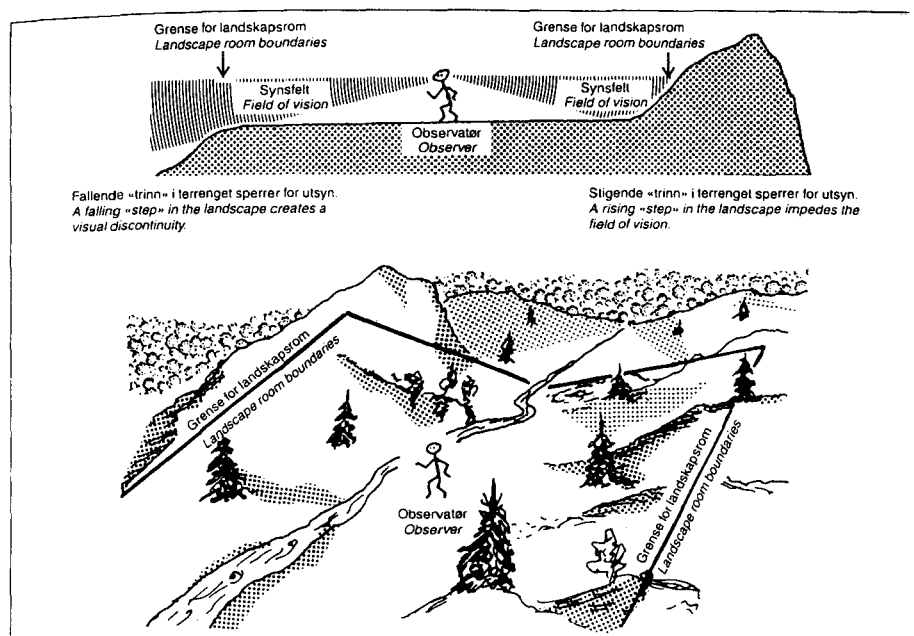


Fig. 1. Landscape rooms are constituted by continuous surfaces which appear as the 'floor', and by hill-sides or vegetation boundaries creating the 'walls'. Discontinuity in the surface 'floor' may also create edges that constitute room boundaries (courtesy of Gansum, Jerpåsen and Keller 1997).

been more or less overlooked ever since. This is in my opinion most unfortunate, even if some interpretations need to be reconsidered. To end today's concerns with the subsequent scientific negligence of the site, in spite of Malthi's extreme importance as being one of the few Middle Helladic settlements and the only completely excavated site of that period, a re-examination of Malthi's architectural remains and all the finds, especially the pottery, should be regarded as an urgent matter.

Indications of rituals

The first moments after death has occurred come the laments, the preparation of the body¹³ and vigil over the dead person. Through all these difficult stages the mourners are helped by the performance of certain death-rituals. Anthropological research has shown that people seem to feel reassured if they can release their grief

13 In lack of written evidences from Greece, we can borrow the words from the Hittite king Hattusilis I, ca. 1650–1620 B.C.: 'Wash my body, as is seemly; hold me to thy bosom, and at thy bosom bury me in the earth' (Gurney 1952: 168).



Fig. 2. The MH tumuli I & II at Vrana, with the 'altar' in the middle. Note the topography; the cemetery is placed in the border zone between the mountains and the grasslands/fields, on the southern slope of the Charadra creek (after Marinatos 1970d:pl. 8).

in a safe and ordered context through a mourning ritual that will allow them not to drown in horror and helplessness (Bell 1997:240).

As the greater and most expressive parts of rituals are impossible to detect by archaeological excavations,¹⁴ I will focus on some possible examples of material remains. To get some consistency in the presentation, I will try to present the different moments in the order they may have happened, starting at the grave entrance.

Thresholds and other borderlines between this and the other world

Thresholds are of great importance in rites de passage, when individuals pass from one zone to another. The entrance of the so-called megaron-shaped-grave

¹⁴ A most certain ritual but difficult to prove by material evidence, is the funeral procession. It must have been conducted because of the very necessity to transport the body to the grave, but for the Early and Middle Bronze Age we do not have any material evidence. To transport the corpse with some equipment creates the need for people to acting together, in other words, it formes a procession. For such magnificent procession as the *ekphora* in Geometric and Archaic times, when the bier was carried on a wagon drawn by two horses, accompanied by female relatives, professional mourners and armed men, there are no evidence before early Mycenaean times. The pair of horses laid down in the dromos of the tholos tomb at Marathon, probably *ca.* 1450–1425 BC, most certainly had drawn their owners to the grave (Stikas 1958).



Fig. 3. The central grave in Tumulus IV at Vrana. Note the vessel (for libations?) to the right in front of the 'threshold' in the entrance area. (None of the preliminary publications informs about this vessel, so our hope lies with M. Pantelidou-Gofa in her future publication of the 1970 excavation.) The burial chamber was divided in gradual stages by sidewalls into three inner compartments. Tumulus II (to the right on Fig. 2) and other graves had the same type of division (after Marinatos 1970d:pl. 23b).

