

SVENSKA INSTITUTEN I ATHEN OCH ROM
INSTITUTUM ATHENIENSE ATQUE INSTITUTUM ROMANUM REGNI SUECIAE

Opuscula

Annual of the Swedish Institutes at Athens and Rome

14
2021

STOCKHOLM

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Published with the aid of a grant from The Swedish Research Council (2020-01217)
The English text was revised by Rebecca Montague, Hindon, Salisbury, UK

Opuscula is a peer reviewed journal. Contributions to *Opuscula* should be sent to the Secretary of the Editorial Committee before 1 November every year. Contributors are requested to include an abstract summarizing the main points and principal conclusions of their article. For style of references to be adopted, see <http://ecsi.se>. Books for review should be sent to the Secretary of the Editorial Committee.

ISSN 2000-0898

ISBN 978-91-977799-3-7

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Printed by PrintBest (Viljandi, Estonia) via Italgraf Media AB (Stockholm, Sweden) 2021

Cover illustrations from Leander Touati *et al.* in this volume, p. 191

Life and death in ancient Hermione

Excavations in the necropolis

Abstract

The wealth of ancient Hermione is no longer visible: continuous habitation from *c.* 3000 BC down to the present day has obliterated most traces. Important information on the social organization and economy of Hermione can however be drawn from the tombs that have been unearthed. A large cemetery was discovered in the early 20th century just outside the city gate, stretching along the road leading to ancient Mases and in continuous use for a period of 1,500 years. It covers an area of 1.5 km east–west along the modern Hermione–Kranidi rural road, taking in the terrain to either side to a width of 160 m and extending south to Pron Hill and north to a patch of level ground some 60 m wide. In this article we focus on cemetery finds unearthed in the area south of the present-day Gymnasium-Lykeion school of Hermione, as they typically reflect the urban organization and economic development of the ancient city. These two themes comprise some of the goals pursued in the collaborative research programme between the Ephorate of Antiquities of the Argolid and the Swedish Institute at Athens.

Keywords: Hermione, necropolis, Warrior Tomb, Greek burial practice, grave gifts, Greek funerary ritual

<https://doi.org/10.30549/opathrom-14-09>

Introduction

Ancient Hermione, a city known in the ancient sources for its wealth and power, can be barely envisaged today: in his rather embroidered narrative, the traveller Pausanias describes numerous temples and public buildings—hardly a trace of them has survived.¹

Editorial note: The section on Hermione, published in *OpAthRom* 14, comprises six articles: Papadimitriou 2021; Gerding 2021; Blid 2021; Klingborg 2021; this contribution by Angeliki Kossyva; Wallensten 2021. This article was translated from Greek to English by Don Everly.

¹ Paus. 2.34–35.

This situation, however, is absolutely to be expected for an area that has been inhabited continuously for 5,000 years, from the very start of the Bronze Age (*c.* 3000 BC) down to the present day.

Today, though, more information on the social organization and economy of ancient Hermione can be drawn from the tombs that have been unearthed.

The cemetery (*Fig. 1*) of Hermione as used in historic times was discovered in the early 20th century by Alexander Philadelphus, just outside the city gate and stretching along the road leading to ancient Mases (now the wider region around the settlement of Koilada).

The excavations of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the Argolid (formerly the 4th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, or 4th EPKA), in campaigns of work lasting from 1991 up to the present day, have clarified the extent of the cemetery, the layout and organization of the tombs, and the length of time it was used. Thus, we know that the cemetery covers an area of 1.5 km east–west along the modern Hermione–Kranidi rural road, and takes in the terrain to either side to a width of 160 m; it extends south to Pron Hill and north to a patch of level ground some 60 m wide.

