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Views of Wealth, a Wealth of Views: Grave Goods in Iron Age Attica

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Introduction

Connections between women and property in ancient Greece have more often been approached through literary sources than through material remains. Like texts, archaeology presents its own interpretive challenges, and the difficulty of finding pertinent evidence can be compounded by fundamental issues of context and interpretation. Simply identifying certain objects can be problematic. A case in point is the well-known terracotta chest buried ca. 850 BC in the so-called tomb of the Rich Athenian Lady in the Athenian Agora. The lid of the chest carries a set of five model granaries. Out of the ground for thirty-five years, this little masterpiece has figured in discussions of Athenian society, politics, and history. Its prominence in scholarly imagination derives from the suggestion made by its initial commentator, Evelyn Lord Smithson: “If one can put any faith in Aristotle’s statement (*Ath. Pol.* 3.1) that before Drakon’s time officials were chosen *aristinden kai ploutinden* [by birth and wealth], property qualifications, however rudimentary, must have existed. Five symbolic measures of grain might have been a boastful reminder that, as everyone knew, the dead lady belonged to the highest propertied class, and that her husband, and surely her father, as a *pentakosiomedimnos*, had been eligible to serve his community as *basileus*, *polemarch* or *archon*.” The chest, she suggested, symbolized the woman’s dowry.¹

Recent studies have thrown cold water on this interpretation from different standpoints.² As ingenious as it is, the theory rests on modern assumptions regarding politics, social organization, inheritance patterns, mortuary custom, and gender that need individual consideration. While this paper cannot fully address all these aspects, the granaries and their context raise an important point. The evidence of grave goods offers an especially promising resource for investigating connections between women and property in early Greece. Mortuary assemblages can provide direct links not only to individual women but also to the symbolic systems that inform the creation and use of material goods.

¹. A *pentakosiomedimnos* is literally a “five-hundred-measure man,” referring to the highest propertied class of Athens, whose land produced that many dry or liquid measures annually. For the exhibition, Ober and Hedrick 1993: 43 (catalog entries by Diane Buitron-Oliver and John Camp); first publication of granaries, Smithson 1968: 96.

². Williams 2000; Morris and Papadopoulos forthcoming.

The methodological difficulties in interpreting ancient grave goods are well known. The placement of artifacts in burials was determined by a combination of social, eschatological, emotional, ritual, and practical factors, not all of which are retrievable by standard research methods. Patterns of artifact distribution in a cemetery must ideally be considered according to variables of age, sex, gender, class, ethnicity, kinship, and other aspects of social and personal identity; in reality, the critical osteological analyses on which such fine-tuning depends often are lacking. Moreover, recent research has questioned the reliability of past osteological identifications.³ The incompleteness of the archaeological record further complicates the issue. While any useful observations must be based on some kind of statistical analysis, the relation of the archaeological record to historical reality is ultimately unknowable.⁴ A given set of excavated graves, even a whole cemetery, represents only a certain part of a population selected by class, age group, or some other variable. Determining what demographic elements are missing — even whether any are missing — is a daunting task. It is difficult to determine into what context the grave as symbolic system falls; researchers have read the symbolism of early Greek grave construction and content in terms of either socio-political construction *or* eschatological expression, and yet these spheres are not mutually exclusive. The form of burial may be affected by whether the deceased was perceived to have had a “good death” or a “bad death.”⁵ Despite these challenges, it is possible within justified theoretical boundaries to explore the relationship of ancient burial customs to issues of wealth, property, and ownership.

Recent studies in mortuary archaeology proceed from the theory that grave gifts have a direct bearing on the social construction of the deceased, as opposed to a subjective “self.” This is not to say that burials directly reflect pre-existing social structure; rather, they offered an important opportunity to renegotiate the communal standing, political alliances, and social identities of the deceased and his/her kin. To the extent that graves are an index of social status, “it is the social status of the funeral organizers as much as the social status of the deceased that is involved.”⁶

Our concern here with what burials and goods left with the dead reveal about women and property highlights issues of gendered interpretation. The difficulty of osteological analysis is well known, and the problem of trying to “sex” a grave through goods has a vast literature of its own. Gender interpretation may rely too heavily on the assumption that items in a grave have to do with the deceased and not the kin arranging the burial. When researchers decide that a sword must mark a man’s burial or that a fibula is a female dress item, for example, then a wife who long ago placed her favorite fibula in her husband’s grave can send them scrambling to identify multiple genders in that society (not to deny that such distinctions are sometimes valid). Careful analyses uncover what we might already have suspected: that there is no easy correlation between male and female and the goods in the ground. Even among apparently gender-linked object types there is “blurring and cross-over” between gender lines that reflect the untidy complexities of life.⁷ Some have even concluded that the gender of the deceased is no longer an issue, and all symbolic graveside discourse is between the living players, and not really about

³. Morris 1992: 72-90; Hodder 1997.

⁴. Papadopoulos 1993.

⁵. Humphreys 1980.

⁶. Parker Pearson 1999: 84. Generally, Kurtz and Boardman 1971: 200-17.

⁷. Lyons 2000: 95-96.

gender at all.⁸ It is surely disingenuous to propose that gender is irrelevant to any ideological, political, or social discourse. Without doubt, the funeral offers an excellent opportunity to reiterate ideological stances about gender definitions according to notions of a corporate ideal.

Athenian sumptuary laws and social custom tended to minimize the goods placed with the dead for most of the Archaic and Classical periods. The trend was to memorialize the deceased with markers, stelai, and enclosures. A better opportunity to find evidence of female property ownership is the Early Iron Age, ca. 1000-700 BC, when funerary display was at an unbridled height and other ritual avenues for display were only beginning to develop. I want to focus on two particular questions. First, how might representations of women's wealth or property — broadly defined as ownership of valuable goods or status display as evidence of some degree of economic autonomy — be manifest in the ground? Such evidence might be present, for example, in objects of restricted distribution, intrinsic value, and symbolic authority. Second, how can the material be interpreted in such a way as to avoid simplistic and vague correlations between the deceased and the goods? I start with the present state of studies of wealthy female burials in the Early Iron Age (EIA) and then apply theoretical approaches to the contents and patterns of these burials to reach a new interpretation.

“Ladies of Substance:” Rich Female Burials in Early Iron Age Attica

The phenomenon of rich female graves unmatched by equally rich male graves in Early Iron Age Attica, especially during the ninth century, has been much remarked. The archaeological pattern among burials is striking and well documented, but remains poorly understood.⁹ Female graves have the edge over males in the conventional criteria for determining wealth and status by grave goods: distance from source, artifact diversity, and hierarchy of raw materials. Unattested in Mycenaean burials, this tendency appears in Submycenaean. From the eleventh through eighth centuries, not only are the richest female graves always more lavish in terms of intrinsic material value than the wealthiest male graves, but female graves on average include more distinct items than do male burials. This phenomenon particularly characterizes Athens and is not commonly found elsewhere in Greece; it must be understood in local terms. Yet, a similar prominence of female graves also occurs elsewhere in Europe, providing a source of theoretical support for interpretation.

Contemporary sources, such as they are, offer little help in understanding the archaeological residue of EIA funerary rites. In the rites for Patroclus, Homer (*Iliad* 23) provides a veritable blueprint for heroic warrior funerals, but only in eighth-century Cyprus (and to some extent tenth-century Lefkandi) do archaeological remains support funerary activity on a similar scale.¹⁰ In Athens practices varied among and even within cemeteries. For the most part men and women tended to receive similar rites and tomb forms, although the move from cremation to inhumation during Middle Geometric (MG) seems to have begun in rich female graves slightly earlier than for men. If the general treatment of male and female bodies did not differ substantially, the material accompaniments show much interest in gender. Protogeometric (PG) and Geometric ash urns (neck-handled amphoras for men, belly-handled and shoulder-handled

⁸. Barrett 1987.

⁹. The phrase “ladies of substance” is from Coldstream 1977: 78.

¹⁰. *AA* 1963; Coldstream 1977: 349-51.

for women) and grave-markers (kraters for men, belly-handled amphoras for women) were selected on a gender basis.¹¹ It is in the contents of the tombs that gender differentiation occurs most clearly.

