

Rest in Pieces (RIP): Mutability of Gender Identity and Personhood in Pre- and Protopalatial (3000-1700 BCE) Minoan Tholos Tombs

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Abstract

During the Pre- and Protopalatial periods (ca. 3000-1700 BCE), the Minoans, the Bronze Age inhabitants of the Aegean island of Crete, viewed death as transitory, practicing a variety of funerary and mortuary processes involving the physical and symbolic modification of the deceased. The shift from primary burial (i.e., initial interment) to secondary burial (i.e., disarticulation, curation, and burning of the corpse) facilitated the transformation of the deceased's gender identities and personhoods. Specifically, at tholos tombs the Minoans actively used these stages of death as opportunities to restructure gender identities and distinctions previously held in life. In this article, I will address how the funerary architecture of the tholos tombs and the secondary stages of burial reveal the mutability, or fluidity, of gender identities and personhoods in Minoan death. Using feminist theories, I will argue that the Minoans viewed gender as mutable in death. The function and value of certain gender identities was largely dependent on the mourner's relationships to the deceased, and the spatial and temporal context of the tholos tomb mortuary landscape.

Introduction

The familiar epithet RIP (Rest in Peace) is a common feature of everyday discussion, either seriously, when talking of mortality and death, or humorously referring

to quips about unfortunate circumstances. The concepts of death and burial, in our culture, are intrinsically connected to those of rest and peace. Yet, an analysis of burial practices of the Minoans, the Bronze Age (3000-1700 BCE) inhabitants of Crete,

suggests that for them, death involved active and constant engagement with the skeletal remains of their ancestors. Throughout the island of Crete in the phases known as the Pre- and Proto-palatial periods, the Cretan communities constructed a variety of tomb types, one of which stands out for its unique treatment of the deceased. Tholos tombs (pl. tholoi), which were large, above-ground mortuary structures, yielded evidence of mortuary practices involving both a primary interment of the deceased and a secondary manipulation and disarticulation of skeletal remains.¹ During the primary burial process, the people of Minoan Crete modified the body with costuming and artifacts to represent the identities and the personhood (i.e., composite of multiple dimensions of

identity and personal relationships) of the deceased. After decomposition, the body was disarticulated and this physical segmentation of the body symbolized a change in personhood for the deceased.² In this process, the Minoan communities also altered the deceased's gender identity and attributes, as gender formed a critical part of personhood. On these premises, this article aims to argue that personhood and gender identity were mutable and fluid in death at Minoan tholos tombs.³ Using feminist theories, I will suggest that the people of Minoan Crete viewed gender identities as context-dependent and mutable in death rather than rigidly set within a gender hierarchy.

¹See Parker Pearson 1999 for definitions. Todaro and Girella 2016 extensively discuss Minoan secondary burial methods.

²Personhood refers to the objective and subjective relationships between different parties—living or deceased (Gillespie 2010). Personhood involves the composite of individual identities like gender, race, class, etc. and the relational links and networks at the community, household, and personal level. Theories of personhood evolved in feminist studies to challenge the idea of Western individualism. Clark and Wilkie 2006 assert that a person combines two facets: “socially constructed collection of identities” and “lived life experiences of particular persons” (335).

³In this article, fluidity of gender does not refer to gender fluidity as discussed contemporarily; rather fluidity of gender identities focuses on how the living mourners changed and transformed the identities of the deceased through body modification. Although the term gender identity connotes a living individual's sense of self and identification with masculine, feminine, or non-binary features, I use it to discuss how the living conceptualized the identity of the deceased. Some may argue other terms such as gender ideology are better suited for this research, but I believe the concept of gender identity adequately highlights mutability of the deceased through a living individual's memory and decisions about the dead's gender. See Conkey and Spector 1984 for definitions.

This article uses feminism as an analytical lens to view gender identity as a context-dependent process. Previous scholarship has focused on defining strict gender hierarchies on Minoan Crete, but a feminist lens aims to explore more nuanced approaches to gender that cannot be fully described by concepts of 'hierarchy'.⁴ Primarily, I rely upon the study of personhood which encompasses an individual's social identities and their relations to others.⁵ Since personhood is intersectional and relies upon links to others, it is highly relative to different spatial and temporal contexts. Gender identity is embedded in concepts of personhood and is likewise dependent upon one's social

location, according to feminist theorists such as Judith Butler and Marie Louise Stig Sørensen.⁶ With this interpretive framework, I consider how gender identities and personhood were transformed via modification of skeletal remains, the manipulation of funerary architecture, and artifact placement. In this article, I will argue that the Minoans viewed death as transitory, thus facilitating the fluid and mutable nature of personhood and gender identity in death.⁷ Through the study of several tholoi of South and North Central Crete, I demonstrate how personhood and gender identity were expressed in tholoi through funerary architecture and body modification.⁸