What particularly distinguishes the cemetery is its continuous use for a period of 1,500 years. The earliest use of the necropolis dates to Protogeometric and Geometric times (10th to 8th centuries BC), when it was composed of stone-built cist tombs and *enchytrismoi* (burials made in vessels). In Classical and Hellenistic times, the tombs were organized inside burial enclosures and received successive burials, right down to Late Antiquity (5th century AD). Outside the boundaries, infants were buried in large pots, such as amphorae.

In this article we will present the cemetery finds that have been unearthed in the area just south of the present-day Gymnasium-Lykeion school of Hermione (*Fig. 1*), and they typically reflect the urban organization and economic development of the ancient city. These two themes comprise some



Fig. 1. Aerial view showing the extent of the ancient cemetery of Hermione. By Patrik Klingborg, basemap by Google, © CNES/Airbus, European Space Imaging, Landsat/Copernicus, Maxar Technologies, Map data 2021.

of the goals being pursued in the collaborative research programme between the Ephorate of Antiquities of the Argolid and the Swedish Institute at Athens.

The excavated tombs and burials

The rescue excavations of the 4th EPKA during 1991 to 1994 revealed seven burial enclosures (designated by Greek letters A, B, Γ, Δ, E, ΣΤ, Ζ) in the area (Papadimitriou 2021, figs. 1, 8–11).² In the campaigns of 2016 and 2017, the investigation continued in a couple of these (ΣΤ and Δ of the seven), the two with which this paper deals. Burial Enclosure ΣΤ dates from the 6th century BC to Hellenistic times, while Burial Enclosure Δ has burials from the 4th century BC to the Roman era.

BURIAL ENCLOSURE ΣΤ

Tomb 1—The Warrior Tomb. Burial Enclosure ΣΤ measures 2.70 m (north–south) by 3 m (east–west): it is constructed of rectangular limestone blocks with smaller rough stones inserted in gaps (Papadimitriou 2021, fig. 10a). Inside, in 1993, a single-piece (i.e., worked from a single large block of stone) *larnax* (Tomb 1) made of shelly fossiliferous stone was discovered in the south part, covered by slabs of poros and other varieties of limestone. The *larnax* was used for the burial of two adults in a supine position, with their skulls to the east. In the south-west corner of the grave was a bronze helmet of Corinthian type³

and two bronze phialai, which covered a group of black-figure lekythoi. Other lekythoi, a cup, and a bronze bowl were set over the buried persons in a scattered arrangement. A bronze mirror with handle was found on the floor of the *larnax*. The clay vessels seem to be of Attic origin according to their clay type and the quality of the iconography.⁴ The vases' pictorial repertoire includes Dionysian scenes (Fig. 2) and banquets, a four-horse chariot with its driver, the farewell scene of a warrior, a rider in full gallop (Fig. 3), and a young man at the *palaistra*.⁵ A black-figure skyphos found inverted above the cover of the tomb and apparently used for funeral rites depicts the punishment of Sisyphos (Figs. 4a–c), the mythical king and founder of Ephyrā/Corinth, who tricked death twice. As punishment he forever rolls a heavy stone up a mountain, under the gaze of Hermes, Kerberos, Athena, Zeus, and possibly the deities of the Underworld, i.e. Pluton and Persephone. The vases and bronze helmet date from the late 6th and first quarter of the 5th centuries BC. Both the imported Attic pottery and other grave goods suggest that the two deceased belonged to the upper social classes and were important figures of their time, perhaps some of the men who participated in the naval Battle of Salamis or the Battle of Plataiai.⁶ The grave has therefore been called the Warrior Tomb (Papadimitriou 2021, Figs. 10–11).

² Papadimitriou 1994, 147–148; Spathari & Papadimitriou 1991, 104–105.

³ Papadimitriou 2012, 220–221.

⁴ Analogous grave offerings are usual in the 5th-century BC burials of the North Cemetery at Corinth (Blegen *et al.* 1964, 81).

⁵ Papadimitriou 2012, 221–222.

⁶ Hermione took part with three ships in the Battle of Salamis (480 BC, Hdt. 8.43.1) and contributed 300 men to the Battle of Plataiai (479 BC, Hdt. 9.28.4).