The discovery and 1968 publication by Smithson of the Tomb of the Rich Athenian Lady (RAL) from the North Slope of the Areopagus threw into relief by spectacular example the growing evidence for a number of wealthy ninth-century burials. These contained exceptionally fine pottery, iron weapons, gold, bronze, and iron jewelry, and imported luxury goods and materials such as ivory and faience. Most importantly, Smithson noticed that certain female burials stood out among these rich graves.¹² In recent years documentation of gendered wealth and status hierarchies in Athenian graves has been presented in two analytic studies. James Whitley's 1991 *Style and Society in Dark Age Greece* examined the intersection of gender, class, and wealth with artifacts and style in Athenian graves. This broad-ranging survey produced striking results in revealing the continuum of rich female burials and demonstrating the artifactual and stylistic ties that linked the graves within prominent "burying groups," which he saw as probable kin-groups. Binary male-female gender identification in his study was based on a combination of osteological identifications and "probable" artifactual linkages. Agneta Strömberg's 1993 study, *Male or Female? A Methodological Study of Grave Gifts as Sex-indicators in Iron Age Burials from Athens*, specifically explored links between sex and grave-goods based on a core group of osteologically sexed burials. She covered Athenian burials from Submycenaean (SM) to Late Geometric (LG), but without distinguishing phases within Geometric or attempting any social analysis. Unsurprisingly, she found few absolute sex-based material associations. This conclusion resulted in part from her reliance on a fixed binary system, without consulting age-group distinctions or fully theorizing how gender is constructed by material goods, which have no simple direct relation to osteological sex. Any cases of token offerings placed in, for example, a male grave by female mourners would, through Strömberg's use of her "exclusion principle," have led to the elimination of an item that might be strongly gender-associated.¹³

Despite their methodological limitations, these studies have brought into sharper focus earlier impressions concerning rich burials. Gender was an important factor in elite identity from Submycenaean on, with a few adult women marked more richly than men and at least one rich adult female grave present in each burying group. This pattern has implications for kinship, property, and a significant social role for women of the "married" age group. Strömberg interpreted the general lack of such work-related items as spindle-whorls in these female graves as an impersonal marking of women which presents an ambiguous (to her) sense of female agency: these women most plausibly carried the status of their families — a conclusion she

¹¹. Desborough 1974: 138; Boardman 1988.

¹². Smithson 1968. Inventoried in this spectacular burial were the following: 1 chest with five model granaries; 1 model granary; a pair of gold earrings; 6 gold rings; 2 bronze fibulae; 1 necklace of Syrian faience, glass, and rock crystal; 3 bronze and 1 iron pin; 2 ivory seals; 2 spindle whorls; 4 beads and 2 hollow balls of clay; and 53 vessels. Reexamination of the RAL's remains reveals a 30-36-week fetus in her cremation, which obviously complicates the understanding of this burial (Liston and Papadopoulos 2002). In particular it raises the question of whether the large quantity and specific types of items were present because of the nature of the double burial. This requires study from a different approach; the present examination focuses on the significant parallels with other adult female burials.

¹³. Examples of mourners present in their offerings: a single scale of armor found in the "artificially female" grave Lefkandi, Skoubris T.59 (Popham and Sackett 1979: pl. 110, 59.37), and a pair of gold earrings placed in a niche in the trench of warrior cremation Toumba T.79 (Popham and Lemos 1995).

reiterated in 1998. Whitley returned to the theme of rich graves in 1996, addressing in particular the binary symbolic system defined by patterns of cremation/inhumation, weapons/non-weapons, and 2-D (painted)/3-D (modeled) artistic representations in Athenian graves. He postulates a binary gender system based on an adult male/child (rather than adult male/adult female) dichotomy, where women float between or share in both realms.

There are several issues to address here. Strömberg posed her questions in terms of “either gender or social status” being reflected in grave goods, when in fact the two are not necessarily separable. It is more plausible that the hierarchies of social status ultimately were derived from or modeled on those of gender. As Lynn Meskell observed for New Kingdom Egyptian cemeteries, the age and sex of an individual become more important as a source of difference and inequality as the social status rises.¹⁴ Further, Strömberg’s implication that men’s weapons were more personal and less symbolic than granary models is unsupported; in fact it seems quite the contrary. The burial of weapons has at least as much to do with a male symbolic system and social status as with actual life experience.¹⁵ Neither of these important studies explains why certain women and not men were selected for lavish burial, nor how we might get closer to understanding their changing roles in a rising aristocracy.

The standard approach to understanding these rich female graves is to assume they served as indirect expressions of family (i.e., male) status rather than as evidence of powerful women with autonomy and property. Gendered approaches to burials in other cultures however, especially in Scandinavia, offer new ways of addressing equivocal signs of female wealth.¹⁶ In the interests of time and space, I do not describe those studies here but excerpt a few theoretical points. Marie-Louise Sørensen has argued that the use of goods in funerary rites might reflect more than one ranking system at work in a culture.¹⁷ For example, if social ranking were based upon a unitary system defined by a warrior code as is commonly accepted for EIA Greece, the grave-goods pattern would tend to show many male-linked items and few or none that are female-linked, so that many graves appear “neutral.” This is perhaps the case at Argos, where there are few female-linked goods and graves but male warrior burials can be quite richly provisioned as late as the end of the eighth century. In Athens, the situation is very much otherwise: more goods are associated exclusively with women than with men. Most of the female-linked items occur in the richest graves; poorer or “regular” graves look gender-neutral, and gender marking can thus be seen as an elite prerogative.

In Athens evidence for a warrior ethos has led to assumptions that rich female graves reflected men’s status and that women served as status-carriers for the family or kin-group. Such a view leaves no way to discern a more positive, active role for women. This assumes a unitary system based on an adult male/non-male or adult male/child distinction in which men are defined by positive attributes, women and children by lack or opposition.¹⁸ It seems illogical to position women who are so passively defined not only as status-carriers for the group but as the occasion of the destruction of real wealth. At Argos, where such a unitary system may be evident, women do not provide occasion for funerary display of wealth. In this paper I assume there is no great

¹⁴. Meskell 1999: 211.

¹⁵. Whitley 1996; Barrett 1989; van Wees 1998.

¹⁶. Shennan 1975; Randsborg 1986; Gibbs 1987; Sørensen 1987; Ehrenberg 1989; Levy 1999.

¹⁷. Sørensen 1987.

¹⁸. For more on unitary systems, Weglian 2001.

discrepancy between the apparent status of a woman in her funerary treatment and in her life.

Refining Sørensen's multiple-hierarchies suggestion, I suggest that there are multiple sources of power and status that might have been played out along gender lines.¹⁹ The rich female graves, despite their continuity through the period, are not a monolithic phenomenon. A wealthy female burial of the eighth century should not be interpreted in the same way as the ninth-century Rich Athenian Lady — or for that matter, the woman buried in the tenth-century heroön at Lefkandi. All graves, both male and female, present essential differences between the ninth and eighth centuries that seem to reflect social change. By exploring the interface of identity and wealth in women's graves, we might come closer to seeing social change from the inside. Customs of property distribution and inheritance are attached to marriage patterns; these tend to show up with women, as the parties who change household, connect lineages, and produce heirs, rather than men. I organize my examination of the Athenian evidence around the *specific contents* of the rich female tombs and begin with basic chronological distinctions. What most characterizes the rich Attic female graves is a set of symbolic items (horse pyxides, granary models, seals, imports, handmade pottery, and figurines) which are associated exclusively or largely with females and certain children. This pattern suggests that the different rules operating in female ranking had little or nothing to do with a heroic male ethos. Male graves, by contrast, have very few items that can be linked to gender and these are narrowly restricted to weaponry and (rarely) tools.