⁴Hierarchy refers to the strict vertical differentiation of status. Archaeologists have argued for strict gender hierarchies on Crete because of iconographic images depicting men in more active positions while women were in more passive positions (Poole 2020); they also argue that social complexity must feature social stratification which in other cultures has included aspects of patriarchal rule. Mina 2015 has refuted these points and advocated for other systems of social differentiation. The research in this article is important for broadening our perspective on gender identity and hierarchy in prehistory.

⁵As an example, motherhood is defined because one has a link or relationship to a child, and one is a biological female. This personhood could change if

the child died, or it would be fatherhood if it were the identity of a biological male with a child.

⁶Butler 1998's performance theory upholds that repeated gendered actions became performances and legitimized gender roles and identities. Sørensen 2000 affirmed that gender and gender identities are fluid or able to change within separate contexts. Together these theories describe how gender is a performance meant to transmit particular social messages.

⁷Liminality as discussed by Huntington & Metcalf 1979 and Tomkins 2012 refers to a state of passage, otherworldliness, and in-betweenness.

⁸The tombs of Vorou, Hagia Triada, Moni Odigitria, Hagia Kyriaki, Lebena, Kephali, Koumasa, Kamilari,

The Tholos

The tholos tomb was a circular, domed, above ground tomb (Figure 1). They first appeared on Crete in the early Prepalatial (3000-2000 BCE) period with no precedent from the Mainland or Cycladic islands.⁹ There were approximately 130 tholoi cemeteries in the South-Central typically with just a single tholos, or a large tholos surrounded by one or two smaller ones.¹⁰ Of my sample size, Tomb I at Papoura (Lebena) and Tomb III Zervou (Lebena) have a single tholos while Yerokambos, Moni Odigitria, Vorou, Hagia Kyriaki, Kephali, Kamilari, Koumasa, Platanos, Hagia Triada, and Archanes Phourni have at least two and in some instances three.¹¹ Each tholos cemetery was predicted to belong to a certain settlement or hamlet, but they display some common features. Tholoi were constructed using large limestone and schist blocks layered together in a circular arrangement. The blocks

decreased in size up the wall and likely culminated in a corbelled, or hive-like roof.¹² The construction of the tombs relied upon careful engineering of the thickness of the walls, buttressing, and diameter measurements.¹³ They mainly faced away from the settlements and had low doors of about 1 meter constructed with post-and-lintel stone slabs.¹⁴ Many tholoi cemeteries started with one tholos and expanded to two or three, typically in the late Prepalatial period.¹⁵ Additionally in this period, the Minoans modified some tholoi cemeteries by building annexes—rectangular, small rooms preceding the dome structure—paved courtyards, terracing walls, and ossuaries (Figure 2 for example plan). For example, at Moni Odigitria, Hagia Kyriaki, and Platanos large *peribos* walls, or containing walls, surrounded the mortuary landscapes, including the tholoi and smaller buildings. Many tholos tombs fell out of use between the beginning and the end of the Protopalatial (2000-1700 BCE) period.

Platanos, and Archanes-Phourni were considered for this study.

⁹Wilson 2008, 84; Branigan 1993; Dickinson 1994; Mee 2012.

¹⁰Legarra Herrero 2014, Table 2.

¹¹Legarra Herrero's *Gazetteer of Funerary Contexts in Pre- and Protopalatial Crete* was consulted for preliminary data about these sites (2014).

¹²Branigan 1993; Legarra Herrero 2014; Wilson 2008.

¹³Branigan 1993.

¹⁴Branigan 1998.

¹⁵Legarra Herrero 2014.

Tholos tombs were used in subsequent periods but with less frequency in Crete. The Pre- and Protopalatial periods represent the peak of tholoi construction and the sites examined here represent the best published, accessible, and preserved cases.



