

Mortuary differentiation and social structure in the Middle Helladic Argolid, 2000-1500 B.C.

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Preface

This book is the outcome of my PhD thesis, that was carried out as part of the five-year project (under the scheme “Grant for Innovative Research - VIDI”) financed by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Faculty of Arts, University of Groningen (RUG) and directed by Sofia Voutsaki (The text was submitted for publication in October 2020). The title of this project is ‘Shifting Identities. Social Change and Cultural Interaction in the MH Argolid, 2000-1500BC’. This wider project included the analysis of funerary, skeletal and biomolecular data from the Argolid (see Ingvarsson-Sundström et al. 2013; Voutsaki 2005, 2012, forthcoming; Voutsaki et al. 2013) alongside the examination of settlement data (Voutsaki 2010c) and the imagery of the MH period (Voutsaki 2010a). My thesis however, was a fully independent and self-standing study.

I am extremely grateful to the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Faculty of Arts, University of Groningen (RUG), who funded my study and to my supervisor Sofia Voutsaki for providing me with much invaluable advice and extensive comments and for editing the final text.

It was a pleasure to work with the members of the project, Sevi Triantaphyllou and Anne Ingvarsson-Sundström, who were responsible for the osteoarchaeological analyses, Tomeck Hertig, the project assistant who helped a lot with the databases, and, of course, with Sofia Voutsaki, the director of the project.

During my stay in Groningen, I received much help by the staff at the Groningen Institute of Archaeology, and especially by Luuk Tol, the previous administrator, and Frans Geubel, the previous porter. I am grateful to all. I would also like to thank the current coordinator, Flip Kramer, for his help during the final stages of my study.

I am extremely grateful to Carol Zerner for taking time to discuss MH Lerna with me at great length and for allowing me to use unpublished plans of the MH layers. The permission to include the material was given by the American School of Classical Studies, M. Wiencke, C. Zerner and E. Banks. I would like to thank M. Wiencke and E. Banks also for giving me the permission to examine and photograph the Lerna finds and to consult the Lerna photographic archive held in the Museum of Argos. C. Zerner had been working on the publication of the MH settlement and the graves for a long time; this difficult task will now be completed by L. Spencer. As my study

appears before the definitive publication of the material, some of my observations may be revised, though I hope that my general conclusions about the social structure of the Lerna community will remain valid.

For permissions to study and include the Asine material, my thanks go to C.G. Styrenius, S. Dietz, R. Hägg †, and especially to Gullög Nordquist, who provided me information about the findings at Barbouna in advance of publication. I am more than obliged to the Aspis directors, Gilles Touchais and Anna Philippa-Touchais, for permitting me to study the burial offerings and contexts—and for giving me access to unpublished information.

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Introduction

Geographical setting

The focus of this book is the Argive plain and the smaller valleys around the site of Asine (243 km²), which are situated in the NE Peloponnese, Greece (Figure 1). This area can easily be demarcated as a study area on both geomorphological and historical terms. It is a fertile and well-watered coastal plain that is surrounded by mountains. Furthermore, it has some natural harbours in the well protected gulf of Argos. The focus of habitation in the area has been throughout its history in the fertile plain and the surrounding low hills (Zangger 1993: 1).

In the Argolid, the larger and best documented MH cemeteries are those at Lerna, Argos¹ and Asine. There were also two important, but less well documented

cemeteries at Mycenae and Tiryns. The Prehistoric Cemetery in Mycenae is much larger than the rather dispersed burials in Tiryns. Besides these, there were some smaller cemeteries, for instance Myloi, Prosymna and Berbati Midea. Our focus here will be Lerna and the three cemeteries of Asine, Kastraki, East Cemetery and Barbouna.² For comparative reasons the smaller cemeteries of Myloi in Lerna and Aspis in Argos will be included.

Chronological setting

The Middle Helladic period, i.e. the Middle Bronze Age in the Greek mainland, is divided into three phases based on the ceramic sequence: MH I, MH II and MH III and is followed by the LH or Mycenaean period.



Figure 1: Map of the study area (based on Piérart/Touchais 1996: 10)

¹ The burial assemblage of the Argos ‘Tumuli’, although studied and analysed, will not present here, as it will be the subject of a separate sub-project (Voutsaki *et al.* 2009b).

² Sofia Voutsaki has studied the Prehistoric Cemetery and the Grave Circles of Mycenae and Prosymna as part of the Middle Helladic Argolid Project (Voutsaki 2012; Voutsaki in Voutsaki *et al.* 2009a: 141-142, 145-146, 2009b).