Another point to consider is that the burial context often serves as a site of negotiation by only a certain segment of the burying population. Ian Morris demonstrated this through class divisions in Athens, by assuming that visible burial was an elite prerogative, so that what appear as richer and poorer graves reflect strata within an upper class until the later eighth century.²⁰ This theory provides a useful way to consider the gender imbalance among the graves. When women have more wealth in the ground than men and this is constituted or accompanied by a set of female-linked objects, it seems likely that there is competition or discrimination among women's graves that is separate both from that among men and within the community as a whole. Men played out their competitions in non-funerary spheres of activity while the funeral offered an occasion especially useful or relevant to women.

I begin with a brief survey of gender-linked Attic grave goods by period, adapting Strömberg's catalog and the analyses of Whitley, Morris, and Ruppenstein. This is intended not to be a comprehensive comparison of male and female grave goods, but a survey of differences and developments within female burials.

Survey of burial goods and deposition, Submycenaean to Late Geometric

Attic graves in the Submycenaean period (ca. 1100-1050), generally inhumations, are sparsely furnished with a few pots and the occasional piece of jewelry. Even so, differential treatment of burial by gender can be discerned. First, a small number of goods are associated with women, including spiral hair ornaments and handmade household pottery.²¹ No categories have been shown to be exclusively male. In wealthy graves of both sexes several types of metal

¹⁹. Similar approach in Levy 1999: 216-17.

²⁰. Morris 1987, 1992, 1999.

²¹. Ruppenstein 1999; Strömberg 1993: 41-3.

goods are found, including gold and iron jewelry, and bronze in quantity.²² Second, female graves tend to contain more goods than male. Strömberg calculated the average number of items per person for the period to be 2.0 per male grave and 5.3 per female, a trend (if not the absolute numbers) confirmed by Ruppenstein's study of additional Kerameikos graves. Similarly, Whitley's highest wealth scores in the admittedly few sexed cases went to female burials.²³

In the Protogeometric period (ca. 1050-900) significant changes in funerary practice articulate more clearly the gender of the deceased. Cremation replaces inhumation burial, with ashes generally placed in a gender-linked ash urn, neck-handled for males, belly-handled for females.²⁴ Distinct male and female assemblages emerge among burial goods. Men might now be buried with weapons, such as arrowheads, dagger, knife, shield buckle, spearhead, and sword. At the same time an even bigger array of items appears exclusively with females: clay tripod cauldrons, spindle-whorls, figurines, terracotta chests, objects of Attic Dark Age (ADA) incised ware, jewelry of gold, iron, and bronze; and numerous vessel types, many of which were new at this time (e.g., the kalathos).²⁵ Items found in both male and female burials include fibulae and several kinds of pots. Strömberg's average object rates were 3.9 objects per male grave and 9.1 per female grave.²⁶

The appearance of symbolic material in both male and female graves suggests an increasingly sophisticated use of material culture to mark and define age, gender, and probably status and role. The richest graves are still female, with two outstanding cremations in the Kerameikos (PG39 and PG48) particularly notable for sheer volume of goods (over 50 objects each). All but a few pieces of jewelry came from the pyres, suggesting gifts placed by a sizeable crowd of mourners. As is argued below, the predominance in these two assemblages of female-associated ADA ware, spindle whorls, and household pottery implies that these deceased were leaders particularly among women. In these graves, and a few other PG cases, appears a set of symbolic goods that will recur with rich women for the next one hundred to one hundred and fifty years, and that may well have cultic connections.

The number of gender-exclusive symbolic objects continues to expand in the Early Geometric period (900-850). Granaries, clay boots, and ivory seals are new additions to the female symbolic repertoire. Terracotta chests disappear by the end of the period, possibly replaced by the new pyxides with horse figurines attached to the lid. By the end of the period imports and exotic materials, such as faience figurines and scarabs, Phoenician bronze bowls, amber beads, and gold and ivory occur in the richest graves, sometimes of men and children but particularly of adolescent and adult women. Leading examples of such burials are the EGII Rich Athenian Lady, and the transitional EGII/MGI Kerameikos graves G41 (female), G42 (male), and G43 (probably male).²⁷ Ian Morris sees the period from ca. 925 to 850 as characterized by

²² . For example, Kerameikos grave 27, Kraiker and Kübler 1939: 18-19; Strömberg 1993: 153, cat. 249b.

²³ . Whitley 1991: 95, nos. KS 108, KS 27, and KS 46.

²⁴ . This is not always the case, as a small number of discrepancies show, but the pattern becomes fixed by the end of the period and is more rigidly applied to males.

²⁵ . Strömberg 1993: 44-46; Ruppenstein 1999.

²⁶ . Strömberg 1993: 54; I use her adjusted number, discounting the deposition of 80 beads in one grave that skews the average.

²⁷ . Kerameikos graves 41-43, Kübler 1954: 235-39. It should be noted that all these graves are disturbed and incomplete.

the appearance of “princely” tombs — a small elite corps buried with weapons, imported goods and rationed materials. There are numerous ties to the wealthy Lefkandi burials by means of Attic goods and similar grave assemblages.²⁸

The century or so of Middle Geometric (ca. 850-760) has been appraised as one of new mortuary developments: increased selectivity of burial rites (with fewer child and poor burials), the decline of the princely tomb, and a general leveling-off of ostentatious burial.²⁹ This last observation has been made without consideration of the rich-female burial pattern, where the continuity of assemblage runs counter to trends for men. Shifts within female grave goods are of three sorts. First, certain symbolic items drop out but are replaced by others of related function. Terracotta chests disappear but horse pyxides become relatively frequent and are sometimes given in quantity. ADA ware ceases early in MGI, but is replaced by the fine handmade “Argive Monochrome” ware. Second, a new type of rich female burial begins by MGII. Continuing the older type, a set of graves in Kavalotti Street still includes orientalia and fine gold ornaments, while in other burying groups the rich female graves show a marked decline in metal wealth and symbolism, but contain large quantities of pottery and gold-foil ornaments. The graves on Kynosarges Hill typify this new trend, which, as I argue below, may herald a new focus on young women.³⁰ The third and most striking change is that the richest MG female burials now appear out in the Attic countryside, particularly at Eleusis (graves Alpha and Isis) and Anavysos (graves 2 and 51), where they attest the spread of wealth (or wealthy Athenians) into the farming regions. These show once again the mind-boggling array of exotica, luxury goods, and specialty items last seen in the RAL grave: granaries, boots, clay balls, the last ADA ware, kalathoi, ivory and faience objects, and spectacular gold jewelry.

Several changes take place around 760. Monumental grave-markers with figural funerary iconography mark the elite male and female graves of certain, but by no means all, cemeteries in Athens. Those graves also contain fewer intrinsically valuable goods, and in fact fewer goods altogether (although since many have been disturbed or plundered, this should be stated with caution). This move to bury fewer goods implies a new emphasis on memorialization and a shift away from the deceased as an “activated” body that previously would have been covered in valuables. While all Late Geometric graves are a little less splendid than in earlier periods, there are still *female* exceptions. An outstanding example is Dipylon Gr. 13, which contained many pieces of fine pottery, faience figurines, and most important, the unparalleled set of six locally produced ivory statuettes modeled after Syrian prototypes.³¹ Gold continues to be found in LG graves but only in flimsy bands and gold leaf work, and hardly represents the funerary investment that Middle Geometric jewelry did.

Another current burial pattern involves a profusion of pottery as grave gifts but with no traceable surface marker. The emphasis is not on memorialization but on the event of the funeral.³² Since the latter type of burial can also contain valuables, these must be seen as two (or more) competing strategies for elite “burial discourse.” An upsurge in child burials, and indeed in sheer numbers of burials, produces a more complete demographic picture in Athens.

²⁸. Morris 1999.

²⁹. Morris 1987, 1998, 1999; Whitley 1991. Morris does not discuss rich female graves.

³⁰. Kavalotti Street, *AD* 20 (1965) 75-80, pls. 43-46; Kynosarges Hill, Strömberg 1993: 180, nos. 448-453.

³¹. Brückner and Pernice 1893: 127-31.

³². Whitley 1991: 161.

