

THE SECOND MEDITERRANEAN ARCHAEOLOGY
COLLABORATIVE SPECIALIZATION (MACS) WORKSHOP 2025

MORTUARY TRADITIONS IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

7-8 March 2025

In-Person Location

Archaeology Center, 19
Ursula Franklin Street,
Ap 130, University of
Toronto

Online By Registration

[7 March register here](#)



[8 March register here](#)



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO



Classics
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



Mediterranean Archaeology
Collaborative Specialization



Art History
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



The Archaeology Centre
University of Toronto



Near & Middle Eastern Civilizations
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

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MORTUARY TRADITIONS IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

Mortuary traditions play an important role in the creation of cultural landscapes and the maintenance of social relations. The materialization of burial practices, however, varies in scale and form across space and time. Traditional scholarship on mortuary contexts has primarily focused on issues of social hierarchy and social mobility without adequately addressing the material dimensions—objects, artefacts, structures, and spaces—associated with the dead. Being relational at multiple scales of observations, materials and spaces offer us the opportunity to understand and apprehend the varied choices involved in the representation of the dead and their significance for the living communities. Moreover, critically analyzing the visibility, materiality, and spatiality of mortuary contexts in conjunction with cross-disciplinary approaches to remains of the dead—skeletal (osteology) and Ancient DNA data—can bring new insights into mortuary practices.

To this end, a two-day workshop is organized to explore mortuary matters and associated practices. With a focus on the ancient Mediterranean, our workshop aims to provide a forum for scholars with diverse disciplinary perspectives to come together for collaborative engagement. What inferences can we draw by analyzing the intermediate space between the living and the dead delineated by physical things? What choices are involved in the demarcation of specific spaces by burials? How can we interpret the containment of a person's memory – often associated with personalized objects – in a pot, surrounded by stone slabs, or in a burial pit? Is it possible to shed light on past life events by combining current scientific skeletal analysis with contextual information? Can we elucidate how people understood, created, and moved within and amongst their mortuary landscapes?

Organizers

Anisa Mara, PhD Candidate, Department of Art History

Zeynep Kuşdil Sak, PhD Candidate, Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations

Katerina Apokatanidis, PhD Candidate, Department of Classics

Moizza Elahi, PhD Candidate, Department of Art History

Tucker Deady, PhD Candidate, Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations

Date

7-8 March 2025

In Person Location

Archaeology Center, 19 Ursula Franklin Street, Ap 130, University of Toronto

Online: By Registration

7 March 2025: <https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/lENSxuOdTnGVa6v3rg-gqg>

8 March 2025: https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/OixrpKpnQ_qNXO4w9FN8BQ

The background of the page features a faint, stylized illustration. It depicts two figures, possibly skeletons or spirits, standing in a field. The figure on the left is wearing a dark, hooded cloak and is looking down. The figure on the right is also in a dark cloak and is looking towards the viewer with a slight smile. The background is a mix of earthy tones like brown, tan, and green, with some abstract shapes and patterns. The overall style is somewhat ethereal and artistic.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

WORKSHOP PROGRAM

Day One: 7 March 2025

09:00 – 09:20 am *Coffee*
09:20 – 09:30 am Opening Remarks

Theme 1: Theoretical Approaches

09:30 – 10:00 am Burial as Containment: Closure and Continuing Bonds
Carl Knappett, *University of Toronto*

10:00 – 10:30 am Performative Pots: Mortuary Inclusions as Social Agents
Anne Porter, *Independent / University of Toronto*

10:30 – 11:00 am Cremation Burial and Iron Metallurgy in Early Greece
Sarah Murray, *University of Toronto*

11:00 – 11:15 am Discussion Session

11:15 am – 12:00 pm *Coffee Break*

Theme 2: Methodological Approaches

12:00 – 12:30 pm Things Forgotten: İkiztepe, the Black Sea Region of Anatolia, and Strontium Isotope Analysis in Türkiye
Lynn Welton, *University of Toronto*

12:30 – 01:00 pm Connectivity and Mobility in the Early Bronze IV of the Southern Levant: Social and Spatial Network Analysis of Mortuary Landscapes
Tucker Deady, *University of Toronto*

01:00 – 02:00 pm *Lunch Break*

Theme 2: Methodological Approaches Continued

02:00 – 02:30 pm New Archaeogenetic Insights into the Albanian Bronze and Iron Age
Lorenc Bejko, *University of Tirana*; Xiaowen Jia, *Munich University and Max Planck Institute of Evolutionary Genetics*

02:30 – 03:00 pm A Bioarchaeological Investigation of Crisis (and Collapse) at Roca Vecchia during the Early Iron Age
Megan Savoy, *University of Michigan*

