

Petras, Siteia

The Pre- and Proto-palatial cemetery in context

*Acts of a two-day conference held at the Danish Institute at
Athens, 14-15 February 2015*

Edited by

Metaxia Tsipopoulou



Monographs of the Danish Institute at Athens
Volume 21

*This volume is dedicated to all those individuals who participated over the years
in the excavation, conservation, study, site development and publication
of the results.*

*This lofty vision for Petras and its region was made possible by their hard work,
dedication and support.*

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Front cover:

The Petras cemetery (photo M. Tsipopoulou) and Protopalatial silver signet ring from HT 9 (photo C. Papanikolopoulos)
Graphic design: Garifalia Kostopoulou and Metaxia Tsipopoulou

Back cover: Excavation of House Tomb 1, Room 6. Prof. S. Triantaphyllou (photo G. Kostopoulou).

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The conference participants gathered in the courtyard of the Danish Institute at Athens 15 February 2015

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Abbreviations

Archaeological periods

EBA	Early Bronze Age
EH	Early Helladic
EM	Early Minoan
FN	Final Neolithic
LH	Late Helladic
LM	Late Minoan
LN	Late Neolithic
LBA	Late Bronze Age
MBA	Middle Bronze Age
MH	Middle Helladic
MM	Middle Minoan
MN	Middle Neolithic

Petas Area

HT	House Tomb
R	Room
L	Lakkos
P	Petas
PTSK	Petas Cemetery

PTSOU

Petas Rock Shelter

Σ -palace

Stratigraphical trenches of the palace

W

Wall

Other

A.S.L.

Above Sea Level

diam.

diameter

gr

gram

h

height

kg

kilogram

w

width

wt

weight

th

thickness

lt

liter

MMD

Mean Measure of Divergence

MNI

Minimum Number of Individuals

NISP

Number of Identifiable Specimens

SM

Archaeological Museum, Siteia

vol.

volume

The form of the English language for the native speakers (British or American) was the author's choice. For the non-native speakers the American form was used.

Bibliographic Abbreviations

AAA – Archaiologika Analekta Athinon
ActaPalaeobot – Acta Palaiobotanica
AJA – American Journal of Archaeology
AJPA – American Journal of Physical Anthropology
AJS – American Journal of Sociology
AmJHumBiol – American Journal of Human Biology
AnnMathStat – Annals of Mathematical Statistics
AR – Archaeological Reports
Arachne – (on-line access to the CMS, with corrected information and enhanced illustrations) <http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/drupal/?q=de/node/access> date March 2016.
ArchDelt – Archaeologikon Deltion
ArchEph – Archaeologike Ephemeris
AS – O. Krzyszkowska, *Aegean seals: an introduction* (BICS Suppl. 85), London.
ASAtene – Annuario della Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Atene

BAR-IS – British Archaeological Reports, International Series
BCH – Bulletin se correspondence hellénique
BICS – Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London
BSA – Annual of the British School at Athens

CHIC – J.-P. Olivier and L. Godart, *Corpus hieroglyphicarum inscriptionum Cretae* (Études Crétoises 31), Athens and Rome 1996.
CMS – Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel, Berlin 1964-2000, Mainz 2002-
CretChron – Kretika Chronika
EtCret – Études Crétoises
JAS – Journal of Archaeological Science
JMA – Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology
Kentro – Kentro: The Newsletter of the INSTAP Study Center for East Crete
MA – Monumenti Antichi
OJA – Oxford Journal of Archaeology
Prakt – Praktika tes en Athenais Archaeologikes Etaireias
SIMA – Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology
SMEA – Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici



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House Tomb 5: A preliminary analysis of the human skeletal remains*

