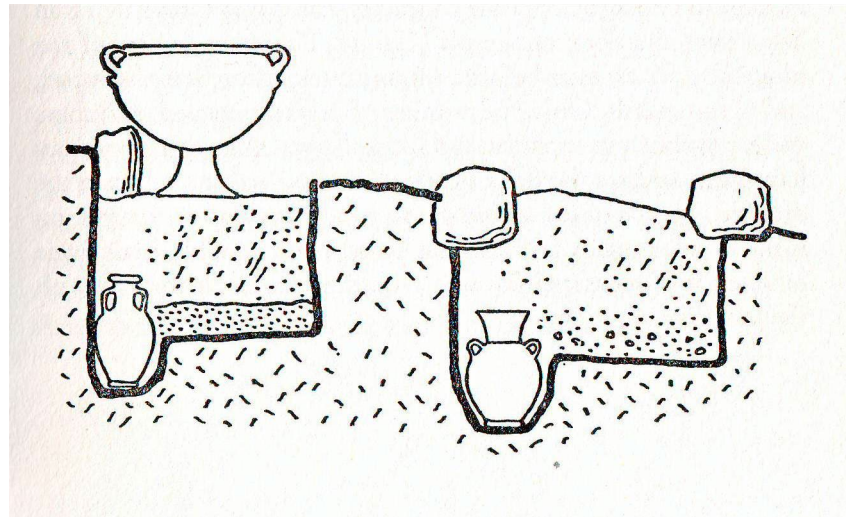


ON THE THRESHOLD BETWEEN LIFE AND THE BEYOND

ASPECTS OF FUNERARY IMAGERY IN ATTIC POTTERY

N.A. HAROKOPOS

Schematic representation of a Geometric burial



- Pit graves
- Secondary cremations
- Funerary amphorae
- Stone grave markers
- Vase as a grave marker (*sema*)

**Late Geometric I Attic
amphora by the Dipylon
Painter with a prothesis
(laying-out) scene**

(760–750 BCE)

**(National Archaeological
Museum 804)**



Honors of the dead (geras thanontōn) and ritual lament



Late Geometric I Attic amphora (Dipylon Painter)

Detail of the prothesis scene of the deceased woman

goos, oimōgē, thrēnos

“Weeping, they gathered the white bones of their noble companion into a golden urn and a folded cloth” (Homer, Iliad 23.252–253)

“Thus, he spoke, weeping, and the people groaned; Hecuba led the piercing lament among the Trojan women” (Iliad 24.429–430)

Homer apparently differentiated between a more spontaneous γόος (*góos*, ‘weeping’, ‘wailing’) by relatives or friends (cf. Hom. Il. 18,316; 24,723; 24,747) and the *threnos* sung by outsiders: Hector's body, laid out on a bed, is surrounded by singers (Hom. Il. 24,719-722), the leaders of the *threnos* (ἔξαρχος/*éxarchos*: Hom. Il. 24,721; 18,316) and the women who accompany the song with lamentations. In the lament for Patroclus (Hom. Il. 18,28-31 and 339-342), the captured Trojan women sing the refrain part. Thus, from the earliest times the singers of a *threnos* were accompanied by unarticulated crying and lamenting.

tillesthai (tearing out the hair)

πολιάς δ' ἄρ' ἀνὰ τρίχας ἔλκετο χερσί, τίλλων ἐκ κεφαλῆς (X 78)

sternotypia (beating of the breast)

The bondswomen whom Achilles and Patroklos had taken captive screamed aloud for grief, beating their breasts, and with their limbs failing them for sorrow (Iliad 18.31)

amyssein (lacerate, tear)

Briseis, fair as Aphrodite, when she saw the mangled body of Patroklos, flung herself upon it and cried aloud, tearing her breast, her neck, and her lovely face with both her hands (Iliad 19.283-84)

kopetos (beating of the head and breast in lamentation)

“The old man cried aloud and struck his head with his hands” (Iliad 24.33–34)





Ekphora

Late Geometric IB Attic krater by the
Hirschfeld Painter with an ekphora
(funeral procession) scene (750–735
BC)(NAM 990)

Visual "heroization"