Fig. 2 (left). Black-figure lekythos with a Dionysian scene from Burial Enclosure ΣΤ, Tomb 1. Photograph by G. Patrikianos.



Fig. 3 (right). Black-figure lekythos with a horse rider from Burial Enclosure ΣΤ, Tomb 1. Photograph by G. Patrikianos.



Figs. 4a–c. Black-figure skyphos with the punishment of Sisyphos from Burial Enclosure ΣΤ, Tomb 1. Photographs by G. Patrikianos.

Cist tomb. In 2016, in exploring the rest of the interior of Burial Enclosure ΣΤ we discovered, just north of Tomb 1, a cist tomb made of roughly-worked limestones and with a disturbed cover of similar material. The cist is orientated on a north-east–south-west axis and partly runs below the north side of Burial Enclosure ΣΤ. Inside the tomb, the skeleton was discovered in a supine position, with two inverted Corinthian miniature vessels (a pair of small kotylae) and a bronze aryballos over the lower abdomen. These finds belong to the second

half of the 6th BC. Over this tomb, however, isolated human bones (Fig. 5) and a Protogeometric jug were found, possibly coming from an earlier burial disturbed during the construction of the cist tomb or during the positioning of the later *larnax* of Tomb 1.

The dead person in the cist tomb must have been buried (sometime during 550–500 BC) before the installation and use of the *larnax* of Tomb 1 (525–480 BC). The enclosure appears to have been arranged to encompass only the *larnax*



Fig. 5. Bones on the cover of the cist tomb inside Burial Enclosure ΣT. Photograph by A. Kossyva.



Fig. 6. North extension of Burial Enclosure ΣT. Photograph by A. Kossyva.



Fig. 8. Pair of iron pins with a bone terminal in the shape of a dove from Tomb 5. Photograph by K. Xenikakis.



Fig. 7. Tomb 5, a single-piece larnax in the space between Burial Enclosures Γ and Δ. Photograph by A. Kossyva.

containing the prominent persons of the upper class, since it is partly built over the north side of the cist tomb.

North extension. In the Hellenistic era, in the middle of the 2nd century BC, just north of Burial Enclosure ΣT an extension was created (Fig. 6): three sides (east, west, and south) consist of roughly worked limestones of large and medium

size set in rows, while on its north side it is made up of three rectangular limestone blocks.

Inside this northern extension of the enclosure, a pit-like tomb was discovered. The outline of the tomb is defined by medium-sized roughly worked limestones; it is covered by four Laconian plain roof tiles. The deceased lies supine with the skull to the east. As offerings there were placed on the right-hand side of the body a clay unguentarium, on the trunk were two gold plates (one leaf-shaped), by the left leg a second clay unguentarium and a lagynos,⁷ and before the deceased's feet were found yet another clay unguentarium, three pieces of a pair of iron scissors, and a sea shell.

TOMB 5

In the space between Burial Enclosures Γ and Δ was uncovered Tomb 5, a single-piece *larnax* (Fig. 7): made from a shelly stone, just like that in Burial Enclosure ΣT, it was orientated north-east–south-west. It was covered by a rectangular block of the same stone as the *larnax* body and two limestone slabs. Inside, three people were buried in a supine position with their skulls to the north. The dead had been buried with their jewel-

⁷ Proskynitopoulou 2011, 207, 209.



Fig. 9. Burial Enclosure Δ. Photograph by A. Kosyva.

lery: a pair of bronze pins with a terminal of a lion's head,⁸ a pair of bronze pyramid-shaped earrings with a sphere at the tip,⁹ a pair of iron pins with a bone terminal in the shape of a dove (Fig. 8), another pair with a bulb terminal, a single pin with a disc terminal, and an iron ring with a simple bezel. On the floor of the *larnax*, to the north-west, and below the right shoulder of the westernmost skeleton, a bronze mirror with its tang handle, and a stone alabastron were also recovered.¹⁰ The finds are dated to the end of the 6th–early 5th centuries BC.