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Abstract

House Tomb 5 consists of twelve rooms which vary in size and content. The majority of the skeletal remains were recovered from Rooms 2, 9 and 10, which are also the largest rooms of the tomb. The macroscopic study of the human bones was conducted in relation to international methodological standards for the study of commingled skeletal assemblages, which were also applied to the skeletal remains from the nearby Rock Shelter and those of House Tomb 2. Taphonomic evidence favours a secondary manipulation of the human remains which, during or after the decomposition of the body, were deposited or transferred in the rooms of the house tomb in semi-or disarticulated form. Moreover, a high degree of fragmentation and evidence of short-term firing on the bones confirm the hypothesis of secondary activities which took place inside the house tomb as well as outside it, at an area not located as yet by the archaeological research. Regarding differentiations in the deposition of the skeletal assemblage, there is not any patterned selection of particular body parts and all age and sex groups are well represented. Pathological conditions observed include a low frequency of osteoarthritis and vertebral arthritis, healed fractures, and periostitis on the long bones, as well as dental disease related probably to a certain degree to the dietary habits of the living population.

Introduction

This paper aims to present the results of the recent study of the human skeletal remains excavated from House Tomb 5 at the Kephala-Petras cemetery. The use of House Tomb 5 extends from the Early Minoan III to the Middle Minoan IA periods (2200-1900 B.C.)¹ and thus covers a period of 300 years. The

study of the human remains will add new information on the character of the late Prepalatial burial practices alongside the quality of life of the population group buried in House Tomb 5 during their life course. The house tomb is rectangular in shape and consists of twelve rooms which vary in size and type, with Room 2 being a later addition to the initial plan of the tomb.² All the skeletal material excavated in the rooms of the house tomb was in a commingled

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1 Manning 2010, 18-28. Table 2.2.

2 Tsipopoulou this volume, "Documenting sociopolitical change".

state; not a single primary burial occurred. More than 5,000 bone fragments were studied, out of which 2,974 provided adequate anatomical features necessary for anatomical identification and siding.

The macroscopic study of the diagnostic bone fragments was performed following international methodological standards for the study of commingled skeletal remains,³ and was adjusted to the recording scheme proposed by Triantaphyllou⁴ in a series of studies including the Petras Rock Shelter and the House Tomb 2 skeletal material. Each bone element was labelled with an individual inventory number and, according to a number of archaeological and anthropological parameters, was entered in a Microsoft Access database. The archaeological parameters included information about the context of the area where the bones were located (room number, locus, stratum and associated excavation and group number) and about taphonomic changes observed in the skeletal assemblage (weathering, preservation and discolouration), while the anthropological parameters recorded information on anatomical identification and siding, age, sex, metric and non-metric traits and pathological changes.

Taphonomy and character of the human bone depositions

Regarding the character of the deposition of a skeletal assemblage, taphonomic observations can be highly illustrative. The human skeletal remains from House Tomb 5 do not show any skeletal alterations which would be compatible with pre-burial exposure of the body to external conditions, as for instance cracking and discolouration due to thermal fluctuations and gnawing due to animal activity. Despite the lack of evidence indicating exposure of the deceased, the skeletal remains present a high degree of

fragmentation suggesting that secondary activities, such as frequent re-openings and multiple visits, were taking place within the tomb.

Moreover, evidence of human interference indicating manipulation of the deceased was revealed from the bone fragments exhibiting thermal alterations. That is, a total of 326 post-cranial and cranial bone fragments showed some kind of discolouration and periosteal texture change, such as warping and erosion. Bone discolouration ranges from black to blue-grey and white, with the latter forming the most abundant group. As far as it concerns the spatial distribution of the burnt remains, these were only found in Rooms 1, 2, 3, 9 and 10, of which Rooms 2 and 9 contributed most of the material. Despite the relatively high number of fragments exhibiting heat induced alterations, the estimated minimum number of individuals derived strictly from the burnt human remains is only six, suggesting that burning was not a common practice at House Tomb 5. Archaeological evidence would further support the above observations since no distinct traces of burning have been found to date in the broader area of the cemetery. It is highly possible therefore that partly defleshed body parts, as indicated by the variety of discolourations and the few cases of severe thermal alterations, were moved away after their initial disposal and were exposed to firing conditions in a place outside the cemetery which has not been located as yet.⁵

Human activity as an extrinsic factor that affected the state of the skeletal remains found in House Tomb 5 can also be detected by the representation of the anatomical elements. Table 1 shows the actual number of the bone elements recorded in the skeletal assemblage compared to the expected representation of skeletal elements for a minimum