Accompanied by other material signs of a breakdown of aristocratic exclusivity, this pattern suggests *isonomia* at work, challenging the old elite systems in a movement that will ultimately produce the Athenian polis. Rich female graves continue throughout Late Geometric. Horse pyxides are the special indicators of the period and are assumed to signify land-wealth and status. These vessels frequently accompany gold bands and gold leaf jewelry in a female grave. The sets of symbolic objects so important in rich Middle Geometric burials begin to break up, although many types linger. I note also a significant pattern that has gone largely unremarked: while adult women had the richest graves in previous periods, these now go to adolescent girls and very young women.

The contents of female graves

From this brief survey there emerges an association of men with weapons and women with jewelry and non-functional models which characterizes the gendered nature of grave goods in Attica as it does in many ancient societies. It is useful to invoke Janet Levy's cautionary observation: "there is a serious risk of reading present gender understandings (i.e., weapons>> male>> violence>> authority; ornaments>> female>> display>> passivity) back into the past."³³ Indeed, examining the specific contents of the rich female graves supports the possibility that women wielded a significant control over both sumptuary and symbolic items. I focus on the categories of items that constitute a recurrent cognitive set in rich female graves: seals, granaries, horse representations, ADA ware, jewelry, kalathoi, models of boots and pomegranates. Motif, material, and assemblages overlap in complex ways. While this discussion is only schematic, it shows how a new picture of gender, public stature, and wealth might emerge from a close scrutiny of the conceptual nature of EIA grave goods.³⁴ There is good evidence for cultic links among these objects as well.

Seals. The production of seals is one of many activities that ceased with the collapse of the Mycenaean socio-economic system. When seals, whether imports or local creations, reappear in Greece in the following centuries, most of their bureaucratic or administrative dimension has undoubtedly been lost. Nevertheless, seals may have been revived as more than just amulets. Systems for personal identification, from the marked tokens cast by Homer's heroes (*Iliad* 7, 189), to shield blazons and potter's stamps, are well attested by the ninth and eighth centuries.³⁵ As a traditional token of identity and authority, a seal placed in a grave might be considered a significant indicator of status, office, or property. It is therefore striking that the first post-Bronze Age seals made in Greece are found in female graves and that they are made of ivory, a sumptuary material. The earliest known examples are two pyramidal seals of the Rich Athenian Lady, followed by others in the contemporary female grave Kerameikos G41 and the slightly later Kavalotti Street Gr. 1 (MGII), most or all manufactured by the same local workshop.³⁶ Early seals may also have been made of wood,³⁷ whose loss accounts for the lack in men's

³³. Levy 1999: 216; see also Sørensen 2000: 91-92.

³⁴. I discuss each category in more detail in my forthcoming study of art and gender in Early Iron Age Greece.

³⁵. Spier 1990; Papadopoulos 1994: 485-87.

³⁶. RAL seals, Smithson 1968: 115-16 nos. 79, 80, pl. 33; Boardman 2001: 109 fig. 152. G 41 seal, Kübler 1954: pl. 161; Coldstream 1977: 58-59, fig. 14c. Kavalotti Street Gr. 1 seal, Boardman 2001: 109 fig. 153. LGI-II seal from VDAK1, von Freytag 1974; Boardman 2001: 385 fig. 318

³⁷. Boardman 2001: 108.

graves, yet ivory seals presumably carried greater prestige by virtue of their exotic material. Significantly, the figured ivory examples employ high-status motifs of horse-training and enthroned figures.³⁸ Imported Phoenician faience scarabs are more common than seals. They are strongly, though not exclusively, connected with women, who used them not just as jewelry and amulets but also to mark personal property, if the spindle whorl from the Agora well that carries a scarab-seal impression can be interpreted as marked for the women who used it.³⁹ There is every reason to assume that high-status Attic women used their seals just as the men did: authorizing commands, casting lots, marking production or possession, guaranteeing their word and authority.⁴⁰

Granaries. These terracotta models generally conform to a standard round form with a pointed roof and an opening set well above floor level.⁴¹ They may be single or paired, and one triple version is known, in addition to the Rich Athenian Lady's unique set of five. Geometric granary models begin with the pieces in the RAL grave of ca. 850 and continue to the mid seventh century. The 27 known examples are all of Attic fabric; known findspots are limited to the Attic sites of Athens, Eleusis, Phaleron, Kallithea, and Ano Mazarakis. Those with context come either from graves containing an adult female (or a single child) or from an Agora well.⁴² Smithson's interpretation of the RAL granaries as class indicator was ingenious and apparently irresistible, judging by how widely it is cited. Yet it seems unlikely that she would have proposed it had the chest contained fewer than five granaries, or if their workmanship were the unexceptional sort of all other known granaries. The suggestion presents a problem even within the RAL grave, which also had a large singleton model: if family status was effectively symbolized by five granaries, why include one more? Anachronism is another problem. The Athenian class system is unlikely to have originated in this precise form as early as the ninth century. It is probable that Solon added this top class himself to earlier divisions that might have had a different, perhaps military, basis.⁴³ Even if the *pentakosiomedimnoi* were a distinct class at this time, it seems doubtful that a woman would bear that badge. As Dyfri Williams observes, "although women might have been able to own property, there is no indication that they were eligible to take on the political duties for which that status was intended to qualify someone." If a specific class indicator is unconvincing, they still could function as symbols of agricultural prosperity through a religious or cultic aspect. The terracotta chest under the RAL's granaries provides a further clue. Protruding at either end of the box is an animal's head that narrows to a point with eyes set on top, the way Geometric artists render snakes. As stock images of Attic funerary art, chthonic underground dwellers, and protectors of grain from pests, snakes would seem a natural embellishment to guard the gift of Demeter. It seems more than coincidence that

³⁸. It may be significant that the extremely rich female tomb in the Skoubris cemetery, Lefkandi, contained a fibula engraved with a scene of a man taming a horse in a scheme much like that of the Kavalotti Street seal; Popham and Sackett 1979: 243, pl. 240, e-g.

³⁹. I know of no seals from Attic child graves, in contrast to the Lyre-Player group that served as protective amulets in child burials at Pithekoussai; Boardman and Buchner 1966.

⁴⁰. Scarab buried with man, Brann 1960: 406; with women, Skias 1898: pl. 6; von Freytag 1974; Davidson 1952: 223 no. 1763, pl. 100. Spindle whorl from Agora well: Brann 1960: 406 fig. 2, pls. 89, 90.

⁴¹. Catalogs and discussions of granary models: Smithson 1968; Cherici 1989; Williams 2000. Cherici and Williams consider them as beehives.

⁴². For the triple model found at a shrine of Artemis at Ano Mazarakis, Mazarakis Ainian 1997: 120, fig. 498.

⁴³. Williams 2000.

these model granaries first appear in rich graves and follow the expansion of population and land-wealth into the Attic countryside.

Horse representations. Horses are perhaps the quintessential prestige symbol of the Early Iron Age, appearing in all artistic media (sculpture, painting, and metalwork) from at least the tenth century. Horse representations, trappings, and elite “horse culture” in general tend to be connected with social status expressed through the (androcentric) warrior ethos. The connection of horses with aristocratic identity is important but is by no means their only cultural meaning in the EIA. Horses carried the most complex array of social and religious elements of all animals in early Greek society. Nor is the assumption of a strong bias in horse symbolism towards male identity warranted. The topic is too complex to address fully here; I highlight a few observations regarding the use of horse representations in Attic Geometric graves.

1. Specific types of horse representations are associated with women and not men, and the Attic horse pyxis (a round ceramic box with terracotta horses on the lid) is the premier example. Once assumed to have marked the “knightly status” of a deceased man, they have been found to be a female grave gift.⁴⁴ In the few cases where a man received a horse pyxis, the horses had been snapped off the lid and omitted from the grave, as if to render it useable for him. It seems likely that the horse pyxides, like the fine terracotta chests of PG and EG female graves (the type with the five granaries of the RAL grave) refer in some way to property; after all, chests are used in Classical art to signify the dowry.⁴⁵ It may be significant that the intricately decorated chests disappear just as the horse pyxides begin.⁴⁶

2. Models of horses, whether on pyxis lids or freestanding, seem to be found in Attic graves with women and children but not adult men, while two-dimensional horse representations in painted pottery, ivory and metalwork occur with women, children, and men.⁴⁷ Examples include horse pyxides with painted horses on the box and two LGI children inhumed in neck-handled amphoras with horse imagery.⁴⁸ The latter might indicate reuse of the vessels, but they do not support the theory that painted horses were “rationed” only to adult men.