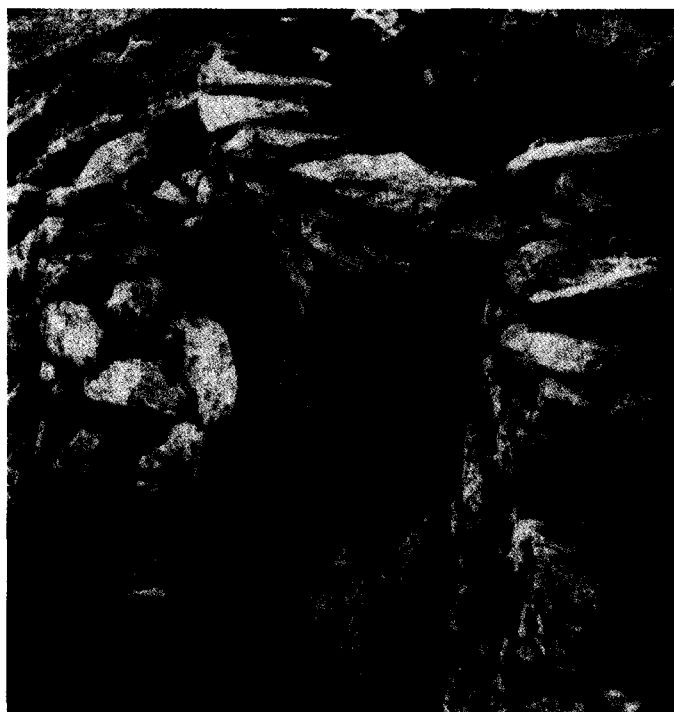


Fig. 4. The western outside wall of the inner circular enclosure in Tumulus I at Vrana. Note the two amphora necks standing ready to receive libations (after Marinatos 1970d:pl. 12b).

Fig. 5. The horse skeleton in Grave 3, Tumulus I at Vrana, without legs and shoulders (after Marinatos 1970d:pl. 15b).



in Tumulus II at Vrana is marked by a horizontal slab *ca.* 80 cm wide (to the right of the 'altar' on fig. 2) like a large doorstep of schist bordered by stones on either side. The central Grave in Tumulus IV also has a threshold arrangement at the entrance (fig. 3). Maybe also the horizontal schist slab outside the inner circle in Tumulus I, to the right of the vessels on fig. 4, can be interpreted as a 'symbolic' threshold leading to Grave 1. This grave was probably the central grave in the whole complex, resting inside this earth-covered well-built little circle, in company with an older deeper Grave 1a, with a placement in the direction between the feet of the deceased in Grave 1 and this 'symbolic' threshold.

Doors in the graves

The earlier mentioned 'symbolic' door openings (in note 5), with the prepared space in front of the graves from the Early Bronze Age, both at Aghios Kosmas and at Tsepi,¹⁵ were not intended to be used by the caretakers placing the body in the grave since it was obvious that the interment must have been lowered down from above.

15 *Supra* notes 5 and 6.

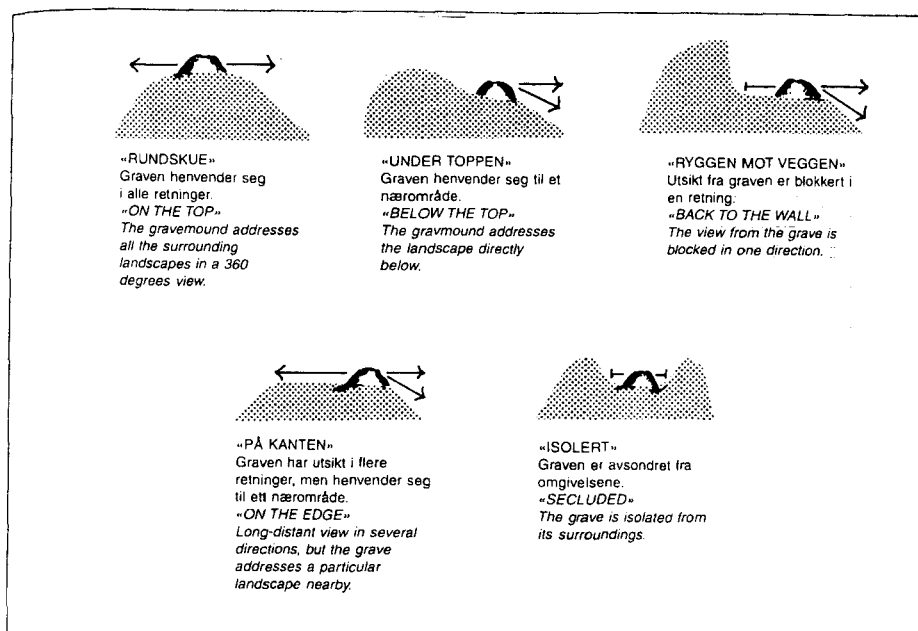


Fig. 6. Useful model in describing positions of architectural remains, for instance tumuli that may be located in a variety of ways. By mapping the view from the mounds and what is actually seen in that view, we can get an idea of what the mounds are addressing: a nearby area, the sea or the distant horizon (courtesy of Gansum, Jerpåsen and Keller 1997).

Examples from the Middle Helladic period: both Grave 1 within the inner circle and Grave 4 in Tumulus I at Vrana, have one of the walls (in the SW direction, by the feet of the dead) altered in what can be interpreted as a 'false door'.¹⁶ The other three sides were neatly built walls.¹⁷

The other graves at Vrana, in Tumulus II and Tumulus IV with impressive entrances, s. 2 and 3, did obviously not need any such imitation feature.

Some of the tumuli graves at Argos were quipped with 'symbolic' door openings (Protonotario-Deilaki, pers. comm.; *ead.* 1990a:figs. 7 and 25).