3 Outram *et al.* 2005; Osterholtz *et al.* 2014.

4 Triantaphyllou 2009; 2010; 2012.

5 For a discussion on evidence for ritual burning in Crete see also Triantaphyllou this volume.

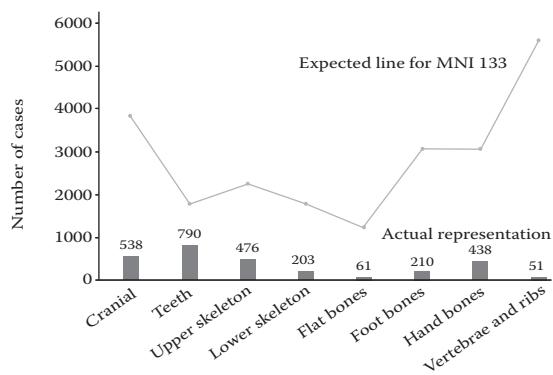


Table 1. Actual bone representation of the human remains from the Kephala-Petras House Tomb 5; the black line indicates the expected number of skeletal elements for a minimum number of individuals (MNI) at 56.

number of 56 individuals,⁶ assuming that the latter would represent once complete skeletons. The high values of the actual number of the bone elements represented by the upper skeleton and the hand bones conflict with the low numbers recorded for the lower skeleton and the foot bones, whereas other bone groups such as the flat bones, the vertebrae and the ribs are underrepresented in the assemblage. Of particular interest is the uncommonly high occurrence of loose teeth (that is, detached from the bone alveoli), which amounts to 790 mandibular and maxillary teeth.

Thus, the picture obtained from the bone representation index favours the hypothesis of the secondary manipulation of the bodies, the defleshed remnants of which appear to have been intensively removed, mixed and transferred perhaps even within the different rooms of the house tomb. In particular, skeletal remains were found in Rooms 1,

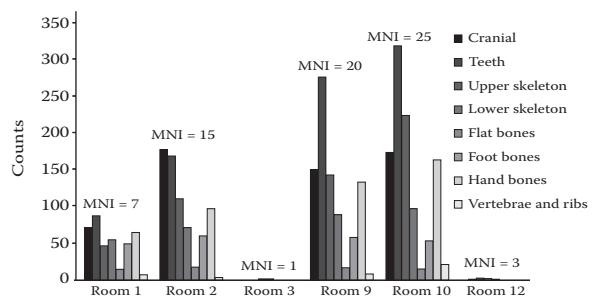


Table 2. Representation of anatomical units per room; the MNI for each room is also indicated.

2, 3, 9, 10 and 12; the majority of the material comes from Rooms 2, 9 and 10 which are the largest in the house tomb. Bones from the cranial skeleton are lacking from Rooms 3 and 12, suggesting perhaps that particular burial practices allowed the moving of selected body parts, during or after decomposition, to certain rooms within the house tomb, although any clues regarding the above rooms are very tentative due to the small number of human remains located within them. Table 2 displays the actual representation of the bone categories per room and the minimum number of individuals estimated for each room separately. This picture is similar to that obtained for the house tomb overall: the upper skeleton prevails over the lower skeleton in almost every room, apart from Room 1, while the hand bones occur significantly more frequently than the foot bones. The secondary character of the depositions is also supported by the high number of teeth found detached from their bone alveoli and the low numbers of rib cage bones, vertebrae and flat bones (e.g., ossa coxae and scapulae) represented in each room. The under-representation of the latter bone groups cannot be explained solely as a result of intrinsic factors causing the decay of particular osseous structures.

6 The Minimum Number of Individuals (MNI) was based on the presence of 45 right petrous parts of the temporal bone, for the adults, and of 11 teeth in various formation stages or post-cranial fragments, for the subadults, which were carefully cross-checked to avoid duplication and over-counting of the same individual.

