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The Necropoleis of Mytilene from the Archaic to the Roman Periods. Spatial Organisation and Interpretative Issues

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The Necropoleis of Mytilene from the Archaic to the Roman Periods. Spatial Organisation and Interpretative Issues

Yannis Kourtzellis – Thaleia Kyriakopoulou

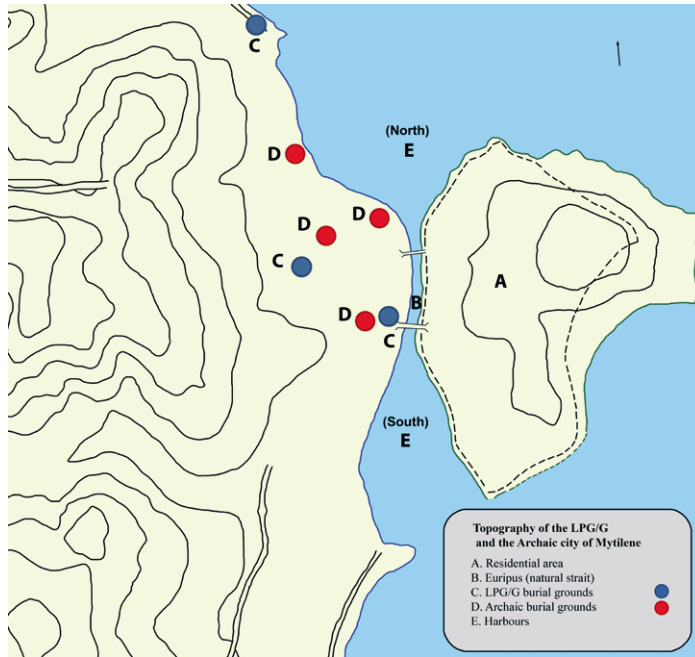
History of Research

The first scientific evidence for the topography of ancient Mytilene comes from the German archaeologist-architect Robert Koldewey, who laid the foundations for archaeological research on the island of Lesbos. When Koldewey visited the island in the late 19th century he could still identify relics of the ancient city incorporated into the Ottoman urban fabric or as ruins visible in unbuilt areas. His monograph »Die Antiken Baureste der Insel Lesbos« (1890) consists of a comprehensive and detailed study of the topography of the ancient city as it correlates his observations with the ancient literary sources, the testimonies of European travellers and the previous studies of Newton (1865), Conze (1865) and Pistorious (1913). His assessments have been a valuable guide for subsequent scholars and have been verified almost in their entirety. However, his references to the cemeteries of Mytilene are rather limited in relation to his remarks about the other topographical elements of the ancient city.

The information provided by the Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον until 1974 barely focuses on the excavation data of the cemeteries, but does refer to the altars and inscribed tombstones, thus supplementing, along with the study by Serafim Charitonidis, Αἱ Επιγραφαί της Λέσβου. Συμπλήρωμα (1968), the corpus of Inscriptiones Graecae (1899) and the Inscriptiones Graecae, XII. Supplementum (1939). Even Ioannis Kontis in his unique topographical work Η Λέσβος και η Μικρασιατική της περιοχή (1978) devotes little space to the necropoleis of Mytilene.

Since 1986, the local Ephorate of Antiquities has carried out extensive excavations in Mytilene within the framework of public and private projects, bringing to light important evidence on the urban development of the ancient city and the spread of its necropoleis, which are annually presented in the Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον. A recent article by Lillian Acheilara¹ examining finds from the Archaic cemetery of the city also makes a significant contribution to the study of the necropoleis of Mytilene.

¹ Acheilara 2012, 55–68.



1 Topographic map of the ancient city of Mytilene indicating the locations of the Late Proto-geometric/Geometric and Archaic burials

Brief Description of the Topography of the Ancient City

The city of Mytilene, built amphitheatrically on the slopes of two opposite low hills, was divided by the natural strait of Euripus into two sections: the insular (or the island) in the east and the mainland in the west (fig. 1)².

During the Early Iron Age and the Archaic periods, the city's residential core was located on the island and the burials took place on the mainland. The earliest burials which can be dated to the Late Proto-geometric and Geometric periods have been found close to the western, roughly-shaped banks of Euripus³, in the area where the commercial North Harbour was later created⁴ and on the slopes of Aghia Kyriaki hill where the Late Hellenistic-Roman residential area developed⁵.

In the Archaic period the burial activity continued at the same areas, where new clusters were formed, presenting the highest density on the coastal zone⁶. From the beginning of the 5th century BC a significant change to the delimitation of the city's burial grounds can be observed. Graves are no longer scattered all over the mainland area, but are concentrated and organised in three main necropoleis: the North (fig. 2)⁷, the South (fig. 3)⁸ and the West (fig. 2).

The West Necropolis has barely been excavated and for this reason is not presented thoroughly in this study. It is situated on the mainland, on the summit of Aghia Kyriaki hill and along the landlocked city-walls. The few excavated tombs can be dated between the Classical and Roman periods⁹. The extent of this

² Diod. Sic. 13, 79, 6; Strab. 13, 2, 2; Kontis 1978, 211–216; Kourtzellis 2013, 29–31; Kyriakopoulou 2020, 109–126; Kourtzellis – Theodoulou 2021, 109–116.

³ The graves were revealed under the bell tower of the church of Aghios Symeon. See Herbig 1927/1928, 620; Acheilara 2012, 65; Kyriakopoulou – Roungou 2020, 56 colour pl. 2, 2 no. 5. For burials of the same period in the ancient city of Methymna, see Zachos 2017, 91–110; Kourtzellis – Pappa 2020, 95.

⁴ For the grave revealed at the height of the northwestern breakwater of the North Harbour, close to Georgiadis-Kalamaris' factory see Kyriakopoulou – Roungou 2020, 56 colour pl. 2, 2 no. 7. For the North Harbour, see Theodoulou 2014, 495 f. fig. 2; Theodoulou – Kourtzellis 2020, 79–83; Kourtzellis – Theodoulou 2021, 110–116.

⁵ For the grave revealed in the modern district of the 1st Nursery School see Kyriakopoulou – Roungou 2020, 56 colour pl. 2, 2

no. 6; pl. 1, 2. For the Late Hellenistic-Roman residential area, see Archontidou-Argyri – Acheilara 1999, 106; Kontis 1978, 224 f.; Kyriakopoulou 2020, 115–121.

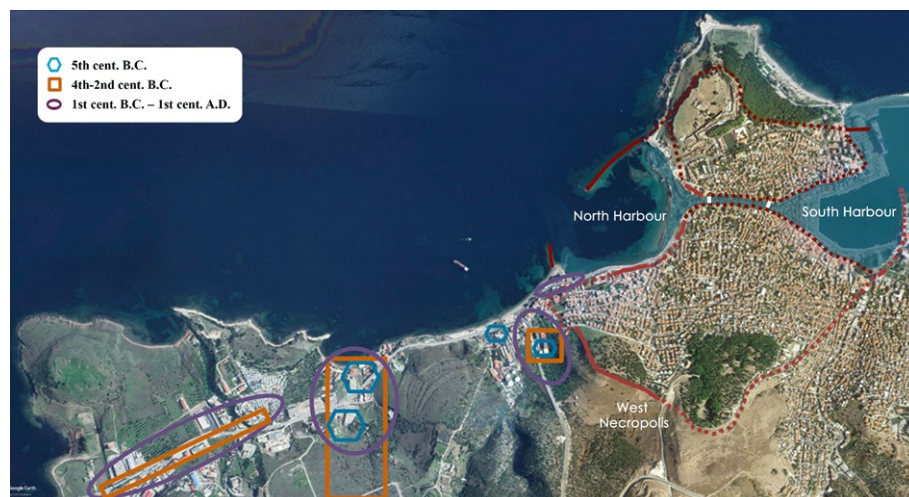
⁶ Kyriakopoulou – Roungou 2020, 60 colour pl. 2, 2 nos. 5. 12–14. Especially for Aghios Symeon see Acheilara 2012, 55–68 and for North Harbour area, see Acheilara 1999a, 745–749. For the graves in the modern Epáno Skála quarter, next to the 8th Primary School and under the so-called 'Roman Villa' see Kyriakopoulou 2014, 2178.

⁷ For all the available references on the North Necropolis in the ADelt see Kourtzellis 2020, 364 n. 4.

⁸ For all the available references on the South Necropolis in the ADelt see Kourtzellis 2020, 364 n. 5.

⁹ At this location Koldewey (Koldewey 1890, 10) and Kontis (Kontis 1978, 223 draw. 39. 40) placed the northwestern gate of

2 Satellite image from Google Earth indicating the expansion of the North Necropolis from the early 5th century BC to the Roman period, in relation to the city's defensive walls and the North Harbour. The location of the West Necropolis is also indicated



3 Satellite image from Google Earth indicating the expansion of the South Necropolis from the early 5th century BC to the Roman period, in relation with the city's defensive walls and the South Harbour



necropolis cannot be estimated at this stage, but its connection with a cluster of graves in the area of Pagani, located on a hill opposite Aghia Kyriaki, via a paved street cannot be ruled out¹⁰.

The creation of the three necropoleis is strongly connected with the construction of the defensive walls on the mainland in the late 6th or early 5th century BC and the intention of the city to repurpose the Archaic burial ground for residential and civic use¹¹. The excavation data are in line with Thucydides' ex-

planation that the city had started to expand to the mainland trying to increase its living space during the Classical period, a procedure known as *Synoikismos*¹². That procedure was brutally interrupted by the Athenians when Mytilene revolted against the First Athenian Alliance in 428/427 BC during the Peloponnesian War¹³. The tragic punishment imposed on the city for its disobedience included the demolition of the fortification wall, an issue which still remains open in the current research¹⁴.

the city, the so-called 'Methymnean', which led to the island's heartland. However, they did not discern tombs on the area and so they suggested that the city of Mytilene had only two necropoleis. Demetrios Evangelidis (Evangelidis 1920/1921, 109 f.) seems to be the first who mentioned the existence of the West Necropolis. For the excavated tombs see Archontidou-Argyri 1986, 198 n. 7 draw. 2 pl. 142 β.