3. Horse-taming scenes turn up first with women. Images of one or two men taming or exercising a horse occur on an ivory seal Kavalotti St. Gr. 1, a bronze woman’s fibula of Attic manufacture from Skoubris T.59 at Lefkandi, and a nearly identical fibula in the wealthy female burial Kerameikos G41.⁴⁹ These EGII horse-taming scenes, it should be noted, are among the earliest of all human representations in Athenian art. Closely related to these examples is the horse-tamer who stands between two horses on a LGI miniature amphora from Kerameikos child grave 50, which because of its many models (including pomegranate, basket, and horse pyxis) is thought to

⁴⁴. Kübler 1954 on “knights”, also Ober and Hedrick 1993: 44; Bohlen 1988: 7-8 noting female pattern, tentatively; confirmed by Strömberg 1993; Whitley 1996.

⁴⁵. Smithson 1968: 96; Lissarague 1995.

⁴⁶. The earliest horse pyxides are from the EGI “Boots grave” in the Agora, Young 1949, and Kriezi St. grave XCI, *Archaiologikon Deltion* 22 (1967) B, 95.

⁴⁷. Contra Whitley 1996, who suggests 2-D horses were considered appropriate only for men.

⁴⁸. Horse pyxides, Bohlen 1988: 129H, pl. 38, 5. Child inhumations, Kerameikos graves G85 and G97, Kübler 1954: 264-65, 270-71.

⁴⁹. Kerameikos G41, Kübler 1954: 235-36, fibulae pls. 159-61; Coldstream 1977: 59 fig. 14, 131 fig. 42a. Skoubris grave 59 fibula, Popham and Sackett 1979: 243, pls. 108-110; Coldstream 1977 65 fig. 19a-b.

be that of a girl.⁵⁰ The focus on training in these scenes suggests a meaning associated with horse ownership.

4. The reappearance of the horse in Attic art has been seen as a revival inspired by Mycenaean finds and a belief in the animal's chthonic character, a connection that has no gender linkage.⁵¹ Other religious aspects of horse symbolism, however, are associated particularly with women and female deities. A probably female Late to Subgeometric grave in Kallithea contained, along with numerous vases, both a model granary and a female terracotta figurine seated on a large throne with a horse painted on its back. This connection of thrones and horses is reminiscent of a LG terracotta "Demeter" seated on a throne in the shape of a double horse protome found at Eleusis.⁵² At least one granary model has a horse painted on it.

Representations of this multivalent icon, it can be concluded, appear early and varied in connection with women, carrying both aristocratic or property and cultic associations, and are therefore no less complex than when they appear with men.

Kalathoi. Kalathoi, terracotta models of openwork baskets, are rarely found in settlements but are not uncommon in graves and sanctuaries. They are best characterized as ritual vessels made to hold offerings. In Attica and in Lefkandi they are associated with female burials.⁵³ They are thought to refer to wool baskets and/or offering containers, concepts that seem to merge in the popularity of this vessel in female graves and in early sanctuaries of Demeter and Persephone, and of Hera.⁵⁴ Because social and personal identity are thought to be significant factors in both votive offering and funeral rite, it is difficult to know whether kalathoi are related to the person of the votary, deceased, or goddess, or to the occasion, holding offerings for a religious or funerary rite. For present purposes it is sufficient to note that kalathoi have a strong dual connection with women and with goddesses.

Attic Dark Age Incised (ADA) Ware. This fine handmade ware with incised decoration is known in ritual pottery found only in ninth- to mid eighth-century graves of women and possibly children.⁵⁵ Forms in which ADA ware is known include simple bowls, pyxides, pomegranates, balls, beads, spindle whorls, loomweights, jointed dolls, a tripod, a pendant, a turtle, and a double granary.⁵⁶ Their modest appearance belies the fact that ADA ware objects are found in the richest female tombs and often occur in large numbers. The pyre that accompanied Kerameikos cremation PG48, for example, included 80 beads, 9 bowls, and two female figurines of ADA ware. Since the types of ADA objects bear close relation to the activities and concerns

⁵⁰. Miniature amphora, Kübler 1954: pl. 141.

⁵¹. E.g., Benson 1970.

⁵². Kallithea group, Callipolitis-Feytmans 1963; Eleusis terracotta, Scheffer 1994: 121 fig. 6h; Binder 1998. See Scheffer 1994 for religious aspects of the horse in early Greece.

⁵³. For Attica: Smithson 1968: 98-103; Strömberg 1993: 56, 66-67, 73, 86. Lefkandi: Popham and Sackett 1979: 304-307, esp. graves P 3 (8 kalathoi), P 22 (2 local kalathoi, 2 Attic kalathoi), P 39B (12 kalathoi), S 59 (14 kalathoi). Asine: Wells 2002: 120-21, 128.

⁵⁴. Pemberton 1989: 19-25; Lissarague 1995: 95-96.

⁵⁵. Smithson 1961: 170-72; Bouzek 1974; Reber 1991: 118-39. Bouzek had stressed a Balkan origin for the ware that spread into Greece along with cremation rites. Reber argues convincingly for an Attic origin and cites at least six inhumation burials that contained ADA objects.

⁵⁶. Langdon 1993: 72-73.

of women and children, it is more than likely that these items were produced by women specifically for funerary use. Ethnographic studies find that handmade wares are usually produced by women, especially at a time of increasing male professionalism in decorated wheel-thrown fine wares, as was happening in this period.⁵⁷ The low-tech nature of ADA ware, far from being a deficiency, makes it appropriate for producing items quickly — as for a sudden funerary need. With its specialized shapes, intimate size, and humble hearthside appearance, ADA ware may have constituted a medium of female discourse for the funerary context — not the possessions of the deceased but gifts brought by (female) mourners. Models and dolls made of ADA ware are particularly interesting as a combination of ritual ware and symbolic form, and are discussed individually below. This production ceases abruptly around 750, when it is replaced by another fine handmade ware, conventionally termed “Argive Monochrome,” although most pieces found in Attica seem to have been made in workshops at Athens and Eleusis. This new ware is used to make small containers and model pomegranates that are now found not only in women’s graves but also in sanctuaries of Demeter and Hera. Nota Kourou has argued that the small containers held sedatives or drugs, most likely opium, which had been widely used since the Bronze Age. With juice that could relieve suffering and abundant seeds that suggested resurrection and fertility, poppy products and representations had close symbolic and ritual connections to the goddesses of vegetation and fertility.⁵⁸

Dolls and Boots. The ADA dolls have conical dresses with legs suspended beneath; breasts are indicated by reed impressions, and an apron of vertical lines hangs down the front of the skirt. With one exception all known examples have been found in pairs. One pair was found with the inhumed body of a (adolescent?) girl.⁵⁹ Reber suggests that these dolls, similar in form to Classical terracotta jointed dolls, represented playthings that the girl would traditionally have dedicated to Artemis on the eve of her wedding. These sometimes coincide in graves with pairs of model boots that represent the *nymphides*, or “bride’s boot.”⁶⁰ Similar model shoes have been found in the famous Agora “Boot grave” (2 pairs), another grave in Athens, and two graves at Eleusis.⁶¹ Also possibly related to nuptial iconography is the model chest, a finely decorated rectangular lidded box that occurs in graves with the dolls.⁶² The dolls, like the boots, were not themselves toys but may symbolically have enabled the young deceased to complete her preparations for marriage, much as in later customs of placing bridal finery and wedding vases in graves.

Orientalia and Sumptuary Items. A female-linked symbolic system is one thing; control of sumptuary items is another matter, and leads to the crux of the problem with rich female graves. Most imported objects and luxury materials — ivory, faience, Baltic amber, gold, silver, glass, and electrum — placed in Attic graves are in those of women. Putting valuables, even

⁵⁷. Vincentelli 2000: 48-54.