	Suggested Calendar Years BC			
	Dietz 1991	Dickinson 1994	Rutter 2001 (based on Manning 1995)	Voutsaki, Nijboer and Zerner (2009c)
EH III			2200/2150-2050/2000	-2100
MH I		2100-1900	2050/2000-1950/1900	2100-1900
MH II	-1775	1900-1700	1950/1900-1750/1720	1900-1800
MH III	1775-1700	1700-1580	1750/1720-1680	1800-1700
LH I	1700-1625/1600	1580-1500	1680-1600/1580	1700-

Table 1: Relative and absolute chronologies of the MH period (after Voutsaki 2010d, table 7.1)

While there is agreement about the earlier part of the period, which begins around 2100 BC, the transition to the LH period is debated. According to the ‘High Chronology,’ a date around 1700 BC is more possible (Manning *et al.* 2006), while the ‘Low Chronology’ prefers a date at 1600 BC (Warren and Hankey 1989). Although the definition of internal subdivisions of the period is difficult, recent 14C analyses from Lerna (Voutsaki *et al.* 2009c) render support to the ‘High Chronology’. Current suggestions for the chronology of the period are summarised in the table above (Table 1) (Voutsaki 2010d: 100).

Basic characteristics of the period under study

The MH period is bracketed between the EH and the Mycenaean period. Both periods are well studied, due to their economic growth and cultural prosperity. Until recently the MH period was described as homogeneous and static. However, recent research and the ‘Mesohelladika’ conference (Philippa-Touchais *et al.* 2010) has shown regional variability, early changes and more complexity. In terms of cultural continuity, the two first phases, MH I and MH II, and the proceeding EH III share a lot of common elements. It is now clear that some changes in domestic architecture and in mortuary practices occur already in these phases. During the MH III and the following LH I³ period a general precipitation of change can be observed in many different spheres (Voutsaki 2010d: 99-103).

MH settlements usually consist of freestanding houses of rectangular or apsidal plan, and have no organized lay-out, at least during the MH I-MH II period (Dickinson 1977; Wiersma 2013). However, some differences in size and contents have been observed even in the earlier period. For example, MH I House 98A in Lerna has a more complex layout, while more imported pottery was found in this house (Voutsaki 2010d: 103; Wiersma 2013: 140, 151). Recently, Philippa-Touchais (2016) has proposed the existence of an early MH (MH II?) strong retaining wall around Aspis, while an inner enclosure

³ As one of the aims of the wider project is to understand the causes of the changes leading to the establishment of a hierarchical society in Mycenaean times, the LH I phase is also included in my analysis.

was probably built during MH II late. In the later phases, house plans became more complex and at the same time differences among houses become more marked. For instance, MH III Houses B and D in Asine are up to four times larger than ordinary MH houses and have a more complex layout (Nordquist 1987: 76-81; Voutsaki 2010c). Finally, in MH III-LHI, a few sites acquire a more organized layout. For instance, in the southeastern sector in Aspis a row of adjoined houses encircles the top of the hill (Philippa-Touchais 2010).

Throughout the period, Kolonna in Aigina stands out because of its heavy fortification wall, the more organized arrangement of the houses and the presence of a monumental structure from MH I onward (Felten 2007: 13, 15; Gauss and Smetana 2010: 168-169).

Overall, MH pottery is considered simple and conservative (Rutter 2007: 35). However, there are marked differences between regions and even between neighbouring sites. For instance, each site contains different proportions of local wares, and imports from different regions. Non-ceramic finds, basically tools and ornaments, are also simple and basic. However, recent studies have shown that technological advances did take place—for example, the potter’s wheel was adopted (Spencer 2010). While the range and quantities of metal objects remained limited throughout the period, advances in metalwork can also be observed (Kayafa 2010). We might suggest that conformity to tradition characterized most of the mainlanders. That situation started to change already in MH II and changed dramatically toward the end of the period (Philippa-Touchais 2016; Philippa-Touchais *et al.* Forthcoming; Voutsaki 2010d; Voutsaki and Milka 2016; Whittaker 2014).

In the mortuary sphere, inhumation is the only mode of disposal of the dead. The body was usually placed in a contracted position in simple pit graves, or in cist graves. Storage vessels were more seldom used as burial containers. These vessels were then buried, on their side, inside pits. The vast majority of the burials are single and without grave offerings. When grave offerings are present, they consist mostly of ceramic

vessels, bone or stone tools and only rarely of personal ornaments (Cavanagh and Mee 1998: 23-35; Dickinson 1977: 33-34, 38; Voutsaki 2010d: 103-104).

However, at the end of the period, i.e. MH III and the beginning of LH I, important changes occur: the introduction of more labour intensive tombs, the adoption of a more complex burial ritual (e.g. multiple and secondary burials, removal and breaking of offerings), the clearer gender divisions and an increase in the wealth deposited with the dead. These changes are more dramatically manifested in the large and very deep tombs of Mycenae, the so-called Shaft Graves (Dickinson 1977: 38-58; Karo 1930-33; Mylonas 1973; Voutsaki 1997: 41-3).