16 The most common examples of false doors are from Egypt. Although it was completely solid, the Egyptians believed that it would function as a real door for the spirit of the deceased, allowing him to leave the burial chamber at will in order to receive the offerings in the burial chapel (Spencer 1984:58).

17 When graves are totally sealed (as the referred examples from Vrana), the false door was the only imaginable way out for the spirit after the decomposition (Gräslund 1994:24).

Offerings

Grave goods are not so common in the early part of the Middle Helladic period (Nordquist 1990). Later in the Middle Helladic period, there are usually a jug and a drinking cup placed near the body. Other possible offerings, made of materials like leather, wood and textiles have not been preserved in the earth.

My estimates (based upon Blackburn 1970) show that of 532 Middle Helladic graves in 15 different cemeteries, only 142 graves, *i.e.*, 27%, had some kind of offering, mostly pottery. By analysing the distributions of grave offerings between the cemeteries, some interesting differences appeared. Large cemeteries, like Asine with 147 graves and Lerna with 221 graves, had 16.5% of the graves containing offerings. Middle-sized cemeteries, like Eleusina, Kirrha, Prosymna and Mycenae,¹⁸ had 30% with offerings. After that there is a big difference compared to the small cemeteries: Corinth with 13 graves have 70% with offerings and Aphidna with the 13 graves of a relatively early Middle Helladic date had 77% containing offerings.

However, these estimates can only be approximate since so many graves have been robbed of their contents.

Traces of fire

Valmin found traces of fire at Malthi, both inside and above the three graves in the "grave circle" (C3 on fig.8), in the Southern cemetery (1938:191).

At Aphidna, Wide found charcoal inside some of the graves (1896).

Altars (hearths)

The most significant sign of ritual activity involving sacrifices are the altars.¹⁹ The round structure between Tumuli I and II at Vrana on fig. 2, suggested to be an altar, is built of 33 large boulders. These impressive, neatly built tumuli, with the altar in the middle may be encircled either by foot or on horseback.²⁰

There seems also to have been free space inside the tumuli, around the graves with the little inner circular enclosure (fig. 4) in Tumulus I and also around the apsidal grave in Tumulus II (fig. 2). Perhaps these areas were opened and made

18 Eleusis (52 Middle Helladic graves); Kirrha (13 Middle Helladic + 28 Shaft Grave period); Prosymna (31 extramural, mostly pits) and Mycenae (81 small pits and 15 Shaft graves).

19 Altars represent the centrepiece of ritual worship. Prehistoric open-air rituals in Mesopotamia probably employed a natural rock or heap of pebbles or earth, but with the development of temples or shrines, more obvious altars were made of clay, stone or brick (Black and Green 1992:29).

20 Cf. Alexander the Great's behavior around the tumuli at Troy in 334 BC, on his way to start the campaign against the Persians. First he brought offerings to (what he thought was) Protesilaos' grave. Next, he visited Achilles' grave and after having greased the tomb stone, Alexander ran totally naked in a nightly torchlight procession around the grave, followed by his Thessalian cavalry (Diod. Sic. XVII,17; Plut. *Vit.Alex.* 15.7–9; Windfeld-Hansen 1989:83).

accessible for walking around, or perhaps even for dancing.²¹ That could also have been the case with the Early Helladic graves covered by round platforms at Steno on Lefkas (see note 4; Dörpfeld 1927). The Middle Helladic tumulus of Aghios Ioannis on SW Peloponnese was provided with both a horseshoe shaped structure (kenotaph?) and a small 'altar' with traces of fire (Pelon 1976:76).

The horse in Tumulus I at Vrana

Before suggesting rituals in this case, I need to state that the horse burial at Vrana (fig. 5) has caused some dispute. The excavation team appears to have found Grave 3 in Tumulus I empty except for a dismembered horse skeleton.²² Had the grave been totally cleared of its earlier interment(s) before the 'horse burial', or was it built to be a kenotaph with the horse corpse as a later intrusion? Petros Themelis has questioned its authenticity (Themelis 1974). He believes that it is a modern horse,²³ which has fallen down (or been pushed down) from above. But in that case there should have been some accumulated earth upon the bedrock under the skeleton, earth that would have slipped down through the cracks during the millennia, before the horse fell down.

James Muhly has suggested, as an explanation for the piece of slab that Themelis claims has been found under the skeleton of the horse, that after the dead person had been buried in Grave 3, the horse was slaughtered over the lid of the grave (1979:312). But what then of the total absence of a human skeleton within the Grave 3? Marinatos mentioned that the roofing slabs had fallen down on the horse and broken its spinal cord. That observation, but even more the fact that there does not seem to have been any layer of accumulated earth upon the rock bottom under the horse skeleton is for me an indication that the horse most probably is roughly contemporary with the other burials in Tumulus I, *i.e.*, of a clear Middle Helladic date. Maria Pantelidou-Gofa assisted Marinatos in the excavation, and her statement that 'on the bottom (...) without any intrusion of whatever deposit, lay the splendidly preserved horse skeleton' corroborates this.²⁴ Perhaps Themelis' reluctance to accept an ancient date when he wrote his article in 1974 stems from the uniqueness of the find, two-three years before the Middle Helladic horse-burials at Dendra were excavated in 1976–77 (Payne 1990:103). A Middle

21 Ritual dance is a powerful mean of self-surrender since it is easier to begin than to stop.

22 Marinatos mentioned nothing about any finds in this grave except for the horse, but Themelis draws our attention to some sherds that were found near the ribs of the horse; three coarse ware fragments of unknown date and one late Byzantine sherd (1974:243).

