

THE ICONOGRAPHY OF DEATH: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN *PROTHESIS* RITUAL THROUGH ICONOGRAPHICAL TECHNIQUES, MOTIFS, AND GESTURES DEPICTED IN GREEK POTTERY

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ABSTRACT: *Prothesis* scenes have been a controversial and debated theme of iconographical approaches to Greek pottery analyses. Focused on meaning and historical references these studies usually have considered pictorial elements isolated in a particular pottery production and style, Attic Geometric for instance. This paper intends to analyze and discuss some iconographical elements such as technique of production, style, motifs and gestures taking into account a broader perspective and chronology, including vases and terracotta *pinakes* from the Geometric to the Classical Period. This approach to *prothesis* ritual scenes allow us to point out continuities and changes in the funerary ritual iconographic representation itself and its social and cultural meanings.

KEYWORDS: Greek Archaeology; pottery; iconography of death; *prothesis* scenes.

A ICONOGRAFIA DA MORTE: CONTINUIDADE
E MUDANÇA NO RITUAL DE PRÓTHESIS POR MEIO
DAS TÉCNICAS ICONOGRÁFICAS, MOTIVOS E GESTOS
REPRESENTADOS NA CERÂMICA GREGA

RESUMO: Cenas de *prothesis* têm sido tema de debate e controvérsia nas abordagens iconográficas de análise da cerâmica grega. Fundamentados na busca dos significados e das referências históricas, esses estudos usualmente consideraram os elementos pictóricos isolados em um determinado estilo e produção de cerâmica em particular, por exemplo, a produção Geométrica Ática. Este artigo pretende analisar e discutir alguns elementos iconográficos, como técnica de produção, estilo, motivos e gestos, levando em conta uma perspectiva e cronologia mais amplas de



análise, incluindo vasos e *pinakes* do Período Geométrico ao Clássico. Essa abordagem das cenas dos rituais de *próthesis* nos permite apontar continuidades e mudanças na própria representação iconográfica do ritual funerário, assim como em seus significados sociais e culturais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Arqueologia grega; cerâmica; iconografia da morte; cenas de *próthesis*.

The iconography of death depicted in Greek pottery is mainly represented by *próthesis* and *ekphora* scenes. The ritual structure of Greek funerary practices is a long-standing and wide-ranging subject that has long been under debate among scholars from different perspectives. As is well known, burial rites in Ancient Greece seem to have preserved their main structures throughout a long period, having a tripartite schema characterized as one of the *rites de passage* defined by Van Gennep (1960). In general, this structure concentrates on three major rituals performed on behalf of the deceased at the moment of death (Boardman and Kurtz, 1971; Garland, 1985; Morris, 1987, 1992). First, the body was prepared for exposure and mourning (*próthesis*). Then, a funeral procession accompanied the transportation of the body to the burial place (*ekphora*). Lastly, the cremated or inhumed remains of the dead were deposited in the grave – usually along with objects – and the ceremony was then followed by funerary feasts.

While the first part of burial rites was largely represented from the Geometric to the Classical period, images of *ekphora* from the sixth century onwards were extremely rare and the burial itself was almost never depicted in Greek art in general, such as ceramic vases, terracotta *pinakes*, sculptures, or *stelai* (Vermule, 1979; Boardman, 1955; Shapiro, 1991). The vast majority of *próthesis* scenes come from Attic pottery from the eighth to the fifth centuries. The overall iconographic schema is the portrayal of the deceased on its bier placed in the center of the scene and surrounded by mourners. Most of the literature on *próthesis* scenes discusses their iconographical elements, symbolic meanings and social functions from an isolated point of view trying to understand them chronologically and/or in particular pottery production and style. In this context, Athenian grave markers depicting *próthesis* and *ekphora* scenes from the eighth century BC, for many decades, have been the central object of study from different theoretical and methodological approaches to Greek art during the Geometric Period. Only few studies focus on the iconography of death as evidence of ritual behavior and social and religious changes through a long-term analysis (Shapiro, 1991).

The major concern and interest of iconographic studies in Attic Greek Geometric art revolves around the identification and recognition of the image referents in the *real* or the *natural* world of the living. From this approach, pictorial elements are defined as specific and distinct features to identify the deceased's and the mourners' genders: the small-sized figures presented in the scene are described as being children; geometric shapes such as triangles, lozenges, and squares would represent stones and plants; swastikas between the legs of horses from the chariot that carries the deceased to the place of burial in *ekphora* scenes would be signs of movement; and parallel wavy lines would indicate aquatic environmental representations such as a river, a lake or the waves in the sea. The work of Gudrun Ahlberg

(1971) is one of the most typical examples of such an approach focused on recognizing geometric motifs as forms, elements, and aspects of *reality*. The iconographical perspective of these analyses, however, do not take into consideration the essential characteristics of Geometric art and such assumptions become autonomous and untenable truths which lead to highly questionable generic conclusions.

Another considerable number of studies of images of *prothesis* focus on historical, cultural or social referents in order to understand and decode the message and meaning expressed in the scene as a symbolic representation of funerary rituals (Snodgrass, 1980, 1998; Coldstream, 1968, 1976). Three different interpretative approaches can be pointed out. The first one classifies the scenes as “typical” stressing that the images are standard compositions of human actions, composed of impersonal and timeless narrative elements, thus they are general reproductions of funeral rituals from daily life (Whitley, 1991; Morris, 1987). The second approach emphasizes the “mythological” aspect of the scenes as a narrative composition of mythical episodes, such as the funeral of the great characters of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (Snodgrass, 1998). From a completely different view, some authors defend the “particular” element of the image that would, in fact, be displaying a private and personal funerary rite performed by the family in honor of the deceased depicted in the scene and buried in the grave marked by the vase at the specific time of his or her death (Ahlberg, 1971). In this sense, the images have an individualized narrative value, capable of representing a particular event, specific in time and space, as a fact of *reality*. Scholars who support this position say it would be very difficult to establish with certainty the ties between the images and the excerpts from Homeric poetry (Ahlberg, 1971; Coldstream, 1976).

In order to reach some possible meanings or referents for the mortuary scenes, it is necessary to understand the characteristics of art as a whole during the Geometric Period. It is remarkable that the majority of the approaches to Geometric art are based on linguistic and semiotic assumptions, even though the authors do not discuss their definitions – a fact that, in some cases, results in misleading and contradictory readings of geometric images. These interpretative approaches usually contrast Geometric with *Naturalistic* Mycenaean art and consider stylization and geometric representations of the real and natural world as a transitional process for the representation of the world in a *naturalistic* or *realistic* way. Naturalistic representations are marked by the *narrative aspect* of the images, consequently their functions are not to represent human actions and behaviors and the natural world as “it is”, but on the contrary they create artistic fictions, they have an “illusionist” meaning as assigned by Gombrich (1977).