Until recently, MH studies concentrated on the origins of the MH civilization or on typological sequences. Papers in the journal *Hydra* and studies by Dickinson (1977), Zerner (1978) and Nordquist (1987), have been central for research on the MH. More recently, our view on the period has largely changed due to (Voutsaki 2010d; Voutsaki and Milka 2016):

1. new publications (Maran 1992),
2. synthetic works on the period (Kilian-Dirlmeier 1997; Rutter 2001; Whittaker 2014; Argolid and Corinthia: Lambropoulou 1991; central Greece: Gorogianni 2002, Phialon 2011; Laconia: Boyd 2002; Messenia: Zavadi 2013)
3. continued research of important sites (e.g., Kolonna: Gauss and Smetana 2007; Aspis: Philippa-Touchais 2013; Touchais 1998; 2016; Mitrou: van de Moortel 2016)
4. the re-study of old excavation data (e.g. pre-Mycenaean finds from Ano Englianos: Davis and Stocker 2010; MH Argolid: Voutsaki 2005; 2016; Voutsaki and Milka 2016; Argos: Papadimitriou N. *et al.* 2015)
5. ceramic (Balitsari 2017; Pavuk and Horejs 2012) and bioarchaeological studies (Kolonna: Kanz *et al.* 2010; Lerna: Kovatsi *et al.* 2009; Triantaphyllou *et al.* 2008a; Voutsaki *et al.* 2013; Aspis: Triantaphyllou *et al.* 2008b; Asine: Ingvarsson-Sundström 2003; Ingvarsson-Sundström *et al.* 2009; Koufovouno: Lagia and Cavanagh 2010; Kirrha: Lagia *et al.* 2016).

In addition, three conferences on the MH period (Felten *et al.* 2007; Philippa-Touchais *et al.* 2010; Wiersma and Voutsaki 2016) have assembled many of the new observations and discussions. As a result, the traditional perception of MH societies as static, backward, isolated, and homogeneous is now being doubted (Rutter 2001: 132). By now we know that important changes took place already in MH II (Balitsari 2017; Philippa-Touchais *et al.* forthcoming; Voutsaki and Milka 2016; Whittaker

2014). The MH period is now seen as witnessing important social, political, and cultural changes that lead to the formation of the early Mycenaean polities (Voutsaki 2010d).

Basic questions

The basic question addressed in this study is: What does the mortuary patterning tell us about the social structure of MH society? Trying to reconstruct the social structure of the MH society is not only important for the understanding of the MH period but also for the better understanding of the processes that led to social changes at the onset of the Mycenaean era and to the establishment of a hierarchical society.

The central aim of the Middle Helladic Argolid project, under which my study was carried out, was to explain the changes that took place during the MH period, and their intensification in the transition to the LH period (Voutsaki 2005: 135-136). More precisely, the main objectives of the wider project were:

- To explore the nature of social organisation during the MH period.
- To examine the process of social change during the MH period.
- To explain the rise of Mycenae towards the end of the MH period.
- To explore the role of external contacts.
- To explore the redefinition of personal and group identities in wider processes of cultural and social change.

The analysis of the funerary data, part of which this study is, proceeded in the following stages:

- All extant skeletal material from selected sites in the Argolid was re-examined in order to confirm age and sex identifications, but also to examine variation in occupational activities, pathologies and diet.⁴ Dental microwear analysis⁵ and stable

⁴ S. Triantaphyllou (Department of Archaeology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) and A. Ingvarsson-Sundström (Societas Archaeologica Upsaliensis, Uppsala) have re-examined the skeletal material from Lerna and Asine respectively (Ingvarsson-Sundström in Voutsaki *et al.* 2007: 70-76; Ingvarsson-Sundström 2010; Triantaphyllou in Voutsaki *et al.* 2005: 35; Triantaphyllou 2006: 95-102, 2007: 63-64, 2010b: 130-131, in preparation; Triantaphyllou *et al.* 2008a). Triantaphyllou has also examined the human skeletons from Aspis for the publication of the site (Triantaphyllou in Philippa-Touchais and Touchais, 2002; Triantaphyllou *et al.* 2008b), and the extant skeletons from Deilaki's rescued excavations of the so-called 'Argos tumuli' (Triantaphyllou in Voutsaki *et al.* 2009b: 179-188). A. Ingvarsson-Sundström has also studied the material from Midea (Ingvarsson-Sundström in Voutsaki *et al.* 2009a: 143-144).

⁵ The dental microwear analysis was undertaken by Triantaphyllou as part of a separate project, financed by the Institute of Aegean Prehistory (Philadelphia) (Triantaphyllou in Voutsaki *et al.* 2006: 95-102; Triantaphyllou in preparation).

isotopes analysis⁶ were used in parallel, in order to reconstruct the diet of the MH populations.

- A radiocarbon analysis of human skeletal material was carried out, in order to increase the chronological resolution of the study.⁷
- The archaeological data from selected sites were analysed to determine if there is variation between individual burials, groupings and cemeteries, and to reconstruct change through time. At a final stage, the radiocarbon, archaeological and anthropological information were integrated in order to reconstruct variation within and between communities, as well as change through time. This work was done for Lerna, Myloi, Kastraki, Barbouna and the East Cemetery (EC) of Asine, and for the Aspis in Argos as part of my dissertation.⁸ Lerna and the three cemeteries of Asine were chosen because they are large and well documented cemeteries, while Myloi and the Aspis were added mostly for comparative reasons.