BURIAL ENCLOSURE Δ

Burial Enclosure Δ (Fig. 9) measures 7.50 m (south–north) by 4.80 m (east–west), is rectangular in shape, and is aligned on a north–south axis. It is made up of rectangular poros blocks. Inside the enclosure, vertically-placed single poros slabs divide it into 17 spaces in two rows, cist tombs, each of which was used as the resting place for either an individual or a number of burials.

During the rescue excavation of 1993, some of the cist tombs were excavated: they were found disturbed, with minimal grave goods (2–3 vessels and iron strigils) of the Hellenistic period.

In 2016, the full extent of Burial Enclosure Δ was revealed and six more cist tombs (Tombs 3 and 6–10) were excavated: they contained multiple burials and had had their covers destroyed. The exception is Tomb 3, which was empty of bones and finds alike. It was also discovered, that Burial Enclosure Δ (Fig. 10) had a deeper level with earlier burials: the stone cov-



Fig. 10. Plan of the tomb outlines on both levels of Burial Enclosure Δ. Plan by K. Nikolakopoulou.

erings of at least three more graves were discerned, aligned in different directions.

Tombs 6 to 10 of Burial Enclosure Δ have an east–west orientation and dimensions of 0.50 m (north–south) by 1.80 m (east–west) in just about every case.

Tomb 6 held three bodies with their skulls to the east. Due to the lack of space, the dead person in the middle (Body 2) had been placed in a supine position, while the other two had been buried on either side and on their sides, facing towards the centre. The offerings included two clay figurines of Aphrodite (one is half-clothed, holding a phiale in her right hand, while the other, very fragmentarily preserved, has the goddess accompanied by a Silenus mask).¹¹

There were also recovered two figurines of standing women in chiton and himation, three clay pots, one alabaster pot,¹² one salt-cellar, a small lekanis with a lid, two bone disc-shaped plaques perhaps from a box, as well as a large ritual “double-axe” of bone with an iron handle. These offerings were scattered overall three of the bodies. Furthermore, one bronze and parts of at least three iron strigils were deposited by the arms

⁸ Similar pins are known from Perachora and the Chalkidiki (Jacobsthal 1956, 55).

⁹ Similar earrings are known from the necropolis of Halieis (Jameson 1969, 321); they are on display at the Nafplion Archaeological Museum.

¹⁰ Parlama & Stampolidis 2000, 334; Tiberios & Grammenos 1984, 23–24.

¹¹ Both types of Aphrodite figurines are known from corresponding finds in the tombs of Veroia (Tsakalou-Tzanavaris 2002, 222, 224).

¹² Parlama & Stampolidis 2000, 372 with bibliography.



Fig. 11. Clay figurine of a young man leaning on a rock from Burial Enclosure Δ, Tomb 7, phase 2. Photograph by K. Xenikakis.



Fig. 12. Iron strigil from Burial Enclosure Δ, Tomb 8. Photograph by K. Xenikakis.

and legs of the dead people. Based on the dating of the offerings, all three burials are to be placed in the 4th century BC.

Tomb 7. Stratigraphical information and archaeological evidence indicate that Tomb 7 had been used at least three times during the 2nd century BC. In the latest case (phase 3), dating to the second half of the 2nd century BC, two bodies were interred, with their skulls to the east side. Body 1 was placed in a supine position, while Body 2 was to the left (south) of the first and set on its side. Two unguentaria were found, one on either side of the two skulls, with the majority of the offerings though being placed beside the arms and between the legs of the dead. They included three cylindrical lead pyxides with lids,¹³ two more clay unguentaria, a small bronze mirror, a bronze bangle, an iron pin, sections of iron scissors, and a lead weight. A clay lamp was found in the north-west corner of the tomb.¹⁴

The middle phase (phase 2) held two burials with their skulls also to the east. Body 3 was placed in a supine position, with Body 4 on the right (north) and on its side. The dead were accompanied by two iron strigils, two bronze rings, and

two clay figurines. These last depict a young man leaning on a rock (Fig. 11) and an upright female figure in a chiton and himation. All the offerings were grouped at the legs of the deceased, from the thighs down to the feet.