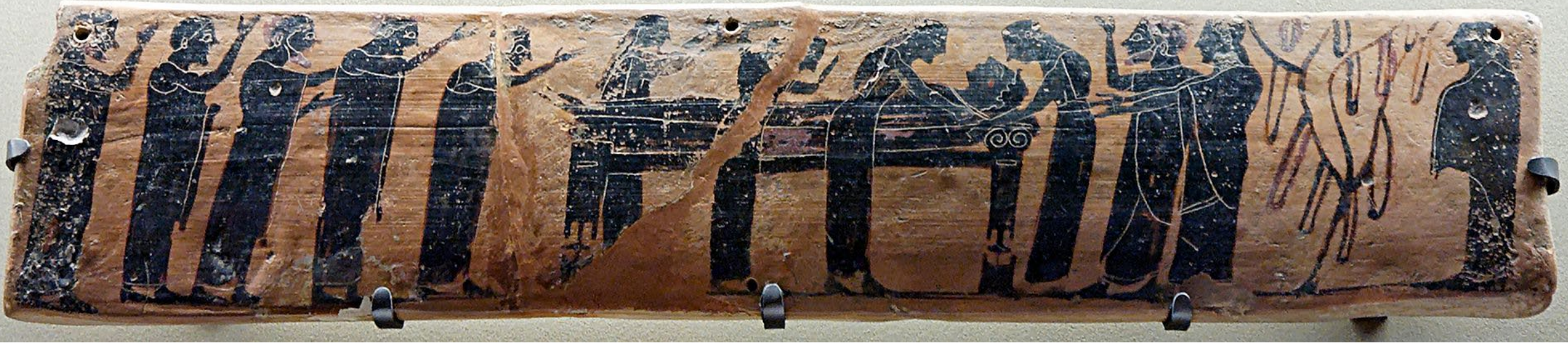


Fragment of a Late Geometric krater (Dipylon workshop) with battle scenes (Louvre A519)



Mycenae, Bronze dagger with hunting scene (16th c. BCE)

The Archaic (aristocratic) *oikos* in the face of death and loss



Funerary plaque by Lydos, ca. 560–550 (Louvre CA 255)



Terracotta funerary plaque, ca. 510 (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum IV 4398)