My aim, however, is not to reconstruct MH social organization, as I do not believe that this is possible on the basis of the burial data alone. Ucko (1969: 266), based on ethnographic data, was among the first that cautioned about the problem of reconstructing social order using funerary data alone. Recent discussions in archaeological theory and mortuary studies have emphasized that burials do not simply reflect the social reality. Burial patterning may rather distort and misrepresent social organization through the filter of ideological representations (e.g. Hodder 1982: 139-146; Parker-Pearson 1993). Voutsaki (1993: 29-30) believes that mortuary practices create rather than legitimate social reality. They do so by shaping individual's perception of the world and of their position within it.

Social structure, however, is an ideal model, a mental template, of the relative placing of individuals within the social universe. It is thus different from the social organization, the real relations between people in everyday life. Social structure is created, maintained and subverted largely through rituals, such as the funeral (Leach 1954: 15-16; Morris 1987: 39-42; Pader 1982: 54; Parker-Pearson 1999: 86). My aim is therefore

⁶ The stable isotopes analysis was carried out by M. Richards (Triantaphyllou *et al.* 2008a, 2008b; Ingvarsson-Sundström *et al.* 2009).

⁷ The radiocarbon analysis was carried out at the Centre for Isotope Research of the University of Groningen, and the results were interpreted by S. Voutsaki and A.J. Nijboer (Groningen Institute of Archaeology) (Voutsaki *et al.* 2008; 2009c; 2010).

⁸ The archaeological data from the 'Tumuli' of Argos (Protonotariou-Deilaki 1980a) were also analyzed by E. Milka (Milka in Voutsaki *et al.* 2009b: 168-179) but were at the end not included here, as they will be part of a separate sub-project examining the MH burials of Argos (Voutsaki *et al.* 2009b). Sofia Voutsaki has analyzed the archaeological data from Mycenae (the Grave Circles and the Prehistoric Cemetery) and Prosymna (Voutsaki in Voutsaki *et al.* 2009a: 141-142, 145-146; Voutsaki *et al.* 2009b).

to detect the general structural principles, which differentiated, but also kept MH communities together.

In order to reconstruct social structure during the MH period, detailed, contextual analysis of the tombs was undertaken in order to detect variation and change through time. The burial offerings held at the Museums of Argos and Nauplion were systematically re-examined and photographed. The old excavation photographs, where available, were also studied and digitalized. An electronic archive of photos was created. Subsequently, all the available archaeological and anthropological information from Lerna (Angel 1971; Banks 1967; Blackburn 1970; Caskey 1954, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958; Nordquist 1979; Zerner 1978, 1990), Myloi (Dietz and Divari-Valakou, 1990), Aspis (Philippa-Touchais 2002; Triantaphyllou n.d.; Touchais 1975, 1976, 1978, 1980, 1984, 1990, 1991) and Asine (Dietz 1980, 1982; Frödin and Persson 1938; Hägg and Hägg 1973, 1975, 1978, 1980; Hägg and Nordquist 1992; Nordquist 1987, 1996; Protonotariou-Deilaki 1974, 1977) were encoded into a relational data base (Access). A different entry was created for each cemetery, each burial in the cemetery, each skeleton, and each offering. In total, data from seven cemeteries, 489 burials, 520 skeletons, 305 pottery offerings and 355 non-pottery offerings were encoded.⁹

In order to give some answers, spatial variation between the burials and change through time will be examined. In every chapter, I will first discuss aspects of age and gender differentiation, I will then turn to wealth and elaboration as criteria of differentiation and I will close the discussion by examining the importance of kinship. Then, I will examine change through time in all the above mentioned aspects. The degree and nature of differentiation in the mortuary record will be discussed in each section.

Method and theory

The main theoretical question addressed here is how social structure can be studied through the material culture deposited in the grave, the skeletal remains of the deceased, the design and construction of the graves and the spatial patterning of the graves.

In order to address this question in a systematic way, first a short historical outline of the way burial data have been interpreted will be given. The aim is not to give a thorough overview of burial studies but to focus on the advantages and disadvantages of each approach in relation to the main research questions of this thesis. I will limit the discussion to those aspects of personal identities that I think to be fundamental for the way MH societies were structured, age and gender and kinship and to a lesser extent status. At the same time

⁹ The Argos 'Tumuli' are also included in this database.

methodological issues will be discussed and parallels will be given.

Cultural-historical approach

The emphasis of the cultural-historical approach was placed on beliefs, which were seen as shared by entire societies or socio-cultural systems. Grave offerings were primarily used for dating the grave, for detecting the diffusion of ideas or the movement of people by studying differences and similarities in the material culture, and for reconstructing religious ideas and beliefs in afterlife (Binford 1972: 209-213; Johnson 1999: 16-18; Parker-Pearson 1999: 22-23; Trigger 1989: 148-149).

The spatial patterning of the tombs was not systematically studied. Archaeologists often used functionalist explanations, which emphasized the domination of the social whole over the individual parts. As a result, social divisions within and between communities, which are the main focus in this study, were neglected.

The diffusionist approach was adopted in the physical anthropological interpretations of the skeletal remains, where the emphasis was on racial differentiation. Angel's work on the skeletal material from Lerna follows such approaches, but he sometimes moves beyond them as well (Angel 1971; Lagia *et al.* 2014: 111).