¹⁰ The 'Pagani cemetery' is located about 1200 m west of the West Necropolis in a direct line. It was discovered during the construction works of the new city's Veterinary Office and in-

cluded tombs dated to the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods (Archontidou-Argyri 1993b, 417–419 draw. 6 pl. 125 α).

¹¹ Koldewey 1890, 3–8; Kontis 1973, 71–79; Vlachos 1987, 70–88; Kyriakopoulou 2020, 109–111; Theodoulou – Kourtzellis 2020, 79; Kourtzellis – Theodoulou 2021, 109–112.

¹² Thuc. 3, 2, 3; Diod. 12, 55, 1; Kontis 1973, 64–70; Kontis 1978, 156–177; Dimopoulou-Piliouni 2015, 142–184.

¹³ Thuc. 3, 2–19; 3, 25–50; Gillis 1971, 38–47; Kontis 1978, 161–177; Quinn 1981; Dimopoulou-Piliouni 2015, 142–184.

¹⁴ Kontis 1978, 217 f.



4 Mytilene, South Necropolis, funerary monuments ›K17‹ (left) and ›K16‹ (right). The funerary monument ›K17‹ indicates the date of founding of the South Necropolis

However, it is certain that in the second half of the 4th century BC the walls were repaired and extended, as were the harbours and the banks of the Euripus¹⁵. The Early Classical demarcation of the city and, consequently, of the necropoleis was maintained without important changes during the Hellenistic and Roman eras. In these periods the burial grounds, several parts of which have been uncovered during the recent excavations, expanded on the slopes of low hills towards the sea and along the sides of the main streets that were leading to the city¹⁶.

An important terminus for the establishment of the North Necropolis at the beginning of the 5th century BC are four clusters of graves developed some distance apart along the coastal zone. The densest groups

of these were found along the conjectured line of the city-walls¹⁷, and also at close distance to the north-east¹⁸, in the middle space of the necropolis area, only two graves of this period have been uncovered so far¹⁹. The above four nuclei remained in use and were gradually expanded either to the north or to the south until the beginning of the Roman era (fig. 2)²⁰.

The date of founding of the South Necropolis is determined by a funerary monument²¹ uncovered near the Early Classical defensive wall (fig. 4)²². On the basis of its contents and especially of a red-figure pelike by the Florence Painter with two standing figures wrapped in a himation on the main side, it can be identified as the earliest tomb in the necropolis, dated to the decade 470–460 BC²³. The area close to the

¹⁵ Kourtzellis 2010, 185–200; Kyriakopoulou 2020, 113 f.; Theodoulou – Kourtzellis 2020, 81–83; Kourtzellis – Theodoulou 2021, 112–115. Also, for the city's history in the 4th cent. BC, see Pistorius 1913; Kontis 1973, 70 f. 94–102; Kontis 1978, 186–194; Dimopoulou-Piliouni 2015, 18–271.

¹⁶ In the South Necropolis, a section of the main funerary street (length 9.85 m × 4.40 m maximum width) was found during the excavation in the yard of the 6th Primary School of Mytilene (Archontidou-Argyri 1992a, 531 draw. 6 pl. 149 f.) (fig. 5 C). In the North Necropolis several sections of the main funerary and secondary streets were located quite a distance from the city's defensive wall (Acheilara 1998b, 776; Acheilara 1999d, 759; Acheilara 1999e, 759; Acheilara 2000d, 934 f.). The funerary monuments in the Stavrinou land plot are built along a stone-paved street apparently 13.60 m in length (Acheilara 1999c, 758).

¹⁷ Tsirivakos 1973/1974, 855–859 draw. 4. This chronology is concluded by the study of terracotta figurines found in the plot of ›ΕΠΙΟΜ‹ distillery (Acheilara 2005, 185 no. 22; 230 no. 138; 278 nos. 244–247; 280 no. 253; 281 no. 254; 282 no. 259; 283 no. 262).

¹⁸ The graves were found in front of the former Military Medical Station on Navmachias Ellis Street (Acheilara 2000c, 934; Kyriakopoulou 2020, 110 f.).

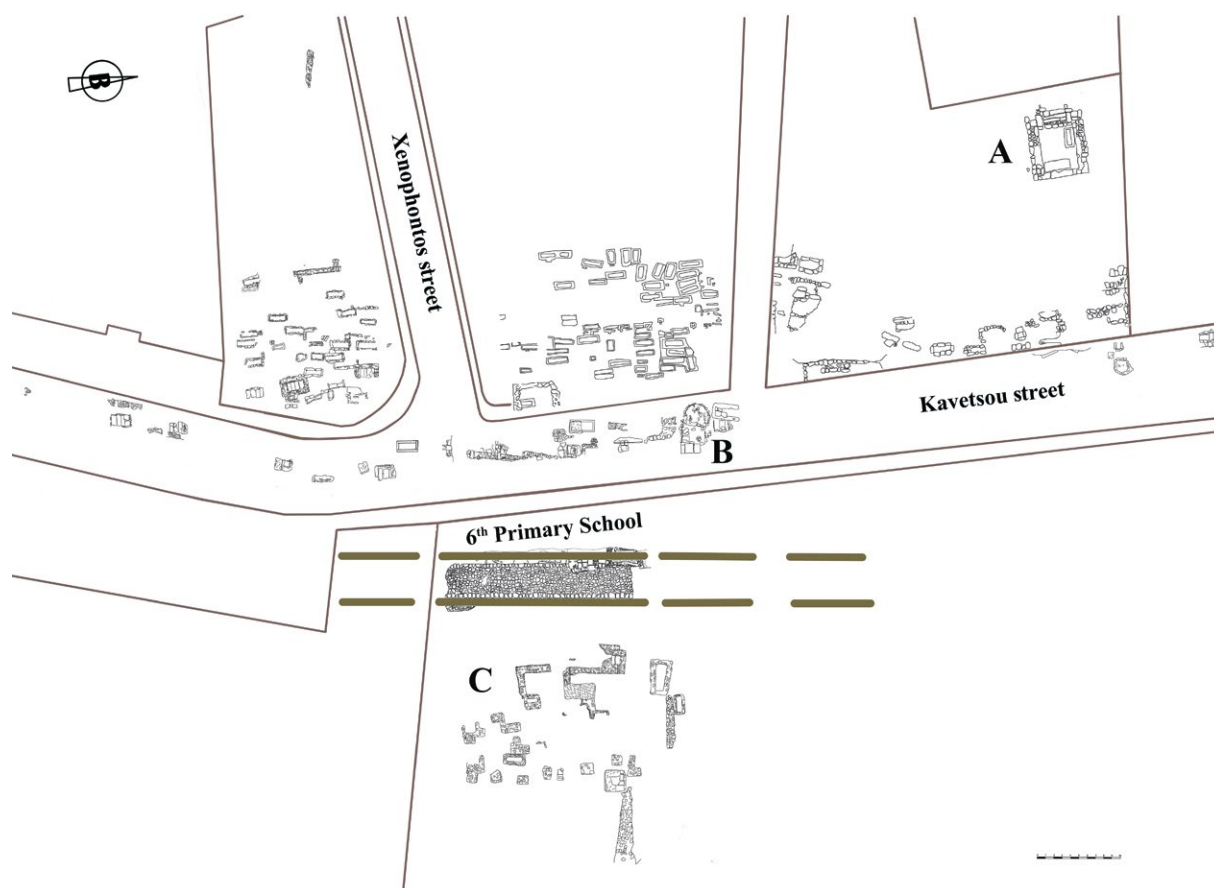
¹⁹ The graves were found in the Tambakaria area (Acheilara 2000d, 934 f.). See also n. 41.

²⁰ Acheilara 1998b, 776; Acheilara 1999b, 753–755; Acheilara 1999d, 759; Acheilara 1999e, 759; Acheilara 2000d, 934 f.; Kyriakopoulou 2020, 110 colour pl. 7.

²¹ Archontidou-Argyri 2000b, 930 fig. 22.

²² Archontidou-Argyri 2000a, 930 f.

²³ Kourtzellis – Panatsi 2019, 560–563.



5 Detailed topographic map of the South Necropolis in the area of the 6th Primary School of Mytilene

city-walls was strongly preferred for the Late Classical and Hellenistic tombs, which were usually arranged in clusters²⁴. The Roman necropolis partially used the Hellenistic section, but it was mostly extended southward and eastward, having continuous use until the 3rd century AD (figs. 3, 5)²⁵.

Clusters of Late Classical, Hellenistic and Roman graves were also developed relatively far from the southern limits of the city giving rise to a serious concern whether they should be considered sections of the South Necropolis or as small peripheral cemeteries (fig. 3)²⁶.

It is worth mentioning that some Late Classical tombs of these distant clusters were extremely rich in grave goods. For example, from a group of 12 tombs, three contained some of the most valuable exhibits of the Archaeological Museum of Mytilene: a diadem and a lot of ornaments made of gold, a gold leaf with an inscription, possibly interpreted as Orphic or other mystical hymn, an elaborate bronze mirror, a gold olive tree leaf of a wreath and many clay figurines of Macedonian influence²⁷. All these offerings indicate that the tombs were tied to members of an affluent family of the end of the 4th century BC, living in the southern suburbs of the city.

²⁴ Acheilara 2000a, 932 f.

