

**Geometric Period *Plithos*
Burial Ground at *Chora* of
Naxos Island, Greece:
Anthropology Report**

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Prologue

Significant questions remain unanswered regarding the dynamics of the human condition that prevailed during the transitional period within the Early Iron Age, from the ProtoGeometric into the Geometric Period in ancient Greece. Sustained population growth in mainland and island communities in augmenting demographic stability, economic growth and incentives for long distance trade, support for the resurgence of the letters and arts, developments in the domains of the political milieu and administrative organizational abilities, as well as the availability of necessary diplomatic and military capacities must have been some of the critical objectives, decisive prerequisites, for the emerging contexts and subsequent sovereignty of the early city-states (Ahlberg 1971; Boardman 1998; Coldstream 2003; Hesiod; Kirk 1949; Kourou 1984; 1998; and 1999; Lambrinoudakis 1988; Moore 2000; Morrison and Williams 1968; Reber 2011; Snodgrass 2000; Schweitzer 1971; Zafeiropoulou 1983; 2001; and 2003; Zafeiropoulou and Agelarakis 2005).

Hence, data that may offer reflections on features and nuances of the circumstances and living conditions of populations which were active during this important temporal juncture are essential in providing comprehensive understandings of the time period dynamics; particularly when it may be possible to retrieve, study, and evaluate life aspects of the individual members¹ of those populations. Such an approach based on archaeological anthropology offers valuable research applications providing, in addition to bioarchaeological data, aspects on the subtleties of individual members' life hues and conditions, components of the communal dynamics and actions which facilitated transformations that in effect created the foundation pillars, the visions, and legacies of the Geometric period, thus also providing launching platforms for the modes of the subsequent Archaic period in Greek antiquity.

This report aims to offer glimpses of the human condition on Naxos island focusing on the archaeo-anthropologic study of the human skeletal remains along with associated contexts of faunal materials recovered from the Geometric (900 -700 BC) component of the burial ground site of *Plithos* in *Chora* at Naxos island. The record of skeletal remains was recovered mainly during the late 1970s with some additional materials unearthed in 2002 (Reber and Zafeiropoulou 2012; Zafeiropoulou 1988; and 2007). As provided by assessments of the anthropological laboratory study, carried out at the Naxos Archaeological Museum in 2005, the human skeletal population sample was identified to comprise 60 individuals², along with an associated assembly of faunal remains; see **Table 1** for a concise report. The human skeletal record had been recovered as primary and secondary burials, in inhumed or in cremated form, representing 48 burial contexts that involved either individual or multiple interments. Of the 60 human individuals identified during the laboratory analysis, four were atypically featured by few fragmented small infracranial bone fragments, or by a single *ex situ* tooth in dry form, while one in cremated form was represented by a flaked off bone fragment weighing 1.0gr³. While the recorded fragments representing these 5 individuals could be considered as of intrusive nature into the specific burial contexts from which they were recovered, juxtaposed to population approach assessments of the skeletal collection recovered, and based on their extremely limited condition of preservation as well as lack of further diagnostic anatomic criteria were not involved in subsequent inspectional and mensurational bioarchaeological analyses, or in palaeopathological assessments. Hence, the data of the skeletal record were retrieved from the remaining fifty-five individuals, while the unit of analysis in this project was based on the skeletal individual.

¹ In the case of this study from data permanently recorded on the human skeletal record of the ancients, and information gathered through the traces of their "fossilized" ideational world and behavioral conduct, imprinted and relatively safely preserved in the complex strata of their burial grounds.

² The analysis of the anthropological remains was carried out at a provisional laboratory space adjoining the museum's repository area. The author was assisted by a team of four students, namely: Angela Hernandez, Jessie Blackwood, Anna Sardis, and Sevasti M. Agelarakis.

³ Of the five cases, those that were represented by axial or appendicular skeletal fragments, their maximum diameters ranged from 28.7mm to 43.76mm.

