



Burials and Funerary Traditions  
Across Antiquity  
**Humanity In History**  
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# Questions Pursued During this Project

1. Why are we so disconnected from those who lived throughout antiquity?
2. How does this disconnection limit us from understanding and and then lead to misinterpretation of antiquity?
3. Can burials and funerary traditions be a window for us to find the humanity of those in antiquity?



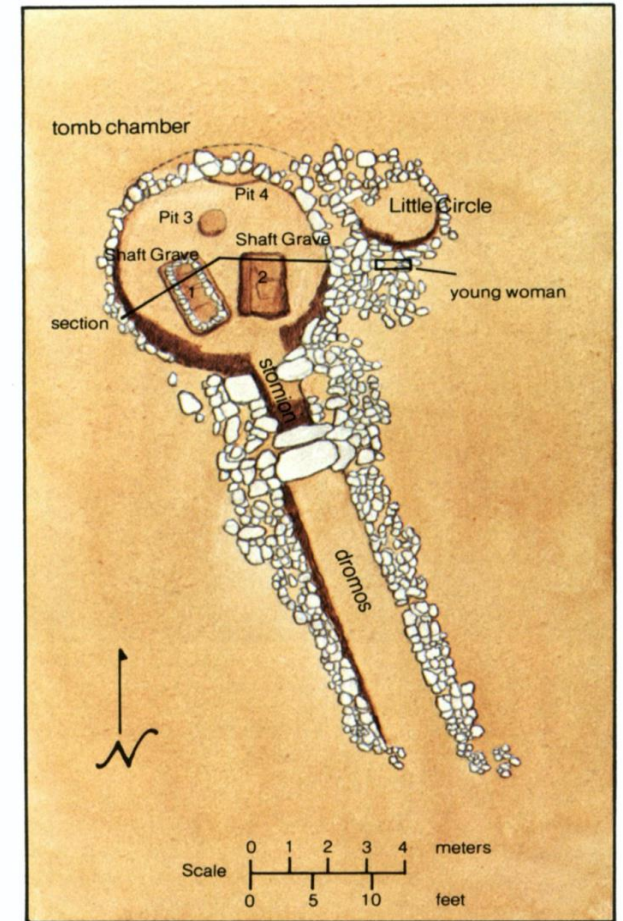
# Project Road Map

Week One: Minoans And Mycenaeans	Week Two: Iron Age Greece	Week Three: Archaic Greece	Week Four: Classical Greece
Week Five: The Hellenistic World	Week Six: The Etruscans and Early Rome	Week Seven: The Roman Republic	Week Eight: Imperial Rome
Week Nine: Pompeii	Week Ten: Late Antiquity	Weeks Eleven through Fourteen: Project Proposal	Week Fifteen: End

# The Minoans and Mycenaeans

The Minoans and Mycenaeans were two Bronze Age civilizations that existed on the Greek mainland and on the island of Crete; with the Minoans persisted from 2000 BCE to 1250 BCE and the Mycenaeans 1600 BCE to 1150 BCE. They were often simplified due to their seemingly mysterious nature and the lack of primary written evidence. However, both the Minoans and Mycenaeans had ways for expressing their humanity, which is prominent in their burials and tombs. For the Minoans, the Temple Tomb type, located at the site of Knossos, presents how liminality, which is described as a space between reality, may show a complex relationship between life and death. In this case, the physical tomb acted as a space between life and death, where the living could become closer to deceased loved ones who congregated there.

The Mycenaeans may have had similar views on death due to the design of some of their larger tombs: Tholos type. The Tholos contained a passageway called a dromos. This passageway acted as a space between life and death where members of a family could potentially enter into the main chamber multiple times to leave offerings for loved ones. The Minoan and Mycenaean belief in continuing connections after death belief of connection after death would remain prominent and would inspire cultures thereafter would continue to demonstrate the humanity of those who lived in antiquity.



(Above) *The three elements of the tholos — dromos, stomion and tomb chamber — are shown in this plan. Cut into the floor of the tomb chamber are two deep shaft graves, a small circular pit that contained an undisturbed hoard of bronzes, and a shallow, rectangular cist that held four secondary burials. Adjacent to the tholos is the earlier Little Circle that contained at least 18 burials. An extended burial of a young woman was found directly beside the Little Circle, with her feet placed against the back of the tholos wall.* (Right) *A reconstruction of the tholos shows how the lower part of the tomb chamber was sunk into the side of the hill. The upper part of the vault, which projected above the original ground level, was covered with a mound of earth, so that none of the masonry would have been visible.*

# Classical and Hellenistic Greece

Burials and cemetery sites have existed in some form for over 100,000 years and have acted as a way for the living to express their love and remember those who have passed. However, there has and continues to be a stigma around how those in the ancient world buried their dead, specifically their children. In the case of ancient Athens, which flourished from 480 BCE to 323 BCE, this misconception arose due to the modern belief that children were not seen as full individuals by the Athenians, and therefore not given the same rites in death.