Figure 1: Hypothetical reconstruction of roof upon physical remains of Kamilari Tholos A. Image used with permission from Luca Girella.¹⁶

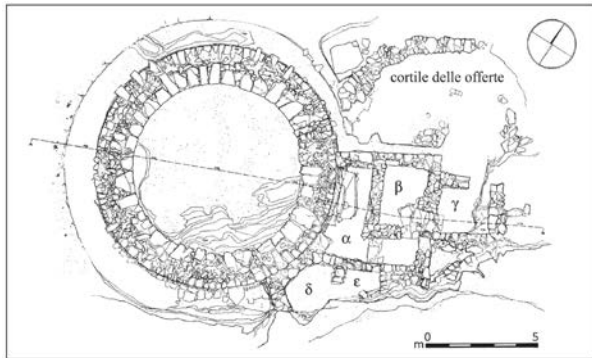


Figure 2: Architectural plan of Kamilari Tholos A. Rooms α , β , γ , δ , ϵ represent annexes. Other tholoi have plans similar to this one. Image used with permission from Luca Girella.¹⁷

Tholos tombs are often cited as both primary and secondary depositions of skeletons and material culture. They often had multiple layers of bones, some with underground burials, some laid above ground, and some in burial containers. Red patches of dirt termed “flesh-eaters” at Platanos, Moni Odigitria, and Lebena indicate an area where bodies decomposed and were subsequently moved.¹⁸ Over time burial strata marked by ash and burning in the soil separated differing periods of tomb usage, demonstrating episodes of fumigation. Fumigation involved removing and burning layers of bone and material; these cleaning and purification periods mean that all the bones left in the tholos upon modern discovery were not the remains of all the burials ever to occur in the tholos tombs.¹⁹ Yet, the tholoi yielded extensive evidence of communal, or mass, burial. Tholos B at Koumasa yielded over 100 remains of individuals at its latest stage.²⁰ Hagia Kyriaki tomb held 420-480 burials throughout its history.²¹ Evidence of fumigation layers, bone disarticulation (i.e., cutting, breaking), repositioning, and removal of bones (all

¹⁶ See Girella 2013, 93.

¹⁷ See Girella 2018, 263.

¹⁸Vasilakēs 2010; Alexiou & Warren 2004.

¹⁹Vasilakēs 2010.

²⁰Xanthoudides 1924.

²¹Blackman & Branigan 1982, 55.

secondary depositions) after initial decomposition, indicates that the Minoans practiced different stages of death, performing certain rituals that symbolized the shifting roles and personhoods of the deceased.²² The stages of primary and secondary burial reveal the variability of Minoan mortuary practices and the complex behaviors associated with funerary processes.

At the beginning of the Protopalatial period, the Minoans began to use burial containers called larnakes and pithoi to hold their dead within tholoi. Larnakes are clay containers shaped like bathtubs with pitched roof-like lids.²³ They were positioned throughout the tholoi and could hold one skeleton in a contracted, fetal-like position, but have also been found to hold the remains of ten individuals.²⁴ Pithoi were thick, 1.5 m tall ceramic jars that held contracted bodies, particularly children's bodies, or multiple bones; they were commonly found in contexts of the Protopalatial palaces as storage jars.²⁵ As larnakes and pithoi (henceforth burial receptacles) originated in the period during the formation of the first

palatial centers, some have suggested they indicate a move towards more individual burial practices. However, their association with communal burials still indicates their connection to tholoi; it is possible that by dividing certain groups of skeletal remains, the Minoans intended to differentiate particular identities and personhoods.²⁶ The burial receptacles have been found to contain both a mixed assemblage of female and male bones, and in other instances, just one female or male skeleton.²⁷ Body receptacles represent one of the burial techniques the Minoans used to separate, mix, and alter the gender identities of the deceased.

In some cases, the skeletal remains of the tholoi can provide evidence for the sex of the deceased. The pelvic bone, skull, long bones, and teeth can commonly reveal the sex, stature, diet, and traumas of deceased persons.²⁸ After the primary burial of the deceased, in which they were laid upon the floor or in burial receptacles within the tholoi, the Minoans practiced selective skeletal curation. When they disarticulated the bones during secondary burial, they chose

²²Branigan 1993; Legarra Herrero 2014; Alexiou & Warren 2004; Vasilakēs 2010; Xanthoudides 1924.

²³Wilson 2008; Sakellarakēs & Sapouna-Sakellarakē 1997.

²⁴Sakellarakēs & Sapouna-Sakellarakē 1997.

²⁵Legarra Herrero 2016.

²⁶Legarra Herrero 2016.

²⁷Legarra Herrero 2016; Papadatos 2005.

²⁸Parker Pearson 1999. Triantaphyllou 2010, 2016, and 2018.

to preserve certain skulls and long bones, either piling them into groups within the tholoi or removing them to outside areas (i.e., ossuaries) to be mixed with other bones.²⁹ Some of these skeletal remains, like those at Moni Odigitria and Archanes-Phourni, could be sexed because of their preservation of the pelvic bone or skulls; however the fragmentary nature of the assemblages means not all bones preserved, either due to mortuary behaviors of the Minoans or natural deterioration.³⁰ Nevertheless, the stratigraphy and assemblages of the bones demonstrate the different processes of secondary burial and the intentional decisions the Minoans conducted to display the various identities and personhoods of their ancestors.