Unlike Mycenaean iconography, characterized by a *naturalistic* style, Geometric art is marked by stylization and standardization. It is a way to represent natural and human shapes, institutions, social and cultural events in a “minimal schema” (Gombrich, 1977) through geometric, stylized, and symmetrical basic shapes capable of denoting the universal, the generic, and the essential aspects of reality. Therefore, the symbolic message of visual language is optimized and their meanings become intelligible and are immediately decoded by coeval observers. There is no concern about time and space. The symbolic message of pictorial elements is focused, therefore, on the action performed and not on individual

characters or particular events. There is no room for individualization, but this does not indicate an inability from the part of the potters and painters, but is rather a matter of choice (Whitley, 1991, p. 51).

Unlike Saussure's structural linguistics interpretations of the complete arbitrariness and abstraction of signs,¹ the geometric motif suggests its own meaning, i.e., an icon, an index, a representation of phenomenological order of the existing forms and objects in the natural world, as defined by R. Barthes (1965) and N. Bryson (1983, p. 59-62, 1989, 1994) as "denotation" and "mimologique" representations by G. Genette (1976). This does not mean that the geometric representations are particular and unique. On the contrary, they are generic and essential shapes and this characteristic can explain their high frequency, recurrence, and similarity throughout time and space in different societies. Geometric scenes do not have a narrative character, they do not show a sequence of events associated to a specific time and space. They are synoptic, as they are capable of gathering different episodes and events of human behavior at the same time and in the same space through their essence and general meaning (Genette, 1976, p. 50). Painters are concerned about systematized and essential pictorial elements to represent the natural and social world they are living in.

These are the assumptions of Geometric art defined as "Representational art", which means that the iconographic scenes are impersonal and timeless, marked by a *formulaic* language (Boardman, 1964; Boardman and Kurtz, 1971; Coldstream, 1976; Snodgrass, 1980, 1993, 1998, 1999). In this sense, *prothesis* scenes cannot be "particular", and only with rare exceptions can they be considered "mythical", illustrating a specific Homeric episode (Snodgrass, 1980, 1998). J. Boardman also uses the term "Representational art" to highlight the "typical" aspect of the funerary image, representing an overall and timeless narrative without any specific indications or signs of space. However, the author states that there are elements of individualization in scenes portrayed which can be seen from the pictorial details of certain figures, such as eyes, breasts, and hair, although these are kept to a minimum in iconographic representation pictured as geometric motifs.

From this perspective, the reference of the image cannot be "particular" or "private" and the scene does not represent the specific time of the funeral ritual performed in honor of the person buried in the grave. In a similar way, the scenes do not portray a specific mythical episode of literary sources, for instance the *prothesis* of the Homeric heroes like Hector, Patroklos or Achilles. It is extremely difficult to recognize iconographic elements capable of identifying the funeral rites in honor of the unique epic heroes in Geometric art. A. M. Snodgrass pointed out that the scenes have a "synoptic narrative" (Snodgrass, 1987, p. 135-147), which means that the functions and meanings of the images can be found in the action performed during the funerary rituals as cultural and social categories. J. Whitley (1991) agrees with the synoptic character of the visual language, although the author indicates that the narrative aspect is contradictory with the nature and with the intrinsic elements of Geometric art, as discussed some paragraphs above.

¹ Saussure, Ferdinand. *Cours de Linguistique Générale*. Ed. Bally & Sechehaye. Paris: Payot, 1971 [1916].

In this brief article, we do not intend to solve this problem. However, we do believe that the analysis and discussion of some iconographical elements, such as technique of production, style, motifs, and gestures, taking into account a broader perspective and chronology, will allow us to point out continuities and changes in the iconographic representation of the funerary ritual itself and enable us to reveal some possible social and cultural meanings. This paper will consider the development of Athenian images of *prothesis* from around the middle of the eighth century to the end of the fifth.

Our analysis of the *prothesis* scenes depicted in the vases of the Attic Geometric is based mainly on Ahlberg's book (1971) and the extensive literature produced on this subject. Ahlberg presents a total of 50 objects (whole and restored vases and fragments) attributed to 4 main painters, workshops, and groups in Attic Geometric pottery production with *prothesis* scenes. Seventeen of them are attributed to the Dipylon Master and Workshop with certainty, 7 to the Hirschfeld Workshop and Group, 8 to the Athens Workshop 894, 1 to the Athens Workshop 897, 1 to the Benaki Painter and 2 to the Painter of Paris CA3282. The vases of the Dipylon and the Hirschfeld Group belong to the Late Geometric I (LG Ia – 760-750 and LG Ib – 750-735).² The vases attributed to the other Groups and Workshops are dated to the Late Geometric II (LG IIa – 730-720 and, especially, LG IIb – 720-700). The author presents only one vase dated to the Middle Geometric II (800-760) – the krater from the Metropolitan Museum 34.11.2 (Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 1a-e).

It is not our intention to discuss in detail all the iconographic elements, non-figured and figures motifs, which constitute the *prothesis* structure and composition. This thorough analysis of the iconographic identification of natural and real referents of the geometric representations considering their relations and functions in the *prothesis* scenes has already been done by Ahlberg. As we have stated earlier, our aim is to focus on some iconographic aspects through their stylistic and technical characteristics, in order to discuss elements of continuity and change in the whole scene, which is seen as a representation of a crucial phase of mortuary rituals. We will concentrate our investigation on three major pictorial aspects present on *prothesis* scenes: the depiction of the dead and the human figures who attend the ritual, the depiction of the gesture of lamentation, and the number of human figures who participate in the funerary ritual. Other iconographical elements will be taken into account according to some images examined in more detail.

It has already been extensively mentioned that these monumental vases were used as grave markers, mainly the ones attributed to the Dipylon Master and Workshop and to the Hirschfeld Workshop and Group. These vases are human dimension amphorae and kraters and the *prothesis* scenes are always depicted between the handles (vertical or horizontal) immediately below the shoulder of amphorae or on the upper part of the belly of kraters. The majority of the vases from all the other Groups and Workshops were used as grave goods, and consequently, they have smaller dimensions. The *prothesis* scenes are frequently

² On absolute dates of the Geometric Period based on Attic pottery production: Coldstream, 1968. Cf. Snodgrass, 1971; Davison, 1961. A more recent chronological table is offered by A. Coulié, 2013. All dates mentioned for the Geometric Period are BC.

depicted in the neck of amphorae, oinochoai or hydriai. Kraters are not usual shapes in these Groups and Workshops. In all examples, *prothesis* is portrayed in the center of the decorative panel and a particular iconographic characteristic of all *prothesis* scenes during the Geometric Period must be stressed: the presence of a secondary zone (or even two or three decorative panels).

In the *prothesis* composition, the deceased is depicted lying down on his or her side on a bier with the head usually placed to the right. The legs can be apart in most cases, but are sometimes close to each other. A type of cloth (funerary garment) with which the corpse is wrapped is found in rare examples, such as the fragment of krater Athens NM 812³ and the hydria D23/1982 in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, attributed to the Analatos Painter⁴ and to which we will return later to analyze some particular iconographical elements in more detail. The arms of the deceased are usually held at the sides in a downward position. The head, in general, rests on a kind of support, like a pillow.