²⁵ Chatzi 1972, 593; Acheilara 1987a, 479 pl. 289 a; Archontidou-Argyri 1989a, 403; Archontidou-Argyri 1989b, 403 f.; Archontidou-Argyri 1992a, 531; Archontidou-Argyri 1992b, 530; Archontidou-Argyri 1992c, 530 f. draw. 5; Archontidou-Argyri 1993a, 415–417; Acheilara 1998d, 774 f.; Acheilara 1999f, 736 f. fig. 2; Acheilara 2000a, 932 f.; Acheilara 2006, 1063 f. fig. 2.

²⁶ Archontidou-Argyri 1988, 459 draw. 9.10 pl. 277–279; Archontidou-Argyri 1989a, 404; Archontidou-Argyri 1991, 362 f.; Archontidou-Argyri 1997, 907; Acheilara 2000b, 933; Archontidou-Argyri 1993a, 415–417 draw. 5 pl. 124 y; Acheilara 1999g, 737 f. fig. 3.

²⁷ Archontidou-Argyri 1988, 459 pl. 278; Acheilara 2005, 67 f. 75. 77. 151. 338–340. 345. 347 f. nos. 401–404. 416. 417. 422–425; Kourtzellis 2017.

Tomb Typology (Tab. 1)

	LPG (10 th –9 th cent. B.C.)	LPG/G (9 th –8 th cent. B.C.)	A (7 th –1 st half of 6 th cent. B.C.)	LA (2 nd half of 6 th cent. B.C.)	EC/C (480–350 B.C.)	LC (350–300 B.C.)	HL (3 rd –1 st cent. B.C.)	R (1 st cent. B.C.– 3 rd cent. A.D.)
Inhumations	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Cremations			+	+	+	+	+	+
Pot-burials (<i>Enchytrismoi</i>)	+		+	+	+	+	+	+
Pit graves		+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Direct soil burials				+				+
Cinerary urns			+	+	+	+	+	+
Clay sarcophagi				+				
Stone sarcophagi				+	+	+	+	+
Box-shaped chests				+	+	+	+	
Funerary monuments					+	+	+	+
Cist graves						+	+	+
Tile graves (<i>Kalyvites</i>)								+

LEGEND: LPG= Late Protogeometric, G= Geometric, A= Archaic, LA= Late Archaic,
EC= Early Classical, C= Classical, LC= Late Classical, HL= Hellenistic, R= Roman

Tab. 1 Burial and Tomb typology of the Necropoleis of Mytilene

A synthetic implementation of the tomb typology from the Geometric to the Roman periods will be attempted, based on the excavation data from the North and South necropoleis of Mytilene. In this way valuable information can be found regarding the burial rites and customs that prevailed in the Mytilenean society within each historical period.

Of the three Early Iron Age tombs, the one below the bell tower of Aghios Symeon is poorly documented due to its early excavation in 1928. The type of the grave and the method of burial are not referred to in the excavation report, but luckily a grey bowl-lekane and two grey one-handed cups could be identified among the goods that accompanied the dead²⁸. The closest parallels to these vessels can be found in Antissa²⁹ and Old Smyrna³⁰, respectively, and date to the 10th–9th century BC.

The pithos-burial on the slopes of Aghia Kyriaki hill is the earliest case of *enchtrysmos* from the city of Mytilene, dating to the LPG period. It contained the poorly preserved skeletal remains of a single interment in contracted position. At the height of the knees four gold and bronze adornments were found as well as four bronze asymmetrical bow fibulae with a swelling, which would have fastened the shroud of the deceased³¹.

The tomb uncovered in the coastal zone, on Navmakhias Ellis Street (fig. 6), is a pit grave carved into the natural rock, delimited by walls of rough stones and covered with four slabs. The single interment was accompanied by five grey vases grouped around the head and also a heavily oxidised bronze fibula found at the height of the neck. The shape of the vases points to a date in the 10th–9th century BC³². However, the fibula

²⁸ See n. 3. Kontis 1973, 16 fig. 11; Spencer 1995, 279–281; Archontidou-Argyri – Acheilara 1999, 78; Bayne 2000, 211 fig. 62, 1–3; Hertel 2007, 107 f. fig. 8, 3; Acheilara 2012, 65 n. 72.

²⁹ Lamb 1931/1932, 54 pl. 20, 6; Bayne 2000, 202 fig. 59, 6; Hertel 2007, 108–110 fig. 9, 6.

³⁰ Bayne 2000, 160 figs. 38, 1–3; 39, 1; Hertel 2007, 99 f. fig. 1, left 1–3; right 1, 2.

³¹ Unpublished. See n. 5. For the specific type of bronze fibulae in LPG/SPG context see Catling – Catling 1980, 238–240. 244 pls. 239 a–c; 248, 5–8; Lemos 2002, 111 f. figs. 2, 1. 5. 10; 3, 1. 2.

³² The grave included a neck-handled amphora, a high-footed skyphos, a cup, a small jug and a navel bowl. For the shape of the amphora see Desborough 1952, 16. 139 pl. 22, 75; Lemos 2002, 58 f. For the shape of the skyphos see Desborough 1952, 77–92 pls. 10. 11; Lemos 2002, 33–44 pls. 23, 9; 24, 8; 30, 4; 56, 6; 60, 3; 61, 2; Hertel 2007, 102 fig. 1, right 4–6. For the shape of the cup see Bayne 2000, 160 fig. 39, 4–7; Hertel 2007, 99 fig. 5 pl. 9, 4.

with three knobs in the bow, which belongs to a familiar Aegean type dating mostly between the Geometric to Archaic periods, could advance the chronology of the tomb to the Geometric period³³.

Interment in rectangular pits carved in the natural rock or in clay vessels, such as amphorae or large pithoi, continued during the Archaic period (fig. 7). In the early 7th century BC primary cremation with the ashes collected in amphorae, which were placed in pits horizontally or in upright position and in groups, appears for the first time in the area of Aghios Symeon³⁴.

The first burials in monolithic sarcophagi hewn out of whitish volcanic rock are dated to the end of the 6th century BC, but there are also a few examples of terracotta sarcophagi belonging to the well-known Clazomenian type or representing local imitations without painted decoration on the rims³⁵. Large pithoi, often reaching the impressive height of 2.00 m, usually contain single or multiple interments. An interesting example from this period is a burial cluster revealed in the deepest layers under the city's Hellenistic agora. The excavation has brought to light 17 direct soil burials of adults and children, a monolithic sarcophagus of whitish volcanic rock, 12 single burials of children, mainly in amphorae, and 19 multiple burials of adults in seven pithoi (fig. 8)³⁶.

Recent finds under the city's Roman residential area also attest that cremations and inhumations continued to co-exist until the late 6th century BC³⁷. A new element that this burial cluster has introduced in the Archaic tomb typology is the use of the stone box-shaped chest.

In the Early Classical era, monolithic stone sarcophagi and box-shaped graves were widely adopted, while funerary monuments for the upper social classes appeared for the very first time. Stone box-shaped graves contained bronze or ceramic urns with the deceased's ashes. They were usually single chests;

however there is also a triple one that came from the South Necropolis³⁸. They were usually made of four square slabs of volcanic stone (reddish or whitish trachyte) or marble, connected with clamps, but in one case the chest was monolithic covered with a gabled lid³⁹.

A unique example from the Early Classical period that combines the funerary monument and the box-shaped grave is the tomb mentioned above in relation to the founding date of the South Necropolis. Unfortunately, only its foundations consisting of trachyte blocks and rubble infill remained. Even though the superstructure had been looted, a square stone box-shaped grave that was incorporated in the east side of the structure had escaped the grave robbers' attention. Apart from the red-figure pelike by the Florence Painter, the chest also contained a bronze cinerary amphora, a bronze lebes, a bronze strigil and a clay loom-weight⁴⁰.

A chest which also can be dated to this early period, but located in a separate area, has been found in the middle space of the North Necropolis and also contained a red-figure pelike⁴¹.

A very interesting example of a box-shaped chest dating to the late 4th century BC has been discovered at the southernmost boundary of the South Necropolis. It included a cinerary bronze hydria with sculptured relief of a Nike crowning a warrior on the attachment below the vertical handle, a red-figure pelike of the Griffin Group and a bronze strigil⁴².

The rectangular cist grave appeared in the Late Classical period and prevailed through the Hellenistic and Roman eras. These graves were made with variable building techniques: rubble stones, trachyte blocks in irregular isodomic masonry or four monolithic plaques connected with clamps. In several cases tombs are protected by a stone-built enclosure or *peribolos* (fig. 9)⁴³. Tile graves (*kalyvitis*)⁴⁴, direct soil

³³ Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1978, 57–59 pl. 12, 340 (type III b); Kašuba 2006, 213–235, esp. figs. 3, 1, 7, 8, 15, 19, 25; 4, 1; 6, 7, 26; 13; Kyriakopoulou – Roungou 2020, 56 f. Generally, for the Protogeometric burials (interment in pits, fibulae) see Kurtz – Boardman 2011, 34–39.

³⁴ See n. 6. Acheilara 2012, 55–68. The Kriklanis-Koutsovilis plot is located a short distance from the Aghios Symeon Church where the Protogeometric grave was found (see n. 3, 28).

³⁵ A good example of a painted Clazomenian sarcophagus is the fragment with inv. MM. Apx 1. Other examples of Clazomenian type sarcophagi, with or without painted decoration on their rims, are known from the cemeteries of the ancient cities of Eresos with inv. SE 605, and Methymna (Buchholz 1975, 63 f. draw. 15; Tsaravopoulos 1987, 482 pl. 289 y; Kourtzellis – Pappa 2020, 96). Also from Antissa see Lamb 1931/1932, 65 f. figs. 14, 16; Archontidou-Argyri 1996, 602.