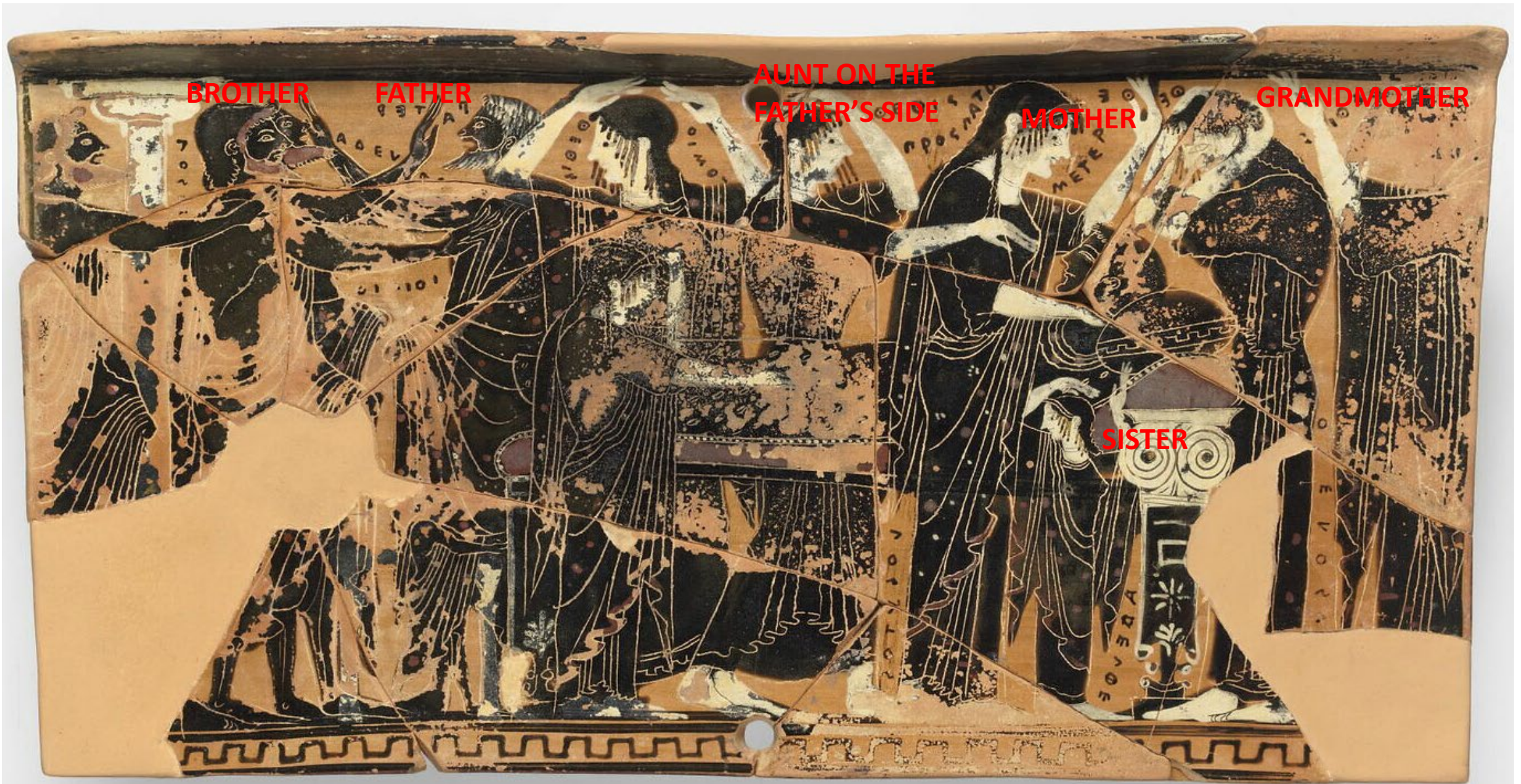
Solonian legislation and restrictions

'Law The deceased shall be laid out in the house in any way one chooses, and they shall carry out the deceased on the day after that on which they lay him out, **before the sun rises**. And the men shall walk in front, when they carry him out, and the women behind. And no woman **less than sixty years of age** shall be permitted to enter the chamber of the deceased, or to follow the deceased when he is carried to the tomb, except those who are **within the degree of children of cousins**'
[Demosthenes] *Against Macartatus*, 43.62

He also subjected the public appearances of the women, their mourning and their festivals, to a law which did away with disorder and licence. [...] **Laceration of the flesh by mourners, and the use of set lamentations**, and the bewailing of any one at the funeral ceremonies of another, he forbade. 5 The sacrifice of an ox at the grave was not permitted, nor the burial with the dead of more than three changes of raiment, nor the visiting of other tombs than those of their own family, except at the time of interment.

Plutarch, *Life of Solon* 21.5

- The deceased to be laid out indoors
- Burial procession before sunrise.
- Men lead, women follow
- Restrictions on women's participation unless close kin
- Regulation of women's participation in funerals and mourning practices
- Prohibition of: excessive lamentations, self-mutilation, disorderly ritual behavior
- Limits on offerings and funerary display



Funerary plaque (Sappho Painter, ca. 510–500, Louvre)



**Prothesis and choruses of mourners
Loutrophoros amphora, ca. 510
(New York, Metropolitan Museum 27.228)**





**Chariots accompanying the ekphora. Funerary plaques by Exekias, ca. 540–530 BCE
(Berlin, Antikensammlung F 1811-1826)**



**Prothesis and lamentation
of a deceased woman
Funerary plaque by
Exekias, ca 540-530 BCE**



Loutrophoros amphora, ca. 510 BCE. New York, Metropolitan Museum 54.11.5



Funerary Games for Patroclus (detail)
Volute crater by Kleitias and Ergotimos
(François Vase) ca. 570-560 BCE.



**Bail amphora by the Sappho Painter,
ca 500-490**

**Placement of the body of the
deceased in the coffin, mourners.**

**Brunswick (ME), Bowdoin College:
1984.23**



**Black-figure loutrophoros by the Sappho Painter,
ca 500-490.**

Internment.

Frieze below: chariot race

Athens, National Museum A450

Mourning and *nomizomena* (social norms) between the public and private spheres in Classical Athens



Demosion Sema
(Public Cemetery)
Associated finds and
restoration of the *Dromos*
from Kerameikos to
Academy



**Prothesis of a deceased woman (detail)
Loutrophoros-hydria, ca. 460 BCE (Athens, NAM 1170)**



**Loutrophoros-amphora, c. 460-450 BCE.
Berlin, Antikensammlung 31008.**

THE TRANSCENDENTAL WORLD OF WHITE LEKYTHOI



Development of the shape of the Athenian lekythos (early 6th – late 5th centuries BCE)



White-ground lekythos (Edinburgh Painter, ca. 510–500 BC)
Dispute over the arms of Achilles (?)



**White-ground lekythos attributed to the Thanatos Painter, with broken neck revealing the interior oil container, ca. 430 BCE.
Canberra, ANU College of Arts & Social Sciences.**



Lekythos: the Athenians say it is a kind of vessel in which they carried perfume (myron) for the dead, namely the alabastron (unguent container). The term alabastron may also be used in the masculine.

(Commentary on Hippias Minor Ἱππίας Ἑλλάσων 368c)

*First spread a bedding of oregano,
then place beneath it four broken vine-branches,
bind everything with ribbons and set out the
lekythoi,
and place a vessel of water before the door.*