The deceased is flanked by a series of standing human figures on each side of the bier and are usually in secondary decorative zones on the body of the vase, on the inferior part of the belly or below the handles. These figures are depicted in the customary mourning attitude which is by far the most usual and generic gesture in the geometric representations: both arms raised and both hands lying on the head, touching it. The Dipylon amphora, Athens NM 804,⁵ at the National Archaeological Museum, in Athens displays seven mourners symmetrically disposed on each side of the bier, eight other on the opposite side of the vase and three below each arch of the two handles in M shape. They are all standing up and their legs are apart, an iconographical element that, during the Geometric, at least in the LG I, LG IIa and LG IIb, does not work as a clear criteria for the distinction of sex and gender among the mourners (Alexiou, 1974; Havelock, 1981; Halm-Tisserant, 2010).

It has already been registered that there is an evident relation between the type of vase used as a container of the ashes of male and female burials, i.e. neck-handled amphora for male and belly-handled for female cremations (Morris, 1987; Whitley, 1991). Moreover, the relation is valid for the monumental vases used to mark these graves, i.e. neck-handled amphora and kraters used for male burials and belly-handled amphora and oinochoai placed over female burials (Whitley, 1991). The Dipylon amphora is of a belly-handled type, traditionally used for female burials. Consequently, we would say that it is very unlikely “that a vase with the representation of a female corpse would be used in the funeral of a man, and vice versa” (Ahlberg, 1971, p. 32). If this is the case, the *prothesis* depicted in the Dipylon amphora is a female *prothesis* and the mourners who surround the deceased can be either men or women according to iconographic grounds. The technique and the stylistic representation applied to the mourners in Geometric art bring us to the discussion on

³ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 18.

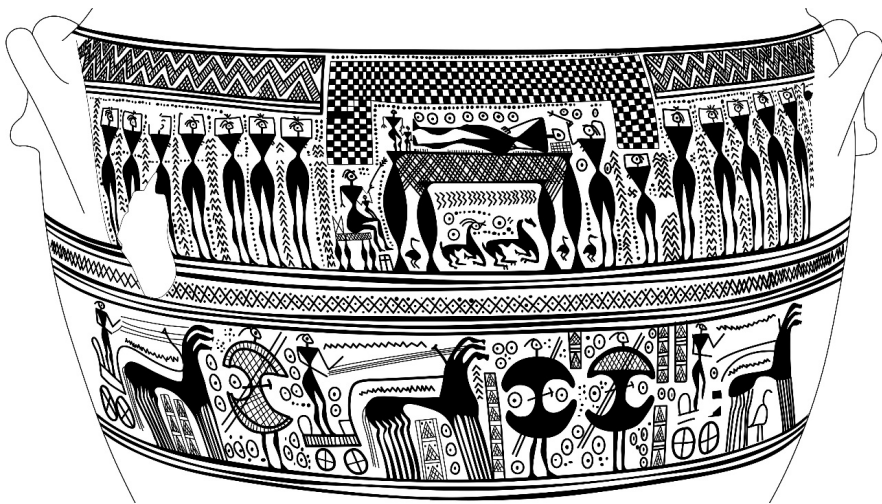
⁴ Hood, Ronald G. A New Greek Vase of C. 700 B.C. *Art Journal* 23, 1982 (Fig. 1, 2, 3 and 4). <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/a-new-greek-vase-of-c-700-b-c/>, accessed on 06.30.2017. The vase is not listed on Ahlberg's catalogue.

⁵ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 2.

gender divisions, distinctions, and roles in funerary rituals. Lamentation is not an exclusive act performed by women during *prothesis* as it is well indicated in the Homeric funerals of Patroklos, Hector, and Achilles.⁶ Hector's mourning is led by male professional singers and kinswomen. Achilles himself is the chief mourner of Patroklos' *prothesis*.

The mourners depicted in krater Louvre A517,⁷ at the Louvre Museum in Paris, have exactly the same design displayed on the Dipylon amphora and the iconographic composition represents a typical male *prothesis*. The sex identification in this example takes into account not only the shape of the vase (a krater used as a grave marker) but also the other figured motifs pictured in the *prothesis* scene and the scenes depicted in the other zones of the vase. In addition to the mourning figures, warriors on foot or in chariots equipped with swords and/or daggers, helmets, spears, and shields are depicted in the same panel where *prothesis* is represented and in the other decorative bands in the inferior zone of the body (Fig. 01).

FIGURE 01 – Detail of the krater from the Metropolitan Museum of Art 14.130.14.
Drawing: Yannis Nakas.



The same iconographical scheme applied to the mourners is also observed on kraters Louvre A522,⁸ Athens NM 802,⁹ on the one from Piraeus Street,¹⁰ Louvre A547,¹¹ on the

⁶ For Patroklos' funeral: Homer, *Iliad*, XXIII; Hector's: Homer, *Iliad*, XXIV, 583-589; 775-804 and for the funerary rituals of Achilles: Homer, *Odyssey*, XXIV, 35-74.

⁷ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 4.

⁸ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 5.

⁹ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 7.

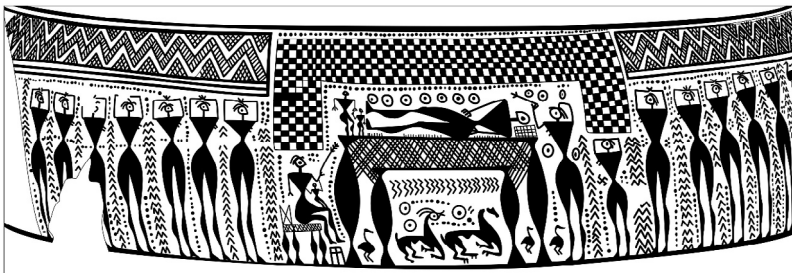
¹⁰ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 8.

¹¹ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 13.

one from the Nicholson Museum 46.41¹² in Sidney, Louvre A541,¹³ Louvre A522,¹⁴ and the one from the Metropolitan Museum of Art 14.130.14¹⁵ (Fig. 01 and Fig. 02), where all the figures are in the traditional lamentation gesture, i.e. both arms raised touching the head, in a standing or seated position, have their legs apart. A row of seated mourners appears in a band over¹⁶ or under¹⁷ the deceased and sometimes under the bier. The depiction of seated mourners immediately placed at the feet or at the head of the corpse is also common. It is interesting to notice that seated figures are extremely rare in *ekphora* scenes due to the fact that the funerary ritual itself is characterized by movement, by activities performed in an open space, in outdoor scenery. Their presence in a *prothesis* scene would suggest that the rituals were carried out in a more “closed” space – even when the landscape is outdoors – probably in the courtyard of the house (Ahlberg, 1971, p. 143-146; Cavanagh and Mee, 1995). This does not mean that *prothesis* was a “private” event during the Geometric. On the contrary, our analysis provides elements to support the idea of a more “public” event executed by members of the family and peers of the deceased to be displayed to the whole community.

On krater Athens NM 812 at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens,¹⁸ and on the one from the Metropolitan Museum of Art 14.130.14¹⁹ (Fig. 02), the human figures on the right present two lines (two short traces or dashes) representing breasts, this technique reveals the artist’s intention to distinguish the sex of the human figures through an iconographic feature based on biological characteristics. The breasts are drawn both on the same side – on the left – probably indicating the painter’s intention to depict the female mourners in a profile view.