Processual approach

Processual archaeologists (i.e. Binford 1971, 1972; Saxe 1971; Tainter 1978) moved the emphasis away from cultural beliefs to social divisions. Funerary remains were seen as a direct reflection of past social relations. On the site level, the emphasis was primarily placed on the reconstruction of rank through the study of variability in the mortuary practices (Parker-Pearson 1999: 73). Of particular interest was to distinguish between vertical (e.g. elite and non-elite groups) and horizontal (e.g. membership in a kin group, age-gender differences) differentiation (Parker-Pearson 1999: 74). The degree of differentiation was usually measured by means of energy expenditure during the funeral (Tainter 1978). Binford (1971, 1972) and other American archaeologists, strongly influenced by Goodenough's role theory, were trying to find roles and identities that can be identified in the mortuary record (Parker-Pearson 1999: 73; Thomas 1999: 127).

In this approach, grave goods were primarily interpreted as expressions of rank and the social persona of the deceased (i.e. Cavanagh and Mee 1998; Coleman 1977; Graziadio 1991; Jacobsen and Cullen 1981; Saxe 1971). Anthropological analyses of the skeletal remains had

as their primary goal to detect horizontal or vertical differences between men and women or between different age categories. Dietary preferences, health status and mechanical load patterns were now widely studied (i.e. Halstead 1987; Papathanasiou 1999; Stravopodi 1993). The spatial patterning of the graves was used in order to study the distribution of various features across space using statistical analyses. The emphasis was now placed on quantification of the data (i.e. Brown 1971; Chapman 1983; Mee and Cavanagh 1990; O' Shea 1984).

Although the processual approach has heavily influenced the archaeological thought in general and the way the mortuary data have been interpreted in particular, it has been widely critiqued. One of the main arguments is that the role of ideology and beliefs was neglected. The main concern of the processual approach was on behaviour rather than agency or motivation, in other words on what people did rather than why they did it. Furthermore, the emphasis was on cross-cultural generalisations thereby omitting the historical context and masking variation between societies (Parker-Pearson 1999: 32, 73).

Post-processual, contextual approach

As a reaction to the processual way of interpreting the archaeological data, the role of symbolism and ideology was introduced to archaeology. The treatment of the dead was now seen as a form of representation, which does not passively mirror social relations (Thomas 1999: 127). Funerals were seen as political events during which the status of the deceased as well as that of the mourners were actively negotiated and re-evaluated (Parker-Pearson 1999: 32). The emphasis was placed on the relation between the living and the dead, especially on power (as social control) relations (Thomas 1999: 127-8). The mourners do not just express their grief but they actively manipulated the social roles of the deceased.

According to this approach, grave goods do not only express the identities of the deceased but also the relationships between the mourners and the deceased or the circumstances of death (Parker-Pearson 1999: 84). Burials may serve as an opportunity for destruction of wealth, irrespective of the actual status of the deceased (Thomas 1999: 129).

Anthropological studies concentrated on small scale, contextual analyses of all possible information derived from the study of the human bones. In the post-processual approach, spatial analyses were focused on the context of the graves and the mutual associations and correlations of different aspects of the mortuary practices, and not merely on the distribution of various

features across space (i.e. Cullen 1999; Triantaphyllou 1999; Voutsaki 1993; 1998; Wright 1987).

Agency, what people do as knowledgeable actors, the intentions behind their actions, was now introduced to the funerary archaeology. The focus was turned from high-level systemic explanations to the study of intra-societal groups, e.g. gender or age groups (Hamilakis *et al.* 2002: 3). However, although the ideological manipulation of the burial was highlighted, the experience of death was neglected.

Contemporary archaeological theory

In the last decades, the post-processual approach to ritual as misrepresenting the social reality has been challenged. It is now generally recognized that the idea of power manipulation of relationships is too narrow to fit the range of people's motivations and actions in the mortuary realm. Mortuary rites are culturally meaningful in different ways, and are not only about the socio-economic status of the deceased. The social order may be maintained through human action, but this action is culturally defined (Tarlow 1999: 23-4).

As a response to the need to underline the importance of human action, as socially and culturally informed, the notion of agency has been re-introduced to archaeology. Many different approaches to agency exist. However, it is usually agreed that agency is a socially significant quality of action rather than being synonymous with action itself (Dobres and Robb 2000: 8-10). In contrast to previous approaches, recent agency theory views agents not as independent, free-willed individuals but rather as socially embedded persons. The dialectic relationship between structures, in which people live and which they create, and agents is emphasized (Dobres and Robb 2000: 4-5). This view of agency enables the study of social structure, as it recognizes that people's actions and choices are not independent from the sociocultural system in which they live.

According to these approaches burials carry multiple meanings which bear on the identity of the deceased and on the actions of people who buried him or her. An effort is therefore made to adopt a more holistic approach in the way we interpret our data. Both the agency of the deceased and of the mourners -restricted and enable by the sociocultural system- employ and shape material culture. In this way, material culture in the funerary realm -the cemeteries, the graves and their content- can give us information on many aspects of social life.