Analyses of the human skeletal record were carried out through the interdisciplinary methodological processes of BioArchaeology and Physical/Forensic Anthropology, following a protocol guided by the requirements of an Archaeological Anthropology laboratory substrate, in working with the unique, non-renewable, remains of the site's human skeletal record (Agelarakis 1996; Angel 1981; Aufderheide, Rodriguez-Martin, and Langsjoen 1998; Bass 2005; Brothwell 1981; Buikstra and Beck 2006; Hillson 2002; Iscan and Kennedy 1989; Komar and Buikstra 2008; Krogman, and Iscan 1986; Larsen 1997; Ortner 2003; Ortner and Putschard 1981; Shipman, Walker, and Bichell 1985; Steele and Bramblett 1988; Ubelaker 1982, and 1999; Wells 1960; White and Folkens 1991). Henceforth, primary focus was placed in the domain of skeletal biology through the arc trajectory of growth and development to degenerative and aging processes, the manifestations of anatomic morphology and epigenetic/non-metric variability, the nature of demographic composition dynamics, the composite of the palaeopathological profile, along with the tangible traces unveiled through the osteological study reflective of burial customs and practices; constituent elements as these may be in a reassembling of ingredients of life-milieus and of concepts on the passing to afterlife during the Geometric period at Naxos.

Geometric Component Burial Contexts and Anthropological Remains

Archaeological excavations at the Geometric component of the burial ground documented 48 burial contexts. The laboratory study of the anthropological record determined that 43 out of the 48 burial contexts that yielded human burials had involved single interments while 5 had contained multiple interments (**Graph 1**). These comprised an assemblage of 55 human individuals given that in addition to the 43 single individuals, 12 individuals were identified from the 5 burial contexts which involved multiple interments (**Graph 2**). One of those 5 burial contexts included 4 interments; the remaining 4 burial contexts involved 2 interments respectively. The latter appeared during the early stages of laboratory analysis to reveal a rather non-random condition, possibly featuring aspects of burial practice patterns. It was therefore rendered prudent to conceivably establish through the results of the anthropologic analysis the presence or absence of nuances of distinction or variability between the individuals that had been interred as single versus those of multiple interments; it was hypothesized that a set of data could have been yielded, conceivably instrumental in helping illuminate additional facets of the archaeo-anthropological study.

The skeletal population sample of 55 human individuals (*hominini*) contained anthropological remains in both dry and cremated form. The 43 individuals yielded from burial contexts that involved single interments revealed a nearly isometric distribution ratio of 22:21 (51.16% : 48.84%) between dry and cremated anthropological remains while of the 12 interments retrieved from burial contexts that yielded multiple interments, 7 (58.33%) were in dry and 5 (41.67%) in cremated form. Hence, the skeletal collection of 55 individuals involved 29 (52.73%) dry, and 26 (47.27%) cremated individuals (**Graph 3**). The distribution of the 29 individuals interred in dry form, recovered from both burial contexts of single and multiple interments, comprised 9 infants and individuals of incomplete skeletal biological-development and maturation at the incidence of death which were designated as of "Indeterminate" biological sex, along with all 14 individuals within the cluster⁴ of Females, and 6 individuals within the cluster of Males. Regarding the distribution of the 26 *hominini* interred in cremated form, it clearly appears that the burial practice involved individuals which were assessed within the cluster of the male biological sex [25 (96.15%) out of 26 cases] with the exception of a case (3.85%) of an adult individual, of "Indeterminate" biological sex due to the very poor condition of skeletal preservation (**Table 2**).

⁴ A biological sex assessment "cluster" may indicate the level of certainty of the assessment, for this particular project mainly based on the level of preservation of diagnostic anatomic morphologic criteria and/or availability of metric indicia documentation. Hence, similarly to a "male cluster", the "female cluster" includes for this project assessment rubrics such as "Females", "Probable Females", and "Possible Females". Where based on young age (as in Infancy), immature skeletal development, and/or poorly preserved skeletal remains hindering the retrieval of morphometric diagnostic data the biological sex assessment rubric designated was "Indeterminate".