FIGURE 02 – Detail of the krater from the Metropolitan Museum of Art 14.130.14.
Drawing: Yannis Nakas.



¹² Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 14.

¹³ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 15.

¹⁴ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 16.

¹⁵ <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/14.130.14> and Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 25.

¹⁶ For instance on kraters Louvre A517 and the one from Piraeus Street.

¹⁷ For example on amphora Athens NM 804, on kraters Louvre A547, Louvre A541 and on the one from the Metropolitan Museum of Art 14.130.15.

¹⁸ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 18.

¹⁹ Supra n. 40, especially Fig. 25f.

Kraters Metropolitan Museum 14.130.15²⁰ and Athens NM 806,²¹ at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens are the first examples of sex distinction based on physical aspects and associated with distinct mourning gestures.²² Male figures are identified by the long sword at their waist and are represented with only one arm raised, while the other mourning figures have both hands touching their head and also have breasts. This physical element of sex distinction can also be found on amphora Athens NM 18062 from the National Archaeological Museum in Athens²³ (Fig. 03). The mourners on the *prothesis* scene placed on the shoulder of the vase also present two lines indicating breasts. In both examples, krater Athens NM 806 and amphora NM 18062, the traces are disposed in opposite directions, one to the left side and the other one to the right side of the triangle which represents the chest. This stylistic way of representing the breasts is probably related to the artist's desire to draw the mourning figures in a frontal perspective.

FIGURE 03 – Detail of the Amphora Athens NM 18062. Drawing: Yannis Nakas.



Gender distinctions become more and more evident through the depiction of gestures and attitudes towards the end of the LG II. On the amphora Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek 2680, in Copenhagen, we observe mourners figures with breasts and long robes.²⁴ The same iconographical elements of sex distinction can be observed on the amphora from the Staatliche Museen 1963.13²⁵ in Berlin. The typical male gesture of lamentation (Alexiou, 1974; Cavanagh and Mee, 1995) is now depicted with one of the hands in the head and the other arm raised with the hand splayed out in direction of the deceased, for instance on the

²⁰ <http://metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/248905> and Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 22, especially Fig. 22c.

²¹ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 20, especially Fig. 20b. This picture provides the best example of sex and gender distinction associated with the mourning gesture.

²² For the female roles in the funerary rituals: Havelock, 1981. The lamentation gesture is usually considered a gender distinction during the mortuary practices. Women play a central role on *prothesis* performance. See also: Alexiou, 1974, Cavanagh and Mee, 1995, p. 53 (for female mourners) and p. 54-55 (for male mourners).

²³ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 24, especially Fig. 24b.

²⁴ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 29.

²⁵ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 31.

amphora at The Ashmolean Museum 1916.55²⁶ in Oxford, and the fragment of oinochoe 31 at Hobart University²⁷ where the human figures hold a sword on the waist. This gesture is often interpreted as an homage or a reverence attitude towards the deceased by his peers (Ahlberg, 1971; Snodgrass, 1980; Sourvinou-Inwood, 1983, Shapiro, 1991; Cavanagh and Mee, 1995).

Sometimes the male mourners are depicted with one arm downwards, as we can observe on the amphora K 969²⁸ at the Folkwang Museum, in Essen. On this vase, it should be remarked that both female and male mourners are depicted in a row at the same iconographic panel, on the neck of the amphora, in two different horizontal bands. The distinction of gender by gesture and posture of the human figures is evidently marked by iconographic details in sex determinations and cultural elements, such as clothing and weaponry. The same differentiation of male and female mourners can also be observed on oinochoe CA 3283²⁹ at the Louvre Museum, in Paris (Fig. 04), on the amphora “market” in London³⁰ and the fragment of amphora 1370³¹ at the Kerameikos Museum, in Athens.

FIGURE 04 – Oinochoe CA 3283 Louvre Museum, Paris. Drawing: Yannis Nakas.



²⁶ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 33, especially Fig. 33c and 33d.

²⁷ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 65b (drawing).

²⁸ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 41, especially Fig. 41d.

²⁹ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 47, especially Fig. 47c and 47d.

³⁰ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 48.

³¹ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 57d.

In all these vases, whether they are male or female *protheses*, there is always a great number of mourning figures, suggesting that the funerary ritual was usually performed not only by members of the family but by peers of the deceased. Some authors even defend that such a large number of participants denotes professional mourners and sometimes dancers.³² The figures depicted immediately at the head and at the feet of the deceased are commonly interpreted as close members of the family of the deceased.³³ In many instances, these figures have one arm raised, according to the lamentation gesture, and with the other hand they are holding a branch, probably used to keep away the insects that surround the dead body.

Mourners are generally depicted under the bier, kneeling or seating. Animals are very common representations under the bier as well, especially birds. The position of these figures can be understood as the painter's tool to represent figures "in depth", a characteristic that was absent from Geometric art as a whole. This is the result of the artist's conception to avoid overlapping figures, representing them, instead, under the bier as a way of denoting that they are behind or in front of it. Birds are usually connected to mortuary symbolisms, "serving as ideograms of funeral"³⁴ and occasionally attributed to a Mycenaean heritage or Oriental origin.³⁵ Although their occurrence in *prothesis* scenes is remarkable, they are a very common figured motif depicted in Geometric vases in general in all big centers of pottery production, especially the argive.³⁶

Towards the end of the Geometric Period, especially in the vases produced by the workshops and groups from LG IIb onwards, we observe great changes in the style applied to the geometric motifs in general, resulting in much more *naturalistic* scenes. Iconographic details are added to the figures as a technical implement in order to create some aspects of particularization. In the first moment this can be seen in physical features such as sex distinctions, eyes, and hair and then in cultural and social elements, clothing and garments, weaponry and gesture, posture and decoration elements.

Hydria D23/1982 from the National Gallery of Victoria's collection in Melbourne, attributed to the Analatos Painter, is a very particular *prothesis* scene dated to the end of the Geometric Period and the beginning of the Protoattic style, around 700 BC. It is the only known example of *prothesis* scene where the deceased is placed with the head towards the left. The mourning females are drawn in a very close style to those on the vases from the workshop of Athens 894, for instance amphora 48.2231³⁷ at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore and

³² Ahlberg, 1971, p. 107, 131.

³³ Ahlberg, 1971, p. 108, 135; Cavanagh and Mee, 1995, p. 52-53.

³⁴ Ahlberg, 1971, p. 139.

³⁵ J. L. Benson (1970, p. 26-31) emphasizes the presence of birds on Mycenaean art with funerary significance. Together with horse representations they assume an ennobling symbolism. A. Roes (1939, p. 57-84) connects bird representations in Greek Geometric art with sun symbols present in Oriental art.

³⁶ In most instances, birds appear on funerary vases, i.e. skyphoi and kraters deposited with the deceased inside the tomb (Courbin, 1966, 1974; Souza, 2011 – with references).