In this approach, grave goods are no longer simply considered as direct reflections of personal identities, such as status and wealth. Instead, artefacts in the grave are seen as constructing different aspects of the

deceased person's identity and can interpreted in many different ways: as gifts (King 2004), as objects which characterize the relationships between the dead and the living (Brück 2004), as items having multiple meanings and illustrating specific life stages and gender divisions (Sofaer 2000b) or as aspired identities (Janik 2000). This does not mean, however, that people of special status never receive more gifts or more objects indicating an extensive network of relations; this possibility always exists, but needs to be demonstrated rather than assumed.

Closely related to the way the deceased is treated and to the way artefacts are placed in the grave are concepts about the body. The archaeology of the body is now an established field of study (Hamilakis *et al.* 2002). While different approaches to the body exist most recent studies reject the division between the biological and the cultural body (Ingold 2000: 240). It is also recognized that there are distinct and physically less tangible entities (spirits, souls, minds) which may be variously associated with the bodily component of people (Hamilakis *et al.* 2002: 4). The living human beings are not the only important beings in most past societies. Significant relationships between humans and 'the supernatural' may also be articulated through the body (Tarlow 2002: 24; Voutsaki 2010a, 2012).

These discussions can be directly applied to mortuary analyses by studying the body position and the positioning of objects in the grave, as long, of course, as we deal with single inhumations. The grave forms a restricted setting where the person/body and objects are closely and meaningfully associated (Sofaer 2000a: 10).¹⁰

Furthermore, it has been realized that bodies may be sometimes considered as material culture themselves. Post-mortem human remains may be extensively treated and manipulated in the same manner as other objects. The existence of disarticulated bones outside a grave context, for example, may indicate that some bones were circulated among the living (Chapman 2000a). On the contrary, in the occasions of articulated burials, which are our primary focus here,¹¹ the integrity of the body was emphasized.

The different identities, or some of them, the deceased had during life probably had some influence on the way the body was treated in funeral. Amongst these social identities kin positions and relations and age/

¹⁰ This is directly relevant for the MH period, where single inhumations are the norm and where iconographic representations of humans are largely missing. Thus the body position of the deceased is actually the only source of gestures and the grave the only context where body and material culture are directly associated.

¹¹ It should be added that disarticulation and secondary treatment are introduced in the Argolid towards the end of the MH period.

gender life stages are generally considered the most influential. Those identities however, are now perceived as relational attributes, constantly changing through life (Brück 2004).

We see therefore that in the last decades mortuary studies have moved beyond the post-processual explanations. A more refined interpretation of human action is offered and in general a more holistic approach to mortuary data is proposed. Despite the many nuanced discussions, the social dimension of mortuary practices, and specifically the construction of age, gender, status and kin identities, remain underdeveloped. And yet, kin-relations and age/gender life stages are among the main questions explored by archaeologists studying mortuary practices. Status/wealth differentiation is also extensively discussed but, as we will see, it may not be applicable to the largest part of our case-study. Thus, staying closer to recent approaches and recognising the complexities of human actions, the emphasis in this study will be on the social facets of burial practices. These will be introduced in more detail below.

Age and gender differentiation

The last decades many studies on gender in archaeology have been published and more recently age studies have also become popular (Sofaer 2002; Sofaer and Sørensen 2013; Sørensen 2000). However, gender is usually studied separate from other social dimensions resulting to a fragmentary and distorted picture of the past (Voutsaki 2004). Gender and age are indeed interdependent as gendered roles change with age. Social age, like gender, can also be used as a mechanism for societal control. Thus, age-gender life stages should be studied together rather than as separated categories (Sofaer 1997: 487-489). It is generally accepted that we need to explore those categories within our data by exploring age-gender related patterns, rather than imposing modern or anachronistic concepts. The exact relationship between age and gender and its manifestation in material culture is culturally specific. Consequently, analyses should be carefully contextualized (Sofaer 1997: 485).

Such an analysis on early Anglo-Saxon burial rites revealed that alongside the general age system was a more complex one, which saw each of the general age stages subdivided along gender divisions. In those cases, our modern, 'objective' biological stages are not adhered to, as different cultures have their own definitions of lifecycle stages (Stoodley 2000). Again, correlations between different aspects of the evidence, material associations and detailed anthropological data are the only way to detect this kind of patterning.

Moreover, gender should to be studied in combination with age as they both determine kinship position and at the same time they both are closely articulated with social differentiation. As kinship is the main principle structuring social relations in traditional societies, age and gender should not be examined in isolation, but should be discussed alongside kinship position and social status (Voutsaki 2004).

However, we have to examine age differentiation not only in relation to gender. In prehistoric fisher-gatherer-hunter communities in the south-east Baltic and Scandinavia, for example, the patterning of grave goods in non-adult graves allowed the interpretation of social relations based on age rather than sex distinctions (Janik 2000). Thus, in some societies age seems to be the main criterion guiding social relations.

The study of age and gender however is not without problems. To start with, different conceptions of age exist. The chronological age, for example, is a biological concept referring to age in years and is closely related to the physiological age which is a modern medical construct referring to the physical ageing process. Social age, on the other hand, refers to age norms of proper behaviour and is cross-cut by gender ideology (Sofaer 1997: 486). Even in a developmental sense, the age categories commonly described within physical anthropology are problematic. Biologically accurate assessments of skeletal development form somewhat artificial divisions in terms of social and mental development (Sofaer 2000a: 8).