⁵⁸. Kourou 1988: on workshops, 318; drugs, 320-24.

⁵⁹. Dolls were found in the following graves: Kerameikos PG33; PG48; Nea Ionia Pyre B, Smithson 1961. Ayios Dimitrios 20, *Archaiologikon Deltion* 19 (1964) 54. Lefkandi P 22, Popham and Sackett 1979: pl. 137, 30.

⁶⁰. “Nymphides,” *Hesychie Alexandrini Lexicon* II, K. Latte, ed., 1966; Kourou 1999; Morgan 1999: 336-38.

⁶¹. Agiou Dimitriou Gr. 20, *Archaiologikon Deltion* 19 (1964) 54; “Boots grave,” Young 1949; Mitsaion St. grave, *AD* 21 (1966) B1, 85; Eleusis, Skias 1898: pl. 4, 4 and 1912: 35-36, fig. 17.

⁶². Smithson 1961: 165-66 no. 42 (chest), 172 no. 54 (dolls), pls. 28, 30. Bouzek 1974: 52. Popham and Sackett 1979: pl. 137, 4 and 30.

personal jewelry, into a grave represents a decision effectively to destroy rather than keep them in circulation for inheritance and gift exchange. So whose possessions were these, and whose the decision — or right — to bury them? Luxury goods as gifts and status markers in graves involve a more complex use of material culture than tools, weaving equipment, and similar “occupational” references, because imported goods and materials imply an exchange and control of resources and the products of others. By embodying specialized knowledge, a network of connections, and widened personal horizons, such objects promote the stature and charisma of owner and recipient. Viewed against the rarity of ivory in Geometric Greece, the ivory seals described above are clearly prestigious, and the ivory statuettes from Dipylon Grave 13 prove an even more spectacular find.⁶³

Ordinarily, the preponderance of orientalia and luxury items in female over male graves proves only that women could be associated with sumptuary goods after death.⁶⁴ Once again, attention to the specific items offers further insight. It was argued above that local production combined with their restricted funerary distribution supported interpreting ivory seals as possessions of the deceased. Contemporary gold jewelry might be similarly connected by ownership. These showpieces share common traits — lunate forms, granulation, pomegranates, chains, amber beads and inlays, snake-head finials — that identify them as products of a single source, presumably a workshop in Athens. Although it has long been theorized that technique and certain formal elements indicate the hand of a resident foreign craftsman, probably Phoenician, this is increasingly disputed.⁶⁵ Much remains to be understood about this material, but it is striking that the same style, motifs, and origin connect the jewelry of these prominent women who are also closely associated by their symbolic assemblage. It would be useful to consider this material in terms not of production but of commission, which might explain recurring features as those favored by leading women in the various communities.

Interpretation of the Graves

This survey reveals differences among rich female graves of different periods, with the most significant changes occurring after ca. 750. In a period that enjoyed few luxury materials, wealthy Submycenaean burials use jewelry, primarily hair spirals, pins, and fibulae, to distinguish a small number of women, both adult and juvenile. Women also receive the rare ivory and glass objects. Then, from a slow beginning in Protogeometric and rising to a crescendo in Middle Geometric (typified by the RAL and Eleusis Isis graves), a female symbolic system emerges: granaries, horse representations, chests, model boots, model pomegranates, kalathoi, gold jewelry especially with lunate and pomegranate elements, and ADA ware. At the same time, imports and luxury materials — ivory, faience, electrum, amber, and gold — occur far

⁶³. For the rarity of ivory in early Greece and its magical associations in epic, Carter 1985: chap. 1. Dipylon ivories, Brückner and Pernice 1893: 127-31; Kunze 1930. The statuettes were accompanied by three faience lions, bone appliqués, and six vessels. A large pitcher most likely indicates a female grave.

⁶⁴. Whether this material represents the dominant portion of such goods in the community is difficult to determine. Men may have used luxury items in other contexts for peer gift exchange and sanctuary dedications. Phoenician bowls have been found in sanctuaries as well as graves, but in general votive dedication of sumptuary items becomes significant only in the later 8th century. The circulation of such materials in gift exchange is plausible, but the archaeological evidence is problematic.

⁶⁵. Coldstream 1977: 56; Higgins 1980: 97-99. See now Hoffman 1997: ch. 4; Ogden 1998. Stylistic links to the Tekke jewelry complicate the picture, but must be considered elsewhere.

more often in female than in male graves. These attest women's increasing association with and possibly control of a sizeable share of sumptuary and symbolic items. By Late Geometric the rich female burials are marked less by tangible wealth than by sheer quantities of pottery. Although the traditional symbolic set is breaking up, at least in the funerary context, many individual elements linger: granaries, pomegranates, and kalathoi, for example, continue to the end of the period. After 750 the most outstanding female graves are those of very young women.

The persistence of this symbolic set of female-associated goods in the face of dramatic social changes makes most sense when they are associated not simply with status and wealth but with religious cult, specifically that of Demeter and Kore. Theorizing that the occupants of the RAL, Eleusis Isis grave, or Anavysos graves 2 and 51 were priestesses of Demeter, for example, makes the grave goods suddenly look like coherent packages.⁶⁶ The familiar symbolism of Demeter and Kore forms the heart of these rich Athenian grave goods, as a brief review underscores. Two items in particular — granaries and horse pyxides — carry associations with land and agriculture, with crops and pasturage representing twin aspects of land wealth. While the application of a Solonian model would be anachronistic, it makes sense not to reject all property connections but to think in terms of multivalent symbols locking wealth and status into a more cosmic scheme. Granaries bear a meaningful connection to Demeter, whose sphere is the Attic land itself and the crops it bears: the Attic dead were called *demetrioι*. Similarly, the early Greek connection between horses and death proceeded from the animal's chthonic nature, binding it with the earth and ultimately with Demeter in several areas of the Greek world.

As ritual vessels kalathoi are not common grave goods outside of Athens and Lefkandi, but are particularly connected with Demeter and Kore at Eleusis and at Corinth. The pomegranate, modeled in both painted fineware and ADA ware in women's and children's graves, is a well-known emblem of fertility, appropriate but not exclusive to funerary usage.⁶⁷ It dangles from the earrings of the RAL and the necklace of Spata grave 4, lies in the hand of the enthroned figurine in the Agora pyre, and graces the necklaces of the LG Boeotian "bell-idols" that are descended from the ADA dolls.⁶⁸ Pomegranate models occur in Argive Monochrome ware, along with other small-scale containers thought to have circulated with opium and similar drugs within the cults of vegetation and funerary goddesses. The multiple connections of this fruit with fertility, blood, and sustenance make it an appropriate symbol for Demeter. For these same reasons it also plays a specific narrative role in effecting Persephone's marriage. The seated goddess of the Kallithea grave with a horse painted on her throne (and an accompanying granary) is linked to the seated goddess in Pyre 12 in the Agora, who holds a pomegranate; it is attractive to follow Rodney Young in seeing her as Kore.⁶⁹ Both images recall the LG terracotta goddess seated on horse protomes from Eleusis. ADA ware is a ritual class found only in graves and characterized by simplicity and small scale; it was used to make not only granaries, pomegranates, and dolls, but also little clay balls and beads thrown in large numbers onto pyres or strung onto chunky necklaces for the deceased to wear during cremation. The humbleness of these objects suggests that the material itself — hand-molded earth — constitutes the symbolic

⁶⁶. This idea was first suggested by the excavator of the Eleusis graves, Skias (1898), and continued by Poulsen (1905); it is rarely mentioned in 20th-century scholarship, but see Coldstream 1977: 79.

⁶⁷. Muthmann 1982; Kourou 1987; Suter 2002. Nixon (1995) has an intriguing new take on the significance of pomegranates in Demeter and Kore cults.

⁶⁸. Bouzek 1974: 43.

⁶⁹. Young 1939: 64-65.

heart of the offerings: Demeter embodied in her own earth?