³⁷ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 37.

amphora 1927.27.6³⁸ at the Museum of Art in Cleveland. We notice a tendency to make an angle with the hip and a trail with the mourner's skirts ending in a neat point on the ground line. The same drawing of the skirt can be found on the neck of fragmentary amphora 1370³⁹ at the Kerameikos Museum in Athens and amphora 10.210.8⁴⁰ at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The similarity between these female mourning figures and the ones depicted in Mycenaean larnakes found in the chamber tomb cemetery at Tanagra in Boeotia dated to the Late Helladic IIIA and IIIC is remarkable.⁴¹

The three mourners painted to the right under the bier are facing the right at the deceased's feet. One of them has both arms raised in the traditional gesture of lamentation and the other two have only their left arm raised with their hand on their head, while their right arm is in a downward direction, along the waist. The way these figures are portrayed, not erect, but bend forwards – a gesture that can be related to a sign of homage commonly represented in later *prothesis* scenes with the mourners placed immediately at and directed towards the head and the feet of the deceased – is remarkable.

We also stress the recurrence of plastic decoration, filling ornaments, and figured motifs with clear Orientalizing connotations, such as the plastic snakes applied to the rim edge, handles and shoulder, the bands of grazing deer and of two rampant lions facing left in the handle zone, and the band of spirals below the *prothesis* scene on the neck. All of these stylistic elements contribute to create a narrative character in geometric representations. From the 7th century onwards, with the development of the black-figure technique, the ritual itself acquires new social and cultural meanings and these changes can be seen in the iconographic representations of *prothesis*.

According to Oakley (2004, p. 76),

there are a few Attic examples [of *prothesis* scenes] from the second quarter of the seventh century, after and before which there is a break in the record until the end of the century, when a long series of grave plaques depicting it begin. Starting around the middle of the sixth century, the *prothesis* became a standard subject on black-figure loutrophoroi, and down until the second quarter of the fifth century it is also occasionally found on other black-figure shapes. It was also used on red-figure loutrophoroi and at least one red-figure hydria during the fifth century.

³⁸ Davison, 1961, Fig. 34; Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 36; Coldstream, 1968, p. 58.6.

³⁹ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 57d.

⁴⁰ Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 64d. The picture presented by the author is just a drawing of the detail of the mourners. Photos of the entire vase can be seen on the online collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York: <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/248293>.

⁴¹ Cavanagh and Mee, 1995, Fig. 1-10. Ahlberg, 1971, Fig. 66d, 67 and 69, especially Fig. 67c, 67d, 68a, 68b. For the lamentation gesture and its origins: Halm-Tisserant, 2010, Alexiou, 1974.

In a brief search into the Beazley Archive,⁴² *prothesis* scenes in the archaic and classical periods occur in 127 ceramic objects, of which 70 were produced in black-figure technique, 57 in red-figure technique, 26 in red figures and 31 in the sub-technique of ‘white ground’. It is important to insist on the fact that this survey must be taken with its limitations: 54 of the 127 files do not have images of the objects – vases, pinakes, and unidentified fragments. In these cases, our conclusions are based solely on the brief descriptions supplied by the Archive and we cannot observe variations in gestures, in the number of characters in the scene, or any other particularity that might be interesting to indicate in this study. It is also essential to take into consideration some of the problems that this research tool presents to us such as the existence of duplicate files and of images published in books, catalogues, magazines and other Internet files which were not included in the Archive for copyright reasons or were not updated at the time of the research, among other issues. Therefore, our survey is quantitative and proposes a minimum sampling of *prothesis* scenes according to the publications made available by the BA and supported by commentaries and descriptions from CVA and other titles presented in this paper’s bibliographical references.

In black-figure technique there are 23 pinakes, 30 loutrophoroi, 5 phormiskoi, 3 skyphoi, 3 cups, and 6 various vases (one of each: kotyle, alabastron, amphora (?), oon, pyxis, and one unidentified form). A large part of this material is either fragmentary or consists only of few fragments which could possibly be used in proposals for reconstitution of the form. There are seven attributions to six different artists⁴³ which does not represent a broad panorama of production or give us any indication that these artists were ‘specialized’ in funerary scenes. These attributions, however, are particularly characteristic of two specific types of productions: the plaque series and the single plaques. The plaque series are those which presented *prothesis* scenes on several plaques with one scene specially dedicated to the scene of the deceased and the others to the groups of mourners, all disposed in sequence to complete the composition. The oldest ones, produced in the last quarter of the 7th century BC “are also the only examples in relief [...]. They are followed in the first quarter of the sixth century by a small group painted in an archaizing style [...]” (Boardman, 1955, p. 51), and their production ended in 530 BC after some reminiscence from the series produced by important painters from the period, such as Sophilos and Exekias. The single plaques – in greater number in this time frame – portray a complete scene in itself, with the deceased and his or her mourners. Some of them are framed by ornamental bands or by bands decorated with race scenes. These plaques commonly present small holes in their inferior and superior parts indicating that they were possibly hanged on or fixated to other surfaces.

In terms of the form, the plaques have a rectangular shape with dimensions that vary from 20 to 45 cm in height, 40 to 50 cm in width, and 2 and 4 cm in thickness. Some

⁴² <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/pottery/default.htm>, accessed on 07.31.2015.

⁴³ Four attributions to the Sappho Painter, one pinax and three loutrophoroi; three skyphoi to the Theseus Painter; three Little Master cups, and one plaque to the Lydos Painter; two attributions to the Exekias Painter; and one to the Group E or to the Vatican Mourner Painter. Boardman (1955, p. 51) also mentions one plaque attributed to Sophilos, which is not listed in the BA.

have received a protuberant border in the superior part with a small ‘ceiling’ over the figured scene. This ‘ceiling’ can be decorated by an ornamental band. Technically, they can receive the same treatment as the black-figure ceramic vases with the application of an engobe to the surface that will be decorated.

The analysis of the *prothesis* scenes during this period brings us information regarding the technique, the production, and the context which is important to be mentioned. According to Shapiro (1991, p. 630)

in the sixth century, after Solon’s legislation, the *prothesis* is typically shown either on a rectangular pinax, probably affixed to the outside of the tomb or on a loutrophoros used to carry water for bathing the dead and then mark the tomb. The number of mourners is clearly fewer now though this may have been something to do with the available picture surface.

In the loutrophoroi, even if the number of characters around the deceased in the main scene is smaller, there is still the surface of the neck where normally the groups of mourners⁴⁴ are portrayed in a row separated by gender and each representing a typical gesture from the period: male figures in valediction and female figures with their hands to their heads. However, in the phormiskos from Bologna (Museo Civico PU 190)⁴⁵ there is a *prothesis* scene in the central decorative band in which the deceased is accompanied by 19 mourners composed of men, women, and “children” (if that is how we interpret the four figures of smaller proportions closer to the bier). This phormiskos, a vase of small proportions (23 cm), presents – as the larger vases mentioned above – an expressive number of followers of the deceased in typical poses and gestures. Therefore, it is possible that the number of figures and characters ordered around the mourned character is not determined solely by the surface or the size of the vase.