In addition, there are several restrictions/ problems in the skeletal estimations of age (Mays 1998). Age estimation, for example, is not accurate after the developmental years (+/-18), when the growth of bones and teeth has been completed. Further, there is a tendency to under-estimate the age of older individuals as age indicators become more ambiguous in old age. In addition, preservation and taphonomic forces may affect the condition or availability of skeletal materials for study. Finally, the cultural version of the 'osteological paradox' should be kept in mind: a dead person of a given age may not have been socially regarded in the same way as a living person of that age (Robb 2002: 161).

The exclusion of skeletally immature individuals and of the elderly is another symptom of many population analyses (Sofaer 1997: 487). Even when these age categories are included, usually a general distinction between adults and sub-adults is followed. Sofaer (1997: 488) stresses that the division between children and adults fails to consider the transition from one stage to another, the liminal phases characteristic of many

rites of passage. Although she is right, we have to keep in mind that detailed anthropological analyses are not always available and the rough distinction between adults and sub-adults is often the only way to analyse the data and to make comparison between sites.¹²

The study of biological sex also has certain restrictions. In their estimates of sex, skeletal analysts typically record features indicative of morphological differences and quantifiable dimorphism. Femaleness and maleness reside at opposite ends of a continuum with an ambiguous zone in the middle. However, it was not until the eighteenth century that a two-sexed model of the body emerged in European society. Moreover, immature individuals are slotted into 'unknown' category, as their skeletal systems have not yet developed the traits diagnostic of sexual difference (Geller 2005: 598-602). To make things more complicated, age-related changes may also disguise sex estimates, as the skeletons of old females become more robust and resemble male skeletons.

Despite those problems and restrictions age and gender remain powerful tools in mortuary archaeology and provide valuable insights into past societies. However, we should not apply binary gender opposites as universal categories. Rather, we must examine the importance of age and gender in social life and examine whether they were expressed or not in the mortuary practices. Finally, we must explore by which means these categorizations were given material expression (Voutsaki 2004).

Kinship and descent

Although kinship is recognized as a fundamental structuring mechanism, especially in small-scale societies, its study has been scarce in archaeology (Howell and Kintigh 1996).

The reason for this scarcity is the wrong conviction that anthropological notions of kinship, such as residence patterns and descent systems (i.e. bilateral, unilineal, ambilineal and double descent), should be applied in archaeology. It is true that residence patterns and descent systems leave no trace on material culture, and it is very difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct them.

On the other hand, the physical anthropological study of morphological traits of the human skeleton that reflect genetic affinity and the recent aDNA analyses can at best shed some light on some aspects of biological kinship. Admittedly, both methods are not without problems. The study of morphological traits requires

large number of well-preserved skeletons, in order to have statistically valued results (Nikita 2017: 182-186).

Additionally, DNA analyses usually detect maternal lines through the use of mitochondrial DNA, which is more easily acquired than nuclear DNA. Moreover, aDNA techniques are effective and can give useful results on large scale studies, searching for affinities and population movements over extensive geographical areas and through broad chronological phases, i.e. Mesolithic-Neolithic population movements in Near East and Europe (Hofmanová *et al.* 2016). In small-scale studies, such as in the MH Argive sites, the fragmentary preservation of aDNA makes it almost impossible to ascertain genetic affinities between small groups of skeletons. To make things even worse, the climate in Greece does not favour the preservation of aDNA, and the high cost of the analysis are prohibitive.

It is therefore difficult to reconstruct kinship relations on the basis of the archaeological data alone. The question then is what kind of information concerning kinship can be revealed from archaeological studies? And how can we retrieve this information? To start with, we have to move beyond residence patterns and descent systems and try to detect broader affiliations. In a more general sense, kinship relations may be expressed by means of a. spatial proximity and clustering, b. reuse, c. similar practices, e.g. similarities in mortuary treatment, or the use of grave types. In this way, kinship is considered as a web of social and/or biological relationships that form an important part in the way societies are organized. Kin groups usually include people related by descent, in the sense of claiming common ancestry. However, people not connected by common descent may also be connected with strong ties, for instance a married couple. Moreover, kin-position of each individual is not static but is a constantly changing element during the life course (Voutsaki, 2004).

The existence of such affiliations, whether biological, social or other, may have been expressed in spatial terms (grave clustering, relation to houses) as well as in similarities in practices leaving some patterning in the archaeological record. They may also have been expressed in temporal terms (emphasis on memory and descent), which can be inferred from the mortuary record – e.g. in the persistence of grave clusters, the marking and re-use of graves, or the presence of later offerings. We therefore can use the archaeological data in order to explore kin relations between individuals and groups.