Besides skeletons, tholoi have yielded rich material assemblages, including ceramic vessels, stone vases, jewelry, metal

tools/ornaments, obsidian, beads, carved seals, and clay human and animal figurines, that could have demonstrated symbolic associations of craftsmanship, trade, wealth, status, and identity with particular deceased bodies.³¹ The tombs of Lebena, Moni Odigitria, and Koumasa featured foreign products from Egypt (i.e., scarab seals) and marble folded arm figurines from the Cycladic islands.³² At Moni Odigitria, Lebena, and Hagia Triada hundreds of ceramic vessels, namely cups and jugs for liquids, were unearthed and likely used in ritual feasting and drinking events.³³ These pots, both local and imported, were found scattered throughout the tholos or sometimes clustered together. At times, the placement of these vessels reveals important ritual behaviors, as in the case of the upside down and stacked cups uncovered in Tomb II at

²⁹Todaro and Girella 2016; Branigan 1993; Vasilakēs 2010.

³⁰Triantaphyllou 2010 sexes the bones of Moni Odigitria and Archanes-Phourni, to be discussed below.

³¹Branigan 1993; Legarra Herrero 2014; Alexiou & Warren 2004; Vasilakēs 2010; Xanthoudides 1924; Wilson 2008; Sakellarakēs & Sapouna-Sakellarakē 1997; Papadatos 2005.

³²Cycladic folded arm figurines (FAFs) were flat, stylized figurines carved in white marble with painted details, typically from the Cycladic Islands. They have been mostly documented as women because of

raised nipples and an incised pelvic triangle, although in some cases the absence of genitalia does not mean the absence of male representation. The figurines could have represented the mourners' or the deceased's bodies or symbolized natural and abstract concepts. Cycladic FAFs featured in many of the tholos tombs including Yerkambos (Lebena), Zervou (Lebena), Hagia Kyriaki, Koumasa, Platanos, and Archanes-Phourni. See Papadatos 2005; Alexiou & Warren 2004; Vasilakēs 2010; Xanthoudides 1924; Goula 2016.

³³Branigan 1993; Legarra Herrero 2014.

Yerokambos (Lebena), Vorou, Kephali, and Hagia Triada.³⁴ The deposition of material culture may signify symbolic decisions and identities the living ascribed to the deceased and/or may record the occurrence of certain funerary rituals and activities.

Interpreting Tholos Burials: Community vs. Individuality

A tholos was not an individual burial, but a large collective one. In fact, the architectural arrangement of the cemetery and the tomb type suggests communality was a key feature of these Minoan communities. Under the same roof, different generations shared the same grounds, allowing different families and groups to gather together to celebrate and mourn their dead. The circular shape of the tholos communicated togetherness with its lack of corners and equal space, which at times has been seen as recreations of cave burials and ritual spaces for chthonic deities.³⁵ Yet, the communal aspect provided by this tomb type does not signify equality. Burial demarcations, selective curation, grave goods, and burial containers provide evidence that differences

still existed between bodies. For example, two burials in Lebena (Tomb I in Papoura and Yerokambos) included stone slabs and edges that suggested individual burial spots.³⁶ Certainly, the trend of burying bodies in body receptacles offered a clear mode of distinguishing bodies, as in the case of Tholos Gamma at Archanes-Phourni that held approximately 20 larnakes and pitthoi, one of which held four skulls (three adults and one child) (See Figure 3). Furthermore, evidence from Tomb III in Zervou (Lebena), where bones were piled along the edges of the tholoi walls, from Hagia Triada where 16 skulls were found in one room, 14 in another, and one skeleton in yet another separate room, and finally, from Tomb I in Papoura, where nine skulls were found near the entrance of the tomb, indicate the selective individual curation of skeletons.³⁷ In terms of individuality, this selectivity indicates that skulls and bodies were not placed haphazardly in the tholos; instead, their placement reveals a clear intention and pattern of arrangement. This emphasis on individuality is echoed in the discovery of seals, jewelry pieces, and figurines in the