23 He thus questions the estimation of the paleontologist (Professor Melentis at the University of Athens), who after examining the horse skeleton gave his professional opinion that it is a *Equus przewalskii*, about 8 years old (in Marinatos 1970d:13)

24 Pantelidou-Gofa 1986. Translated by the present author.

Bronze Age date of the find is not so improbable, having in mind that horse-breeding had been an important component already in the Neolithic/Copper age tradition in Sredni Stog sites like Dereivka, North of the Black Sea, where the bones of horses make up over 50% of the faunal remains (Telegin 1986; Levine 1990).

Considering the horse to be sacrificed, there are also different opinions about the removal of the legs and shoulders. Taking into consideration that the estimated weight of the 'lintel', which had to be removed for an interment from above, is *ca.* 800 kilos, my suggestion would be that the most logical way must have been to push the horse through the narrow grave opening. For that manoeuvre, the legs had to be cut off. Perhaps the legs and shoulder was saved for some practical use?²⁵ Especially the legs must have been regarded as the most important and perhaps also magical part of the horse.²⁶ A ritual can have been conducted to induce the horse to share the eternal life with its master. For the time being we can compare with the dismembered skelton of a horse in Tholos tomb A at Archanes on Crete (Sakellarakis 1970) and some other examples from the Near East: a burial with a horse skeleton at Tell al-Aggul from MBA II and an equine or horse in a burial at Jericho in MBA I (Hrouda).

It is tempting to speculate that the missing legs and shoulders were after all sacrificed and burned on the so-called altar between Tumulus I and Tumulus II at Vrana.

Libations

The custom of libation, the pouring of a liquid as a drink-offering, is well known from other Bronze Age civilizations.²⁷ It is also one of the best-attested religious practices of the Mycenaean culture from the Shaft-grave period onwards (Hägg 1990:177).

The phenomenon of positioning vessels or parts of vessels outside the grave monuments, fig. 4, also seems to be repeated later, if at least one vessel in the entrance area of Tumulus IV can be shown to have functioned as a vessel for libations (fig. 3).

25 Shovels made of a horse's *scapulae* must have been more practical than those made of wood.

26 Before man was able to see the horse's movements on stills (it has only passed a century since the art of photography was invented), it not only looked as if, but also felt like, the horse was flying when galloping.

27 Libations accompanied all kind of sacrifice and offering in, for instance, ancient Mesopotamia (Black and Green 1992). The liquids were poured onto the ground, all around the sacrificer, from a cup, bowl or jug. It could also be poured on the head of the sacrificial animal, or into a second vessel or at a gateway (*cf.* the earlier-mentioned vessels found in open spaces at Early Bronze Age settlements in Greece).

Earlier and comparable analogies are to be found in the Babylonian ritual offerings where libations to the dead were poured down a clay tube inserted into the ground (Black and Green 1992).

As an example of a zoomorphic vessel, a fragment of a terracotta bovine figurine with pierced muzzle and faint indications of a funnel on the back was found in the fill of the tumulus at Aphidna. Its spouted shape and the find context suggest that it could have been used as a rhyton.²⁸

It is of course impossible to detect ritual activity in cases where offerings and libations had been deposited in vessels of perishable materials, like calabashes or cups made out of wood or bark, leather-bags *etc.*, so it can have been a custom much more widespread than we can determine.

A vessel from Grave Iota in Circle B at Mycenae was soaked with olive oil. There were also traces of flour in the same grave (Schnauffer 1970:6).²⁹

From the Classical period there are texts telling us about rites in the orgiastic religion of the Bacchae taking place directly upon the graves of dead members (Burkert 1997:38), grief and ecstasy coming together.³⁰

Deposits of offering remnants

Deposits placed in so-called bothroi are common. These are usually filled with charcoal, ashes, animal-bones and sometimes even human bones (from human sacrifices?).

Inside a grave at Elateia-Drachmani in Phocis there was a sacrificial pit filled with ashes, charcoal and charred matter (burned wheat), presumed to be from a funeral sacrifice (Goldman 1931).

Whether the contents in these pits were offerings in themselves or just sealed off garbage, too sacred to be thrown away, is uncertain.

Vessels for positioning food

At Aphidna, Sam Wide found large matt-painted bowls that seem to have been placed in an upright position just outside or a little above the mouth of the pithos graves, ready to receive offerings (Wide 1896).

28 For an illustration of the figurine from Aphidna see Wide 1896, pl. xx; also Hielte-Stavropoulou and Wedde 2002:fig 1 NM4705.

29 It seems that only water was used in Babylonian ritual offerings to the dead. In other rituals it was much more common to pour beer, wine, and sometimes milk, honey, oil or cream (Black and Green 1992:117).

30 An anthropological comparison from Africa, where much beer is consumed in the ancestor cult. To get drunk is like a duty. It looks like disorder but it helps actually to keep the order. When the participants get drunk, it helps them to behave in an orderly manner, which makes the ancestors, themselves through death in an already disorderly state, to accept communication with the living relatives.

At Drachmani we have a large Middle Bronze Age matt-painted jar, 60 cm in height, positioned above the earlier mentioned grave with the filled pit inside (Goldman 1931).

Other possible places for deposited offerings are in the elevated pithos in Grave 6 at Vrana. The pithos seems only to have the lower half preserved. Its upright and high position suggests that it was placed there to receive offerings since burial pithoi are generally placed on the side.

Traces of possible sacrifices and ritual activities in cemeteries have also been found at many other sites (Makkay 1992; Tucker Blackburn 1970).