Other aspects of this female-linked object group occurring especially in the graves of girls and young women to suggest a “maiden” type — unmarried or recently wed. Hair spirals, especially in gold but also silver, electrum and bronze, signal these graves, which sometimes contain model boots. These distinctive and unmistakable objects are generally held to represent the long journey by the deceased to the underworld, yet one can easily imagine a connection with Kore, queen of the Underworld and prototypical maiden; in fact graves with model boots tend to have two pairs, one smaller and one larger. This recalls the general pattern of symbolic items offered in pairs, like the ADA dolls, but might relate to the two goddesses who journeyed so far: Kore to Hades and her mother in search of her. They take the form of *nymphidai*, brides’ boots, and represent an early expression of the concept of marriage completed in the grave, paralleling Kore’s archetypal experience.

Some of these object types are more common than others in graves. Kalathoi and ADA ware, for example, occur more widely than does granulated, lunate gold jewelry. Perhaps the difference is between female cult participants in the former cases, and priestesses in the latter. Some formal derivation from North Syrian and Phoenician jewelry may lie behind the gold earrings, necklaces, and pendants, but more significant are their recurring motifs of pomegranate and snake, which might have been selected by the women themselves for their chthonic and mythic associations with Demeter. At least by Herodotus’ day Isis was understood to be the counterpart of Demeter. What prompted the excavator Andreas Skias to consider the occupant of the so-called “Isis” grave at Eleusis a priestess of Demeter was the small faience figurine of the Egyptian goddess placed with her.⁷⁰ If the inhabitants of Attica linked the goddesses this early, perhaps they saw the crescent symbolism of the moon goddess Isis as appropriate to Demeter as well.⁷¹

Caution is needed in connecting funerary goods with actual cult, but when such objects are exclusive to high-status women they cannot be explained simply as standard funeral fare. Identifying these rich Attic women as active participants and priestesses in the early cult of Demeter and Kore can be readily placed into a wider social and political context. While the evidence takes us straight into Eleusis (via the Isis and Alpha graves), this cult iconography is not derived from the Eleusinian Mysteries as such, but pertains to the older and more widespread Thesmophoria, the festival concerned with the sowing of grain, with its emphasis on agrarian prosperity, fertility, and the return of Kore. It was open only to married women. The early universality of the Thesmophoria, documented throughout the Greek world by at least Archaic times, suggests considerable antiquity. Even Eleusis in the ninth through eighth centuries would have known only the older cult, which had yet to be transformed into the Mysteries. The earliest historical evidence for the latter puts a male priest at its head, a change that accompanied the grafting of the Mysteries onto the earlier Thesmophoria cult and would always distinguish Eleusis from all other Demetrian cults, which were customarily officiated through women priests.⁷² The first archaeological indications of cult activity at Eleusis, a general refurbishing of

⁷⁰. Herodotus II, 59. Isis figurine, Skias 1898: pl. 6, 1. Note also the Egyptianizing faience goddess figurine found in Kavalotti St. Gr. B, *Archaiologikon Deltion* 20 (1965) B pl. 46.

⁷¹. Coldstream 1977: 79. For the jewelry, Higgins 1969; Higgins 1980: 96-101, 107-11, pls. 13-17; Ogden 1998. See Clinton 1992 for parallels between the Isis and Eleusis myths.

⁷². Dillon 2002: 105; Clinton (1992: 29-30) notes that only the priestess of Demeter and Kore possessed a title naming both gods, while personnel titles for the Mysteries referred to quite specific functions. I do not ignore the

the sanctuary area, date to the last quarter of the eighth century. The earliest votive offerings come from sacrificial Pyre A, with LG material including the terracotta figurines of a charioteer and a goddess seated between horse protomes;⁷³ they seem to exemplify the fusion of new civic interests with the older Thesmophoric iconography. The rich Alpha and Isis graves predate this material by as much as a century, at a time when the Thesmophoria, as a “household” cult, left no sanctuary traces.

Whatever form it took in the Early Iron Age, the Demeter and Kore myth underlies the celebration of the Thesmophoria, which presumes Demeter’s grieving for Persephone and the need to propitiate the goddess in order to restore agricultural fertility. In the myth’s best-known form, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* integrates the most crucial issues of mortal existence: marriage, sacrifice, agriculture, and death.⁷⁴ Important as it is to separate literature from (earlier) cult history, it is also hard to miss the fact that these issues are precisely what the rich female assemblage — granaries, horses, kalathoi, pomegranates, snakes, bride’s boots and dolls, seated goddess, and ritual (ADA) earth — embodies.

What all this has to do with wealth and property remains to be considered. One of the keys lies in the aristocratic nature of the graves. The female-associated symbolism emerges during the ninth century at a time when rich warrior graves attest the presence of an elite minority that provided community leadership. As Whitley puts it, the ninth century is “the best candidate for the period in which the Archaic aristocracy first establishes itself.” Smithson, noting the accumulation of several rich graves around the RAL on the North Slope of the Areopagus, even ventured to propose that the RAL was the wife of King Arriphron, who would have been the mid ninth-century ruler in Kastor of Rhodes’ list of the Athenian hereditary kings. Some have been willing to identify the area as the burial grounds for the “royal Medontid genos and their retainers” on the model of Athens as a collection of small hamlets, with each claiming the family seat (and attached cemetery) of a noble genos. The Neleid clan, for example, might have dwelled and been buried near the Dipylon Gate.⁷⁵ Focusing on prominent family groups rather than broad class stratum as a factor in the distribution of symbolic items explains their uneven distribution and corresponds with later ritual custom. The home of the leader (*basileus*) would also have been the seat of cult, and it is reasonable to see his wife as priestess officiating over the local Thesmophoria.⁷⁶ Certainly in later times the custom was to select from each deme the wife of a community leader to form an assembly overseeing festivities at the Thesmophoria.⁷⁷ In contrast to past assumptions that participation in the festival was open to all citizen wives, a recent study argues that in much of Attica, it was restricted to small, select

complex issues surrounding the inception of cult at Eleusis and its early relation to Athens, but the view presented here fits the undeniable early cultural affinities with Athens and the tradition of elite family leadership. See Clinton 1992, 1996 and Parker 1991 (who differ on several points); Osborne 1994: 148-54; Sourvinou-Inwood 1997; Binder 1998.

⁷³. Binder 1998: 134; Travlos 1983: 337 figs. 15-16; Sourvinou-Inwood 1997. See Mazarakis Ainian 1997: 147-54 for archaeological evidence, with earlier bibliography. For recent survey of evidence of Mycenaean cult at Eleusis, see Cosmopoulos 2003.

⁷⁴. Foley 1994: 87.

⁷⁵. Smithson 1968: 83; Coldstream 1995: 393.

⁷⁶. For the leader’s house as seat of cult see Mazarakis Ainian 1997.

⁷⁷. Isaeus 8.18-20; Deubner 1932: 57, n. 3; Clinton 1996; Dillon 2002: 117-19; further on deme festivals, Parker 1987.

groups of wives from eupatrid families, perhaps even by hereditary duty. In a well-known tradition the Eleusinian Mysteries drew its leadership from two prominent families, attested as early as the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.⁷⁸

Later developments aside, the distribution in Athens of one or two particularly rich female graves per burial plot in the tenth through eighth centuries, and around Attica by the end of the ninth, marks the spread of cult in tandem with the expansion of population into the countryside.⁷⁹ The small but striking concentrations of wealth mark the locus of leadership, and subsequently of cult. If the cult places themselves are difficult to find, it may well be because the focus of Demeter's worship was periodic festivals with little need of architectural setting for its rather secretive and gender-exclusive activities; hence the early attachment of cult symbols to people rather than place. The profound importance of Demeter worship that led to the "breakaway" mystery cult at Eleusis and the spread of the Thesmophoria throughout Attica (as elsewhere) is readily understood in light of the environmental constraints that made cereal agriculture a risk-prone subsistence base. As Susan Cole succinctly put it, "For the Greeks the growing, storage, and distribution of grain was a matter of life and death." The exacerbation of grain supply problems caused by rising population and possible drought in the eighth century can be seen as both cause and symptom of the emphasis on grain surplus and the insecurity of its storage, embodied in model granaries.⁸⁰ Elevated to a critical role by a heavy dependence on grain, the cult that oversaw agricultural fertility would have given women from leading families the position of wealth and public status to warrant seal-use and exceptional burial display attended by large groups of female mourners (evidenced, e.g., in ADA accumulations on pyres).

