

Changes in Prothesis Rituals as Portrayed on Greek *Lekythoi* From the Archaic Period Through the Completion of the Peloponnesian War

While the funerary process in Ancient Greece varied depending on both location and time period, one of the most consistent artifacts present were *lekythoi* (Kurtz 1971). Kurtz notes that studying the paintings on the *lekythoi* provides a deeper understanding of the perception of death in Ancient Greek Culture. Nevertheless, as Vermeule points out, there is no consistent view of death across Ancient Greece, even in single time periods (Vermeule, 1979). Furthermore, crucial events such as the Peloponnesian War affect the performance and representation of funerary rites. The scenes presented on *lekythoi* before, during, and after the Peloponnesian war highlight how the funerary rites changed during these times. Although there are several changes seen on the *lekythoi* in all stages of the funeral, in this paper I will exclusively focus on the *prothesis*, or the preparation of the body. I will demonstrate how the *lekythoi* show a change in the *prothesis*. From there, I will focus on how these changes were caused by the Peloponnesian war and reflect societal changes; the main changes seen in the *prothesis* include a decrease in the number of people present, the amount of money presumably spent, and the strictness of the ritual performance.

Prior to the war, the funerary rites were an elaborate multistep process and were required to be completed for the deceased to properly enter Hades (Johnson 1999). The first step was the *prothesis*, which involved preparing the body for the funeral. The next step was the *ekphora*, in which the body of the deceased was transferred from the home to the burial site. The final step was the funeral itself. Oftentimes, there were additional requirements for the living during the funerary rites and after the body had been buried (Garland 1985). Additional requirements for the *prothesis* included a timeframe to complete the ritual after the person had died, how to

prepare the body, what items were needed for the ceremony, and how to purify the house after the ceremony was completed (Kurtz 1971). Each of these steps was expensive and required large amounts of time which was unsustainable during the Peloponnesian war. As a result, many requirements changed or were removed altogether.

Prior to the war, many *lekythoi* depict the *prothesis* as involving several people (as in CVA 480, a *lekythos* from 525-475, and CVA 2258, a *lekythos* from 500-450). The *lekythoi* from after the war depict a much simpler *prothesis* with only one or two people present for the rituals (as in CVA 5841 and 5842, *lekythoi* from 425-375). Similarly, another *lekythos* depicts a much simpler *prothesis* (as in CVA 217521, a *lekythos* from 425-375 showing the entire funerary process).

The *lekythoi* produced after the war show scenes that are less involved than those seen prior to the war. Mirto discusses how the Greeks believed that, around this time, the funeral was no longer required for the deceased to properly enter Hades (Mirto 2012). Most scenes featured fewer people, were done in a less expensive manner, and did not need to specifically follow old traditions. These changes reflect the societal focus from the family to the community, the inability to support an excessive lifestyle, and the society's attempt at balancing these changes with a desire to show respect to the deceased.

Bibliography

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