

To Die in Style!

The residential lifestyle of feasting and dying
in Iron Age Stamna, Greece

Gioulika – Olga Christakopoulou



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Preface and acknowledgments

The present paper is based on the results of my PhD research and on the rich recent literature on the subject, which now turns the attention not only to the typological analysis of the archaeological material, but mainly to its interpretative approach, treating the latter as an agent playing an active role, and thus reflecting the social structures of a particular society. In this instance I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Marilena Tsakoumaki fellow archaeologist, for editing and improving the English text. Furthermore I would like to sincerely thank Mary Giamalidi MA, Dr Evy Papadopoulou, Dr Vassiliki Brouma and Dr Gregory Grigorakakis, also fellow archaeologists, but above all friends, for our discussions and the trust they have bestowed on me. I'm particularly grateful to Dr Georgia Z. Alexopoulou, Dr Christina Marini and Maria Golfinopoulou for they have decisively contributed to my study in all possible ways, while I wish to record a special debt of gratitude to Professor Thanasis I. Papadopoulos for reading my study and discussing the subject. It has benefited much of his wisdom.

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Introduction

Symposium for the ancient Greeks was a kind of traditional ritual performed in the occasion of a social event.¹ It was governed by customary individual and collective rules and was accompanied by procedures and even objects which were very closely connected with the participants and the ceremonies, indicating more than just a reception/meeting with benefits, for the sole purpose of enjoying it. Several theories arise about the importance of *symposium* which, briefly and bearing in mind the well-known bibliography, it is said to have the purpose of ensuring the friendly relations between the participants and the participants themselves with the deities towards which they were often addressed. In addition, a symposium could be a moment of cohesion² where the social/military hierarchy was validated and legitimized,³ even when it was part of the funeral process.

There are several synonymous words,⁴ which more or less describe the concept of the process. In the burial process of Stamna perhaps the term ritual banquet could be better used in the sense of ‘*food and drink consumption*’ as a result of the initial social process, which can be characterized as a domestic banquet but also as a symposium⁵ or feasting.

As Wright claims⁶ ‘*there is no generally accepted definition of feasting*’ but for the purpose of writing his article, which refers to feasting in the Mycenaean society, he defines feasting as ‘*the formal ceremony of communal eating and drinking to celebrate significant occasions*’.⁷ Supporting his view, and in order to specify the issue to be

¹ For the symbolic aspects of food consumption and how this process creates, maintains and defines social and political relations (in terms of an international in concept culture) see Sánchez Romero, Aranda Jiménez, Alarcón García 2007, with relevant bibliography.

² Corner 2015.

³ Brouwers 2010, 239.

⁴ With reference to Terminology also see, ‘*Festivals and Feasts, Greek.*’ *Ancient Greece and Rome: An Encyclopedia for Students*, edited by Carroll Moulton, vol. 2, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1998, pp.65-67. World History in Context, (link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX2897200184/WHIC?u=tlc199095657&xid=b741b924), Accessed 23 Aug. 2017.

⁵ For further references to the notion of symposium and to the first elements that establish it in historical times see Wekowski 2012, 19 ff., who refers extensively to the definition of the concept, to its historical origins, to its interpretation, and also to the ritual models occurring and distinguished by archaeological documentation (sympotic vessels etc), and finally to its presence in later periods. See also notes 3 & 10 referring to the review of Murray’s bibliography who dealt with the subject.

⁶ Wright 2004, 133. For further definitions of the meaning of feasting, see also 2004 134-135. Studies of Borgna 2004 and Steel 2004, face the feasting process in Cyprus and Crete as a tradition, clearly characterizing the elite class of the settlements.

⁷ Wright 2004, 133. In general, for the importance of feasting as an integral process in the socio-

analyzed, he argues that ‘*material evidence for either eating or drinking may indicate feasting, but one must scrutinize the evidence closely to determine whether the remains are the result of formal and ritual activities not involving feasting*’.⁸ Among the references made on definitions that give the sense of feasting, he claims also that ‘*feasting is an important ceremony instrumental in the forging of cultural identity*’⁹ and that ‘*the universality of its practice underscores its importance in the formation of identity*’.¹⁰

In the case of Stamna, the *symposium* both as a concept and as a process involving prominent citizens of the establishment, is documented mostly by the finding of the large cauldrons, the tripod jars and the tripod vessels. It should be emphasized that, as the process of *symposium* is presumed to be a social event, which when its owner was alive it accounted for a sufficient number of participants, it is also presumed by the *burial commodity* of the Stamna excavation, that in the burial process the number of participants had to be quite small, an issue which, as we shall see below, is still under discussion. In other words, in Stamna there may be a reverse ritual process where a burial practice consisted of (possibly) a limited number of participants, in contrast to a social event which included vice versa (i.e., *in vivo*), a remarkable number of attendants.

Regardless of the form of the whole process, the concept behind the formal ritual as part of the burial process bridged the gap between life and death, and constituted a meaningful way of communicating with the metaphysical, which was perceived (or at least would like to be treated) both at a personal and a social level, forming part of a perfectly normal and natural process.¹¹

What we live by we die by. Robert Frost

Dealing with death and coping with grief by family and close relatives¹² is reflected through the treatment of the dead body, the location of burials and their accompanying objects. Body and Soul are interrelated and must be treated after death in the same way they are treated in life: as one. Therefore, ritual procedures aim at alleviating pain during the transition as well as preserving the enjoyment with the assistance of provisions which were necessary for them

political life of the Aegean world, especially in the 13th century, see Palaima 2004.

⁸ Wright 2004, 133.

⁹ Wright 2004, 134.

¹⁰ Wright 2004, 135.

¹¹ See Dakouri-Hild 2016, 11-30, for a detailed literature on the concept and the manner in which the ancient people fully incorporated their everyday life into the funerary environment.

¹² For a sociological report of the importance of kinship and worship of ancestors of ancient Greek society see the noteworthy handbook of Numa Denis Fustel De Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study of the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome*, Batoche Books, Kitchener 2001. (Reprint of the Lathrop, Lee & Shephard Co., Boston, 1873 edition).