³⁶ Acheilara 1999a, 747–749 figs. 18, 19; Kourtzellis 2008, 216; Kourtzellis 2012, 225.

³⁷ See n. 6.

³⁸ Archontidou-Argyri 2000c, 931 f.

³⁹ Archontidou-Argyri 2000a, 930 f.

⁴⁰ It is the funerary monument 'K17' in Archontidou-Argyri 2000b, 930 fig. 22; Kourtzellis – Panatsi 2019, 560–563. See also n. 21, 23.

⁴¹ North Necropolis Tomb 110. Acheilara 2000d, 934 f.

⁴² It was found at the junction of Papadiamanti and Molinou streets (Archontidou-Argyri 1997, 907). The square 'chest IV' had internal dimensions 0.55 × 0.57 × 0.65 m. The height of the cinerary bronze hydria (inv. MM 18473) is 0.57 m. The inv. of the iron strigil is MM 18751 and of the red-figure pelike MM 31032. For the red-figure pelike which is dated to the 3rd quarter of the 4th cent. BC see Kourtzellis – Panatsi 2019, 568 f.

⁴³ For example, Acheilara 1998c, 776.

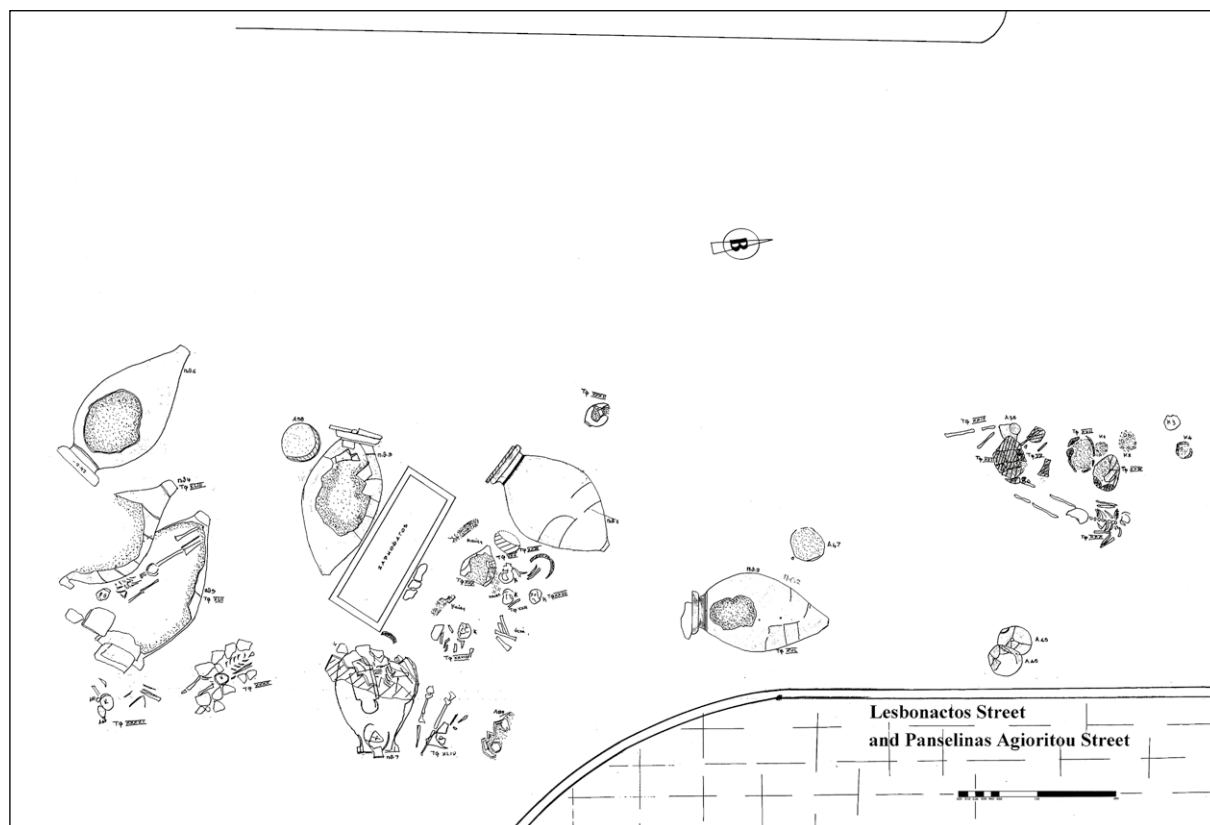
⁴⁴ For the South Necropolis see Acheilara 2000a, 932 f. For the North Necropolis see Acheilara 2000d, 934 f.; Acheilara 2000c, 934.



6 The Late Protoegeometric/Geometric pit grave in the coastal zone of Navmachias Ellis Street during excavation



7 The Early Archaic cemetery of Mytilene with rectangular and circular trenches curved in the natural rock in the Aghios Symeon district (Kriklanis – Koutsovilis land plot)



8 Ground plan of the excavation at Lesvonaktos street with the monolithic sarcophagus and the clay pithoi (Late Archaic period)

burials and sarcophagi with gabled lids⁴⁵ became widespread through the Roman period. Although sarcophagi are usually made of unadorned trachyte stone, the special category of the so-called Assos' Sarcophagi Group is also represented by two examples – one in the Archaeological Museum of Mytilene (Old Building) and the other in private possession⁴⁶. Whether the relief sarcophagi made of trachyte had been imported from Assos or were locally produced is an interesting issue to be studied.

A small-scale collection of marble sarcophagi is also attested in the Archaeological Museum of Mytilene (Old Building). It includes a sizeable plain chest with pseudo-antae on four corners, likely of Lycian inspiration⁴⁷, and also the short side panel of a relief sarcophagus decorated on the broken corners with winged Nike figures holding with their hands the edges of a garland (fig. 10)⁴⁸.

From the Archaic to the Roman era inhumation was used alongside cremation, with the first practice more common than the second. With the exception of

⁴⁵ For example, Archontidou-Argyri 2000a, 930 f.; Acheilara 2000a, 932 f.

⁴⁶ The sarcophagus in the Archaeological Museum of Mytilene (Old Building) has inv. MM 15066. The other sarcophagus, which is now situated in the garden of the mansion of the well-known Lesbian architect Argyris Adalis in the Taxiarches (Kayiani) district, was probably transferred there from the South Necropolis and is published in IG XII² 406. For the engraved curse on the *tabula ansata*, see also n. 94. Koldewey (Koldewey 1890, 10) mentions that there were many sarcophagi in the gardens of the mansions built in the area of the South Necropolis in the 19th cent. and one of these is depicted in his monograph. Similar sarcophagi are also met in Methymna, which is situated opposite Assos, and an example is included in Buchholz 1975, 59 f. pl. 10 c. Also, Kourtzellis – Pappa 2020, 97. Locally made sarcophagi of Assos type are

common in Euboea (Katakis 1999–2001, 188 f., esp. no. 30. 32. 33. 34), Thessaloniki (Stefanidou-Tiveriou 2012, 122 f. fig. 2), Nikopolis (Zachos – Karampa 2015, 36 f. 42 f. 58 f. 74–76) and other cities of the ancient world.

⁴⁷ Koch 2010, 62 f. fig. 46; Özer 2014, 75–87 figs. 4–6.

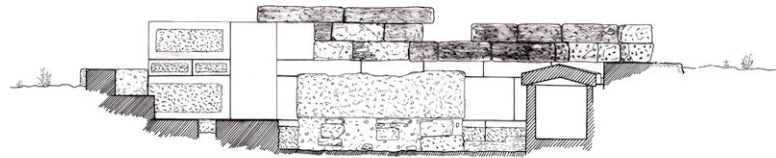
⁴⁸ The panel measures 1.14 m in length, 0.18 m in width and 0.74 m in height. Despite the damage on the surface, it is a nice example of a relief garland sarcophagus with Nikes on the corners, displaying dependence on models from Asia Minor (Dokimion, Pamphylia, Prokonessos, etc.) (Demirer 2005, 149. 152 f. nos. 153–155; 254; Koch 2010, figs. 1. 5. 27. 36. 37. 41. 71; Koch 2011, 9–29 figs. 1.3 c; 1.7; 1.10; 1.20 a). The extensive drilling and the deep curving are characteristic features of the 2nd–3rd cent. AD.



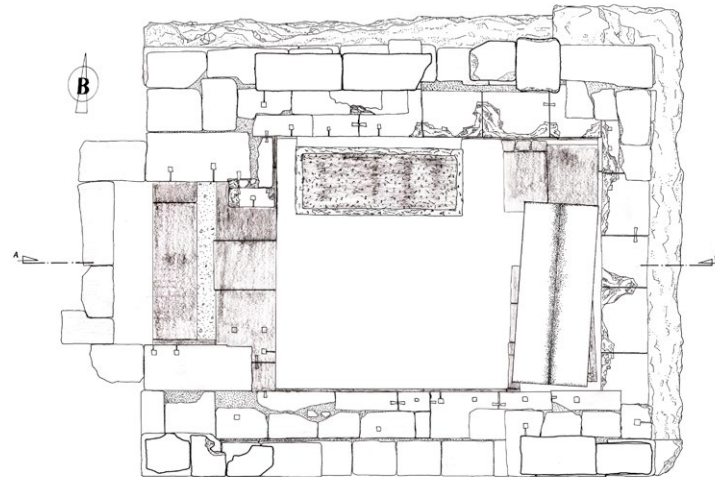
9 Cluster of stone built box-shaped graves defined by enclosures from the South Necropolis of Mytilene (D. Lalellis land plot)



10 Narrow side of the ›garland sarcophagus‹ with the winged Nikes at the corners



Section A - B



Mytilene, South Necropolis (1977) Papadellis land plot.