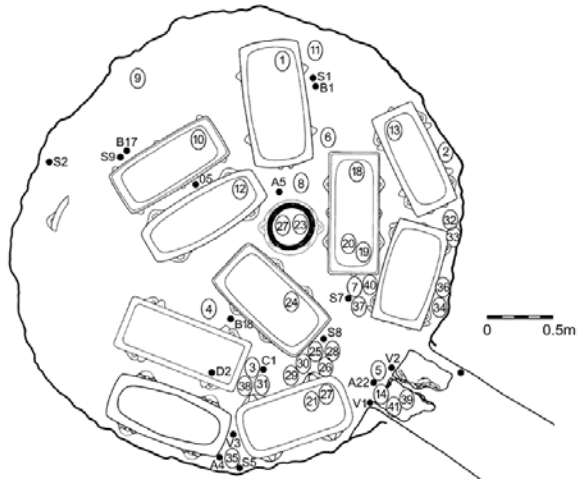
³⁴Upside down cups may have been indicative of a special feasting ritual. See Wiener 2011, Legarra Herrero 2014, and Alexiou & Warren 2004 for assemblages and discussion.

³⁵Driessen 2010; Tomkins 2012; Betancourt 2018.

³⁶Alexiou & Warren 2004.

³⁷Legarra Herrero 2014.

tombs—objects that associate some deceased members with certain grave goods.³⁸ This



evidence illustrates that communality and individuality simultaneously existed in tholoi tombs and fluctuated based on mortuary behaviors and burial techniques.

Figure 3: Stratum II of Tholos Gamma at Archanes-Phourni showing the distribution of *larnakes*, *pithoi*, skeletal remains (numbered circles), and artifacts (black points). Image used with permission from Yiannis Papadatos.³⁹

Likewise, for the living participants, funerals provided an opportunity to both solidify the community and stress individual elements of status. There is evidence of feasting, drinking, and dancing rituals demonstrated by both the architecture and

the finds in tholos tombs. Architecturally, Branigan has proposed that the paved courts at Moni Odigitria, Koumasa, and Platanos were used as dancing pavements for ceremonies.⁴⁰ The importance of dancing is reiterated also by a clay figurine from Kamilari, not far from Platanos, showing four women dancing in a circle.⁴¹ These pavings could also have been used for the performance of other rituals, like singing. One can imagine that members of the family or the community led these ceremonies, consciously asserting their own importance in the community via the deceased’s memory, identity, and personhood in society. Thus, costuming, hair, motions, music, and lyrics during a dance could exaggerate gender roles, power, narratives, and community participation.⁴² The finds from within the tombs must also be taken into account as agents shaping the identity of the deceased and his/her position in life—in regard to wealth, trade, leadership, and/or labor, among other factors—while highlighting the gift givers’ generosity and identity.⁴³ Offering exotic and luxury goods like the Egyptian

³⁸Papadatos 2005.

³⁹ See Papadatos 2005, Figure 5b. Permission also obtained from Susan Ferrence, Director of Publications for INSTAP Academic Press.

⁴⁰Branigan 1998.

⁴¹Soar 2010.

⁴²Huntington and Metcalf 1979, 54 defines these as body symbolism and discuss how movements can convey gender ideals and roles.

⁴³Parker Pearson 1999.

scarab from Tomb I at Papoura or the gold diadems of Moni Odigitira signified that one could afford to dispense wealth.⁴⁴ If these funerals and mortuary activities occurred with the entire community, then families (or other groups) could have illustrated many aspects of their identity as well as imbued those characteristics upon the deceased.

This variability of communality and individuality in tholos tombs indicates that the Minoans constructed multidimensional identities and personhoods. Rather than solely focusing on the status and achievements of distinct individuals, the Minoans constructed identities and personhoods in relation to their connection to others. The preservation of certain skulls and bones could have denoted different personhoods and identities, such as motherhood or “priesthood” (i.e., life of religion, spirituality, or sacredness).⁴⁵ Certain groupings within burial receptacles or skeletal piles may have signified relationships to other deceased members. For example, a pithos in Tholos Gamma at Archanes-Phourni contained three adult skeletons and one child, perhaps grouping a family.⁴⁶ A body

crouched next to a pithos in Vorou may also indicate some association with the deceased within the pithos.⁴⁷ Through the physical modification of bodies in secondary burial, the Minoans dynamically altered the deceased’s personhood, specifically the symbolic relationships and identities associated with the body. Minoan tholoi burials emphasized both communality and individuality as a key feature of personhood through body modification and artifact offerings from the living. For the Minoans, the transformation of personhoods through secondary burials provided an opportunity for the restructuring of gender identities and hierarchies in death.

From Primary to Secondary Burials: Transforming Gender Identities and Personhoods

The funerary practices of the tholoi involved multiple stages in the treatment of the dead. Each stage of death created an opportunity for the living to transform both their relationship to the deceased and the

⁴⁴Alexiou & Warren 2004; Vasilakēs 2010.