Observations of the geographical setting of graves in the landscape

To help interpret how the graves are positioned in the landscape, figs. 1 and 6 show sketches developed from research in Norway on landscape archaeology.

The landscape in fig.1 is seen as a room consisting of a floor, walls and the ceiling. Flat areas constitute the floor, while elements such as hills and mountain sides form the walls. The sky is the ceiling. Discontinuities in the surface 'floor' may also create edges that constitute room boundaries (Gansum, Jerpåsen and Keller 1997:14).

Cross-cultural research has shown that there are broad similarities between peoples from various parts of the world regarding their sacred sites. These holy places are connected with natural features of the landscape, such as mountain peaks, springs, rivers, woods and caves. Sacred places, in almost every case demand offerings, but also space for ceremony and ritual, including tombs.

How then will we define the relation between Landscape and Graves? By using the model in fig. 6, I began to be more aware of their geographical setting in the landscape. Burial mounds may be located in a variety of ways. For instance, the Vrana grave-complex (fig. 2) is in a BACK TO THE WALL position on fig. 6. Where did it 'look out', in other words, what is the site addressing? The view from the cemetery is blocked in one direction so the tumuli face the lowland at Marathon and the Petalian Gulf. Another main enquiry is from what distance the tumuli were visible. Simple field work has showed that in order to get to the tumuli at Vrana one has to walk slightly upwards for about a kilometer. The landscape may of course have changed, but today's topography with a slight undulating landscape hide the sight of the tumuli until only a few hundred meters.

The cemetery known as Grave Circle A at Mycenae, with its beginning from a supposedly Early Bronze Age date,³¹ is positioned BELOW THE TOP in our model on fig. 6, and it addresses the landscape directly below.

31 Protonotariou-Deilaki 1990b: 87, note 19.

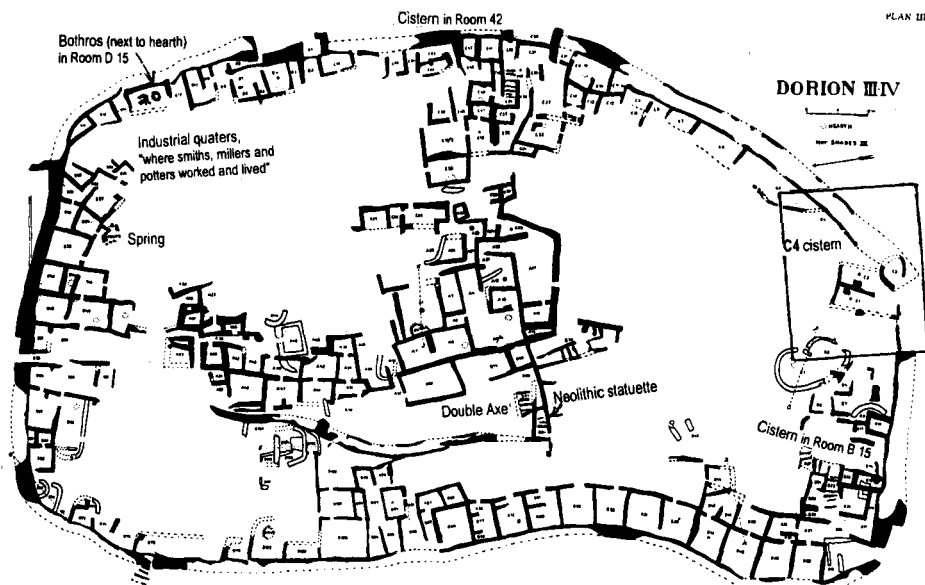


Fig. 7. Malthi, the ca. 140 x 80 m. (inside the walls) MH settlement with about 100 rooms, was excavated and fully published by the Swedish Messenia Expedition (Valmin 1938). Remnants of apsidal houses from an earlier habitation are on the plan marked with 'white, not filled in walls' (after Valmin 1938, plan III).

To take some examples listed by Cavanagh and Mee (1998:25–26), only 12% of the cemeteries with tumuli seem to be situated **on slopes**: Argos in Argolis; and two in Attika: Athens and Aphidna. About 30% are **at the foot of mountain-slopes or in valleys**: Dendra and Asine in Argolis; only one in Messenia/southern Triphylia: Chandrinou-Kissos; the Lefkas tumuli, the Early Helladic so-called R-graves but also the Middle Helladic so-called F- and S- graves; up in Thessaly the Middle Helladic cists and Late Helladic tumulus/built graves at Pharsala-Fetih Tsami; at Marathon in Attika, the Middle and Late Helladic tumuli cemetery at Vrana.

More than 50% of the Middle Helladic tumuli were located **on hill tops**, in prominent positions either **ON THE TOP** or **ON THE EDGE**, obviously meant to be visible. Most of them are in Messenia and in southern Triphylia:³² but there are also examples in Boeotia, Elateia-Drachmani and in Attika, the Middle Helladic tumulus at Thorikos located high up on a hill together with early LH tholos tombs. The Thorikos tumulus may also have been visible from the sea. The perhaps most

32 Samikon-Klidi; Tragana-Kapoureika; Leuki-Kaldamou; Milioti-Aghios Ilias; Pirgos-Tsouka; Pila-Vigles; Papoulia-Aghios Ioannis; Routsis (not specially prominent location); Valta-Kastraki; Peristeria Middle Helladic grave 313.