3:00 – 03:30 pm Mortuary Traditions in Southern Italy Before and After the Greek Colonization: Disentangling biological and Constructed Identities
Giulia Saltini Semarari, *University of Michigan*

03:30 – 03:45 pm Discussion Session

03:45 – 03:55 pm Concluding Remarks

Day Two: 8 March 2025

09:00 – 09:30 am Coffee

Theme 3: Materiality of Death

09:30 – 10:00 am Hidden in Plain Sight: Reconstructing a Third Millennium Wagon in Tomb 7 Te ll Banat
Zeynep Kuşdil Sak, *University of Toronto*

10:00 – 10:30 am Pinning Identity: A Case Study on Pins from the Late Bronze to Iron
Age Mortuary Contexts in Albania
Anisa Mara, *University of Toronto* ; Zhaneta Gjyshja, *University of Michigan*

10:30 – 11:00 am Deathless Mortality: Attitudes Towards Death in the Orphic -bacchic Tradition
Katerina Apokatanidis, *University of Toronto*

11:00 – 11:30 am Coffee Break

Theme 3: Materiality of Death Continued

11:30 am – 12:00 pm Death in Plastic: Perfume, Plasticity, and Mortuary Practice in the Ancient Greek World
Niharika Russell, *University of Toronto*

12:00 – 12:30 pm ‘Don’t Fear the Reaper’? Imag(in)ing Death in the Roman Imperial Period
Bjorn Ewald, *University of Toronto*

12:30 – 12:45 pm Discussion Session

12:45 – 12:55 pm Concluding Remarks

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ABSTRACTS

Theme 1: Theoretical Approaches

Carl Knappett, *University of Toronto*

Title: Burial as Containment: Closure and Continuing Bonds

Abstract:

Notwithstanding the incredibly wide range of burial practices among human communities, we can view them all fundamentally as means of containment. While we might immediately turn to the physical dimension of this process, there are also metaphysical considerations. Burial has often been considered, at least in the 20th century, as an act that can help those grieving detach themselves from the deceased; a sense of closure is then achieved, paving the way for new attachments to be formed. Yet this Freudian perspective has been challenged, with many in grief studies now recognising the need for ‘continuing bonds’ with the deceased. With such a perspective then reconfiguring the nature and needs of closure, we might in turn be encouraged to re-examine the degree of physical closure achieved by burial. Some rites may indeed seem aimed at separation and detachment; but burial containment in many ancient societies has multiple stages with tombs being reopened and secondary treatments. Such ongoing practices might indeed foster ‘continuing bonds’ – a possibility I explore here through examples from the prehistoric Aegean.

Anne Porter, *University of Toronto*

Title: Performative Pots: Mortuary Inclusions as Social Agents

Abstract:

The various materials involved in the disposal of the dead are often treated as defunct once they are placed in a burial, because the burial itself is considered the completion of a life – “the final resting place” as we say. But mortuary inclusions in every context are far from dead. They are active agents in maintaining the social fabric of the community in which the death occurs, and are still, therefore, living. Through the examination of third millennium BC burials on the Middle Euphrates, this presentation will explore the work pots do in: transforming the ontological status of the deceased individual; in extending social networks within and beyond the community; and in creating, and continuing, binding ties between the living and the dead.

Sarah Murray, *University of Toronto*

Title: Cremation Burial and Iron Metallurgy in Early Greece

Abstract:

The question of change and continuity across the Bronze to Iron Age transition in the Aegean region remains contested. However, archaeological evidence clearly indicates that Early Iron Age saw the introduction of at least a few new practices. Among these were the establishment of local iron production and the proliferation of cremation burial. Existing scholarship concerning these major social changes leaves important questions open, including why iron metallurgy was introduced at this time and why certain communities turned towards cremation in mortuary contexts during this consequential transitional period in Greek history. This paper considers whether we might be able to make sense of these two developments together as part of a single phenomenon, rather than as cultural developments operating in two distinct realms – industrial and mortuary – that are usually analyzed separately. I propose that the introduction of iron metallurgy, a previously unknown technology for transforming matter from one state to another, generated fresh thought about the nature of human existence, which in turn impacted notions concerning the appropriate treatment of bodies after death.