Finally, the initial phase of the tomb (phase 1) also contains three skeletons with their skulls to the east. Not all the bones were preserved from the skeletons, so we can be sure of the supine position only of a single one. The only object found, lying beside the arm, was a piece of an iron strigil.

Tomb 8 contained three skulls and long bones scattered at various points, with a greater concentration of bone observed in the tomb's western part. Among the bones, there was only one iron strigil (Fig. 12) with a strongly curved blade and the closed, rectangular handle characteristic of strigils of the Roman era.¹⁵

Tomb 9, also dated to the 2nd century BC, included three skeletons with their skulls to the east. However, since the skeletons appear to have been disturbed, their burial position cannot be ascertained with certainty. The burial offerings were placed from between the shoulder regions down to the legs; they include three clay figurines of standing female figures (one unfortunately very poorly preserved), three clay unguentaria, a bronze mirror disc, a smaller bronze disc, three small bronze nails, and one of iron.

¹³ Cylindrical lead pyxides with a lid are common in the 2nd century BC, from Pylos to Thrace, Delos, and Alexandria (Drougou & Touratsoglou 1998, 39 with bibliography).

¹⁴ Lamp of type XV of Corinth (Pologorgi 1998, 91).

¹⁵ Pologorgi 1988, 123; Tiberios & Grammenos 1984, 19.

Tomb 10 had been used at least three times. The latest event (phase 3) dates to the 2nd century AD, and concerns two supine skeletons with their skulls to the east, as well as long bones of other skeletons collected together at Southwest. The offerings obviously associated with the two articulated skeletons (and not with the bone pile) include a bone needle at the right shoulder of Body 2, a silver amulet (*Fig. 13*) with two figures (perhaps representing the Dioskouroi) above the belly areas of the two skeletons, a glass unguentarium by the thigh of Body 2, and a bronze pin by the thigh of Body 1.¹⁶

During the middle phase of use (phase 2), two people were buried with their skulls to the west, but their skeletons are very disturbed. The offerings that accompanied them were arranged in the northern part of the tomb and at their legs. They included a glass unguentarium, a bronze strigil, two bone ear spoons, and four bone pins, which can be dated to the end of the 1st to the beginning of the 2nd centuries AD.

In the earliest phase (phase 1), the tomb included a single supine skeleton with the skull to the east. The only offering preserved in this earlier burial, at the legs, is the head of a clay figurine of human form.

In 2017, in order to understand better the construction and organization of Burial Enclosure Δ, as there were indications of more tombs at an even deeper level, we temporarily removed some of the internal single dividing slabs that created the sepulchral partitions in the north half.

We then found that at a deeper level at least five stone-built cist tombs existed (Tombs 4 and 11–14). Of them, Tombs 4, 11, 12, 14 are orientated north–south, while only Tomb 13 is on an east–west axis. This last measures 1.83 m (east–west) by 0.58 m (north–south). The dimensions of the other tombs vary from 0.40 m to 0.55 m (east–west) by 1.50 m to 1.65 m (north–south).

Tomb 4 did not preserve any bones. However, it was rich in grave goods: a clay incense-burner with a tall, cylindrical and ridged foot and a conical lid,¹⁷ a clay amphoriskos with a monochrome brownish-black hue, a clay kotyle, a small clay hydria, as well as a female clay figurine in chiton and himation. Based on the vases, the tomb appears to date to the middle of the 4th century BC.