Aristophanes, The Assembly of Women 1030-34

**White-ground lekythos by the
Bosanquet Painter, c. 440-430 BCE
New York, Metropolitan Museum
23.160.38**

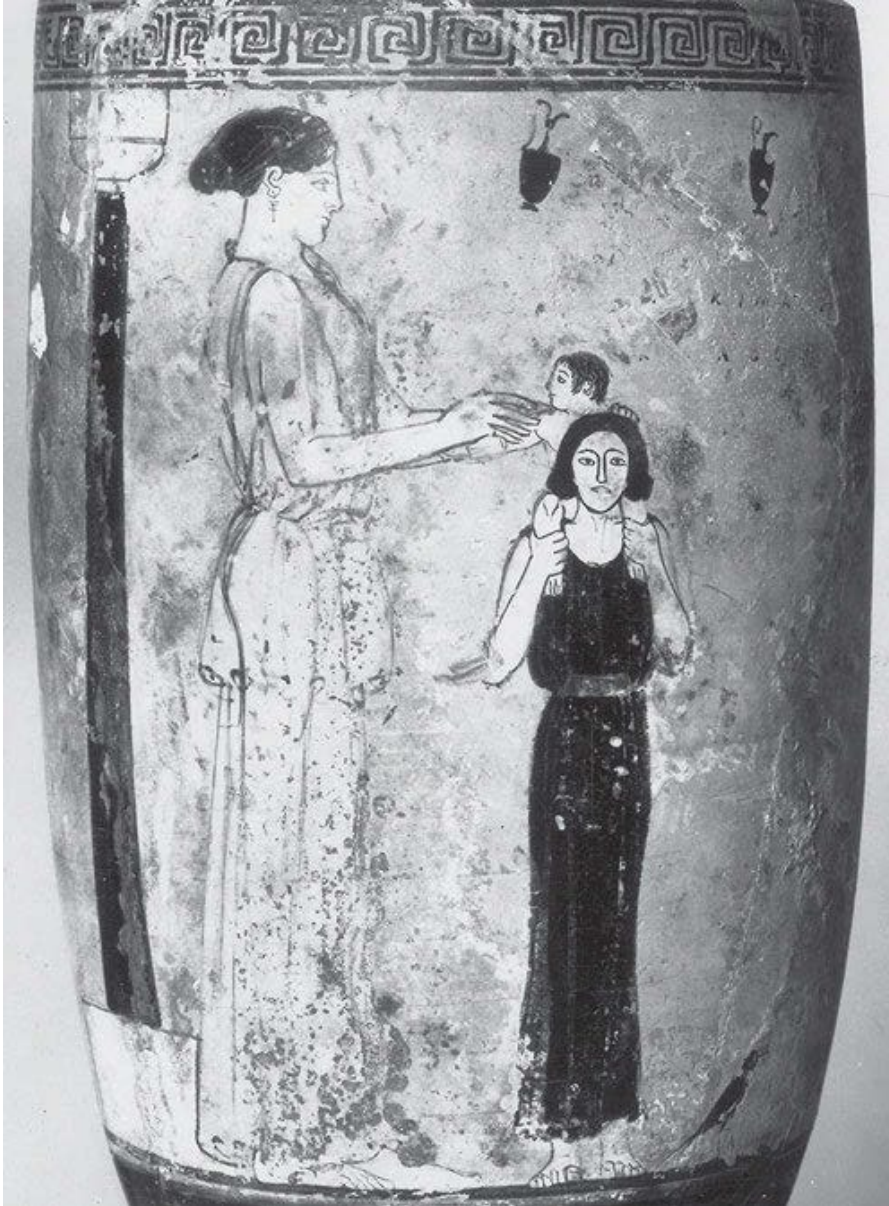
After ca 470 BCE

- **Exclusively funerary** subjects on the lekythoi
- **Gradual development of polychrome decoration:** The use of pigments such as haematite and cinnabar marks an early stage, while after the mid-5th century BCE the colour palette was expanded through the addition of various fugitive, matte colours applied after firing (such as yellow ochre and Egyptian blue), along with a whiter kaolin-based slip.
- **Monumental lekythoi:** A group of monumental lekythoi appears toward the end of the 5th century BCE, reaching heights of up to c. 1 m.
- **Archaeological context:** Incomplete excavation data; these vessels are attested in both female and male burials. Their use is concentrated in Attica and Eretria, with more sporadic occurrences in regions connected to Athens (e.g. Delos, Vergina).
- **Interpretation:** Their relatively limited presence in burial contexts may indicate the higher cost and value of these elaborately decorated polychrome lekythoi.

**White-ground lekythos of the Group of Huge Lekythoi, ca. 400 BCE
(height approx. 70 cm.)
Berlin, Antikensammlung F 2685**



A. Domestic scenes – preparation for visiting the grave



- Two women is the most common domestic theme and remains so until 440 BCE, when images of a visit to the grave begin to dominate. More than 150 white-ground lekythoi with two women are known, almost all of which are polychrome
- The image of two women in a domestic setting, as they perform preferred domestic activities in a manner displaying the important Greek concept of *sophrosyne* (moderation and self-control). The latest scenes (430-420 BCE) are often contaminated with new elements and motifs derived from other types of images.