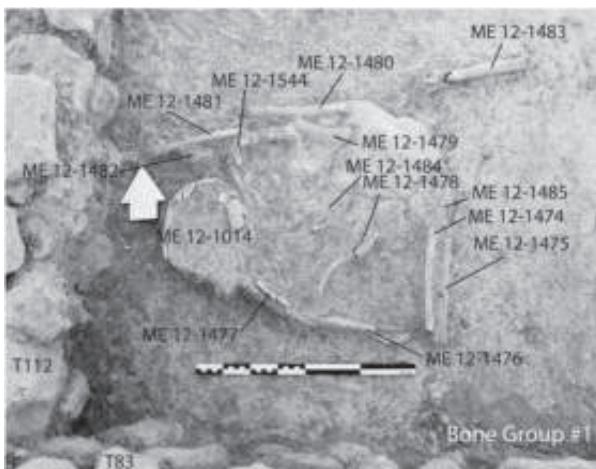


Fig. 1a. Semi-articulated upper torso manipulated in fresh condition, Level 9, Room 10. Photo Petras excavations archive.

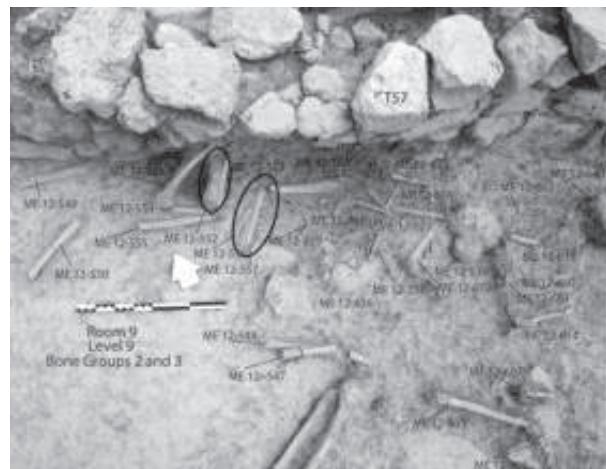


Fig. 1b. Two cases of articulated body parts: left ulna and radius (PTSK12.552 and PTSK12.553), left tibia and fibula (PTSK12.556 and PTSK12.557), Level 9, Room 9. Photo Petras excavations archive.

ous remains,⁷ since bones with low bone mineral density belonging to neonates and infants are well-represented in the assemblage. Moreover, if intrinsic factors were responsible for the unequal representation of anatomical bone groups in the burial assemblage, the presence of numerous small bones with low bone density recorded in the assemblage, such as hand and foot bones, cannot be interpreted efficiently.⁸

To sum up, parameters such as the representation of anatomical units and the degree of fragmentation but also the occurrence, although low, of bone fragments clearly affected by firing conditions would be compatible with different stages of secondary manipulation of the human remains. Yet, is it possible to have these stages identified through the macroscopic study of the human remains alone? The physical presence and the active participation in the excava-

tion of trained field osteoarchaeologists, alongside the close parallel scrutiny of the excavation notes and photographs, helped in capturing the various stages of the manipulation of the dead body. Three modes of secondary manipulation can be detected in this assemblage: 1) one case of a *semi-articulated body* represented by the upper torso found in Room 10, which appears to have been manipulated while it still preserved its soft tissue (Figs. 1a, 2); 2) four

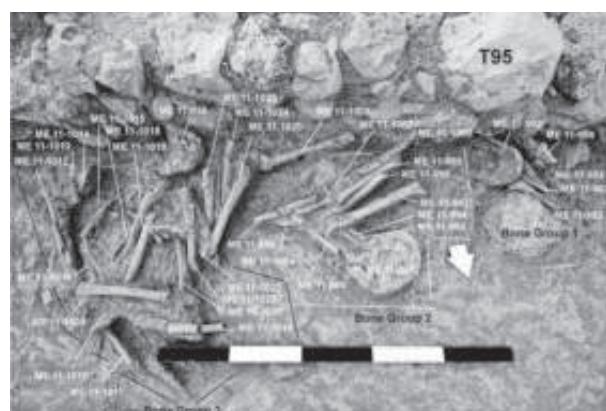


Fig. 1c. Commingled remains manipulated in dry condition, Level 8, Room 9. Photo Petras excavations archive.

