

## Introduction

The decision to re-examine the Submycenaean, Transitional and Protogeometric amphorae from the graves of the Kerameikos cemetery at Athens came from the relevance and the distribution of these vessels. The amphorae are almost always used as ash urns, revealing a fundamental ritual role played in the burial practice; in addition to this, they can be employed as grave goods, and are the first grave markers placed outside the tomb, too. Since during this chronological span the cremation rite replaces inhumation, the amphorae are present in almost all the Protogeometric graves where this rite is adopted. Their analysis helps us to shed new light on the funerary ritual, on the production process and also on the relative chronology of the burials.

### 1.1. Research methodology

The materials forming the object of this study were mainly published in 1939 and 1943 by W. Kraiker and K. Kübler, according to the standards of the day; only the ones edited by F. Ruppenstein in 2007 meet the modern requirements.

For many years the Kerameikos cemetery was the only one being excavated and published, and for this reason its materials have become the corner-stone of the Early Iron Age chronology. Meantime, other excavations have been carried out and further publications offer scope for new discussion. In particular, the detailed publication of the Early Iron Age materials from the Athenian Agora graves, recently edited by J. K. Papadopoulos and E. L. Smithson<sup>6</sup>, provides an important point of comparison with the nearby Kerameikos.

The two above mentioned volumes of the Kerameikos series dating back to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are very detailed, and allow us to reconstruct the structure of the burial, the disposal of the objects in it and the adopted ritual; however, the vases are not depicted in drawings and the materials in the plates are grouped according to their shape, without giving the right weight to the whole contexts and contents.

My review of the evidence from the Kerameikos necropolis has therefore required the retaking of the photographic documentation in colour, together with executing a drawing (when such are absent)<sup>7</sup>. This was made possible by examining the amphorae on site, at the Kerameikos Museum in Athens, and in one case at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.

<sup>6</sup> Agora XXXVI.

<sup>7</sup> See section 3.2.5.

The result has been the production of a homogeneous set of drawings, on which the typology presented in this volume is based; the old typology, in fact, did not make use of any drawings.

The elaboration of this new typology has been a focal point of the volume and it has been developed using what is termed the “envelope” method. First of all the drawings – made on paper – have been digitalized and transformed into vector images. The profiles of the amphorae have been all reduced to the same height, but preserving the proportions, and then the drawings have been overlain: all vases with similar profiles have been considered as belonging to the same type. A greater weight here was given to the shape of the body, while the differences in the form of the lip, of the neck, of the base and in the size have been considered as indicating varieties. The decorative motifs and the characteristics of the clay were first analysed independently, and then linked to the types. Particular attention has been given to any detected repetition in the shapes, so highlighting the presence or the absence of a standardised production, its relation to the chronological scheme and to the spread of the cremation rite.

The study includes an assessment of the contexts in which the amphorae were found, with a re-examination of the burials and an analysis of the spatial distribution of the objects inside them. This analysis gives us important information on the funerary ritual that was carried out in the necropolis, but that had left no other traces, allowing us to reconstruct – at least partially – the cremation procedure.

The nomenclature used needs a brief introduction here. It was determined to refer to the amphorae by their inventory numbers; the catalogue, which follows a chronological order, is arranged consecutively, but the inventory ones are always indicated in the description.

Further, the tombs retain the number that distinguishes them in the volumes of the Kerameikos series. Before each number, the abbreviation SM, PG or G is added: even if these acronyms are not present in the original publications, they are conventionally used here to simplify the identification of the graves (e.g. as done by Morris and Whitley<sup>8</sup>). Presently, one and the same number may be applied to several tombs – according to their period, as determined by scholars. In order to distinguish them, SM is used for most of the burials

<sup>8</sup> Morris 1987; Whitley 1991.

from the necropolis north of the Eridanos river, under the later Pompeion building<sup>9</sup>, that is considered largely Submycenaean; PG is adopted for the graves south of the Eridanos river, usually dated to the Protogeometric period. Another group of graves, again located south of the Eridanos river but considered Geometric, are conventionally preceded by the abbreviation G. Without this labelling, one could end up with three tombs (and their contents) with the same number in the Kerameikos area: the resultant scope for confusion does not bear thinking about.

It must be said at once that these acronyms do not have a real chronological value, since some of the tombs preceded by SM have been dated more precisely to the Late Helladic III C Late or even to the Transitional period; the same can be said for some of the ones preceded by PG, that can be considered Transitional.

An exception to this convention is seen in the burials excavated in the vicinity of the Sacred Way (*Heilige Straße*) and published by B. Schlörb Vierneisel<sup>10</sup>, whose numbers are preceded by the abbreviation hS.

## 1.2. Chapters

Chapter II deals with the Kerameikos cemetery during its earliest phases, from the Submycenaean to the Late Protogeometric period. After a short description of the history of the research, the types of tombs and the burial groups are examined. The problems related to the relative chronological sequence of the graves and to their absolute dating are taken into consideration.

Chapter III concerns the amphorae in more detail. Their use inside the graves and their relation to the gender of the dead are examined. Starting from the present state of research, most of the chapter is dedicated to setting out the new typology proposed, based on the drawings of the vessels. The decorative motifs and the macroscopic characterization of the fabric are examined separately, and then they are correlated to the vase types. At the end of the chapter, a catalogue of the amphorae – ordered according to their relative chronological sequence – contains schematic information about the characteristics of the vessels and their contexts of origin.

Chapter IV deals in further detail with the graves in which the amphorae were found. The possibility to reconstruct the contexts from which these vessels came, thanks to the descriptions in the original publications, is an added value. The burials belonging to the so-called “trench-and-hole” type have been divided in three areas: the trench with the remains of the pyre, the hole containing the amphora-urn

and the cinerary urn itself. In each, objects may turn up, and their presence and frequency has been examined. The target of this analysis was the reconstruction of the funerary rite, making a comparison with the rituals described in the Homeric poems. A paragraph is dedicated to the osteological data, concerning both human and animal bones, and similar to explain the cluster analysis conducted. Finally, the list of the burials with amphorae closes the chapter; as for the amphorae, here too the tombs have been organized according to a relative chronological sequence.

Chapter V concerns the cremation rite, examined through the archaeological and literary evidence. In order to better understand the appearance and the development of this funerary rite at Athens, the cremations in Perati and Salamis have been included. Finally, a reappraisal of the theories concerning the diffusion of the cremation burial rite in the Aegean have been considered.

The plates are of fundamental significance; in particular, the drawings underpin the proposed typology, while those displaying the objects in context give an idea of the materials found in each tomb containing an amphora and of the position that they occupied in the grave. To facilitate the reading of the plates showing the burial contexts, each object has been marked with a letter depending on the area of the grave in which it was found: “a” for the items put inside the amphora-urn; “g” for the grave goods found in the hole with the urn for the cremations or together with the skeleton for the inhumations; “p” for the objects from the pyre debris; “m” for the grave markers placed outside the burial.

<sup>9</sup> An exception is given by the tombs A, B, C, D, E, 1N, 2N, 3N conventionally preceded by the term PG; this is probably due to the fact that, since their first publication, they have not been considered Submycenaean.

<sup>10</sup> Schlörb Vierneisel 1966.