In the plaques listed here,⁴⁶ the number of mourners (Fig. 05) varies from seven to 12 participants, normally separated by gender: on the left of the deceased we find the male figures; behind the deceased and on the right, the female figures. According to the bibliography, the male figure which is closest to the bier would, then, be the father of the

⁴⁴ Men and women in line, grouped according to gender on each side of the neck: Hague, Scheurleer 3507, Berlin, Antikensammlung F1888, Berlin, Antikensammlung F1887, Brussels, Musees Royaux A3576; only women in Cleveland, Museum of Art 27.145, in New York, Metropolitan Museum 27.228, in Kiel, Antikensammlung B56, and in Berlin, Antikensammlung F1889; only men in Athens, National Museum CC690, and in London, British Museum 1928.7-16.1; one line of men in a decorative band above a band formed by a row of women in Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1928.574; unidentifiable gender in the louthroporoi from Athens, National Museum: N914, Tubingen, Eberhard-Karls-Univ., Arch. Inst. S10.1481.

⁴⁵ CVA BOLOGNA, MUSEO CIVICO 2, III.H.E.12, III.H.E.13, pl. (323) 24.1-3.

⁴⁶ Of which we have images: Paris, Louvre Museum CA 255, New York, Metropolitan Museum 54.11.5, Ohio, Columbia University, s/n, Paris, Louvre MNB 905 (L4), Walters Art Museum 48.225.

deceased who, facing the left side of the scene, extends his arm in the direction of the other male figures who approach with their arms equally extended. According to Shapiro (1991, p. 635) “men usually come no closer than the feet of the deceased [...] to be greeted by the master of the house”, which occurs in three plaques. The female figures are commonly holding their heads with their hands or have one hand over the head and the other arm extended, in a position similar to the male figures. It is common to find the figure standing closest to the deceased with her hands pointed to the deceased’s head. In the Louvre plaque (L4), 11 figures accompany the dead: four male and seven female, among which, two children. The female figure in the center touches the deceased’s head with her right hand and raises her left arm taking her hand in the direction of her own head. In this plaque, attributed to the Sappho Painter, there are inscriptions that name the characters not with their own names, but with the position of each member of the family:⁴⁷ we can therefore identify the father, the sisters, the aunts, the grandmother, and the mother, who is interacting directly with her dead son by touching his head.

This interaction may be explained in different ways; it may serve for adding to the drama of the scene by representing the overwhelming grief of the mother who loses her son, leading us to believe in the painter’s creative freedom. Oakley (2004, p. 77), when describing a *prothesis* scene in a white lekythos attributed to the Sabouroff Painter says, “one wonders if the painter might have lost a young brother or son himself” which would have led him to intensify the sorrow of the loss of a close relative in the representation.

⁴⁷ According to Henry Immerwahr’s Corpus of Attic Vase Inscriptions (CAVI, n. 6698): “Boardman’s readings: among approaching men is ἀδελφος; they are greeted by πατερ, who faces them at the foot of the bier; the μετερ holds her dead son’s head [I trust B. is right to call the dead a male]; beside her, her second daughter, αδελφε; at head of bier stands θεθε [for τηθη], the grandmother; three mourners are called aunts, θεθις [for τηθις, father’s or mother’s sister], one of them, on the father’s side, προσπατρ[ρος] [printed as one word by B.] Also: οἰμοι and οἰμοι. λουστος and λουστ are read below the bier and by the column; both words are nonsense; ο[.]ελοσα(2) appears before the aunt at the right (the last preserved letter should be alpha, perhaps followed by more), just possible is ωφελουσα, ‘rendering service,’ “or something from the ομηλ- root might fit the context”, but it is probably nonsense. Typical of nonsense inscriptions on Sappho Painter’s funerary works are: on this plaque: λουστ, λουστος, ο.ελοσα [...] (this can be used for attr. to Sappho Ptr [...]); the inscription corresponding to Louvre MNB 905’s λουστος may be λο...”.

<https://avi.unibas.ch/DB/searchform.html>, accessed on 06.30.2015.

FIGURE 05 – Pinax from Walters Art Museum 48.225. Drawing: Yannis Nakas.



The black-figure plaques stopped being produced in the 5th century BC and did not have continuity in the following technique. “Loutrophoroi did continue to be made, in black-figure and later in red-figure, although after 470 they are clearly uncommon” (Shapiro, 1991, p. 647). In our survey we have found 57 red-figure pieces decorated with *prothesis*: 25 loutrophoroi and two unidentified fragments are decorated with red figures while the other 31 vases – 30 lekythoi and one krater – are all white-ground with a sub-technique developed during an extremely chronologically limited period (*ca.* 450-425 BC, according to Cook, 1960: 172) and serving a predominantly funerary function in Athens until the end of the 5th century BC.

Seventeen red-figure loutrophoroi are attributed to 11 different artists,⁴⁸ a fact that, once more, does not indicate their specialization in these funerary scenes, but rather simply punctuates this production chronologically throughout all the 5th century (between the years of 500 and 400 BC). In the main scenes from the loutrophoroi, i.e. on the belly, where the deceased⁴⁹ is represented surrounded by mourners, the iconographic scheme suffers small, but significant changes: the male figures are no longer found at the feet of the deceased on the left side of the scene; they may be positioned by his head, in groups, in a typical gesture

⁴⁸ According to the Beazley Archive: three vases are attributed to the Syracuse Painter; two to the Kleophrades Painter, to the Hermonax Painter, to the Naples Painter, and to the Naples 132 Painter. Only one loutrophoros is attributed to each one of the following artists: Diogenes Painter, Syleus Painter, Bologna 228, Mykonos Painter, Perseus Painter and Icarus Painter.

⁴⁹ In all the vases, the dead is positioned at the center of the vase in the L-O position: the head always to the right and the feet to the left.

of valediction or even with a ‘feminine’ variation, represented with their arms raised towards their heads. In all the *loutrophoroi* which are in one piece, the neck is decorated with pairs or trios of mourners, with the exception of the vase from the Pergamon Museum 31008, from Berlin, in which the extremely thin neck allows only one mourner figure on each side.

In the Vienna fragment Kunsthistorisches Museum 3441 (Fig. 06) the remaining part of the scene is particularly graceful: the deceased, represented here with peaceful and calm features, is being touched on the head by a figure’s hand (feminine, according to the description on CVA WIEN, Kunsthistorisches Museum 3, 42-43, pl. (149) 149.1), in a gesture that has a more ‘gentle’ appearance than the ones observed in the back-figure plaques. Of course this is also due to the fact that red-figure technique allowed greater freedom in the drawing which was made with a thin brush, differently from the incisions in the earlier technique.

FIGURE 06 – Fragment in Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum 3441. Drawing: Yannis Nakas.



This touch can also be found in the *loutrophoros* from Athens, National Museum 1542 (Fig. 07), in which a standing figure involves the deceased’s head - a bearded man – with both hands. In this scene, however, we can observe some rigidity as the deceased’s head does not seem to be lying calmly on the pillow and his eyes are not completely shut. Once again, artistic freedom and talent must be taken into consideration, more than any other explanation that may be suggested for the scene.