**White-ground lekythos by the
Timokrates Painter, ca. 460 BCE
Woman and maid with infant
Athens, NAM 12771**



**White-ground lekythos
by the Achilles Painter, c.
460-450 BCE
Woman and maid (?)
Athens, NAM 1923**



**White-ground lekythos by the
Timokrates Painter.
Women with baskets carrying
offerings for the dead,
including lekythoi, while they
prepare for their visit to the
grave
ca 460BCE**



**Woman reading to another woman.
Attic white lekythos by the Painter of Athens
1826, ca. 460 BCE
Private, Once Basel Market.**



**Two women musicians. Attic white lekythos by the Achilles
Painter, ca. 445-440 BCE (drawing)
Oxford, Ashmolean 1889.1016.**

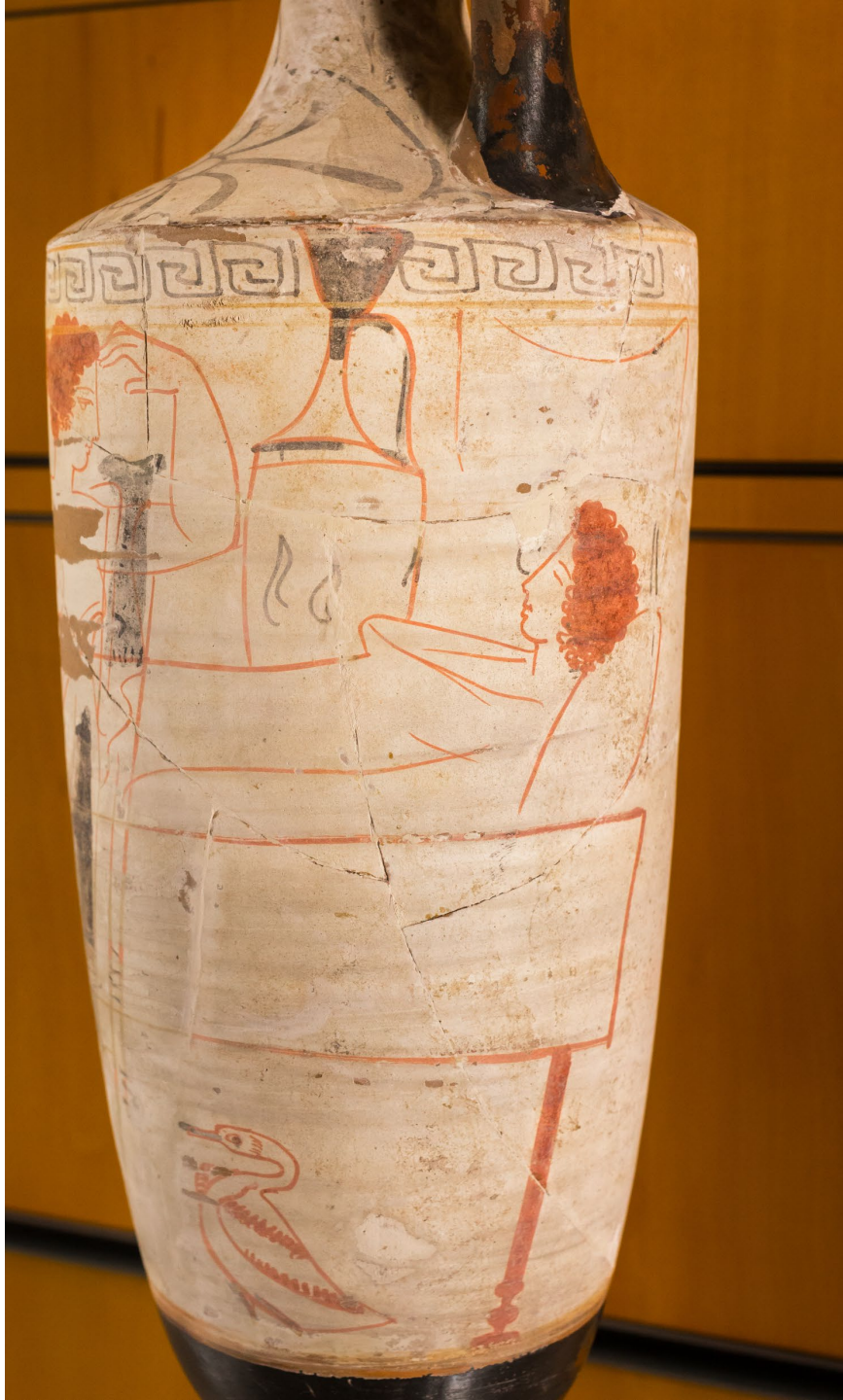


Warrior departing
White-ground lekythos by the Achilles
Painter, c. 440-435 BCE
Athens, NAM 1818

B. Prothesis



**Mother and deceased infant
White-ground lekythos close to the
Inscription Painter, ca. 460 BCE
Berlin, Antikensammlung F 2447**



Prothesis and huge lekythos in the background

White-ground lekythos by the Quadrate Painter, ca 430 BCE

Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts E 288-3



Prothesis

Huge lekythos of the Group of Huge Lekythoi, ca 400 BCE (roll-out view).