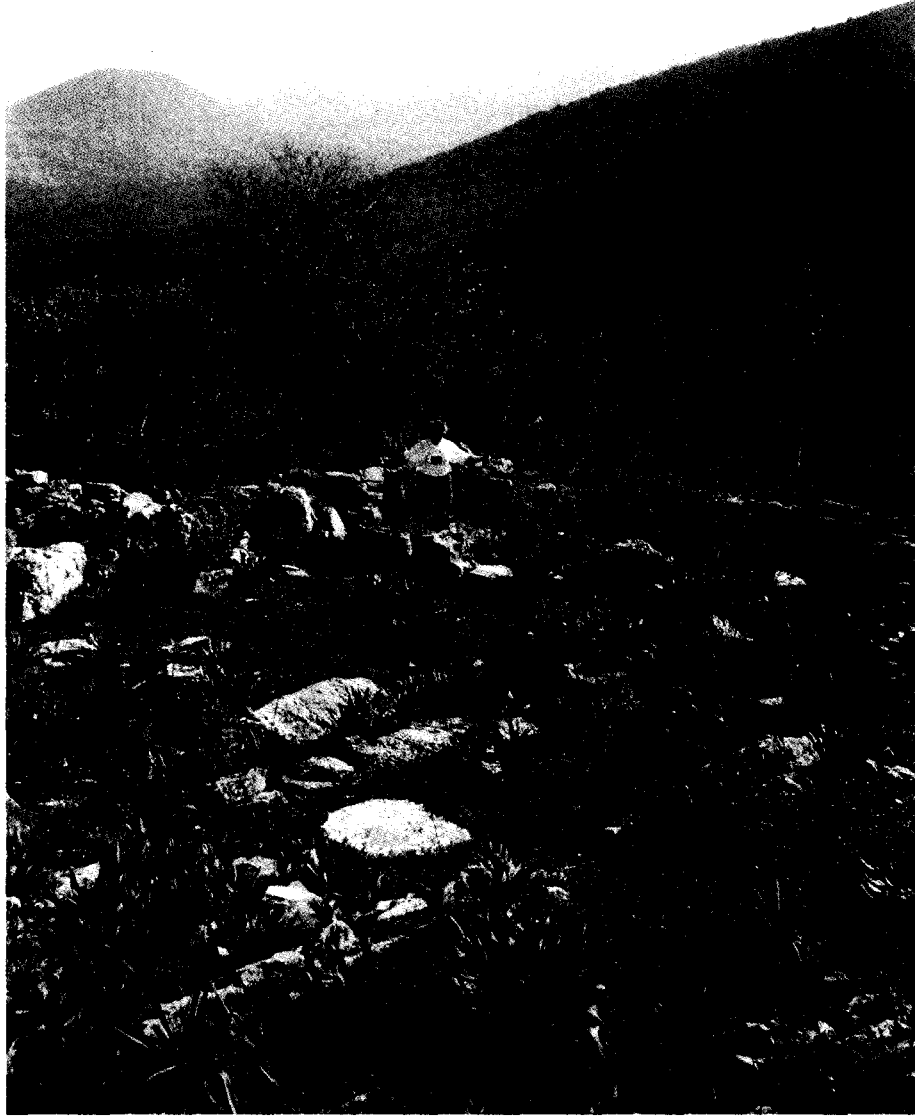


Fig. 9. The MH settlement of Malthi is situated ON THE TOP of a hill overlooking the south-east part of the Soulima Valley, but the 'sanctuary of the grave cult' has the position ON THE EDGE according to fig. 6. See also figs. 7–8 (photography by Nils Christophersen).

degrees view. The site is steep and easy to defend on three sides. The only natural access is from the south. The burials in the 'grave circle' at C3, in the 'sanctuary of the grave cult' (Valmin 1938:126) just on the right hand inside the Southern Gate, figs. 7, 8 and 9, were made ON THE EDGE, with a 'long-distant view in several directions, but addresses a particular landscape nearby'. This 'sanctuary of the grave cult' or else called 'double sanctuary' C1+C2, fig. 8, contained thick layers of ashes and charcoal with large and totally flat stones³⁴ that have been interpreted as a possible altars (Valmin 1938:126–131). The 'activity area' could have been sheltered by a light roof supported by columns on each side of the dividing wall. The stone wall seems to have had a somewhat similar T-shaped formation as on the little island of Nissakouli, also interpreted as a MH sanctuary with hearths/altars and with a similar wall in front of some graves (Choremis 1969).

The 'grave circle' C3 at Malthi had a central burial, with an 'adult male?' as the sole occupant.³⁵ The grave was described as having been initially encircled by a double border of upright slabs. This interpretation has been criticised and an alternative suggestion is that these circle stones actually were a part of a wall built in Late Mycenaean times (Darcque 1980). In that case, one may argue why they built an unorthodox roundel on a wall. On the photo of the grave (Valmin 1938: pls. XV, XXIX, taken during the excavation), at least the smaller inner circle of the grave looks genuine.

With the exception of a stone figurine, most probably Neolithic, which could have been brought in from elsewhere, the material from the site is to its greater extent Middle Helladic. As I said in my introduction, much of the excavator's interpretations have been called into question.³⁶ But the site's history can still in broad outline be re-constructed: after several phases of scattered buildings, a substantial village of integrated plan was founded, probably late in the Middle Helladic. Some of the houses seem to have been industrial quarters, stalls for the animals and storerooms. It remains to be shown if all parts of the walls date from the Middle Helladic, but those walls that constitute the back wall of houses (rooms) containing only MH contexts must be from the settlement's main period of occupation.