⁴⁵Clark & Wilkie 2006 discuss motherhood and childhood on plantations in the Bahamas. Aegean scholars like Nathalja Calliauw (2017) discuss

childhood and the death, revealing how juvenile burials differ from adult persons.

⁴⁶Papadatos 2005.

⁴⁷Legarra Herrero 2014.

social roles of the deceased/corpse.⁴⁸ In the primary burial, it was highly likely bodies remained whole and recognizable. Those treating the body before burial may have wrapped the deceased in a shroud ornamented with stones, metals, or jewelry. Indeed, thousands of beads have been found at the tholos tombs and reconstructed to reveal necklaces with strands of glass, rock crystal, ivory, stones, and faience.⁴⁹ The primary burial focused on the relationship between the living participants and the deceased person, and allowed the mourners to express their loss through ritual, emotions, and ceremonies.⁵⁰ The corpse still retained a sense of personhood, as demonstrated by the grave goods and ornamentation, but the corpse also became a canvas for the mourners to express the identities and personhoods both among the living and to the dead.

Within the primary burial, the Minoans had the opportunity to gender their

deceased in particular ways. Ornamentation, costuming, hair style, and certain types of grave goods may have been more strongly associated with certain genders than others.⁵¹ From iconographic studies of clay figurines and seal stones, it appears Minoan women, in some situations, wore open bodice dresses and long, tiered skirts.⁵² Some figurines (both men and women) had hats, while others had cloaks and loin clothes. The women's outfit described above specifically seemed to suggest a priestess or ritual leader because of the context of the finds.⁵³ One can expect that costuming at funerals would speak to the role and position of both the deceased and the living participants. Feasting, processions, dancing, and other elements of mortuary behavior may have varied according to one's gender. Gender identities would be directly and actively conveyed through the presentation of the corpse.⁵⁴ Such identities may have even been exaggerated or subverted;

⁴⁸Todaro & Girella 2016.

⁴⁹See Vasilakēs 2010 and Sakellarakēs & Sapouna-Sakellarakē 1997 for the finds at such tombs. It should be noted that although jewelry has a feminine connotation today, both sexes adorned themselves in life to visualize status and position (See Poole 2020; Nelson 2007; Allason-Jones 1992).

⁵⁰Huntington & Metcalf 1979; Todaro and Girella 2016.

⁵¹Sørensen 2006. Allason-Jones 1992. Nelson 1997. Crass 2001. Sørensen 2000 has discussed the materiality of gender and how objects can "give it [gender] material consequences and impact" (113).

⁵²Poole 2020 and Lee 2000 among many others.

⁵³Poole 2020. Lee 2000. The famous Minoan 'snake goddess' wears this outfit.

⁵⁴It is highly likely other modes of identity were considered in body modification like status, age, and health, and intersected with assessments of gender.

for example, choosing to dress a woman in a priestess-like outfit would present certain ideals (i.e., holy, mystical, etc.) over others (i.e., weaver, mother, laborer). Additionally, by overplaying certain aspects of identity, one could downplay others. Perhaps those who in life did not conform to the set gendered expectations were presented in the proper way in death. The whole presentation of the body and funerary actions of the primary burial immortalized a certain living image and gender identity of the deceased into the minds of the mourners.

Secondary burials were in many ways continuous and dynamic stages of death. The Minoans practiced disarticulation, rearrangement, and selective curation of bones after decomposition and the primary burial. It is uncertain how much time passed before the Minoans undertook these stages; it could have been just after decomposition or been incorporated with primary burials, in which bones were disarticulated and moved before the newly deceased was interred. Regardless, this process was likely performed by a small group of people, since the tholoi

doors were low, the interior was dark, and the space itself could not hold many living bodies in addition to the dead.⁵⁵ Fumigation layers provide evidence that the tholoi were periodically cleaned and bones were removed and redeposited in other areas like at Koumasa and Moni Odigitria or destroyed completely. Given the interment of hundreds of people over a thousand years, the living community actively engaged with the deceased, whether recently deceased or hundreds of years old. Living individuals may have manipulated the bones in certain ways to reflect the socio-political dynamics of the time. For example, if one family or group successfully maintained a trade network with the Cycladic islands, their bones may be featured together with Cycladic products, given a special space in the tholoi or a separate annex room.⁵⁶ Then in two hundred years a new family may remove those bones, re-claim artifacts, and/or clean out spaces in honor of their clan's trade networks, leadership, or agricultural wealth. Tholos tombs were therefore fluid and active spaces for identity expression.