7 Bones with low bone density such as vertebrae, ribs, flat bones and small bones cannot effortlessly withstand taphonomic pressures and are more susceptible to decay than other bone groups; for a thorough discussion on extrinsic and intrinsic factors affecting the preservation of bones see Bello *et al.* 2006, 28-34.

8 Bello & Andrews 2006, 8-9.

cases of *articulated body parts* (a pair of left ulna and radius and a pair of left tibia and fibula in Room 9 (Fig. 1b), a left clavicle articulated to a left humerus and a right ulna and radius in Room 10); and 3) mixed *commingled remains* deposited in dry condition in all rooms (Fig. 1c). Given that manipulation can be identified in different decomposition stages, the preceding examples would suggest multiple visits to the tomb and the re-arrangement of the remains at different time intervals following the initial interment of the deceased.

Composition and health patterns of the population buried in House Tomb 5

In seeking to reconstruct burial practices in Crete, archaeologists are primarily concerned with the size of the population that used the funerary monuments. A number of different estimation methods have been employed by researchers including the minimum number of individuals calculated from the excavated crania, the total count of the associated artefacts and the size of Early Minoan settlements in order to facilitate the discussion regarding the demographic analysis of Early Minoan communities.⁹ In regard to the present study, the population unit estimated to have been buried in House Tomb 5 was based on Bintliff's estimation model.¹⁰ According to this model a household of about five to seven individuals contributes approximately 20 corpses per century. Considering thus that a minimum number of 56 individuals was buried in House Tomb 5 throughout its use in EM III to MM IA – that is a period of ca. 300 years – we can estimate approximately 18.6 skeletons per 100 years. Although certain limitations

need to be kept in mind with regard to the use of Bintliff's estimation model, it is possible that a population unit approximating a conventional type of nuclear family was using House Tomb 5 throughout the course of its history.

Both sexes and individuals from all age categories are represented in the skeletal assemblage. Regarding the age structure of the population, remains belonging to one neonate (0-1 year), four infants (1-6 years), four children (6-12 years) and two juveniles (12-18 years) were recorded alongside those of adults, suggesting an absence of age-related differentiations in the treatment of the dead. Apart from Room 3 which gave relatively few skeletal remains,¹¹ subadult remains were recorded in almost every room of the house tomb. The determination of sex faced some limitations due to the poor preservation state of morphological features which are necessary for the assessment of sex. However, twelve females and fourteen males that could be identified based on cranial morphology were equally distributed across the rooms of the house tomb. The present results are pertinent to observations made for House Tomb 2 skeletal material concerning the composition of the population, where similarly no indications of sex or age differentiation were found.¹²

The state of health of the population group that used House Tomb 5 seems to be relatively high, since only a few pathological conditions have been attested in the assemblage. In relation to the post-cranial skeleton, vertebral arthritis shows the highest rates (7.9%) with evidence of non-specific infections (e.g., periostitis) on long bones next (1.38%). Furthermore, degenerative arthritic lesions are also present in the joints but in a lower degree than those in the

⁹ Whitelaw 1983, 325-345; Soles 1992, 252; Triantaphyllou *et al.* 2015, 5-6, Triantaphyllou in press, 9-11; Triantaphyllou this volume.

¹⁰ Bintliff 1977, 83-84.

¹¹ The explanation for this phenomenon is that in LM IIIC a pit was excavated in the area of Room 3 down to bedrock and refuse, probably from the Rectangular Building, was deposited in it; see "Lakkos A" in Tsipopoulou 2012, 127-129, figs. 13-14 and Rupp this volume.