Tomb 11 contained two skeletons with their skulls to the north. The offerings were very poor and fragmentary, with only pieces of one or two iron strigils and a fragment of a pin recovered.

Tomb 12 had been used twice. In the later phase (phase 2), of the 4th century BC, four bodies were buried, with their skulls to the north. On the upper part of their trunks and around the skulls were piled up the most part of the offerings,



Fig. 13. Silver amulet with possible Dioskouroi from Burial Enclosure Δ, Tomb 10, phase 3. Photograph by K. Xenikakis.

comprising a bronze mirror, a stone alabastron,¹⁸ a clay figurine of a seated individual, a clay miniature bowl, and a clay pyxis. Lower on the skeletons were found three bronze nails and a piece of an iron pin, while at the legs were only one bone disc and one more stone alabastron.

The first phase of use (phase 1) yielded two skeletons, again buried with their skulls to the north. The easternmost appears to have been accompanied by a bronze mirror found near its skull, while scattered pieces of iron strigil were also retrieved.

Tomb 13 was also used twice. The later phase (phase 2) comprised scattered human bones accompanied by a bone needle, a bone pin, a bone ear spoon, and sections of iron pins. In the earliest burial phase (phase 1), no skulls were discovered, but from the other bones remaining it can be deduced that at least two people were here buried. The offerings included, lying by the arms, a clay figurine head, a dolphin modelled in clay, a piece of an iron pin, as well as a very fragmentary clay figurine, while at the legs was a clay monochrome lekythos, an iron strigil, and part of a bronze strigil.

¹⁶ Proskynitopoulou 2011, 243.

¹⁷ Zaccagnino 1998, 178, 217.

¹⁸ Parlama & Stampolidis 2000, 334 with bibliography.



Fig. 14. Burial Enclosure Δ, after excavation of the tombs on both levels. Compare Fig. 9, a photograph taken before the excavation of Tombs 4, 11–14). Photograph by N. Maniatakis.

Tomb 14 contained neither bones nor offerings. From its small size, it can be seen as a child's grave.

Speaking generally then, in Burial Enclosure Δ (Fig. 14) we have two levels of built tombs. At the upper level are 17 graves in an east–west direction and of broadly uniform dimensions, especially in their length (among them Tombs 3, 6–10 described above). At the lower level are five built tombs that differ in their orientation and dimensions (Tombs 4, 11–14 described above). The sides of the tombs of the upper level are formed of thinner and rectangular blocks of poros, set on edge. These tombs did not preserve any covers. In contrast, the tombs at the deeper level employ both poros and limestone blocks to form the sides of the tombs, and are covered by three or four limestone slabs.

The diversity of form of the lower level tombs in the enclosure displayed may have been due to the original generous amount of space available for these burials or perhaps to the fact that these tombs simply belong to an earlier period than the upper level tombs.

Finally, we discovered that the outer enclosure-wall of Burial Enclosure Δ consists of at least four rows of rectangular poros blocks that are positioned, on the east, west, and south sides of the wall, vertically, while on the north side, the rows of blocks have a stepped appearance. The lower rows stick out further, while the upper ones are stepped inwards. In addition, in the middle of the long axis of the enclosure at both tomb levels, there were rectangular poros blocks measuring 0.40 to 0.74 m (east–west) by 0.40 to 0.80 m (north–south): perhaps

they were to support some kind of superstructure in the wall, which has not survived.

The burial practices

In Greece, extramural burial became the norm in Archaic times and distanced the dead by placing them outside the city walls. Extramural and intramural burial, of adults as well as children, were practised side by side throughout the Dark Ages (1200–800 BC), but in the 8th century, with growing urbanization and the development of the *polis*, extramural burial began.¹⁹ Graves were usually located on the margins of the city, and the area occupied by the cemetery was used solely for funerary purposes. The same happens in Hermione as its necropolis is sited outside the city walls along the main road to Epidauros and Argos (Fig. 1).

