

The pit-graves in the Necropolis at Aiani were simple openings in the ground, in which were laid the litters bearing the bodies of the deceased. They are almost all situated to the west of Enclosures Z and H, outside the area containing the built tombs: the grave goods found scattered in the area between Tombs ΣΤ, Θ, Ι and Ζ can be attributed to the existence and destruction of a small number of pit-graves in this area or the scattering of booty when the built tombs were looted. This view rests on my own personal belief, drawn from my experience as an excavator, that in the Archaic and Classical eras contemporary burials were probably not disturbed. Some of these graves, which belonged to ordinary citizens, escaped being looted. In many cases, the ancient tomb-robbers appear to have been selective in their 'work', looking for gold offerings on the top sections of the bodies and ignoring everything else. The fact that the dead were placed on wooden biers or litters is proven by the discovery of iron nails, some with remains of wood still on them, as well as the curved nails on the handles of clay pots such as *lekythoi* and *kylikes*.

The mouths of the deceased were often covered with lozenge-shaped sheets of gold or silver, the so-called *epistomia*. These sheets are decorated with *repoussé* floral designs. One of them depicts a group of lions and eagles (Fig. 57), while another depicts a winged female figure, lions and rams. Around the bodies were laid the grave goods, which came in a great variety of forms. A considerable number of Corinthian vases were found in the oldest graves (Fig. 58). The black- and red-figure vases that were found are mainly small in size (*lekythoi*, *kylikes*, *aryballoi*, *alabastra*, *kotylae*, *skyphoi*, *exaleiptra* and *kantharoi*), although there are also larger pots (*oinochoae*, *pelikae*, *hydriae*, *kraters* and *amphoras*) (Fig. 59). Pots manufactured by local workshops have been found that date from the last quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup>

century and the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup>

century BC, and a wealth of pots with added colours has also been unearthed (Figs. 60, 61). The metal finds include bronze bowls, *oinochoae* (Fig. 62), *lebetes*, *lekanides*, *strigils*, iron tripods and models of two-wheeled and four-wheeled carts. The figurine finds include a few rare bone specimens and a large number of terracotta figurines in a variety of types (some with amazingly well preserved colours) from moulds used in East Ionian, Attic and Boeotian workshops, such as figurines of

*kouroi*

, pot-bellied dwarfs, standing female figures and others seated with a veil or

*polos*

(headdress) on their heads, a variety of protomes and figurines of horses that are connected with the models of carts (Figs. 63, 64, 65). A number of sculpted vases or perfume jars in the form of a

*kore*

or birds have also been discovered, and another interesting group of finds consists of glass vessels (Figs. 66, 67).

The female burials contained precious jewellery in the form of gold earrings, pendants, gold, silver and bronze pins and fibulae, and gold necklaces (Figs. 68, 69, 70, 71). The weapons found in the male burials include bronze helmets, iron spearheads and swords, and bronze shield plates. The wealth of grave goods found in the Archaic and Classical graves in the Aiani Necropolis display an exceptional quality and diversity of form – evidence of a vigorous economy and high standard of living and proof that, in cultural and religious terms, the area shared the same characteristics as the rest of the Greek world.

**Dr Georgia Karamitrou – Mentesidi**