¹² Triantaphyllou *et al.* in press, 7-9.

vertebral column. Apart from the occurrence of arthritis and non-specific infections, the macroscopic study also identified activity-related skeletal indicators such as trauma (0.31%) and musculoskeletal stress markers (0.56%). The latter refer to bone remodelling induced by mechanical stress at the sites of muscle and tendon attachment on the bone, and are often interpreted as an indicator of activity patterns. In contrast to the picture obtained by the postcranial bone elements, no cranial pathologies are observed in the House Tomb 5 skeletal assemblage, an observation that fits with similar results derived from the study of the skeletal material provided from House Tomb 2 and from the Rock Shelter.¹³

Oral pathologies have been also recorded in the case study population. In particular 57 of the 790 examined permanent teeth exhibited carious lesions either on the crown or on the root surface, whereas a slightly larger number of teeth (N=78), usually incisors, were diagnosed with calculus. Higher calculus rates were also observed in the study of the House Tomb 2 and Rock Shelter dentition, possibly implying particularities in dietary patterns of the studied populations. However, the most frequent dental pathology observed in the House Tomb 5 dental assemblage is the occurrence of ante mortem tooth loss (AMTL; 35.6%), namely the loss of teeth prior to death due to inflammation of the periodontal tissue around the root apex, often caused by periodontal disease or coronal caries.¹⁴ In addition to pre-mortem loss of teeth, a few cases of periapical abscesses (3.39%), also indicative of inflammation, were recognised in maxillary and mandibular alveolar processes. Both ante-mortem tooth loss and periapical abscesses can be caused by caries in combination with dental wear, indicating a considerable intake of carbohydrates. When compared to the other studied Petras assemblages, House Tomb 5 provided the only cases of dental abscesses while

it also displayed considerably higher levels of ante mortem tooth loss. House Tomb 2 and the Rock Shelter, on the other hand, showed evidence of metabolic stress episodes such as enamel hypoplasia that were missing from the skeletal material of House Tomb 5. The preceding differences may to a certain degree relate either to sample limitations or they may indicate differences in diet. Future analysis of the total skeletal remains from the Petras house tombs is necessary in order to reach to secure conclusions.

Conclusions

The study of the human remains points towards a multi-stage funerary ritual that included repeated visits to the tomb and constant contact with the skeletal remains of the dead. The use of the rooms appears to differ in some aspects ranging from rooms which were either empty or filled with only a few human remains, serving perhaps as the initial disposal areas of the deceased, and others which were accommodating considerable depositions of human remains, serving thus as ossuaries. The rooms in which human remains were deposited exhibited no differentiations in the representation of age and sex groups and in the character of manipulation of the dead. The documentation of three modes of secondary manipulation in different decomposition stages, and of a high degree of fragmentation, affirms the hypothesis of secondary activities taking place in the house tombs. In particular the dead buried in House Tomb 5 were disturbed and probably distributed, relocated and manipulated according to ritual and organizational requirements which aimed at the breakdown of personal histories and the prominence of a communal identity. The persistence in seeking a communal frame of redefining the self may also have led to the use of fire as a breaking mechanism against individuality, since the latter was expressed in the still recognizable human remains. The funerary behaviour of the Petras community gives the

13 Triantaphyllou 2012, 165-166.

14 Hillson 2005, 291, 304-310.

impression of a complex and multi-layered mortuary ritual with an extended liminal phase, which asked for, strangely to us, contact with the decomposing body and a successive *damnatio memoriae* of the individual for the sake of the community and/or the lineage.¹⁵

15 For a thorough discussion of Early Minoan funerary practices see Triantaphyllou this volume; Legarra Herero 2014.

Discussion

- Tsipopoulou:** The difference in pathology between House Tombs 2 and 5 – does it have something to do with the fact that at least two of the occupants of House Tomb 2 were males over 45 years old?
- Kiorpe:** It is possible, but older people are found in House Tomb 5, too. Vertebral arthritis and arthritis at the post-cranial skeleton are indicative of old age, but they may also reveal certain stress levels. The latter could likewise be demonstrated by the musculoskeletal stress markers (MSM), and both arthritis and MSM, when found in a population, should be considered as possible activity indicators. In the end we should not forget that my sample did not include many vertebrae, or at least not as many as the House Tomb 2 assemblage.
- Tsipopoulou:** Right, in the House Tomb 2 there were also primary burials.
- Kyparissi:** Since the burials are secondary – maybe you said that yesterday, but I was not here – and you define the building and the whole complex as funerary, even though the burials were secondary, could you explain why they were buried there? What about the primary burials?
- Kiorpe:** You will have an answer to that question in the next paper. I just presented the preliminary results of the anthropological study of House Tomb 5. The secondary character of the depositions is obvious as we have an overall low representation of anatomical bone groups and under-representation of certain elements, evidence that does not agree with the estimated minimum number of individuals for House Tomb 5. Apart from the low bone representation, the accumulations of bones that have been presented are certainly not in anatomical position or articulated, hence a secondary manipulation is more than suggestive. The question of the character of the depositions is what we have been researching for many years now, and especially the next talk and Sevi Triantaphyllou will be able to give you a fully integrated response to that question.