Theme 2: Methodological Approaches

Lynn Welton, *University of Toronto*

Title: Things Forgotten: İkiztepe, the Black Sea Region of Anatolia, and Strontium Isotope Analysis in Türkiye

Abstract:

The development of burial practices in Anatolia provides a useful counterpoint to the patterns observed elsewhere in southwest Asia and in the Mediterranean world. However, the Black Sea coast of Anatolia is one of the most archaeologically under-explored areas of the country. This talk will discuss what is known about burial practices in the central Black Sea coastal region of Anatolia, around the areas of the modern cities of Bafra and Samsun, particularly in relation to what is known about the most extensively excavated cemetery in the region, at the site of İkiztepe. This cemetery offers a unique opportunity to examine aspects of social organization and inter-regional connectivity, particularly through the results of strontium isotope analysis ($^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$) conducted on the skeletal remains. Strontium isotope analysis offers a direct means of empirically tracing human mobility, but this methodology has not been as widely applied in Türkiye (and southwest Asia) as in other global regions. This talk will conclude by discussing possible ways forward to increase the uptake of this methodology in Türkiye and in southwest Asia more generally.

Tucker Deady, *University of Toronto*

Title: Connectivity and Mobility in the Early Bronze IV of the Southern Levant: Social and Spatial Network Analysis of Mortuary Landscapes

Abstract:

Traditional academic accounts would suggest that the Early Bronze IV (EB IV) of the Southern Levant was marked by a breakdown in communication, trade, and complex interactions, trends replaced by isolated groups that lost touch with the nucleated centers of previous years, and lacking the definitions of what an ‘urbanized’ society looked like. Recent scholarship, however, advocates for more nuanced understandings of Early Bronze Age temporal, spatial, and social networks. These tend to be less defined by division and instead consider concepts of integration, ancestral memory, and movement, and ask how these factors may have played a role in the ways people interacted and how this connectivity may be expressed in the archaeological record. This paper gives insight into alternative trajectories of connectivity and mobility through the lens of EB IV mortuary practices. Data reduction techniques reveal patterns at different spatial scales providing a better understanding of communities of mortuary practice. The resulting statistical, social, and spatial analyses to EB IV tomb data shed light on the reality of differentiation and similarities, demonstrating that the EB IV was highly dynamic and cannot be explained by drawing boundaries or ticking boxes.

Lorenc Bejko, *University of Tirana*

Xiaowen Jia, *Munich University and Max Planck Institute of Evolutionary Genetics*

Title: New Archaeogenetic Insights into the Albanian Bronze and Iron Age

Abstract:

Situated at the interface of the Aegean and the Adriatic in southeastern Albania, the Kamenicë Tumulus functioned predominantly as an inhumation burial site from 1700 to 500 BCE. This stands in contrast to the prevailing cremation rituals observed in Central Europe during the same period, which have typically impeded insights into archaeogenetic progressions. In this work, we generated genome-wide SNP data for 230 individuals buried in Kamenicë over its complete historical span, alongside 19 Iron Age individuals from North Macedonia and 2 Late Bronze Age individuals from southwestern Bulgaria. Our comprehensive dataset provides the unique and first possibility for insights into, on the one hand, genetic continuities and changes of Late Bronze Age and Iron Age Albania; on the other hand, the function and meaning of tumuli in prehistoric Europe. Different societal transformations identified in the wider region are associated with a genetically stable and genealogically continuous population at our site. Our results indicate that the Kamenicë population maintained a distinct genetic profile while participating in a regional kinship network extending over 300 kilometers, as demonstrated through identified biological relatedness up to the 10th degree. Moreover, for the first time, we found evidence linking a partial turnover of male lineages around 750 BCE in a patrilineal society to a substantial shift in the structure and material symbols of the cemetery.

Megan Savoy, *University of Michigan*

Title: A bioarchaeological investigation of crisis (and collapse) at Roca Vecchia during the Early Iron Age

Abstract:

The Early Iron Age (950-700 BCE) in Apulia, Italy marks an important transitional period in which large-scale trade networks were replaced with smaller, regional networks and a general decline in social complexity. Funerary contexts are useful tools to examine changes in social and cultural conditions. However, southern Apulian burials from the Early Iron Age are almost non-existent, with the exception of a hypogeic chamber tomb with multiple internments discovered near the fortified settlement of Roca Vecchia, Salento. This talk will outline ongoing research at the chamber tomb to explore connections between the decline of social complexity and human resilience of the inhabitants from Roca. Using demographic, paleopathological, biological relatedness, and funerary analyses of the remains, I aim to elucidate cultural identity, and practices of social inclusion and inequality during this period. This bioarchaeological approach examines the interplay between crises experienced by individuals with the collapse of networks.

Giulia Saltini Semarari, *University of Michigan*

Title: Mortuary traditions in southern Italy before and after the Greek colonization: disentangling biological and constructed identities.