11 Ground plan and section of the monumental underground chamber tomb of the South Necropolis of Mytilene (Papadellis land plot)



12 Funerary monument of the ›exedra‹ type. Visible is the bench bearing curved lion paws at the ends from the North Necropolis of Mytilene

pithoi burials and pits with cinerary urns, the rest of the grave types were used for a single interment during the Archaic period. The practice of single interment is also widely attested from Classical to Hellenistic times, while multiple burials are only sporadically attested at the end of this period. On the contrary, in the Roman era graves very often included two or more interments in layers – one corpse above the other one; it is unknown, though, whether all the deceased were

buried at the same time or were members of the same family. In the same period the process of reduction, in which the disarticulated skeletal remains of the previous interment were swept aside into the corners or towards the walls of the grave, is commonly observed in order to increase the available space for the new burial in the same place. A grave may include many reductions, so indicating that it was used not only as a burial place but as an ossuary as well⁴⁹.

Funerary Monuments

Generally speaking, funerary monuments were typically situated in prominent places as if to dominate, with their splendid architectural form, over the more modest tombs. The majority of them were located on the slopes of low hills, close to the city wall gates⁵⁰ and along the main funerary streets⁵¹ which led to the city. For their construction, mostly marble and local trachyte of rosy hue were used.

Most of the outstanding monuments have been found in the South Necropolis, confirming Koldewey's suggestion that it should be considered the most important necropolis of Mytilene⁵².

The prominent location of the grave monuments and their presence over centuries are evidence that they were considered an urban point of reference, increasing the social and collective memory of the citizens and visitors in the city of Mytilene⁵³. Statues of exceptional art, which in some cases were found close to the funerary monuments, could be associated with them, almost by default.

The partial excavation of the funerary monuments and the almost entire loss of their superstructure preclude any full reconstruction of their architectural plan, although some preliminary observa-

tions are still possible. The indicative architectural elements that were preserved allow their grouping in the following six broad categories:

1. Small or medium-sized monuments in square or rectangular shape, preserved up to the level of foundation in which box-shaped chests or cist graves were embedded (fig. 4). As already mentioned, these richly furnished grave monuments are found in the South Necropolis during the Classical period⁵⁴.
2. A single rectangular monument with loculi, found in the South Necropolis. It was constructed with isodomic masonry of volcanic ashlar blocks and preserved up to the level of the second course above foundation. It included five loculi layered with a thin coating of stucco on the inside faces. The entrance to each loculus was blocked with an orthostat, one of which had been preserved in situ at the time of excavation. The likeliest date for the monument would be in the Early Hellenistic era, based on the offerings and the plain inscribed stelai that accompanied the other graves around it⁵⁵.
3. A unique case among the funerary monuments of the South Necropolis is an underground rectangu-

⁴⁹ For burial practices in the South Necropolis see Chatzi 1972, 593; Archontidou-Argyri 1992a, 531; Archontidou-Argyri 1993a, 415–417; Acheilara 2000a, 932 f. For the North Necropolis see Dova 1998, 776 f.; Acheilara 1999c, 756–758; Acheilara 1999e, 759; Acheilara 2000c, 934; Acheilara 2000d, 934 f.

⁵⁰ For the North Necropolis see Tsirivakos 1973/1974, 855. 858 draw. 4; 859; Acheilara 1998a, 773 f. For the South Necropolis see Archontidou-Argyri 2000a, 930 f.; Archontidou-Argyri 2000b, 930 fig. 22; Archontidou-Argyri 2000c, 931 f.; Archontidou-Argyri 2000d, 932; Kourtzellis – Panatsi 2019, 559–569.

⁵¹ See n. 16.

⁵² Koldewey 1890, 10; Vlachos 1987, 93 f.

⁵³ For the Classical necropoleis in general see Boardman 1999, 132–139; Morris 1992, 128–155.

⁵⁴ See n. 40. Archontidou-Argyri 2000b, 930; Kourtzellis – Panatsi 2019, 560–565.

⁵⁵ Bodenstein 1981, 17 f. pls. 1, 27; 4, 8. Three funerary monuments in Alipheira (Arcadia, Greece) provide a direct parallel to the Mytilenean structure (Orlandos 1967/1968, 203–231 figs. 141–161). For the funerary monuments with loculi, which were built from the 4th cent. BC until the 3rd cent. AD, see Fedak 1990, 25. 57–77 fig. 85 (Lion Tomb, Knidos); 82 f. figs. 103–105 (Charmyleion, Cos island); 92–94 fig. 116 b (Heroon, Miletos); 104 fig. 129 (Alipheira, Arcadia); 130–132 figs. 172–176; 180–182 (Alexandria, Egypt); Tsouli 2013, 33–38 figs. 40–57 (Charmyleion, Cos island), with full bibliography; Daszewski 2011, 438–443. 446–452 figs. 18. 22–24. 28–29 (Marina el-Alamein, Egypt).

lar tomb preserved up to the lower portion of the burial chamber. On the rear (west) side of the building is a two-stepped descending stair, which provides access to the spacious burial chamber through a rudimentary vestibule. The chamber contains two looted monolithic sarcophagi with gabled lids placed along the east and north side of the room. The exterior surfaces of the walls are constructed of volcanic ashlar blocks, in contrast to the fine marble masonry of orthostats–string course–orthostats on the interior (figs. 5 A; 11)⁵⁶. In the absence of firm chronological evidence, the construction date of the monument can only be attributed to either the Hellenistic or Roman periods.

4. A small rectangular monument with underground burial chamber. A structure of the Early Roman period built close to the southern city gate is a characteristic example of this category. The interior surfaces of the walls were constructed of rough rubble and mortar masonry, in contrast to the ashlar blocks on the exterior. A threshold on the eastern wall denoted an entrance to the ground floor that was not preserved. The underground chamber included a monolithic sarcophagus made of trachyte with gable cover and two direct soil burials⁵⁷.
5. Monuments of the Roman era, probably of the type designated as 'tombs with exedra', with marble benches bearing lion's foot mouldings⁵⁸. Two very similar funerary buildings, one found in the North Necropolis on the slope of a low hill (fig. 12) and the other in the South Necropolis, near the city walls, may be included in this category. Com-

binning the data from both buildings, it seems that they comprised large complexes with a long row of rooms opening to the sea. Only one room was uncovered in each monument. It included a hollow podium base, which likely served as the *hyposorion*, constructed from fine dressed stone blocks on its visible exterior. The top of the *hyposorion* was covered with marble slabs, on which the sarcophagus and the benches directly stood. The sarcophagus was placed against the rear wall of the room and the marble benches in front of it, most possibly in a *triclinium* arrangement⁵⁹.

6. Mausoleums of rectangular shape preserved at the level of the podium with in-core filling of rubble stones and mortar or mud. The surviving lower part of the podium consists of the conventional wall scheme of socle course–orthostats–string course and rests on a platform made up of a *krepidoma* and an *euthynteria*. Of course, there are several variations of this arrangement. The socle course is sometimes plain or profiled, but often missing, while euthynteria blocks bear lifting bosses or have drafted borders⁶⁰. Three examples represent this type of funerary monument: the middle tomb building of three adjacent ones in the North Necropolis⁶¹ and the particular case of two, probably intra-urban, mausoleums, symmetrically arranged near the SW gateway of the city⁶². The latter two monuments are associated with altars and ash chests – the ash chests were actually incorporated into the northernmost of the two buildings – inscribed with the names of the deceased, who were addressed by the *Damos* (δᾶμος) as he-

56 Bodenstedt 1981, 17 pls. 2, 23; 5, 9. The tomb was found in the 1970's during private construction works and is still visible in Kavetsou Street. The external dimensions of the monument are 6.75 m length × 6.00 m width. The internal dimensions of the vestibule are 0.96 m length and 2.40 m width; of the burial chamber 4.42 m length and 3.35 m width.

57 Archontidou-Argyri 2000a, 930 f. identified the structure with a burial enclosure, but since the threshold was revealed higher than the sarcophagus' cover we suggest that it should be restored as a funerary building with underground chamber.

58 'Tombs with exedra' are combined with benches and characteristic examples dating from the 2nd–3rd cent. AD are most commonly found in the Lycia and Phrygia region. For a full discussion on the subject see Aktaş 2008, 235–248 figs. 1–35. They are also met in the northwestern part of Asia Minor, such as in Assos (Clarke – Bacon – Koldewey 1902, 241–251. 260) as well as in the West, Pompeii (Cormack 2007, 586–588. 590 n. 8. 10 fig. 37, 2). For benches placed in the exterior or interior of chamber tombs see indicatively Cormack 1996, 5–11. 20 figs. 6. 12 pls. 1 c; 4 c (Ariassos, Pisidia); Hallett – Coulton 1993, 43. 51 n. 27 fig. 6 pl. 2 b (Balboura); Clarke – Bacon – Koldewey 1902, 226–233. 253. 259 (Assos).

59 The bench alongside the sarcophagus is missing from the South Necropolis tomb. From the monument in the North Necropolis it is the sarcophagus that is missing. However a fragmentary preserved sarcophagus lid of volcanic stone and some marble benches are scattered around the North Necropolis monument. The arrangement of the sarcophagus and benches in tomb M70 from Patara presents similarities with the monuments of Mytilene (Aktaş 2008, 239 f. 253 figs. 7. 8). The combination of *hyposorion* in the lower chamber with sarcophagus and benches in the upper burial chamber is also met in 'Tombs with exedra' (Aktaş 2008, 235–248 figs. 1–35) and in a chamber tomb ('East Tomb') in Balboura (Hallett – Coulton 1993, 41–58 figs. 1–6 pls. 1–5).