One of the first attempts to study kinship/lineage groups was through the spatial patterning of formal cemeteries linking the appearance of formal cemeteries with specific kin groups (Goldstein 1981; Morris 1991; Robb 1994; Saxe 1971). These studies were primarily

¹² In our case-study, for instance, for the majority of the skeletal material from the Tumuli of Argos and from Myloi.

based on ethnographic parallels. However, Morris (1991) in his study found only partial support for the connection between discrete cemeteries and claims of kin groups on scarce resources, especially land. He stressed that messages other than lineage claims to resources may be communicated through burials in formal cemeteries.

Another group of studies focus on intramural burials and try to detect households through the relation between houses and graves. Chapman (2000b), for example, studied groups of burials from the Late Neolithic site of Kisköre-Damm in the Eastern Hungary which were found in close vicinity with free-standing houses. He found that the burial groups were coherent in terms of practices indicating that their members were closely related. He sees kin-relations as a socio-spatial categorization of people with complex cultural identities, which were expressed through the mapping of the deceased onto the places inhabited by the ancestors (Chapman 2000b: 177). The same mapping of the newly dead onto habitation areas was widely practiced in the MH Argolid, as we will see in the analysis chapters below.

The temporal dimension of kin relations can be approached through evidence that point to the importance of memory and descent, and thereby the importance of ancestors. Especially when burials took place in the realm of the house/ settlement, people were in a way directly integrating their ancestors in their everyday life. In the MBA Southern Levant, for example, people were burying their dead under the house floors (Hallote 2000). In such occasions death and ancestor worship was incorporated into the daily existence by establishing a reference point to the past within the house. The direct connection with the past further helped ground individuals and collective identities (Hallote 2000: 108).

Outside the settlement, graves may have been marked and revisited indicating that dead members of the kin-group were remembered. The objects deposited in the graves may themselves express a kin web of relations by metaphorically commenting on the links between the dead and the living (Brück 2004: 311, 314). In contrast, in extramural cemeteries the dead relatives were kept at a distance from the houses and the everyday life. In the case of intramural burials under the house floor the importance and primacy of the household was emphasized, while in extramural, formal cemeteries the community may have been given more emphasis.

We see therefore that the concept of kinship can help us to interpret spatial patterning of the graves in relation to settlements, but also to understand funerary ideology and the social structure of the society under study.

Elaboration, 'wealth', status

Next to kinship and age and gender stages social status, in the sense of rank, has been widely discussed in mortuary studies, especially under the influence of the processual approach (Binford 1971, 1972; Saxe 1971; Tainter 1978). Such analyses use the quantity and the elaboration of grave finds alongside with grave elaboration to define the status of the deceased. This rather reductionist approach to grave goods is based on the follow equation: rich burial= rich person= person of rank and power= ranked society (King 2004). Without totally rejecting the possibility that richer and more elaborate graves may belong to individuals of higher status, a wide range of different interpretations of mortuary wealth and elaboration can be offered (see above).

Nevertheless, grave elaboration is an important aspect of the mortuary treatment and a useful tool when analysing differentiation – as long as we do not decide in advance that this differentiation faithfully reflects differences in life. In the MH Argolid such an analysis is difficult, especially in the earlier MH period, when elaborate or rich graves are rare.¹³

A question then arises: Can we attribute differences to status differences? A more cautious approach is adopted in this study by examining grave elaboration alongside other aspects of the mortuary treatment, especially the quantity, quality and diversity of the burial offerings and the existence of more complex forms of burial treatment, as well as by correlating all these different parameters. Furthermore, the placement of the graves in focal areas of the settlement was included in the analysis.

Structure of the book

In the 1st chapter the mortuary data of Lerna and Myloi are presented and analysed. The main analytical unit is the cemetery. The dating of the graves, their location and spatial organization and orientation are examined in detail. Special emphasis is given in the formation, persistence and disappearance of grave groups, and their relation with houses. The second analytical unit is the grave. First information about the skeletons is given. The available anthropological information concerning age, sex, diseases and diet are presented in this chapter. Next, grave types and furnishings and mode of disposal of the dead are discussed. The third analytical unit is the finds, which are divided in pottery and non-pottery objects. In the pottery section shapes, use categories, size, wares, preservation and position in the grave are examined. In the non-pottery section the objects are divided into

¹³ But this is not true for other regions, e.g. Kastroulia in Messenia (Rambach 2010).

use categories: tools, ornaments, tools or ornaments a. pins b. whorls, weapons, miscellaneous objects, organic remains a. animal bones b. shells c. charred grains.

The detailed analysis ends with a concluding discussion drawing together the different aspects of the evidence, stressing the main patterns and attempting a first comparison between Lerna and Myloi. Differentiation along age and gender, status, and kinship is discussed, and some first conclusions on change through time are offered.

In the 2nd chapter the mortuary data from the three burial places in Asine, Kastraki-Barbouna-East

Cemetery, are systematically presented and analysed per burial ground, using the same analytical units as for Lerna. The results from each burial place are discussed first separately and at the end a comparative inter-cemetery analysis is attempted. The same scheme is adopted in the 3rd chapter which presents the fewer burials in Aspis in Argos.

The 4th chapter first presents a summary of the basic mortuary patterns of each site studied here and, at the end, the general conclusions about social structure and change in the MH Argolid of the study. Finally, a list of the graves included in the study is given in an appendix at the end.