However, according to the archaeologist Nikolas Dimakis, this misconception should be challenged due to aerial evidence from the surrounding region known as Attica. The evidence from these burials suggests that society was not untouched when a child passed away, with archaeology now focusing on symbolic memories, emotions, and parental involvement. Specifically, Dimakis observed over 400 child burials to reconstruct evidence from possible funeral rituals associated with the death of a child. Dimakis and his team were able to prove that emotions and memories were still able to impact society at large. Thus, they dispelled the idea that Athenians and by association other ancient societies were untouched by the death of children. Rather, the Athenians expressed their sorrow and grief through rituals and processions proceeding and following the burial itself.

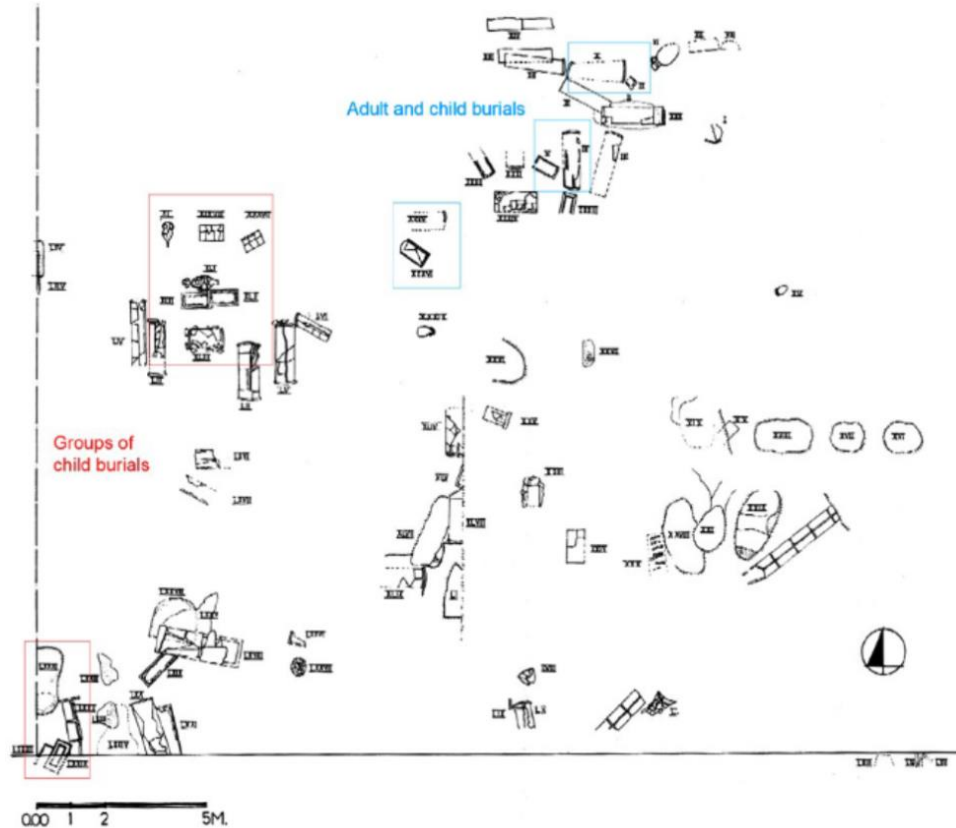


Figure 1. Section of Heriai Pylai Cemetery, Athens, 22 Kriezī and Psaromiliggou (after Karagiorga-Stathakopoulou 1987: 23-4, plan 6; © Ministry of Culture and Sports/Ephorate of Antiquities of the City of Athens/Archaeological Receipts Fund).

# Republic & Imperial Rome: Pompeii

One of the final groups I assessed was the Romans from the late republic and early imperial periods, from the 100 BCE to 79 BCE. Unfortunately, although these two periods of time are some of the most studied when it comes to the Romans, some dehumanize and simplify their culture as militaristic, patriarchal, and unfeeling due to their literature, which recalls common political turmoil and brutal military conquest. However, the ancient city of Pompeii paints a snapshot of Roman life that gives context into the humanity of the Romans, specifically with how they buried and celebrated the dead.

Those in Pompeii buried their dead after long ceremonies and processions, whether rich or poor, to honor them. It did not matter if you were enslaved, freed, or rich, you had a place among the death because for the Romans, it was a fact of existence. Most profound and humanizing to me, were the inscriptions and the simple columella headstones, which were shaped as stylized human busts that marked individual burials, used only in Pompeii and surrounding cities which can be seen at most of the Pompeiiian gates. Columelle could represent those without much money, but were also used for upper elites, they are represented across the social spectrum and mark individual burials within larger family tombs or funerary precincts For the Romans, death was not the end, as seen with the multiple death cult in Pompeii and around Rome, but with the spirit of *Manes*, of death, to guide them. Death was not the end, which was indicated by the family and those belonging to the death cult, especially when they celebrated festivals such as the Parentalia.