60 The exterior articulation of the podiums in the monuments of Ariassos, Pisidia (Cormack 1989, 3 figs. 2. 3 pls. 1 a–4 a; Cormack 1996, 5–7 pl. 1 b. c) and of Assos (Clarke – Bacon – Koldewey 1902, 241. 245. 250 f. 253. 259. 263. 265. 267) present similarities with the Mytilenean examples.

61 Charitonidis 1960, 236; Charitonidis 1965, 493 draw. 6; Acheilara 1999c, 756–758 figs. 28–30.

62 Both monuments were excavated in the early 1980s and remain unpublished. A brief mention in Bodenstedt 1981, 17 pls. 2, 20 a; 4, 7; Kourtzellis – Kyriakopoulou 2018, 308.

roes. These inscriptions not only provide a firm chronological basis for the dating of this specific category of funerary monuments to the 1st century AD⁶³, but also permit the reasonable conjecture that the mausoleums near the SW gate were *heroa* of very prominent citizens. Furthermore, the names of the deceased engraved on an altar and an ash chest *epithema* (lid) revealed in the southernmost of these two monuments are of great interest. The altar was dedicated to a man named Ἡρώϊδας and the ash chest to a certain [Α]ρίστανδρος, both names in the dative case⁶⁴. The very same names were also engraved on an altar and an epithema published in IG² XII 286. 287⁶⁵ accompanied by the adjectives εὐεργέταν (benefactor) and ἥρωϊ (hero), respectively. It is possible, therefore, that all the objects – those from the excavation and the others referenced in IG – are related, decorating the same funerary monument, namely the southernmost mausoleum near the SW gate.

The case of the two funerary monuments near the SW city gate of Mytilene offers us the opportunity to briefly examine the typological characteristics and symbolism of the funerary altars of Lesbos⁶⁶. They are products of one or more local workshops, which creatively combine characteristics of other workshops of the Helladic insular space or Asia Minor region in order to produce prototype altars of good quality.

The altars of Lesbos can be categorised into three groups according to their shape: rectangular, cylindrical and pillar-shaped. Further, some of them are executed in relief, others are inscribed, while a third group combines both relief decoration and inscriptions.

Their peculiarities are mainly identified in the crowning and the shaft. The crowning is convex with images in relief, including chthonic elements and, occasionally, *acroteria*. The shaft is usually decorated with rams' and horses' heads, instead of *bucrania*, and sometimes combined with human busts. It is also worth noting that the decorative motifs always support the schematised garland. The male busts belong to several iconographic types and age groups, as their hairstyle and attire illustrate. They are usually

dressed in *himation* or in *chiton* and *chlamys* and they are possibly identified as officials or members of the upper class of *Hippeis* (horsemen)⁶⁷, on the basis of the complementary motifs, such as defensive and offensive weapons (e.g. cuirasses, helmets, shields, spears) and horses' protomes in section. The depiction of the weaponry may indicate that the men for whom the altars were made died in the battle, or they may symbolise the spoils they took in war from their fallen enemies.

The female busts are usually supplemented with objects of worship, alabaster and fusiform unguentaria, essential in commemorating and making offerings to the dead.

The iconographic tradition of the altars' crowning with chthonic symbols was also used on the lids or *epithemas* of ash-chests. It appears that this particular theme had deep roots in the island's funerary iconography and was so well known and popular that it was continued down to the 3rd century AD through a special category of cult objects from Lesbos: the ›relief offering tables‹.

The heroic character of the altars is further clarified by one more cylindrical altar recently found in the South Necropolis. Fallen inside the rectangular section of a funerary complex, it was found alongside a pile of misplaced bones, giving the impression of a rapid, collective burial (fig. 5 B). The ceramic and glass unguentaria found in the same context dates the monument between the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD. This chronology is compatible with the sculptural form of the veiled female head depicted on the shaft of the altar, and known as ›Mourning Woman‹.

Apart from the burial monuments that have been discovered in excavations, some relief or inscribed architectural members built-in as *spolia* on the walls of the Medieval castle have been considered as further evidence of above ground temple-like funerary monuments due to their small dimensions, a hypothesis which should be treated with caution, though⁶⁸.

However, four inscribed architectural members, now included in the Archaeological Museum of Mytilene (Old Building), can be attributed, with certainty, to Roman monumental graves of the South Necropolis.

⁶³ Matthaïou 2021, 21–25 figs. 1–5.

⁶⁴ Both are included in the outdoor exhibition of the Archaeological Museum of Mytilene (Old Building). The inv. of the altar is MM 7112 and of the ash chest epithema MM 7110.

⁶⁵ The altar IG² XII 286 with inv. MM 334 is included in the outdoor exhibition of the Archaeological Museum of Mytilene (Old Building), while the epithema IG² XII 287 supports one of the columns in the narthex of Zoodochos Pigi chapel in the village of Varia near Mytilene (Diakoumakou 2018).

⁶⁶ For the funerary altars of Lesbos see in detail Kourtzellis – Kyriakopoulou 2018, 303–316.

⁶⁷ In this class belonged Theophanes of Mytilene, well-known for his friendly relations with Pompey, and his descendants (Dimopoulou-Piliouni 2015, 481 f. 580 f. and especially for the friendship between the two men 479–506).

⁶⁸ Williams – Whitbread 1984, 31–76.



13 Views and details of the monolithic marble rectangular Pillar Tomb from the North Necropolis of Mytilene. The tomb was found in 2013 in the sea during the replacement of the central water pipe of the island's power plant

The first three come from a family monument, possibly of the late 1st century BC, that was erected for two brothers bearing the names Γναῖος Πομπήϊ[ος] Σπορίου υἱὸς Νέστωρ and Γναῖος Πομπήϊ[ος] Σπορίου υἱὸς Ἡδύλος, perhaps for their mother Πομπήϊα and for a certain [Γναῖ]ος Πο[μπ]ήϊος Βένυστος. The four persons had been honoured by the *Damos* of Mytilene, as a wreath accompanies each one's name. The interesting point is that both brothers are mentioned as »*spurii filii*« which probably indicates that they, together with Βένυστος, were freedmen, connected »either with Pompey himself or with one of the local families, like that of the famous Theophanes and his descendants, who ultimately owed their Roman citizenship to Pompey and possessed their own *familiae* of slaves«, as Kostas Buraselis points out⁶⁹.

The fourth architectural member is a 3rd–4th century AD marble lintel or architrave of a tomb, whose owner Αὐρήλιος Λέσβιος specifies his profession in the engraved inscription; he worked in textile production as a *plumarius* – ποικιλτής in ancient Greek – namely an embroiderer or weaver⁷⁰.

Monumentality is a special characteristic of the Mytilenean necropoleis during the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods, indicated not only by the funer-

ary monuments and the altars but also by the funerary statues and *stelai*. Animals such as lions and boars as well as mythical creatures such as sphinxes and sirens seem to have decorated family funerary enclosures and elaborate individual tombs⁷¹.

A special case is the recent finding of a fragmentarily preserved, original funerary marble statue of an *ephebe* representing idealised, heroic nudity⁷². The statue was found in the South Necropolis cemetery of Mytilene. The figure is shown standing with his right hand resting on his waist, while his left hand supports the head in an attitude of sorrow. The left leg is lifted up to one side, probably resting on a rock or on some other suitable formation, covered with a neatly folded and arranged drapery, perhaps a short frock-coat or *chlamys*. Since the white marble is definitely imported, the statue might have been created by an unknown local sculptor or workshop combining two prominent iconographic types of his era. Based on iconographical and stylistic criteria, but also taking into consideration the excavation context, the statue should be dated to the last quarter of the 4th century BC⁷³.

Another significant finding is the monolithic marble rectangular *Pillar Tomb*, 2.02 m in height, which was retrieved from the sea in the area of the North

⁶⁹ IG XII² 382–384; Buraselis 1996, 55–59. For the dating of the monument see Hodot 1990, 295.

⁷⁰ Charitonidis 1968, 73 f. no. 112 pl. 30; Fraser – Matthews 1987, 94; Dimopoulou-Piliouni 2015, 652 f. The inscription is carved on the architrave of a small aboveground temple-like funerary monument. The whole inscription is: Αὐρήλιος Λέσβιος ὁ καὶ Ἀτταλὸς Μυτιληνέος τὴν ἐπιστήμην πλουμάριος κατεσκεύασα ἐν αὐτῷ κοιμητήριον καὶ τῇ (συμβίῳ) μου καὶ τοῖς ἐξ ἡμῶν κληρονόμοις.

⁷¹ Indicatively, inv. MM 3130, MM 4112, MM 41979 for statues of lions; MM 31065 for a statue of a boar; MM 3200 for a Sphinx

and MM 4112 for a Siren. For the symbolic meaning of lions and other mythical creatures in funerary monuments see Vermeule 1972, 49–59; Kokkorou-Alevras 2011, 280 f.; Nováková 2011, 226–231 figs. 3–10.

⁷² Inv. no. MM 43076. First mention in: Archontidou-Argyri 2000c, 931 f. One more funerary statue has come to light on Lesbos, from Pamphila, a village north of Mytilene (Evangelidis 1927/1928, 18 f. fig. 9; Despini 2002, 213 n. 30 fig. 9).

⁷³ Kourtzellis 2020, 363–381.

Necropolis of Mytilene and most probably can be dated to the Hellenistic period (fig. 13). On its frontal face, a rectangular *naiskos* is formed with a deep recess and a triangular pediment. A relief shield, of Macedonian type, decorates one of the lateral sides.

In the upper part of the pillar an almost square socket is carved, which was perhaps used for the placement of the deceased as is the case with the well known examples of ancient Lycia⁷⁴.

