

Minoan

Practices

Because of the lack of written material little is known about the specific mortuary rituals of the Minoans. However, the use of burials is well documented starting with the practice of Cave burials. There were many types of Minoan burials on Crete, including Cave burials, Chamber tomb or tholos (Beehive) tombs all being popular in different parts of the island.

Burial was a reflection of life. Bodies were interred with their everyday possessions as well as special funerary items. Some burials were individual but it was more common for ancient Cretan tombs to be communal. These communal tombs could be for the dead of whole communities or for particular clans. In fact the dead of ancient Crete were commonly interred in groups rather than individual graves. In the very early Minoan period, it was common for generation after generation to be added to the same tomb.¹

Some funerary items seemed to have been made specifically for funerary rites. These included stone vases, so small that they were impractical for everyday use and vessels shaped like animals or people. However, most funerary items show use and were not specifically created for these rites.² Additionally, it should be noted that horns and double headed-axes, continue to be favorite themes of funerary art throughout Minoan history.³

Additionally, a terracotta model found at Kamilari and the Hagia Triada sarcophagus represent instances of a special service for, tending of, or more likely a cult of the dead. Specially, a terracotta model showing the statue-like main figure of the dead being offered various gifts. The extended festival, that is depicted on the sarcophagus, includes sacrifice in honor of the dead, gifts and libations. All of those were common on such occasions from the early funerary cults about the tombs in the Mesara . Underlying the 'celebration' of death with its elaborate ritual, which also included communal meals, is the expectation of renewal. The recurring rites depicted as honoring the dead seemed to focus on the tomb rather than on one individual among the many dead that were buried there.⁴ This reflected the communal view held by the Minoans.

Deities and Important Concepts

- A-sa-sa-ra⁵ "The snake goddess"
Though found only in house sanctuaries the imagery of the snakes may be interpreted as symbols of the underworld and point to her being a chthonic deity.⁶ However it is important to note that enough archeological evidence does not exist to be sure of these attributes. Having said that the common appearance of this figure in Minoan society makes her appropriate for invocation at a funerary rite.

Modern Adaptations

- Speak of the deceased as part of the family that they belong to.

Speak of how they join all those of their family that has passed before them. How death is an experience shared by all.

- Ritually toast the dead with mead.

¹ <http://suite101.com/article/minoan-burial-types-and-tombs-a148364>

² http://www.dartmouth.edu/~prehistory/aegean/?page_id=569

³ http://www.dartmouth.edu/~prehistory/aegean/?page_id=569

⁴ <http://kernos.revues.org/pdf/643>

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snake_Goddess

⁶ http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/minoan_snake_goddess.html

Archeological evidence shows that the Minoan's drank mead.⁷ This along with the findings of drinking vessels at funerary sites makes this a very appropriate gesture.

- Hold a communal feast.

Sample Readings

Linear A has never been successfully translated and Linear B text deal with economic matters. Thus no text survives to provide us with materials that we can directly quote.

Resources

- Aegean Prehistoric Archaeology <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~prehistory/aegean/>
- Death and Afterlife in Minoan Religion – Kernos <http://kernos.revues.org/pdf/643>
- The Minoan Mansion of Agia Triada http://www.alpha-omegaonline.com/road/route_13d.htm

⁷ <http://www.historywiz.com/minoandiet.html>