The necropolis excavations to date provide important information on the customs and burial practices in ancient Hermione from Archaic to Roman times.

In Hermione's necropolis inhumation is, as the archaeological evidence so far suggests, the exclusive manner of burial.²⁰ The dead person was placed in the grave in a supine position, with the arms parallel to the body. In both individual and multiple burials, the skull is generally found to the east.

The reuse of tombs seems to be a common practice from the Hellenistic years on. Burial markers have not been identified, but given the long-term of use of the cemetery, older tomb stones may have been employed again as cover plates in later tombs, and so removed from our view.²¹ On the other hand, grave stelai are very rare in the Classical and Hellenistic Peloponnese.²²

The types of tombs found in the cemetery include:

A) in the second half of the 6th century BC, stone-built cist tombs of roughly worked stones for the sides and cover. The tomb contains only one dead person and does not possess an enclosing wall.

B) two stone *larnakes* that date to the end of the 6th and into the 5th centuries BC. They are worked from a single block and have rectangular slab covers. One is in a burial enclosure and has an east–west orientation, while the other is in a space without any restriction to it and has a south–north orientation. They contain two and three burials, respectively.

C) a pit-like grave with covering tiles, dating from the 2nd century BC, with a single occupant.

D) cist graves made up of single poros slabs, covered by rectangular poros or limestone slabs, and typically hosting multiple burials. These tombs are always enclosed by rectangular *periboloi*, and date to the Late Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman years.

Burial enclosures appear to have been created at the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 5th centuries, as that of Burial Enclosure ΣΤ shows. However, their use does not seem to be consolidated at this time, as we can see that Tomb 5 has no enclosure, although it belongs to the same type of tomb and to the same time horizon as does Tomb 1 (The Warrior Tomb), the stone *larnax* of Burial Enclosure ΣΤ. Burial enclosures appear to have been established in Hellenistic times to accompany mainly the cist graves, but possibly also ones with roof-tile coverings too.

It should be observed that in the cemetery of Hermione a chronological gap of one century exists, since no tombs of the 3rd century BC have been discovered. This may be related to some historical event, of which we don't know from the ancient written sources. On the other hand, this may be simply a gap in the evidence occasioned by the fact that only a small proportion of tombs have been excavated relative to the area of the whole cemetery.

Nearly all the excavated tombs have grave goods. The type, number, and position of these—at the head, alongside the body, or the legs—vary. In the Archaic tombs vases such as kotylai and aryballoi are predominant, whereas in Classical tombs typical finds include lekythoi, alabastra, jewellery, and items for personal grooming (such as mirrors).

In Hellenistic graves, the usual offerings are the unguentaria, strigils, and clay figurines of human forms. In the later, Roman tombs, the offerings are less numerous and include glass unguentaria, pins and ear spoons of bone, as well as strigils.

Irrespective of the dating of the graves, these goods accompany the dead as objects pertinent to the social status of the deceased and their relatives. They can be the personal belongings of the deceased, as well as items dictated by rituals and burial customs.

Thus, in the *larnax* in Burial Enclosure ΣΤ (Tomb 1 or The Warrior Tomb), the abundance of bronze phialai and imported Attic vessels indicates that the dead belonged to the upper social class of Hermione in the early Classical years. The bronze helmet in this grave shows at least one of the dead individuals was a warrior, whilst the ointments in the Hellenistic pyxides were items required in personal beautification.

In Burial Enclosure Δ in the comparable cist graves, Tomb 6 and Tomb 7 also of Hellenistic times, the quantity and variety of offerings (vases, figurines, lead pyxides, jewellery, strigils) again indicate the high social class of the dead.

¹⁹ Morris 1992; Sourvinou-Inwood 1983, 43–44; Blegen *et al.* 1964, 65–87.