Funerary Stelai or Markers

Human shaped schematised *stelai* of the second half of the 6th century BC marked inhumations and cremations in important clusters of the Archaic cemetery (fig. 14 a)⁷⁵. These stelai can be typologically identified with the aniconic ›idols‹ of the Phrygian Cybele⁷⁶, whose worship was especially popular in Lesbos during the Archaic period, relating to the protection of life and death⁷⁷.

Of particular interest is the development of funerary markers from the Classical to the Roman period. From the Late Classical era there is just one single example of a marble funerary stele, dedicated to Vittina of Damasistratos from Chios (Βιτίννα | Δαμασι | στράτο | Χίη). It consisted of a tall rectangular shaft crowned by an anthemion which rises on thick stems from a bed of acanthus leaves. Even the thin moulding that separates the anthemion from the shaft below is ornately carved with a lesbian cyma (fig. 14 b)⁷⁸.

The most common type of grave markers during the Hellenistic period were the stelai with a pedimental free standing crowning, *acroteria* placed at the out-

er angles of the pediment and a shaft tapering slightly upwards. None of these stelai have a relief decoration, but they were surely painted as traces of colour can be observed on the pediment and the inscription. The inscription with the name of the deceased followed by the father's or husband's name was engraved immediately below the crowning (fig. 14 c)⁷⁹.

At the end of that period and during the Roman era, sunken panels containing relief or painted figures appeared on the shaft of the stelai, the form of which presents great variance: simple pedimental, of pilaster – with or without pedimental finial – and columnar type⁸⁰. The panels are usually arched without margins, but on the pilaster stelai they could be also rectangular, sometimes in the form of a *naiskos* or bordered with a thin frame to imitate real *pinakes*⁸¹. The relief decoration includes single standing women in the *pudicitia* type or men in the *palliatu*s type, holding a book role⁸². When they appear in pairs they stand beside each other like statues, looking out at the viewer, while the motif of *dexiosis* is depicted in

74 The shaft of the pilaster measures 0.73 m depth and 0.62 m width. Niche 0.365 × 0.255 × 0.11 m. Width of raised bands 0.12–0.15 m. Relief shield with external diam. 0.24 m and internal 0.20 m. Dimensions of the square socket on the upper surface 0.50 × 0.46 m and 0.26 m depth. For similar examples of *Pillar Tombs* in the Necropolis of Hoyran (Lycia) see Deltour-Levie 1982, 41–49 figs. 9–24; Seyer 2020, 217–247 figs. 2–4.

75 The stelai are carved on rosy trachyte and only in one case on marble (Acheilara 1999a, 749 figs. 18, 19; Utili 1999, 116 fig. 8; Kourtzellis 2012, 225; Polat 2013, 196 f.; Yağiz 2014, 129–142).

76 The backrests of Phrygian rock-cut thrones and stepped monuments designed for the Mother Goddess have carvings in the shape of human heads resembling ›idols‹ (Naumann 1983, 93 pl. 9 b; Vassileva 2009, 111–124 figs. 6–10; Rongou – Kyriakopoulou [forthcoming]).

77 Rongou 2013, 48–57, 62–65, 112–118 n. 218 on the spread of Cybele's worship over the island of Lesbos (with full bibliography).

78 Inv. MM 32624. Acheilara 2000a, 933; Pologiorgi 2002, 195–208 figs. 1, 2, 6, 8 for the crowning of the stele of Euboulos in the Archaeological Museum of Brauron (beginning of the 3rd quarter of the 4th cent. BC). For the Attic origin of the palmette-stelai and the spread of the type especially due to the migration of Athenian marble carvers after the law of Demetrius of Phalerum (317 BC) see Papapostolou 1993, 36–38 pls. 11, 12 with full bibliography. In

this framework the stele from Mytilene could be the product of a travelling Athenian workshop.

79 For similar stelai from Mytilene see Conze 1865, 11 pl. 4; Kol-dewey 1890, 10; Evangelidis 1920/1921, 109–111 nos. 10–12; Evangelidis 1924/1925, 47 f.; Charitonidis 1968, 58 no. 81 pl. 23 b; 59 f. no. 82 fig. 29; 60 no. 83 pl. 30; 60 no. 84 pl. 24 b; 60 f. no. 85 pl. 23 a; 62 f. no. 91 fig. 32 pl. 23 c; 64 no. 92 pl. 25 c; 66 no. 97 fig. 36 pl. 26 a, b; 67 f. no. 102. For parallels from Achaia see Papapostolou 1993, 39–44 figs. 4, 5 pls. 17–23 with full bibliography and comments on the origin and diffusion of the type.

80 For some indicative examples of the Roman period see IG XII² 349, 371, 374, 390, 393, 400; Charitonidis 1963, 266 f.; Petrakos 1967, 461; Charitonidis 1968, 64 f. no. 95 fig. 34; 65 no. 96 fig. 35 pl. 25 b; 66 no. 97 fig. 36 pl. 26 a, b; 66 no. 98 pl. 26 c; 66 no. 99 pl. 27 a; 66 f. no. 100 fig. 37 pl. 27 b; 68 no. 103 fig. 38 pl. 27 c; 68 no. 104 pl. 27 d; 70 no. 105 fig. 39; 71 no. 108 pl. 28 c; 72 no. 109 pl. 28 b. For the stele b and d in fig. 15 see Pfuhr – Möbius 1977–1979, 95 no. 177 pl. 38 and 170 no. 565 pl. 88; 564 no. III pl. 329, respectively.

81 For similar stelai in Achaia see Papapostolou 1993, 42–46 fig. 7 pls. 30–42 with full bibliography and comments on the diffusion of the type.

82 Zanker 1993, 216–227; Tsouli 2013, 266 f. 284 f. 303 f. with full bibliography.

14 Characteristic examples of grave stelai from the Necropoleis of Mytilene, dating from the Archaic to Hellenistic periods



15 Characteristic examples of grave stelai from the Necropoleis of Mytilene, dating from the Late Hellenistic to Roman periods



just one case⁸³. The inscriptions may be engraved either above or below the panel or both when they give the names of two dead persons (fig. 15 a. b).

Stelai, especially of the pilaster type, are often decorated, apart from the figural scenes, with honorary wreaths which encircle the inscription *Damos*. They indicate that the city of Mytilene honoured its

notable citizens by erecting these stelai over their graves or may symbolise the honorary offices the deceased person had when alive (fig. 15 c. d)⁸⁴.

In the Hellenistic and Roman periods relief plaques depicting 'funerary banquets'⁸⁵ or the 'Thracian Rider'⁸⁶ as well as stelai of gladiators and athletes had been particularly favoured in the Mytilene-

⁸³ A recent finding of marble from the South Necropolis with inv. MM 31139 (Acheilara 1998d, 774 f.). It measures 1.27 m in height and has a fragmented pedimental crowning. In the rectangular panel a man and the deceased woman Kleopatra are represented standing in a farewell gesture. For reliefs with *dexiosis* scene see Tsouli 2013, 304 f. with full bibliography.

⁸⁴ Indicatively, IG XII² 353. 354. 357. 360. 366. 371. 374. 378. 379. 381. 382–384. 471. For engraved honorary wreaths in funerary stelai, a common motif in Asia Minor, see Zanker 1993, 215; Bu-

raselis 1996, 55 n. 3 with bibliography; Nováková 2011, 232–234 figs. 3–10; Tsouli 2013, 62 no. 305; 361 no. 1946; 402 no. 2199 with full bibliography.

⁸⁵ Pfuhl – Möbius 1977–1979, 441 f. no. 1837 pl. 264; 442 no. 1839 pl. 264; 449 no. 1868 pl. 268; 484 nos. 2011. 2013 pl. 290; Archontidou-Argyri – Acheilara 1999, 118 f. 138 f. 140.

⁸⁶ Pfuhl – Möbius 1977–1979, 331 f. no. 1385 pl. 201; Archontidou-Argyri – Acheilara 1999, 122. 142 f.

an society. Concerning the grave stelai intended for exceptional athletes, the most important among them is the stele of Ἀνείκτος (i. e. Invincible), winner in many *dolichos* races (fig. 15 e)⁸⁷. A fragmentary unfluted column from the North Necropolis could also be classified in the category of tombstones dedicated to athletes as it is decorated with two carved wreaths, each one encircling the name of a Greek city in Asia Minor, Thyateira⁸⁸ and Philadelphia⁸⁹. Therefore, it seems that the column was set up atop the funerary monument of an athlete to be praised for his victories in the athletic contests organised by these two cities.

An important category of relief plaques is the one depicting gladiators and *theriomachies*. Some are embedded in the walls of the Medieval castle⁹⁰ and others in buildings in the area of Thermi⁹¹, north of Mytilene. Among the gladiatorial reliefs that are also housed in the Archaeological Museum (Old Building) the most famous is the stele of Polydromos⁹². Whether the gladiatorial reliefs of Mytilene come from votive or funerary buildings or whether at least some of

them were individual tombstones are issues under consideration. Since they are entirely without excavation context, and also lack other indicative sepulchral features, such as the pedimental crowning – with the exception of the stele of Polydromos – or the funerary epigram, their identification with grave markers cannot be either confirmed or excluded, even when compared to several known parallels from the Aegean Sea region and Asia Minor⁹³.

In many cases, the inscriptions on the Roman tombs of Mytilene testify to the dead person's will to keep the grave in the ownership of his family. In order to prevent a possible violation of the tomb, owners used curses often combined with the imposition of a fine to be paid to the public treasury or to the gods. The violation of the grave constituted a serious offence to the dead and his family, although as the inscriptions themselves suggest, this practice would have been customary at that time, with less wealthy citizens resorting to it who may not have been able to acquire their own place of rest⁹⁴.