Berlin, Antikensammlung F 2684

C. Scenes at the grave



Decorating the grave with ribbons
White-ground lekythos, ca. 460-450 BCE.
New York, Metropolitan Museum 35.11.5



**Mourning old man and a warrior on either side of a funerary stele
White lekythos by the Achilles Painter, ca. 450-445 BCE.
Berlin, Antikensammlung 1983.1.**



**Neck fragment of a warrior loutrophoros by the Kleophon Painter, c. 430-420 BCE.
Athens, NAM 17336**

- The category of the so-called “warrior loutrophoroi” (Krieger-Lutrophoren or battle loutrophoroi) consists of at least 40 fragments and fragmentarily preserved loutrophoroi, dated from the Early Classical period to the late 5th century BCE.
- Their designation derives from the depictions of warriors they bear, shown either engaged in combat or surrounded by their relatives at the moment of departure. In later examples, a funerary stele is also added to the composition.
- The subject matter of these vessels has led scholars to associate them with the public burials of unmarried Athenian soldiers killed in battle, particularly since fragments have been found in excavations of the polyandron in the area of the *Demosion Sema* (public cemetery).



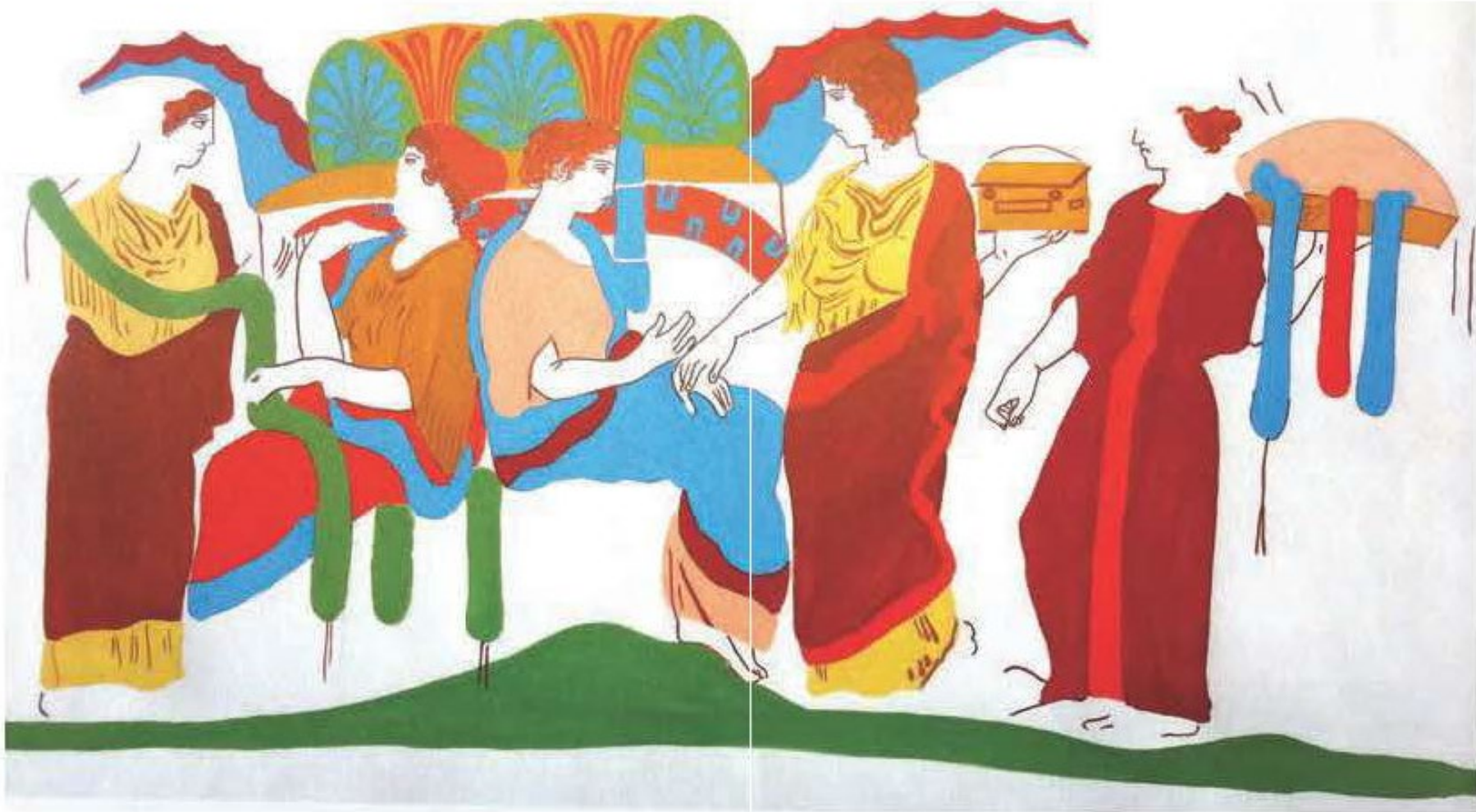
**A small burial mound surmounted by a loutrophoros, flanked by a young woman and a kneeling mourning elderly woman (a Thracian nurse)
White lekythos by the Phiale Painter, ca 435-430 BCE
Athens, NAM 19335**



Dead warrior attended by another youth and a woman at the grave. White-ground lekythos by the R Group, ca. 410 (roll-out view) Athens, NAM 1816 .