FIGURE 07 – Detail of loutrophoros from Athens, National Museum 1542.
Drawing: Yannis Nakas.



Particularly interesting is a neck fragment from a loutrophoros in Berlin (Antikensammlung F2632). On one side we can observe the *prothesis* scene, but presented in a completely different way in comparison to the scenes seen until now: the deceased is alone. There is no escort from other characters beside or around the bier. The deceased is lying covered by a simple draped mortuary cloth on a low bed decorated in a simple manner and his head is supported by a low pillow recklessly decorated. On the other side of the fragment there is a female figure elevating her left arm towards a monument – a tomb, according to CVA BERLIN Antikensammlung 15, 52-53, pl. (4628) 52.3-6 – decorated with ribbons.

If *prothesis* is a funerary ritual in which the dead is exposed for lamentation, if it is the moment of farewell, the moment when private becomes public, then the representation of this lonely deceased is of difficult comprehension taking the group of images mentioned this far. The presence of the female figure in the tomb, however, suggests that the specialization of the scene happens more commonly in the white-ground lekythoi, where male and female characters are found beside the funerary monument in scenes of libation or taking care of the funerary stela. This meeting moment at the tomb will be the most represented theme in white-ground vases – a quick search on BA, using search criteria such as <white ground> and <tomb> results in 560 files of which only four are not <lekythoi>.

A small number in this pool of funerary representations in white-ground lekythoi is dedicated to *prothesis* scenes. According to Shapiro (1991, p. 649) “the mourners in these *prothesis* scenes are limited to three or four, instead of the larger groups that still occur on some louthroporoi. There is no room for the chorus of male mourners, but often a single man or youth [...] appears closer to the bier than in black-figure”.

In fact, there seems to be greater liberty for placing the characters around the dead and the place of adult women or men in relation to the bier may be modified according to the intended representation. We have observed, though, that these changes had already taken place during the transition from the black figures to the red ones. The cylindrical body of the lekythoi does not seem to be, necessarily, a limiting factor for the number of characters any more than the esthetic preference for cleaner and clearer images. Polychrome in the decoration of these vases – a technical aspect – seems to be evidence of esthetic appeal and the detailing of the figures and application of color is apparently more important than the theme in itself. Shapiro (1991, p. 649) also suggests that “the white lekythoi may to some extent represent a further “privatization” of private burials, in reaction to the institution of the public funeral”, and that the contrast between the public and monumental exhibitions of mourning and these more private scenes is reinforced.

Among the 31 lekythoi listed, only five are unattributed.⁵⁰ There is a clear specialization of painters since these vases have the funerary aspect as their main characteristic. From this total, five vases are attributed to the Saboureff Painter, “a busy cup-painter of some merit, offering pleasing if unambitious figures of youths and women on cups and some better work on large vases. He painted a few red-figure lekythoi but many white ground” (Boardman, 2010, p. 37), largely contributing to the popularization of this sub-technique. According to Oakley (2004, p. 77) “[he] was the first to render the *prothesis* on white-ground lekythoi”. His *prothesis* scenes are composed of the deceased – normally a young man – in the center, surrounded by three characters, adult men and women and youth – but never children, which occurs in all the white-ground vases listed here – always holding one or both hands to their head. In the lekythos from London, British Museum D62, a female figure raises her left arm in the direction of the male figure standing behind the bier and touches, with her right hand, the deceased’s face.

The scenes attributed to the Saboureff Painter are extremely simplified as detailing occurs mostly in the coloring of the mourners’ clothing. The anatomy is simple, with clean and continuous traces. The bier is usually very simple as well: a tall bed with a briefly detailed pedestal which is repeated in every scene. There is no accessory decoration or objects to complement the scene; there is only the deceased and his mourners.

Five lekythoi are attributed to the Quadrate Painter, a second generation painter of white-ground lekythoi (430-410 BC). During this period, we can see the introduction of other

⁵⁰ Five lekythoi are attributed to the Saboureff Painter and to the Quadrate Painter; four to the Triglyph Painter; three to the Woman Painter; two to the Tymbos Painter and to the NY Hypnos Painter. Attribution of one lekythos to each one of the following: Bird Painter, Huge Lekythoi Group, Reed Painter, Painter of Birth of Athena, Painter of Berlin 2451 and Aegisthus Painter.

details into the scenes: there was greater decoration on the bier, there were bands, objects fixed onto the decorative field; clothes received some detailing and the figures portrayed more movement in the scene. In two of the vases attributed to the Quadrate Painter we can see the application of crowns – *stephane*, a bridal crown – to the head of the deceased woman. In the lekythoi from Paris (Louvre S 1667), one of the mourners carries on her left hand a basket decorated with ribbons, which according to Oakley (2004, p. 80-81) is a type of basket “connected with the visit to the grave, indicating either that they will leave shortly or more likely that the scene combines elements with pictures of the preparation for a visit to the tomb”. In the small lekythos fragment from Tübingen University (Antikensammlungen S./10 1720.), we observe only the crowned deceased with her eyes still open.

Among the scenes found in our survey, we would like to highlight three of them which are extremely interesting. Attributed to the Woman Painter, a contemporary of the Quadrate Painter, the lekythos from Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum 3748 (Fig. 08) carries a profusion of new data that, for Oakley (2004, p. 82) “may be the finest white-ground *prothesis* scene known”. In the scene, a woman is being mourned surrounded by three mourners, all of them women. The deceased is adorned with earrings and a necklace, covered by a dark mortuary cloth and enveloped in purple bands. At her feet, another woman is holding her left hand to her head and extending her right arm toward the bier. To this woman’s left there is a wreath on the left upper corner and, on the right side there is a small winged figure that will be repeated two more times in the scene. In the middle, another woman holds her hands to her head touching her hair – a recurrent gesture of lamentation in older images. Her fingers are intertwined in her hair, not simply lying over her head. It is as if at any moment she might pull it. On the right side of the scene, placed next to the deceased’s head, a third woman is holding a fan with her right hand and a basket with her left hand. It is the first time we find this object in the scenes listed in this study from all types of techniques. On both sides of the fan two more winged figures fly over the characters. These small figures – *eidola* – mimic the two main gestures observed throughout the *prothesis* scenes: one hand placed in valediction and the other directed towards their heads in a gesture of lamentation. The presence of the basket once again would indicate the mourners going to visit the tomb, as in the case of the Paris lekythos.

Finally, we have the lekythoi from Lyon (Musée des Beaux Arts E288.3) and from Athens (National Museum CC1651), attributed to the Triglyph Painter. In these scenes the deceased is accompanied by only two mourners, one man and one woman. In the figurative field of the two vases, however, we can see two large lekythoi – like those tomb markers – decorated with bands. According to Oakley 2004, p. 85), “the Triglyph Painter’s own lekythoi are large, and because large lekythoi appear with frequency in the images he makes, their presence may indicate a type of self-promotion”. This is an interesting suggestion, although we believe that the presence of these large objects may reinforce even more the funerary character of these supports and scenes and might indicate the spatial context of the cemetery. What strikes our attention the most in these two scenes, though, is the presence of birds under the bier. Oakley says that the bird is a fairly common element in the Triglyph Painter’s

vases – it appears in six of the white-ground lekythoi attributed to the painter. However, wouldn't it be interesting to interpret these birds under the deceased's bier as a form of recovery, as a mnemonic element present in the geometric *prothesis* scenes?