⁸⁷ IG XII² 388; Pfuhl – Möbius 1977–1979, 79 no. 107 pl. 25 (2nd cent. AD); Labarre 1996, 302–303 no. 47 with full bibliography. For other grave markers dedicated to athletes see Charitonidis 1968, 71 no. 107 pl. 28 a; Pfuhl – Möbius 1977–1979, 88 no. 147 pl. 33.

⁸⁸ Thyateira in Lydia region was well-known for the athletic contests called Tyrimneia. Apart from Aneikitos, mentioned above, one more Mytilenean athlete with the name Aur. Kalakaios Mytilenaios is attested to have won in those contests (TAM V² 1010).

⁸⁹ Philadelphia in the Lydia region was also famous for its athletic contests (indicatively TAM V3 1507. 1511; MAMA 8.521), but the epigraphic material has not yielded so far any athlete from Mytilene that won in the games organised by this city.

⁹⁰ The gladiatorial reliefs are incorporated as building material in the outer wall of the middle tower of the so called *Acropyrgos* at the Upper Castle of Mytilene and are dated to the middle of the 2nd cent. AD (Acheilara 1987b, 51–66 with extensive bibliography; IG XII² 452–454; Pfuhl – Möbius 1977–1979, 296 nos. 1208–1211 pl. 183; Dimopoulou-Piliouni 2015, 649 n. 219. 220; Karambinis 2020, 73–100).

⁹¹ The gladiatorial relief plaques in Thermi village are inbuilt in the enclosure of the Aghios Nikolaos church (Kiepert 1842, 148 f. nos. 37. 38 pl. Q, 7. 8; IG XII² 448. 449, respectively) and in the Post-Byzantine Tower of Platsis (IG XII² 450). The engraved stele IG XII² 447 referring to a *familia* of gladiators supported by Marcus Claudius Tryphonianus and his wife Orphia Lailia is incorporated in the Byzantine church of Panaghia Trouloti, also in Thermi. For this stele see Dimopoulou-Piliouni 2015, 649 f. For

Tryphonianus and his relation to the theatre of Mytilene see Charitonidis 1968, 41 f.; Acheilara 1987b, 64–66; Dimopoulou-Piliouni 2015, 620 n. 96; Kourtzellis 2019. It should be noted that there is a misunderstanding concerning the origin of the stelai IG XII² 448–451. They do not come from »Kato-Pyrgi« village, SW of Mytilene, as it is reported in IG, but from the area Pyrgoi at Thermi.

⁹² IG XII² 457; Robert 1940, 223 no. 283; Pfuhl – Möbius 1977–1979, 295 no. 1201 pl. 182.

⁹³ Gladiatorial reliefs were often erected by *numerarii* as parts of commemorative monuments to present a successful spectacle and to portray the gladiators that took part in it. However, these monuments could stand in necropoleis in association with the tomb of the person who organised the combat (Carter 1999, 156–168; Tsouli 2013, 308–311 n. 1608, both with full bibliography). For relief gladiatorial tombstones in Asia Minor, especially from the ancient cities of Aphrodisias, Hierapolis, Mylasa and Stratonikeia see Tsouli 2013, 308–315; Carlsen 2014, 441 n. 3. 4, with full bibliography. For examples from Aphrodisias see Hrychuk-Kontokosta 2008, 190–229, esp. 201–203. 227 f. nos. 39. 40 figs. 40. 41. Also, see Yurtsever 2018, 70–73 no. 3 for the ancient city of Side and Carlsen 2014, 446–448 fig. 5 for Halikarnassos.

⁹⁴ Dimopoulou-Piliouni 2015, 651–659 with all the examples from Lesbos; Kourtzellis – Kyriakopoulou 2018, 307. Funerary imprecations were very common in Asia Minor and may have inspired the respective examples from Mytilene (Strubbe 1991, 38–47; Tsouli 2013, 415–423).

Conclusion

To sum up, Mytilene's burial grounds dating from the Archaic to the Roman periods are closely related to the transformations of residential space, the construction of fortifications, the declining or flourishing economy, as well as historical circumstances. In particular for the form of the Mytilenean necropoleis during the Hellenistic period, it seems that after the city's expansion in the Late Classical period, new graves occupied the most distinctive positions: as close as possible to the defensive walls and the prominent graves of the Classical period, in privileged locations close to the funerary streets, or on hilly knolls.

In those areas impressive funerary monuments were constructed, either underground chamber tombs or aboveground tombs of various architectural types. The perspectives and practices of the Hellenistic world encouraged individual ambition and display through the erection of extravagant graves, which could remain eternally visible, expressing the glory and achievements of the deceased.

So far as can be determined, during the Hellenistic era inhumation in cist graves, sarcophagi and funerary monuments prevailed over cremation in box-shaped chests and clay pots. In most of the cases the tombs of this period were respected by the next generations, while in a few cases they were reused by the descendants of the first owner, as concluded by the careful reductions of the skeletal remains. Also, several graves of the Roman period, mainly the simplest ones, were placed between the graves of the Hellenistic period. It has also been observed that clusters of neat tombs dating to the Early Hellenistic period (rectangular cist graves with monolithic walls, covered by one or more thin slabs) were founded at great distance from the city's main gates – a phenomenon visible both in the South and the North Necropolis –, at such a distance that it is not possible to include them with any surety within the borders of the city's main necropoleis.

Another characteristic feature of the Mytilenean Hellenistic necropoleis is that tombs were furnished with wealthy and articulated grave goods, like gold diadems and wreaths, earrings and rings decorated

with semi-precious stones, and also lavish vessels of metal or clay, imported from various areas of the Greek world. Obviously, this was the result of the Macedonian presence on the island of Lesbos, of its subsequent connection with the Hellenistic kingdoms of the Successors, especially the Ptolemaic kingdom (beginning of the 3rd – middle of the 2nd century BC), and also of the flourishing maritime trade between the cities of Lesbos, Asia Minor and the Aegean islands.

The aboveground funerary monuments are often decorated with marble statues, locally made or mostly imported, of human and animal figures or mythological creatures. Meanwhile, the plain funerary stelai with pedimental crowning and a short inscription giving the name of the deceased, accompanied with his patronymic and the invocation formula *χαῖρε*, constitute the most common mode for commemoration of the dead.

Although during the long-term fieldwork in the necropoleis of Mytilene a very extensive part of the Hellenistic and Roman cemetery has come to light, excavations have failed to reveal much evidence for the tombs from Late Antiquity. If this is not just a coincidence, a most likely explanation for their absence is that late burials have not left any clear chronological evidence, because they were placed in pre-existing Roman graves. On the other hand, the use of the existing necropoleis might have gradually discontinued soon after the introduction of Christianity to Lesbos in the 4th century AD. The modification of rituals required by the new religion possibly made early basilicas in the ancient city core or at the outskirts the new preferred burial sites for the Christian population. After all, the new administrative organisation of the Roman Empire, the decline of the Roman elites and the establishment of the clergy had a direct impact on the reconfiguration of the urban space of Mytilene which at the end of the 4th century AD and after nine centuries of habitation in the mainland started to concentrate again within the boundaries of the Archaic settlement on the small islet (fig. 1)⁹⁵.

Therefore, the limited Byzantine, late Byzantine and Ottoman settlements, which had been established in and near the Castle of Mytilene, became completely disconnected from the ancient necropoleis that had long been abandoned. Conze, Newton, Koldewey and other eye witnesses who visited the city of Mytilene in the second half of the 19th century, noted that sarcophagi, stelai and various other fragments of graves stood semi-covered on the outskirts of the city, and so for the very first time, after centuries, they located the site of the ancient coastal necropoleis⁹⁶.

It is also significant to note that the areas once occupied by the two necropoleis evolved completely dif-

ferently from one another in the modern era. The North Necropolis was used as an industrial zone, while the South Necropolis (mainly Kavetsou, Vostani and Eleutheriou Venizelou Streets), which remained without buildings until 1880, became the most up-scale neighbourhood in Mytilene full of opulent mansions belonging to the new aristocratic and economic elite of the city (1850–1930).

It is almost certain that during the foundation works of these estates splendid tombs and grave goods came to light⁹⁷, perhaps initiating the creation of small family art collections, which later (early 1930s) were granted to the State for the establishment of the first Archaeological Museum on the island of Lesbos.

Abstract

Necropoleis constitute an important element of the spatial organisation of public space in the ancient city of Mytilene. The city's burial grounds were used from the Late Protogeometric and Geometric periods to the Roman era and are closely related to transformations of the residential space, the construction of the fortifications, the flourishing or declining economy, as well as the historical circumstances.

In the early 5th century BC the archaic scattered cemeteries were replaced by the North, South and West Necropoleis, which were situated *extra muros*, outside the three major city gates. In the Early Classical period, the North and South Necropoleis encompassed some sparsely arranged burial groups, but during the Hellenistic and Roman periods they expanded over a much larger area than before, stretching along the roads that led to the city.

The diverse and rich archaeological material related to the necropoleis of Mytilene cannot be exhaustively discussed in the limited context of the present article. However, a comprehensive methodology and synthetic implementation is attempted, devoting particular attention on the grave typology, funerary monuments and grave markers, burial customs and grave goods. At the same time, in addition to the excavation data, the epigraphic evidence is also considered wherever possible.

Keywords: *Lesbos, Mytilene, necropoleis, topography, funerary monuments, grave markers, burial customs, altars, funerary inscriptions, gladiatorial monuments, Archaic tombs, Hellenistic funerary monuments*

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⁹⁶ Conze 1865, 11 f. pls. 4, 5; Newton 1865, 51 f.; Koldewey 1890, 11; Walker 1894, 179; Vlachos 1987, 95.

⁹⁷ Sotiriou-Dorovini 1999, 45–47. 50–62. 85–157.

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