**Youth hunting a hare at the tomb. Attic white lekythos by the Thanatos Painter, ca. 440 BCE
London, British Museum
1876,0328.2**



**Women carrying funerary offering to a monument topped by acanthus leaves and palmettes
Huge white lekythos (roll-out view), ca 400 BCE
Paris, Louvre CA 273**

D. The journey to Hades



Charon, Hermes Psychopompos,
and the deceased
White lekythos by the Sabouroff
Painter, ca. 440 BCE
Athens, NAM 1926

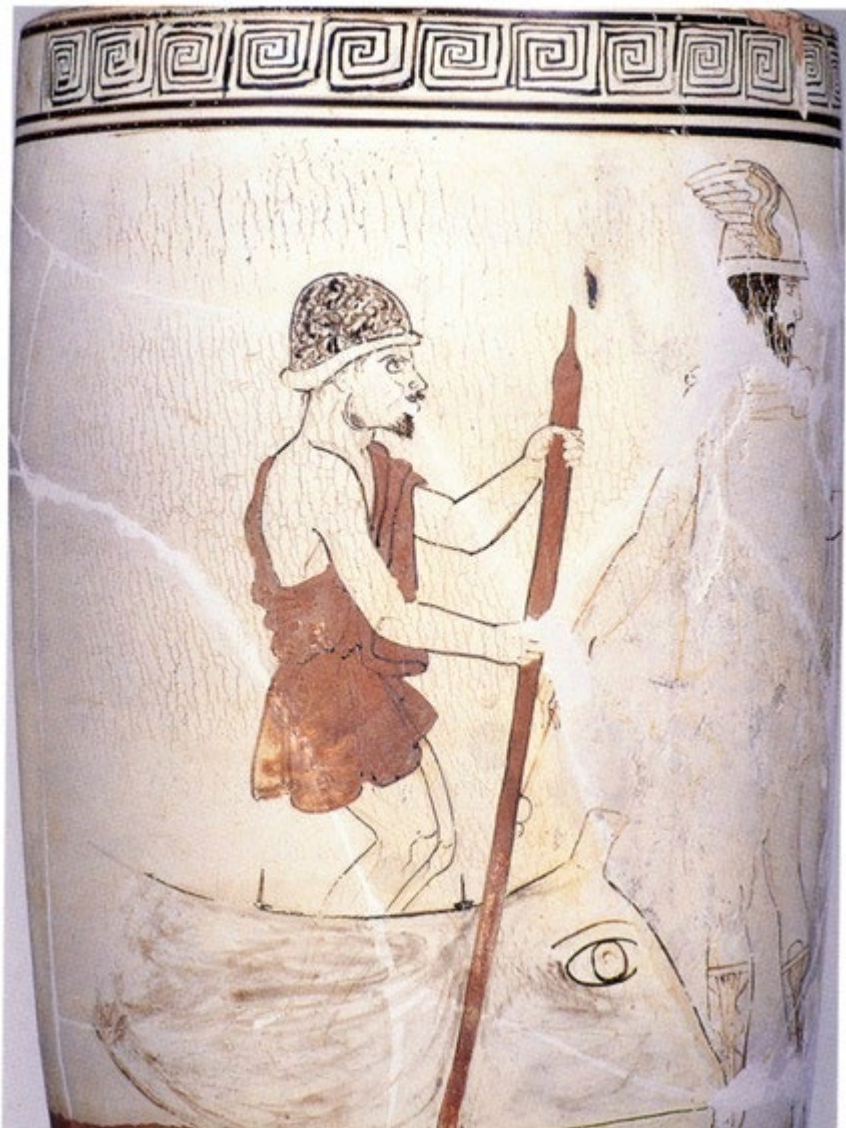


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Charon in his boat, with the souls of the deceased flying around