However, I focus primarily on gender in this article in order to illuminate the mutability of gender in Minoan mortuary landscapes. The thesis of which this chapter is derived delves more deeply into the construction of multiple identities.

⁵⁵Alexiou & Warren 2004. Branigan 1993 and 1998.

⁵⁶The Cycladic islands were the cluster of islands below Greek mainland and above Crete; the Minoans traded extensively with them. Dickinson 1994.

The acts of primary and secondary burials possessed symbolic meaning and intention. At the shift from primary burial to secondary burial, the living eradicated the social person of the deceased and transformed their identities, including those regarding gender.⁵⁷ The nature of these rituals symbolized a transformation of the deceased into a soul, ancestor, and/or object.⁵⁸ In the primary burial the deceased was marked with certain gendered attributes (i.e. costuming, grave goods, ornaments) which communicated their gender identity, or at least the gender identity the living believed the deceased possessed. In the secondary burial, these attributes shifted. Clothing either deteriorated or was removed during disarticulation of bones. Grave goods could have been reclaimed for the living and removed from the mortuary landscape or dispersed during disarticulation.⁵⁹ At the

moment of disarticulation and arrangement, the living stripped the corpse of any external markers of gender. Even if their memory served to distinguish the genders between skeletons, subsequent manipulations over hundreds of years undoubtedly muddled any evidence of gender distinction. The Minoans may have been able to distinguish biological sex by the bones, but their intentional choice of skulls and long bones meant that pelvic bones, the most reliable for sexing bones, were nearly absent from the archaeological record. This physical disarticulation of the bones in the secondary burial symbolized a dissolution of previous gender identities and the construction of new personhoods, either gendered in a new way or regarded as genderless or non-gendered. Gender became mutable and fluid with identities and personhoods being altered by the living.

⁵⁷Legarra Herrero 2017; Todaro & Girella 2016; Huntington & Metcalf 1979; Parker Pearson 1999. Huntington and Metcalf 1979 discussed universally how funerals and burials involve relationships addressing three participants: the mourners, the dead corpse, and the soul or spirit. They suggest the interaction of the living with the dead body in primary burial is unique and different from the interaction of the living with the soul or spirit in the second burial. Morris 1992 used the categorization of three stages of death—rite of separation, rite de

marge, and rite of aggregation—to explain funerary procedures. Rite de marge, of which the Minoans practiced, occurs when the “deceased moves from person to corpse and soul is separated”.

⁵⁸Branigan 1998 discusses that it is possible that these rituals were also motivated by ideas of purity, pollution, and fear of the dead. Cemeteries were never to the east of the settlements and small doors prevented many from entering the tomb.

⁵⁹Legarra Herrero 2014. Alexiou & Warren 2004.

The case studies at Moni Odigitria and Archanes Phourni's Tholos Gamma reveal a variability in the presentation of gender identities and personhoods, and the mutable nature of gender in death. At Archanes-Phourni, Tholos Gamma yielded 13 females, eight males, five unknown adults and four subadults (younger than 18).⁶⁰ Both sexes were found in larnakes and on the interior floor. Four of the larnakes contained more than one body and mixed sexes and ages. For example, Larnax 6 contained one male and two females 40-50 years old and one child.⁶¹ Outside of larnakes, on the interior floor, groupings of bones revealed mixed sex assemblages. Excavators found objects buried beneath larnakes in Stratum III, suggesting they belonged or expressed a connection to those buried in the larnakes. Beneath Larnax 6, two figurines, a seal, gold beads and bands, bone pins and pendants, and an obsidian blade were found.⁶² While larnakes could have been primary burials, the multiple bodies contained in them in Tholos Gamma suggests they acted as secondary burial vessels, and perhaps were placed in the

larnakes after primary burial in Stratum III.⁶³ Their artifacts did not accompany the deceased in the larnakes but remained connected to their bodies when the larnakes were placed over its deposit. The artifacts likely had accompanied the deceased in the primary burial and upon being stripped of them, the corpse was placed in the larnakes (in secondary burial), with other corpses of whom they shared relations. This complex act of association, grouping, and manipulation in the secondary burial demonstrates a certain fluidity or mutability of gender identity and personhood. There is no obvious grouping of skeletons/bones within the larnakes by gender or age, nor on the interior floor; while artifacts were associated with groups, they were not ascribed to individuals. Minoans clearly made intentional decisions about certain groupings of skeletal remains, but these patterns suggest grouping depended upon relationships, perhaps familial or nuclear rather than gendered. The mixing of all bones and the lack of gendered distinction between them at Tholos Gamma indicates that through

⁶⁰Triantaphyllou 2005 found that the prevalence of females over males is rare, as men typically preserve better and are often the majority.