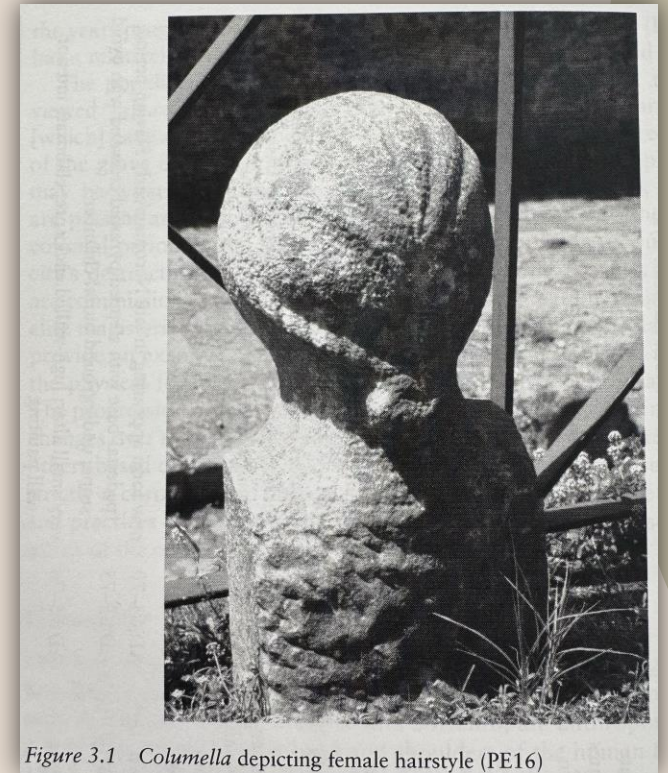


Figure 3.1 Columella depicting female hairstyle (PE16)



# Project Proposal

THE ETRUSCANS  
GENDER EQUALITY IN DEATH

# Main Questions Addressed

1. Is there enough evidence to suggest that there was 'gender equality in death?'
2. If there is evidence for gender equality in death, does that reflect Etruscans life and society as well?



# History of Research and Potential Challenges

## Literature Review -

The Etruscans persisted roughly from 900 BCE to 100 BCE within the Italian Peninsula alongside the Romans.

I will be focusing on the necropolis's of Tarquinia (located in central Italy, focusing on 700-400 BCE) and Cerveteri (located near modern Rome, focusing on 600-400 BCE), which have long histories of excavation, with interest dating back to the medieval and Renaissance periods, and more systematic excavations beginning in the 18th to 20th centuries. Key figures like William Hamilton, Thomas Kirk, and Massimo Pallottino contributed to uncovering these sites. For this project, the focus is on tomb discoveries relevant to gender and societal roles.

Tarquinia, rediscovered in the 18th century, saw major tomb excavations in the late 19th century, such as the Tomb of the Lionesses and the Tomb of the Pulcella, both offering insights into gender identity and women's roles in Etruscan society. Cerveteri's excavation history is less clear but includes significant finds like the Sarcophagus of the Spouses (1881), which suggests a degree of equality between men and women. A major gap in scholarship remains: the lack of explicit evidence confirming gender equality in Etruscan society.

## Potential Challenges -

One major challenge in this research is recognizing the potential bias—both personal and scholarly—that could shape interpretations of Etruscan women's roles. Modern ideologies may influence how archaeologists understand evidence, as seen in Ruth Whitehouse's use of Vedia Izzet's work, which suggests that portrayals of women in artifacts like bronze mirrors may reflect objectification rather than equality.

Another obstacle is the inconsistent and unclear documentation of tomb discoveries, with many lacking precise dates or associated artifact assemblages. To address this, I plan to examine primary sources in Italian, French, and German to gain more accurate and original information.

# Proposal Conclusion

Overall, this proposal's goal is to ask questions and analyze whether there is enough evidence to support a research paper. If so, the resulting research paper would then use that evidence to answer the question, is there equality in death? And if so, does that reflect Etruscan society? This proposal examined the relevant literature, potential challenges, and the organization of said research paper.

This project is significant because understanding equality not only in life, but also in death, helps us relate to the Etruscans on a humanist level. I don't believe that any of this represents common ideas on the Etruscans. I would instead emphasize that we have no primary literature from the Etruscans, so approaching them through text means reading them through a Roman lens. Archaeology allows us to see the Etruscans on their own terms, and funerary archaeology allows an especially intimate view of their priorities in death and potentially life. To find humanity among these civilizations and societies is find humanity among empires, societies, and cultures that we have less evidence for. Meaning, by finding the humanity among these ancient culture, it invites as peoples to gain a deeper understanding of their culture, on their term.



# Final Thoughts



**Thank You!**

ANY QUESTIONS?

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