Black-figure stand fragment, ca 500 BCE

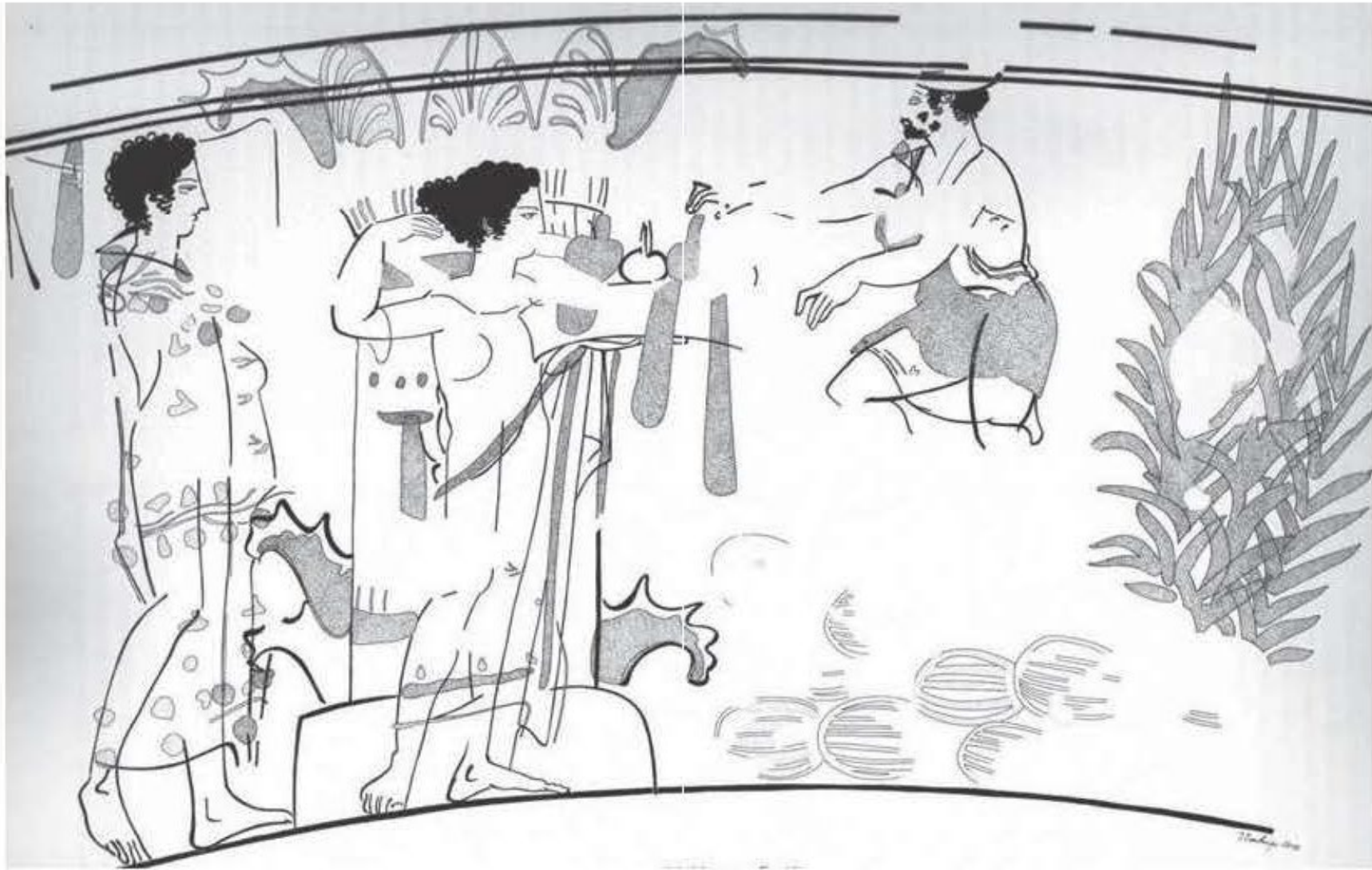
Frankfurt, Liebieghaus: 560



**Charon in pilos and chitoniskos with pole in boat with eye,
Hermes leading woman
White-ground lekythos by the Thanatos Painter, ca 450
Munich, Antikensammlungen: 2777**



**Boy with toy-roller and mother awaiting
Charon. Attic white lekythos by the
Painter of Munich 2335, ca. 430 BCE
New York, Metropolitan Museum
09.221.44**



Youth and woman at a tomb with Charon, who appears to be picking a pomegranate from a funerary basket.

Attic white lekythos by the Triglyph Painter, ca. 410 BCE

Berlin Antikensammlung 2680



**Hypnos and Thanatos with a body before a tomb marked by a tree, as Hermes stands nearby. Attic white lekythos by the Quadrate Painter, ca. 420 BCE
Athens, National Museum 12738**

Conclusion: from the heroic *geras* (honors) of the dead to the consolatory imagery of the white-ground lekythoi.

- **Geometric period:** burial rituals (prothesis and ekphora); public display of an aristocratic ethos through the association with heroic *aphthiton kleos* (imperishable fame).
- **Archaic iconography:** The aristocratic oikos, operating within emerging institutional constraints, presents a coherent visual identity that emphasizes social roles and familial bonds.
- **Classical period:** The oikos is increasingly understood as an organic component of the Athenian polis (cf. the Funeral Orations). Alongside this, a more private dimension of mourning emerges, with the representation of idealized roles and relationships within the household, especially in domestic scenes on white-ground lekythoi.
- Thucydides (2.44.1): “Wherefore I do not so much lament the parents of these men who are present here, as I shall endeavour to console them.” This passage reflects the liminal nature of mourning and the cemetery, particularly in scenes of transition to the Underworld and visits to the grave, suggesting a form of symbolic integration of the dead. It also reveals a growing interest in the blessed or idealized existence in the afterlife.
- **Idealization in funerary imagery:** Figures are typically restrained, introspective, and subdued in expression. Elderly individuals are conspicuously absent, while children and infants are occasionally represented. Overall, there is a marked preference for an idealized youthful figure.