⁶¹See Table 1 in Papadatos 2005 for more information.

⁶²Table 3 in Papadatos 2005.

⁶³Papadatos 2005. See Figure 3 for an idea of what this may have looked like, but note that Figure 3 represents Stratum II of which there were a few more artifacts, while here I discuss Stratum III.

secondary burials—which demonstrated Minoan beliefs about the mutable nature of gender—nearly all the deceased were considered equal in regards to gender and sex.

Further evidence from Moni Odigitria's Ossuary can illuminate these secondary burial trends and gender identity transformations. The ossuary, or bone pit, outside of Moni Odigitria's Tholos A and B yielded 26 male, 15 female, two child and six unknown skeletons/skulls.⁶⁴ It revealed evidence for fully articulated skeletons, disarticulated bones, and partially articulated body parts mixed together. Triantaphyllou notes that there were more males than females and there were markers for high stress on the upper skeleton, indicative of demanding physical activities. Women possessed markers for physical activities but in different places than male skeletons, illustrating some division of labor in society.⁶⁵ Men and women's levels of anemia were nearly identical, but men were exposed more readily to bacteria than women.⁶⁶ These bones recorded health and lifestyle distinctions between sexes and age groups; yet they were all piled together in the ossuary pit with little regard for separation of health, age, or gender, even between the assemblages

of the two tholoi. This indicates that the gendered differences present in life, in terms of labor, leadership, or status (among other factors), became negligible in the secondary burial. Because death was a transitory process, gender and personhood were viewed as mutable and given different values of importance relative to both the stages of death and the relationships of the living to the deceased.

Conclusions

In tholoi, gender identities and personhoods were represented in myriad ways, through architecture, body treatment, and grave goods. I have pointed out how the communality intrinsic in the sharing of tholos space and the mixing of skeletal remains of all sexes suggests unity among the deceased; yet, individuality is also shown through the various body containers, markings on the floor, and artifacts. These elements of individuality, which must have been clear in primary burials, are of the utmost importance as they were means through which the community expressed and identified separate personhoods. Thus, primary burials must have included gendered aspects of identity, now often lost. However,

⁶⁴Triantaphyllou 2010.

⁶⁵Triantaphyllou 2010.

⁶⁶Triantaphyllou 2010 suggests this occurs because of male travel to foreign areas for trading purposes.

I argue that secondary burials offered the opportunity to transform the deceased's gender identities and personhoods to reflect the living's relationship to the deceased and the living's conceptualization of gender. Indeed, the transformative process of rearranging and manipulating corpses in secondary burials reveals that the deceased's gender identity became relatively insignificant. Being stripped of its original gender identity, the body became either genderless or took on new gendered identities ascribed by the mourners. This process would imply that gender identity does not quite matter after a certain stage of death. The archaeological evidence points out that secondary burials transformed the deceased into a different person, or non-person, able to be disarticulated and imbued with different gender identities and personhoods.

Far from a hierarchically strict understanding of gender, the Minoans treated death as an opportunity to alter the previous gender identities and personhoods of life.⁶⁷ By considering gender identity as a mutable and fluid process in death, I have shown that gender acts as a performance and therefore must be explored within its cultural

context. The communal-like architecture of the tholoi facilitated the practice of secondary burial because functionally the dead would have to be moved around or cleaned to make room for new persons. The mourners participated in intentional decision making about the movement and grouping of bones, as well as which aspects of their identity were important to retain. These decisions could have differed depending on time, community, relationships, or even status (among other factors) of the deceased. I argue that the mixing of elements from different stages of burial and mixing of sexes indicates that the Minoans did not adhere to a strict gender hierarchy or at least that this was flexible and, hence, could be manipulated in death. As Sørensen characterizes it, gender is a transitory process, much like the Minoans evidently conceptualized death as a transitory process. It is to this transitory process, this fluidity, that I attribute the wide variability of gender identities and personhoods that the Minoans displayed and practiced in tholos tombs.

Acknowledgements

⁶⁷See Mina 2015 for an explanation of how historically social complexity has been linked to gender asymmetry.

I am grateful to Prof. Emilia Oddo of the Classical Studies Department and Prof. Christopher Rodning of the Anthropology Department for their guidance and mentorship through my research process. I would also like to thank Newcomb-Tulane College, Newcomb Institute, and the Center for Engaged Learning and Teaching (CELT) for their grants that have funded my previous research. I am thankful for the fostering of my analytical approaches by the Newcomb Scholars Program and the Classical Studies Department at Tulane University.

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