The foundation of this theory lies in the grave assemblages, admittedly a relatively small and incomplete set of data. Nevertheless, cult references in grave goods are not alien to Greek custom. In Classical Sparta priestesses, but not other women, could receive an epitaph, a special privilege usually reserved for men killed in battle. Women buried in the fourth-century cemetery on Thasos where the Thesmophorion was important to the community wore jewelry styled with Demeter iconography.⁸¹ Such late parallels have only limited use, however. A more important question is whether the objects under consideration really comprise a coherent symbolic package. One approach is to see what traveled with these "ladies of substance" when they left home. The remains of the Rich Athenian Lady were entombed in a splendid belly-handled amphora with a pair of circle motifs on its "chest," possibly a somatic symbol of the deceased. This distinctive ceramic type was not included in the above survey of symbolic and exotic items, but now emerges as strongly associated with the "Demeter kit." The North Cemetery of **Knossos** has produced a number of similar Attic belly-handled amphoras. Although they were not used here as ash containers, these vessels (and local copies) occur in aristocratic burials — along with gold jewelry with lunates, pomegranates, and snakehead finials — and probably signal the

⁷⁸ . Accordingly, some have tried to connect the Sacred House and the Megaron at Eleusis with Eumolpid and Kerykes families, Travlos 1983; Mazarakis Ainian 1997: 347-48. On aristocratic female priests and Thesmophoria celebrants, Dillon 2003: 84, 119.

⁷⁹ . This reconstruction corresponds with Osborne's 1994 study of the spread of cults in early Attica. Suter (2002: 169-207) reviews evidence for Demeter and Kore cult around the Greek world, finding it largely absent in the EIA because of her focus on the later known cult sites.

⁸⁰ . Cole 1994: 201. For challenges of crop-growing in Attica, Garnsey and Morris 1989; Gallant 1991: 94-98. For drought, Camp 1979. For actual granary remains, Popham and Sackett 1979: 24-25; M. Langdon 1976: 88-9, n. 47.

⁸¹ . Spartan epitaphs, Hodkinson 2000: 260-62; Dillon 2003: 79-92; Thasian graves, Sgourou 2001, esp. 334.

presence of Attic women in the local community. Their appearance at Knossos corresponds precisely with the inauguration of a Demeter sanctuary on the outskirts of the settlement, dated by the presence of Attic MGII pottery.⁸² At the harbor town of **Naxos** MG graves contained a local imitation of the belly-handled amphora with concentric circles, a pair of model boots, and a handmade jug whose closest parallel is at Eleusis.⁸³ Perhaps not coincidentally, at some later point this plot of land became the site of a Thesmophorion. At **Lefkandi**, several very rich female burials and a number of others contain Attic material, including symbolic items such as ADA dolls and beads, fine terracotta chests, incised fibulae, gold lunate jewelry, and openwork kalathoi.⁸⁴ The Toumba cemetery at Lefkandi is thought by the excavators to have housed the remains of the local royal genos.⁸⁵ Both contents and burial method suggest a number of the graves to be those of Athenian residents. There are numerous other examples of fine Attic MG amphoras and kraters around the Mediterranean, and while I would not suggest that all traveled via elite exogamous alliances, it is a useful explanation for the presence of displaced Attic fine goods.⁸⁶ By the mid-eighth century there is little evidence for far-flung Athenian connections.

A number of changes in Attic burial practices begin around 760/50. An increase in both number and demographic makeup of burials, accompanied by a general decline in the wealth of goods, is usually interpreted in terms of the collapse of the earlier exclusionary burial system under challenges coming from within and without the elite ranks: the exclusive minority of *aristoi* is being upstaged by the groundswell of *isonomia*. The pattern of rich female graves also shifts: the prominent burials after the mid eighth century are those of girls and very young woman (under 20 years of age).⁸⁷ Their burials are characterized by gold bands, horse pyxides, hair spirals, model baskets and pomegranates, and a large amount of pottery. In comparison, graves of adult women have declined in interest. Although it is impossible to know the marital status of these young females, their age bracket suggests that they are defined by their (failed) potential marriage status. There may well be a ritual dimension to this, if the model pomegranates and handled baskets assimilate them to Kore, and horse pyxides refer to property; Demeter now seems to be missing. Within an emergent political state, a new set of concerns — renegotiation of the institution of marriage, definition of the household, and control of property

⁸². Coldstream 1973. The MGII krater is paralleled by a similar one at Eleusis. Suter (2002: 169-86) assembles the evidence for a Cretan origin for the goddesses.

⁸³. Kourou 1999: boots, AK 56 MN 593, pls. 16, 45; amphora, MN 513, pls. 25, 56-59 and V; handmade jug, AK 59 MN 474 pl. 52.

⁸⁴. Popham and Sackett 1979, esp. tombs Palia Perivolia 22, pls. 137-139; Skoubris T. 59, pls. 108-110; and Toumba 70. We should also include rich male tomb Toumba 79, where a female mourner had tucked her gold lunate earrings into an offering niche within the burial (Popham and Lemos 1995).

⁸⁵. Popham, Touloupa, and Sackett 1982: 247; Coldstream 1995: 399-401.

⁸⁶. Coldstream (1983, 1995, and Coldstream and Catling 1996, 2: 716) details these Attic exports, considering gift exchange, but not marriage, as a mechanism for their dispersal. His main argument against seeing Athenian women at Knossos is that the imported amphoras were not used as ash urns, the Attic custom (although the deceased are presumably being buried by native Knossians). The double grave Toumba 14 is thought to contain an Attic man and woman, Popham and Sackett 1979: 175-76; Coldstream 1995: 401.

⁸⁷. Kerameikos 50; Erechtheion Street Theta 2; Erysichthonos V-VI, Agora G12:17; Agora G12: 9; possibly VDAK 1, called a “young woman” by excavator.

— now carry the focus of graveside symbolic expression.⁸⁸ Sanne Houby-Nielsen has demonstrated that starting ca. 700 the family is represented in Kerameikos grave groupings by a leading male family member, with other members in little evidence. The oikos now “manifests itself through the social qualities of its male members” and there is “little place in this ideology” for women and children.⁸⁹

Conclusion

Rich female burials offer an important perspective on property ownership by women in early Attica. Previous views of these graves have considered their occupants’ high status to be ascribed by virtue of inherited aristocratic rank. Implied in this interpretation is the notion that in early Greece status could be achieved only through avenues to power and wealth open to men. The contents of female burials suggest other possibilities. For several centuries, from ca. 1000-750, the women of a small elite group of Athenian families achieved prominence *in their own right*, as shown by a continuous gender-exclusive symbolic grave assemblage that includes goods of both intrinsic and symbolic value. Since these goods do not solely reflect family status, it is possible to see wealth as indicating greater complexity in lateral gender interactions, including disposal of property. The continuation of this phenomenon throughout MG runs counter to the general pattern of greater austerity in funerary display and suggests that the treatment of rich female graves was driven more by conservative religious practice than by current social custom. This prominence, derived from a combination of cult participation or leadership and status based on marriage or lineage, may have entailed ownership and disposal of wealth. It is possible that such resources made marriage alliances with the leading families of the small Dark Age hamlets of Athens attractive to the outside world. This rich symbolic system was clearly articulated in the grave as long as the household of the basileus provided strong political and religious leadership, but was transformed amid the shifting hierarchies of the rising eighth-century state.

⁸⁸. In later times the death of unmarried girls was associated with marriage and expressed through grave goods and iconography in a well-known cultural pattern; Seaford 1987; Rehm 1994. Further discussion of this for Late Geometric, Langdon in press.

⁸⁹. Houby-Nielsen 1995: 144-45; also 1992 and 1996.

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