

# Myceanean

## Practices

Most of what we know of Myceanean Greek funerary practices comes from burial practices for aristocrats. While less is known about burials for ordinary people we can take inspiration from the practices that are known.

The body of the deceased was prepared to lie in state where it could be viewed by the grieving population. This was followed by a procession to the resting place, either a single grave or a family tomb accompanied by laments, as depicted on larnakes (burial chest). Grave goods such as jewelry, weapons, and vessels were arranged around the body on the floor of the tomb. Graveside rituals probably included libations and a meal. The Mycenaean seems to have practiced secondary burial, when the deceased and associated grave goods were rearranged in the tomb to make room for new burials.<sup>1</sup>

Rituals shown on larnakes (small box coffins) showed the important role played by women in the ceremony as mourners and perhaps participants in a ritual dance. The women are shown with short hair that has been shorn as a sign of mourning and red marks, which might be self-afflicted wounds.

Several type of tombs were used during the Mycenaean period. Often the dead were buried with elaborate grave goods including jewellery, weapons and serviceable vessels.<sup>2</sup> Gold masks, rhyta (ritual sprinkling vessels) and other elaborate grave goods were also found.

- Shaft Graves

Each of which was dug between 3 and 4 meters into the earth. Pebbles covered the floor of the shaft and wooden roofs sat on rubble ledges lining the long sides of the tomb. These roofs were then covered by dirt and a marker was set up. In some cases to denote the graves, which, in most cases, served from 2 to 5 people thought to be from the same family..

- Pits and cists

Grave that are simply dug into the earth and then filled in after the deceased has been deposited. The cist, derived from the Greek word for "box" or "chest," is also dug into the earth or soft rock, but then walled on all sides, either by individual slabs or a building up of rubble; graves were constructed from the materials at hand. These are usually roofed or covered, as well. These were used for individual burials.

- Chamber tomb

Rock-cut irregularly into an incline, rather than built up from stone or mud-brick, with a long open passageway, or dromos, leading down to the chamber itself. The walls of the dromos usually angle inward toward the top of the passage. Often the transition between the dromos and the chamber proper would be a narrower entranceway, or stomion, which could be walled up to seal the chamber. Again these were most likely family vaults.

- Tholos tomb

Similar to Chamber tombs these had dromos (open passageways) , stomion (transition between the dromos and the burial chambers) and a burial chamber. The Tholos tomb however were built up through corbelling like a beehive, so that each layer of stone slightly overlaps the previous until reaching the apex of the vault where a single stone can cover the gap. The stomion was often elaborately decorated. These were also often used as family tombs.

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<sup>1</sup> "Ancient Greek Funeral and Burial Practices." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 05 July 2013. Web. 24 May 2013. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient\\_Greek\\_funeral\\_and\\_burial\\_practices](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_funeral_and_burial_practices)

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, Matt. Burial Customs and the Reconstruction of Mycenaean Social Structure. N.p.: n.p., 2008 [http://www.galleryofwriting.org/uploads\\_converted/KEY\\_2523212/2523212.pdf](http://www.galleryofwriting.org/uploads_converted/KEY_2523212/2523212.pdf)

- Burials in settlements, pithoi (large jars) or under sherds of large, broken vases

Often used for children and less often for adults.

### **Deities and Important Concepts**

- Poseidon (PO-SE-DO-O)  
One of the main Mycenaean deities mentioned in the Linear B text that later evolved into the Greek pantheon. A chthonic deity, connected with earthquakes. He also represented the river spirit of the underworld.
- Minoan "Mother Goddess"  
The Mycenaean adopted the Minoan deities into their religion. Both frescos of Minoan goddess and terracotta figures have been found.

### **Modern Adaptations**

- Have the body lie in state. Have people walk in two rows with the body leading the way from the car to the gravesite.
- Have people express something they will miss about the person. Use this as a lamentation. Perhaps making a chant of what will be missed.
- Have a short ritual dance given in honor of the deceased. Consider allowing participation in a simple ritualized spiral dance.
- Place a gold colored mask on the face of the deceased.
- Use a ritual sprinkling vessels to bless the deceased.
- Bury grave goods that were meaningful to the deceased with them.
- Offer a libation and some food (cakes, or something easily and quickly shared) at the gravesite.

### **Sample Readings**

While the Mycenaean created a new writing system, Linear B, this text was reserved for record keeping. Thus no ancient funerary text exists.

### **Resources**

- Burial Customs and the Reconstruction of Mycenaean Social Structure  
[http://www.galleryofwriting.org/uploads\\_converted/KEY\\_2523212/2523212.pdf](http://www.galleryofwriting.org/uploads_converted/KEY_2523212/2523212.pdf)
- "The Mycenaean." Google Books. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 May 2013.  
<http://tinyurl.com/p2gd9vw>