34 The eastern stone is *ca.* 0.95 x 0.85 m and the western one is *ca.* 1.25 x 0.85 on a distance of 140 m with the *ca.* 1.0 m thick and 4.0 m long wall in between.

35 Of the 48 graves found at Malthi, only 13 were of a LH date, according to the excavator. Of the 35 pre-Mycenaean graves, the oldest three, XXXVII, XXXVIII and XXXIV, are the ones in the 'Grave circle' listed as Early Bronze Age, but can as well be from an earlier part of the MH period.

36 Dickinson 1994:59–60: 'No significant feature like a fortification has been reliably reported (Darcque 1980:32–33 persuasively suggests, on the basis of the stratigraphy, that the fortified village at Malthi is not Middle Helladic but Late Helladic III).'

Among all the material in need for re-examination and publication, there are for instance a little clay figurine, 'almost certainly the head of a horse'³⁷ found in stairway B70 together with bones of horses (or perhaps in some cases 'mules') all in Middle Helladic contexts.³⁸ All this 'Adriatic' pottery ought to be classified. An interesting little piece is the 'bucranium' (Valmin 1938:334 and pl. XXV,45), once attached to a vase as is shown by the concave back side.³⁹

The large apsidal shaped hearth (1.75 m in diam.) in central room A1 from the LH period (fig.7, on the highest point of the hill-site with a 360 degrees view), is considered by Robin Hägg as a probable focus of cult (1968:46).

Discussion

The first part of this paper has discussed some of the material that gives indications for rituals in Middle Helladic funeral contexts. It seems clear that these people could have had a rich spiritual life, although too little remains to give us any detailed picture. However, hypotheses can be made using results from cross-cultural studies and anthropology. As an example, I will follow Gräslund (1994:18) and consider the 'false door' at Vrana. In pre-literate societies, newly deceased persons are often treated as if they were still alive and have the same needs as the living, receiving food and clothes. If they had a complex soul belief, the breath soul is thought to leave the body with the last sigh, while the free soul had to be taken care of as long as it remained in the dead body. With the total decomposition of the body (flesh) the free soul needs to get out of the grave, and the 'false doors' offer such an opportunity.

The horse at Vrana is another interesting indication of rituals during this MH period.⁴⁰ With new scientific methods available today, it ought to be quite easy to determine both the age, genus and type of horse. Comparing that with results from other horse-offerings could help to clear the question whether the Vrana horse was a sacrifice in a bloody ritual or not.

Clusters of tombs created a special limited area, a sacred place. The selection of a place and its positioning in the landscape, for instance a central grave which came to function as a ritual centre as well as a territorial marker, was not random.

37 Valmin 1938:334 and Pl. XXV, 52.

38 In Apsidal House A 45 'fragments of skull of horse or mule'. In fosse B16: jawbone of horse or mule, with bone-needle, spindle whorls, pottery *etc.*; A 38; a horse tooth in A 43-46; A 42 (Valmin 1938:58, 101, 103, 108, 138 and 161).

39 In the tumuli graves, both at Aphidna and at Vrana were found pottery with attachments that can be interpreted as horns.

40 The discussion of the horse's authenticity has been a forgotten issue for thirty years now while the horse rests under the glass roof covering the grave.

Having the models in figs. 1 and 6 in mind, a suggestion for future research would be to go out in the landscape and try to register at what distances and under what circumstances the tumuli are visible. Also, a more systematic survey could show what other factors could have determined their location.

As a last point regarding the tumuli, it is interesting to note that worships of the Mycenaean heroes at Olympia, Isthmia and Nemea were taking place at tumuli,⁴¹ places that later developed into great athletic centers. It would seem plausible that real and aggressive contests for the right to succession once took place around some of the tumuli.

41 Protonotariou-Deilaki 1990a: 83.

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DISCUSSION

E. Handelman: Excuse me for intruding again into an area I know so little about, but that begins to fascinate me. On the basis of the first two papers sacrifice appears as the dominant modality of what is being called communications between humans and deities. It strikes me that it may be necessary—and perhaps this has already been done—to extrapolate in the direction of cosmology, and to try and establish just what these relationships between deities and human beings were. Might we be speaking about a continuum between humans and deities, in which case sacrifice would perhaps have one kind of perspective? Or are we talking absolute difference? Are we talking about a kind of cosmology that could be called holistic in which ritual is the dominant mode of cosmic organization? Or are we talking about different spheres, rituals are one, and there others, and they exist in a relationship of equivalence to each other? On all of these instances my feeling is that is necessary to extrapolate beyond the hard facts of archaeology in order to get a sense of what the connection between gravesite, shaping the landscape, sacrifice as a way of transforming what is here in relation to what is not here, or maybe made closer, and so forth, may be. If sacrifice is the major medium of transformation, of linkage between human beings and gods, then it has a crucial transformative position in whatever cosmology might be extrapolated—if it has that position, of course. I would be curious to hear whether the experts here think that this might be the case.

