



Elena Walter-Karydi. *Die Athener und ihre Gräber (1000–300 v.Chr.).* Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015. XVI, 421 S., 231 Abb. ISBN 978-3-11-038402-4.

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E. Walter-Karydi: Die Athener und ihre Gräber (1000–300 v.Chr.)

As the title suggests, this work deals with the relationship between the Athenians and their graves, that is analyzed not only from an archaeological point of view, but quite often also from an artistic point of view. The examination of the scenes on the vases, of the statues used as grave markers, of the funerary reliefs, aims to reconstruct the collective mentality of the Athenians over time towards the dead and the death. The research about the Athenian funerary archaeology has been carried on by several scholars. Unfortunately some important works have not been quoted by Walter-Karydi in her book: Donna C. Kurtz and John Boardman, *Greek burial customs*, London 1971 (one of the first complete works about the Greek funerary customs with a section dedicated to Athens and Attica, probably outdated but that can be considered a forerunner of this kind of studies); James Whitley, *The Archaeology of Ancient Greece*, Cambridge 2001 (in which there is also a study of the early Athenian burials through a social approach); Anna Maria D’Onofrio, *Aspetti e problemi del monumento funerario attico*, in: *Annali. Sezione di Archeologia e Storia Antica*, Dipartimento di Studi del Mondo Classico e del Mediterraneo Antico, Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1988, pp. 83–96 (in which it is possible to find an analysis of the Archaic Attic *semata*, *kouroi* and steles). , but, except for a few studies, usually the chronological range considered is quite short and it is difficult to obtain a wider overview. In this case instead, a long period has been taken into account, from the Iron Age (1000 B.C.) until the end of the Classical Age (300 B.C.).

The book is divided into four chapters, in their turn

subdivided into several paragraphs, that follow a chronological order and in which the leitmotif is the *Geras Thanonton*. The first one is quite brief and it is mainly an introduction to the Greek concept of the duty of the livings to honor the dead and preserve their memory. Moreover the idea of “necropolis” is challenged: the term, in fact, does not occur in the literary sources until Strabo (17.1.10.14, referred to a suburb of Alexandria).

The second chapter deals with the Geometric period (ca. 1000–700 B.C.). The Author analyzes the *Geras Thanonton* in the framework of the Homeric poems and from an archaeological point of view: the heroes aspire to the honorable death that gives them the glory, the only way to survive to the physical end; in the Attic graves the commemoration of the dead and their “immortality” within the Athenian society is put in place through three elements: the tumulus, the vase used as grave marker and the stele, that in this period is anonymous, without images or inscriptions.

The anonymity is abandoned during the Archaic period (ca. 650–490 B.C.), analyzed into the third chapter. In this phase the *Geras Thanonton* is expressed through the images and the inscriptions on the funerary monuments and through a new type of grave marker, the *kouros* (or the less common *kore* used for the female burials); steles were made of limestone or marble, statues of marble: in both cases the choice of the material is connected to its endurance. The dead are not represented lying, as in the *prothesis* scenes on the Geometric vases, but standing as alive. The *kouroi* are characterized by their standard-

ized typology, while the figures on the steles are often represented as athletes, warriors or hoplites, even if this typological characterization has not a biographical value; such an absence of personal references is stressed by the comparison with the Egyptian monuments that instead focuses on the life of the deceased. The same can be observed in the case of the inscriptions, where the name of the dead is attested, sometimes together with the one of the father, without any reference to the activities of the deceased.

The last chapter, about the burials of the Classical period (ca. 430–300 B.C.), is the longest one (pp. 125–372), divided into twelve paragraphs. This time span is characterized by several formal changes: the male youth statues, for example, do not follow anymore the rules of symmetry, the weight rests on one leg and the head is not more strictly frontal. However the main change regards the mentality of the Athenians, who now seem to be aware of their condition and develop the idea of the “conscious death” (“bewusste Tod”). A typical example of this transformation, that the author adopts even if it is not related to the funerary context, is the different attitude of the two dying warriors on the temple of Aphaia at Aegina: the one on the west fronton has still an archaic setting, while the one on the east fronton, slightly later, shows to be conscious of his death, according to the classical concept of the human condition. This awareness is observable also in several scenes painted on the vases that show the people in the afterlife, where some figures like Charon or the *Eidola* appear.

It is not possible here to discuss in deep all the arguments treated into this chapter. The institution of the *Demosion Sema* (*demosion Sema* in the text), where all the Athenians who died in war were buried, is worth of relevance; it is defined by the author as a group of tombs and not as a formal cemetery. The family funerary enclosures (*periboloi*), which now constitute a widespread evidence, were characterized by the images and the names of the members of the family (usually a selection) that could be seen by the passers, representing the *Geras Thanonton* of the Classical Age. These two types of burials are the expression of the fundamental values of the Athenian society of this period: the egalitarian treatment of the young warriors who died for the *polis* and the centrality of the family, on which the *polis* is based; in both cases Athens

itself comes into the foreground.

It is worth noting the long paragraph about the variety of iconographies that is possible to find on the Athenian reliefs. From the athlete to the hunter, from the woman with child to the scenes with dead and alive together, this part of the volume constitutes a sort of discursive catalogue furnished of a great number of images.

The large quantity of pictures (231[!]) in the whole book has to be stressed. Each of them is accompanied by a caption where we can find also the high or the length of the monument, the absolute chronology, the place or the museum where it is kept and the inventory number, a very useful information that can simplify their study. In the most of the cases they are black and white pictures; only five colored plates, containing each one a single object, are added, illustrating three main works: the well-known Phrasikleia kore, a youth stele and the painted stele of Hermon.

The book detects a lack of attention for the contexts in which the analyzed objects were found. The study is not properly about the graves, so probably it has been considered unnecessary to examine the areas where the burials were dug. In my opinion a brief introduction on the places in which the tombs were built, as the author has made for the paragraph about the *Demosion Sema*, would have been helpful for a better comprehension of the text, especially for those who are not expert about this matter.

The strength of this book is the long term analysis of the Athenian funerary evidence, constituting an important support for the reconstruction of the evolution of the city, and more generally for the history of Greek art. The author pays a particular attention in the description of the mentioned works and sometimes takes into account also evidences which are not linked to the funerary context, but are useful for a comparison, or, in a couple of cases, that come from a different epoch (a funerary monument in San Domenico church at Perugia and another one in Santa Croce church at Florence), a novelty for an archaeological volume. Starting from the examination of the numerous objects, the author guides us through the changes in the mentality of the Athenians over a period of 700 years, soliciting the interest of the reader, who is spurred to deepen the topic.

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