²⁰ Inhumation in a cist grave was the most common form of burial at Argos up to the 4th century BC, and the reuse of cists for multiple inhumations, possibly of members of the same family, is characteristic of Argive cemeteries (Dimakis 2016; Barakari-Gleni 1996–1997). The same is true for the cemeteries of Corinth and Sparta where we see a near-complete absence of cremation prior to the Hellenistic period (Christesen 2018, 347–353).

²¹ Batsiou-Efstathiou & Triantafyllopoulou 2003–2009, 316.

²² Christesen 2018, 348.



Fig. 15. Iron scissor blade with fabric fibres from Burial Enclosure ΣΤ, tile-covered pit-like grave. Photograph by K. Xenikakis.

Finally, the existence of parts of iron scissors (Fig. 15) in tombs of different types (e.g. in the tile-covered pit-like tomb in the north extension of Burial Enclosure ΣΤ, and in the cist Tomb 7 of Burial Enclosure Δ of the late 2nd century BC) may reveal one of the burial practices of the time: these are perhaps the devices with which the living cut up the cloth in which the dead were wrapped.²³ They were then broken and placed in the tomb. This interpretation is also reinforced by fabric fibres that can be seen adhering to a scissor blade from the tile-covered pit-like tomb in Burial Enclosure ΣΤ.

The offerings made to the dead at Hermione can give us clues about the gods that were worshipped and the sanctuaries that existed there. Thus, the two clay figurines of Aphrodite in Tomb 6 of Burial Enclosure Δ reveal that in Hermione,²⁴ besides being the goddess of beauty and love, Aphrodite has a chthonic existence.²⁵ The cult of a chthonic Aphrodite in the Hellenistic times is witnessed in Delphi, Thespiai, Mantinea, and Kraneio in Corinth.²⁶

The absence of some types of grave goods in Hermione's tombs can also confirm burial customs. For example, according to Strabo, the existence of a chasm in the earth in the region of Hermione that led directly to Hades rendered it unnecessary to provide an obol to pay Charon the ferryman, so it was not common practice there to place coins in graves.²⁷

Questions related to the typology of the graves, the types of offerings made to the dead, and the evolution of burial practices over time throughout the use of the cemetery are hoped to be clarified by the continuation of the excavation campaign.

Other interesting matters of sex and kinship potentially raised by the research into these burials are hopefully going to be answered as the osteological study of the dead progresses.²⁸ Such questions include: (a) the linking of specific types of grave goods to specific burials (e.g. do female figurines accompany female burials, while the strigils are placed only in male burials?); b) what is the relation of the individuals buried over time in a single tomb (e.g. in Tomb 7 of Burial Enclosure Δ, where seven people were buried over the years); c) what links the dead of the different tombs included in the same burial enclosure (such as in Burial Enclosure Δ with its upper level of 17 cist tombs holding at least 21 people). Do the deceased enjoying family links use the same tomb over time? Are enclosures marking family burial plots or are they organized, based on the social class of the dead?

In conclusion, the collaborative research programme between the Ephorate of Antiquities of the Argolid and the Swedish Institute at Athens and the opportunities it offers for interdisciplinary investigation provide a first-class opportunity to solve scientific matters for which we did not have the interpretative tools before. But above all they will contribute to extracting and unravelling the story of an important but virtually unknown ancient city—that of Hermione.

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²³ Corresponding finds in a sarcophagus from Epidaurus (Proskynitopoulou 2011, 250) and in a cist tomb in Elis (Themelis 1994, 154). See also the discussion in Drougou & Touratsoglou 1998, 179–181.

²⁴ For Aphrodite's worship at Hermione: Paus. 2.34.11–12 and epigraphically witnessed in *IG* IV, 695.

²⁵ See the discussion in Lilibakis-Akamatis 1994, 251–252.

²⁶ Tsakalou-Tzanavaris 2002, 222–223.

²⁷ Strab. 8.373; Paus. 2.35.10–11.

²⁸ Dr Anna Tornberg, Lund University, conducts the osteological research and DNA analysis of the Hermione burials.

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