Greek abstract

Κεφάλα Πετράς: η μελέτη των σκελετικών καταλοίπων από το Ταφικό Κτίριο 5

Το Ταφικό Κτίριο 5 παρουσιάζει περισσότερες από μια αρχιτεκτονικές φάσεις και συνολικά αποτελείται από δώδεκα δωμάτια διαφορετικού μεγέθους με μεγαλύτερα τα δωμάτια 2, 9 και 10, από τα οποία προέρχεται και ο κύριος όγκος του οστεολογικού υλικού. Η μελέτη των ανθρώπινων καταλοίπων ακολούθησε την διεθνή προτεινόμενη μεθοδολογία και βιβλιογραφία για την μελέτη των διάσπαρτων οστών όπως αυτή έχει εφαρμοστεί και στη μελέτη των σκελετικών καταλοίπων του Ταφικού Κτιρίου 2 και της Βραχοσκεπής του ίδιου νεκροταφείου με σκοπό την μεθοδολογική συνάφεια, απαραίτητη για την σύγκριση των ερευνητικών αποτελεσμάτων. Η μελέτη της ταφονομίας των οστών συνηγορεί στο δευτερογενή χαρακτήρα των αποθέσεων καθώς τα οστά έχουν βρεθεί σε μη ανατομική ακολουθία και σε μεγάλο βαθμό θρυμματισμένα πιθανότατα εξαιτίας της εναπόθεσης τους στα επιμέρους δωμάτια σε αποσαρκωμένη μορφή. Φαίνεται πως δεν υπάρχει ιδιαίτερη προτίμηση συγκεκριμένων ανατομικών ομάδων καθώς πέραν των μακρών οστών, εκπροσωπούνται όλες οι ανατομικές ομάδες σε αρκετά μεγάλο ποσοστό. Επιπλέον, μικρό ποσοστό των οστών φαίνεται να έχει υποστεί επίδραση πυράς σε χαμηλές κυρίως θερμοκρασίες σύμφωνα με τις μεταβολές που παρατηρούνται σε αυτά (cracking, discoloration). Καμία επίσης προτίμηση δεν διακρίνεται σε σχέση με τα φύλα και τις ηλικιακές ομάδες, εφόσον έχουν βρεθεί οστά που ανήκουν τόσο σε ενήλικες άντρες και/ή γυναίκες, όσο και σε ανήλικα άτομα διαφορετικών ηλικιακών σταδίων, ακόμη και σε νεογνά. Σχετικά με τα επίπεδα υγείας έχουν παρατηρθεί σε σχετικά μικρή συχνότητα αρθρίτιδες, σπονδυλαρθρίτιδες, κατάγματα οστών και φλεγμονές όπως περιοστίτιδα κυρίως στα μακρά οστά, αλλά και οδοντικές παθήσεις, τρυγία (πέτρα), τερηδόνα και οδοντικά αποστήματα. Μελλοντική μελέτη των ανθρώπινων καταλοίπων από τα υπόλοιπα ταφικά κτίρια του νεκροταφείου θα προσφέρει την δυνατότητα σύγκρισης και παρατήρησης της ομοιογένειας των ταφικών πρακτικών αλλά και πιθανές διαφοροποιήσεις στις πρακτικές και στην ταφονομία ανάλογα με την χρονική διάρκεια χρήσης του εκάστοτε ταφικού κτιρίου, όπως επίσης και τα επίπεδα υγείας των ανθρώπων που χρησιμοποιούσαν το νεκροταφείο του Πετρά.