M. Hielte-Stavropoulou: That is what I hope we can accomplish at this symposium.

R. Hägg: You have gathered together a quite impressive number of instances of vestiges of cult at Middle Helladic tombs and cemeteries that may possibly show that there were rituals being performed long after the funeral. Of course, this is one of the key issues, finding out whether these rituals were performed immediately after the funeral or long after. That has to be analyzed specifically in each case. Something that interested me especially were these possible horseshoe-shaped cult buildings, and one reason for that is that I think I see the reoccurrence of such buildings at cemeteries in Late Geometric times in Greece. It is a phenomenon that occurs in various periods. I think you are probably right in seeing them in this period, too. In this connection I want to mention something that is a bit enigmatic and that is the stone tumulus in the Middle Helladic cemetery at Asine. It has been thought of as a central tomb, a tumulus of which the center had been destroyed, robbed out. Maybe you could look at that also in the light of the rest of what you have to see if it could fit in your category.

M. Hielte-Stavropoulou: There are more structures of this kind but I did not have the time to look at them more closely.

N. Marinatos: Following the line of what Robin Hägg said, one of the important points of your contribution, I think, is that the cemeteries, and the installations related to them, go far beyond the temporary funeral. They have to do with a variety of rituals that regroup the community around the dead, periodically and at festivals. The best studied model for this kind of activity is pharaonic Egypt, but also post-pharaonic Egypt, the so-called Late Period, where you have whole installations around the cemetery, including the houses of priests who reside there, and who have been left considerable property in the legacy of the dead so that they can take care of the dead, provide food and offerings at regular intervals. You may also have a dimension of gods visiting the cemetery. Incidentally, we do this in modern Greece, too. On Good Friday right before Easter there is a litany from the church into the cemetery so that the dead can take part in

the ritual. I think you are quite right, and there is a lot of scope for investigating the cemetery as a focus of communal cult activity which goes beyond the funeral.

M. Hielte-Stavropoulou: I think that in general cemeteries have not been investigated as a complex. No complex models are made of the graves, the finds, the scatter of small graves in between.

S. Georgoudi: I would like to say something about the problem posed by Don Handelman. I am very sceptical because from historical Greece we have, for example, inscriptions and iconography, but we are not yet capable of saying what cosmological visions and conceptions the ancient Greeks had, or exactly what is the meaning of the sacrifice. I am very sceptical about interpretations when we have only archaeological remains. We can generate different hypotheses, but we cannot go further. The difficulty of judging in a culture like the ancient Greek, where we have much evidence from many domains, is very great. I would also like to add something to the problem of annual animal celebrations at the tombs because in Greece, for example at Athens, we know of visits to the tombs, we know of annual public celebrations, for example the feast of *Genesis* is both public and private at the same time. You are very right to say that perhaps this is a place where people met not only on the private level but also as a community on certain dates.

P. Pakkanen: I was very happy to hear these comments about the role of speculation and about the need to be aware of the criteria that lead to the possibility of speculation. When we deal with prehistoric material we have to have criteria upon which to base our speculation. What is important here is the role of the gatherings. This has been underlined quite often. Always when we have an important place where people gather together they might have had ritual, and the building around which they gather might have been of a ritual nature. It is a social phenomenon, which might include religious input. The same is true for the funerary context and around tombs. One must also keep in mind that the gathering could have been for more mundane purposes. In the lack of inscriptions or living evidence we must establish criteria before we speculate about the cosmological or the theological sphere.

D. Handelman: I appreciate the scepticism, but it is very much a matter of the kind of premises one begins with in the sense that it is no less extrapolative to begin with cosmological thinking as it is to begin with social thinking. There is no set order of priority in how data are perceived. Whatever order of priority is set, it has a tremendous influence on what one is prepared to say. Here I prefer the word 'extrapolation' to 'speculation'. This is my experience in all disciplines that I have some information about or that I work in myself. We are always calling for more information, because the more information we have the more numerous the possible lacunae of possibilities. It may be that what you are facing is indeed a wide variation of local possibilities in the overarching conception. I would also like to point out that cosmology is a way of organizing the world. If I say to you that it is very likely that there is no religion without ritual, then if ritual exists it must be practiced in order to exist. If ritual is practiced, it may be practiced individually, communally by some specialized category or class of people, and so forth. To me that seems no less outlandish than beginning with the notion of some kind of communal gathering generating social solidarity, and so forth. And I come back to one of the points I tried to make yesterday: if there no religion without ritual, and if ritual was—and this is likely the case—the primary means of trying to act on cosmos in certain ways that are positive, then it is no less speculative to begin with that kind of thinking than it is to begin with thinking of social gathering, communalism, generation of solidarity, and so forth.

H. Tzavella-Evjen: Alexandra Christopoulou excavated in the 80s the Middle Bronze Age cemetery at Chaironeia. It is not published, not a single word. I have seen it and I have her permission to mention it. It would fit very well into your landscape archaeology, it was sited against the Archontion hill and the Boiotian Kifissos was running nearby. Nowadays it is flooded and the highway is built over it, so don't go looking for the cemetery. At Chaironeia I found a Middle Bronze Age secondary burial, a cist grave of a 24-year old person, as I was told by the specialist, built within a strong wall which was associated eventually with Mycenaean pottery. This is the only case I know of secondary burial within a building. That definitely fits into a cult process and a belief of something—I cannot elaborate now, I have written extensively on that. I thought you might be interested in putting it in your record.

M. Hielte-Stavropoulou: Thank you very much. I did not mention the bones hidden inside these tombs. I was avoiding it. But there are lost of interesting features of this kind.

S. Des Bouvrie: You depart from social life and show an empathy with this world, and you compare it to the Sarakatsani. You might also profit from an article by Bruce Lincoln on the Scythian tribes who are moving around and never have a fixed place to raise a temple so to say. But when they bury their chief they are fixed and anchored. They can't move the burial so they have to return to that place. It is a fascinating article.