FIGURE 08 – White-ground lekythos from Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum 3748.
Drawing: Yannis Nakas.



CONCLUSIONS

The iconographic elements analyzed in the *prothesis* scenes from the Geometric to the fifth century BC allow us to make some considerations regarding aspects of tradition and change in the iconographic representation of the funerary ritual itself and also on its social and cultural meanings. The first element taken into account was the use of pictorial elements for sex and gender differentiation. During the Geometric Period, mainly in the first phase, LG I, we observe a lack of distinction between men and women in the iconography

of mortuary ritual. There is no differentiation between the roles performed by men and women in the funerary practices. Both are depicted in the same stylized way, with standardized geometric shapes with the same mourning gesture and posture.

Towards the end of the Late Geometric, especially LG IIb and IIc, specialization of functions and roles based on sexual distinctions can be demonstrated by adding new iconographic details. From the end of the 8th century onwards, we can observe gender differentiations in funerary iconography. Female mourners are distinguished by physical attributes, for instance by the depiction of breasts and long hair; by cultural features, through clothing, for example in the depiction of long robes and decorated skirts; by gesture with the attitude of raising both arms; finally, through a new technique applied to the painting style, such as the skin color with the use of white paint to represent women in the black-figure technique (Alexiou, 1974; Havelock, 1981; Kurtz, 1985).

The iconographical representation of the female mourner during the end of the Geometric Period is very close to the one depicted in funerary images of Mycenaean sarcophagi. Rather than understanding these similarities as a static element of continuity and tradition, we suggest that the *naturalistic* style characteristic of the Mycenaean art served as a mnemonic feature in vogue and was used in the end of the 8th and at the beginning of the 7th century as a technical implement to create a totally new style, a completely new way and conception of representing the world, its natural forms, and its human institutions, including funerary rituals.

Another aspect analyzed, the number of participants in the mortuary ritual, also suffered some changes in this long-term approach. There is a remarkable tendency to reduce the number of mourning figures suggesting a more “public” character of the funerary rituals during the Geometric with a shift to a more “private” state from the seventh and the sixth century onwards. The iconographical changes follow the changes in conduct (behavior) due to legal restrictions from Solon’s legislation, indicating a greater particularization of the treatment of the dead, which would now be something pertaining to the intimate and private sphere and where the demonstration of lamentation became more individualized and personal, even if we do not actually know who those people were or whether the laws were being followed exactly as proposed (Shapiro, 1991; González, 2014). Nevertheless, we cannot lose sight of the production and commercial aspect of these pieces nor of the artist’s freedom and of the decorative technique – the style – that is freer and better adaptable to more creations when compared to the images developed over the geometric period.

This “private” aspect of the funerary ritual during the archaic and classical Periods can also be demonstrated by the direct contact of the mourners with the deceased. This proximity or intimacy with the deceased did not occur in the *prothesis* scenes from the earlier period. This appears in three scenes in the plaques, but it is not seen in any of the other black-figure vases listed in the Beazley Archive. This gesture will only occur again in one red-figure fragment and in very few white-ground vases in our survey. In addition, the presence of “professional” and seated mourners depicted in the geometric *prothesis* scenes, for instance, contributes to the idea that the ritual had a more “public” character, probably performed in outdoor scenery such as the courtyard of the house of the deceased.

In a long-term analysis of the *protheses*, Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood (1983) understands mortuary rituals as a collective representation of death which undergoes change over time, from the Geometric until the Classical Period. However, the author is not concerned with the iconographical aspects of the *prothesis* scenes. She offers a social and cultural perspective based on literary evidence, the descriptions of *prothesis* of the Homeric heroes in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, such as Achilles, Hector, and Patroklos, seen as the richest source for the Dark Age attitudes toward death. Sourvinou-Inwood (1983, p. 39) emphasizes that, during the Geometric Period, *prothesis* is an attitude toward death where the community “pays its respects, and a formal, well-orchestrated lament takes place (...), an expression of the ties which bound the deceased to the community (...) The ritual acts are now formalized and patterned, and this introduces, through the structure of the ritual behavior, an element of order”. She concludes that the attitudes toward death during this period, as in Homer’s epics, “were of the ‘familiar’ or ‘accepting’ type” (1983, p. 34).

Simultaneously, the images of death and the funerary language at this time were a socially symbolic act. In a generic approach to the *prothesis* and *ekphora* scenes depicted in the monumental grave markers of the 8th century in Athens, Sourvinou-Inwood (1983, p. 40) states that

the ‘images of death’ people chose to mark their graves were not personal individualized images of whatever kind—contrast, for example, for images of ‘self’ the archaic reliefs, and for personal images of death (here not on grave-markers) the Charon and the deceased scenes on white-ground lekythoi. What they chose were ‘public’ images of death, in which death (perhaps one’s own) was represented in terms of the death of the social persona, through the public rituals by which the community as well as the family reacted to the death and dispatched the shade to Hades.

She concludes arguing that “since Dark Age and 8th century grave-markers gave little information about the deceased, the idea must be that one’s memory will survive within the community, focused on, and strengthened by, the grave monument” (1983, p. 43).

During the 8th and mainly the 7th century, demographic, socioeconomic, political, and technological changes “affected the existing system of funerary behavior, attitudes to death and afterlife beliefs” (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1983, p. 34). According to the author (1983, p. 46), “a greater concern to separate firmly the margins between life and death”, “a desire to push away death’s physical reality” (1983, p. 47) generated “the weakening familiarity towards death and increasing fear and repugnance” (1983, p. 44) in the Archaic representations of death. Graves from the Archaic Period onwards are individualized through grave-inscriptions and iconography, especially through grave-statues and grave-reliefs (Shapiro, 1991). In this sense, it is the monument itself that “will preserve the memory, recording one’s life and death” (Shapiro, 1991, p. 43). The attitude toward death is more individualized during archaic and classical times. It is no longer the individual’s memory within the community

but one's memory through one's existence, recorded and perpetuated by the grave itself, the monument and the images.

The iconographical aspects of continuity and change analyzed in this brief article indicate that mnemonic elements and signs of tradition are re-signified and treated in different painting techniques throughout the centuries (Radley, 1992). Towards the end of the 8th and the beginning of the 7th centuries BC new decorative techniques allow for more "freedom" and provide a conception and a "new" manner of representing the natural world and human cultural and social institutions. At a first glance, perhaps the general conclusion must seem obvious. However, in our opinion, it is noteworthy emphasizing that art is a human creation, and it simultaneously creates human actions and behaviors (Ingold, 2013). Consequently, both elements of continuity and change in the images of death are responses to historical conditions and cannot be understood out of their social, cultural, and physical (material) contexts (Langdon, 2008).

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