Abstract:

The 8th-6th centuries BC saw a cascade of interconnected changes sweep the central Mediterranean. In southern Italy, increases in social complexity and local productions intersected with intensifying E-W Mediterranean exchanges, the re-settlement of people from the Aegean along its coasts, and eventually the creation of the first recognizable urban sites (the so-called Greek colonies). Several years ago, I started a multidisciplinary project that combined archaeological and bioarchaeological analyses of indigenous and colonial cemeteries. By reconstructing the demographic impact of the Greek colonization and its archaeological signature, Project AMICI (Ancient Mediterranean Interactions between Colonisers and Indigenous populations) aims to shed light on the interaction dynamics between newcomers and local populations that shaped this momentous time. In this talk, I shall discuss the (preliminary) results of the project, its limits, and its theoretical implications for the study of Mediterranean interactions *via* mortuary analyses.

Theme 3: Materiality of Death

Zeynep Kuşdil Sak, *University of Toronto*

Title: Hidden in Plain Sight: Reconstructing a Third Millennium Wagon in Tomb 7 Tell Banat

Abstract:

A peculiar tomb lay on the Euphrates valley and once it served its purpose it was intentionally stowed away from prying eyes. Though surrounded by many burials and mortuary installations in Tell Banat, Tomb 7 (T7) stands out due to its construction and its contents. Mortuary inclusions found within T7 are comparable to other 3rd millennium BCE tombs in the Near East such as the so-called Royal Tombs of Ur, Umm el Marra, Tell Bi'a, Jerablus Tahtani, Shiyukh Tahtani. One of the features that sets T7 apart from similar tombs or graves in this period, is its bitumen flooring. This unique feature has produced a new set of evidence requiring new ways of contextualizing archaeological remains. The bitumen floor preserved the imprints of the artifacts that were once placed on it. Almost every centimeter of T7's floor is covered with impressions, but this paper will focus on one group of impressions on the bitumen floor, related objects and their remains found within the same context to reconstruct what this mortuary inclusion can be: a wheeled vehicle. Wheeled vehicles such as wagons and chariots are commonly known in mortuary contexts in the Third Millennium BCE, this paper will contextualize the wheeled vehicle found in T7 within the larger mortuary practices of this period.

Anisa Mara, *University of Toronto*

Zhaneta Gjyshja, *University of Michigan*

Title: Pinning Identity: A Case Study on Pins from the Late Bronze to Iron Age Mortuary Contexts in Albania

Abstract:

Funerary rituals are a cross-cultural practice in the past, present, and future societies. However, societies vary in how they treat the dead, including body treatment, accompanying ceremonies, and afterlife beliefs, often associated with using perishable and nonperishable objects. This paper concerns tumuli burials in Albania during the Late Bronze and Iron Ages. These burials commonly contained metal pins as grave goods, increasing over time as burial mound construction grew during the 11th to 9th centuries BCE. This period is often linked to pronounced social hierarchies in the region. Our aim is to understand the role of pins in identity construction and the socio-economic organization of different groups. We employ correspondence analysis to examine the relationship between types of pins in burials and their distribution in time and space to comprehend variations in performative social practices. Notwithstanding a degree of typological homogeneity, the data reveal typological changes both regionally and diachronically, suggesting the formation of distinct identities, with implications regarding the potential connections among different communication zones. To this end, our research contributes to understanding the materiality of performance, identity construction, and its persistence and variation.

Katerina Apokatanidis, *University of Toronto*

Title: Deathless Mortality: Attitudes Towards Death in the Orphic-bacchic Tradition

Abstract:


This paper examines the materiality of the Orphic Gold Tablets within tomb space. The Orphic tablets are thin (about 1mm thick) sheets of gold inscribed with mystic information detailing what the soul of the deceased occupant of the tomb should do once it arrives in Hades. While the interment of human remains pertains to beliefs about divine right, the deposition of additional objects in burials is usually considered to reflect the negotiation of the deceased's social status instead. This binary oversimplifies the interconnectedness of the evidence and importantly does not consider the grave accoutrements within the sphere of religious eschatology. While it has been traditional to draw a stark line between the two aspects of burial, with the body being connected to ritual propriety and the grave goods connected to sociopolitical posturing, in the case of the graves containing Orphic tablets, the evidence shows that this division is more complex. In this context, artifacts can also relate to ritual propriety much like the body of the deceased. The grave goods analysed in this presentation can reflect the desire for a successful eschatological transition to the afterlife. I present case-studies drawn from the dataset analysed in my dissertation and posit that tomb space operates as an arena for the negotiation of social (read: ontological) status in the afterlife.

Niharika Russell, *University of Toronto*

Title: Death in Plastic: Perfume, Plasticity, and Mortuary Practice in the Ancient Greek World

Abstract:

The use of scented oil in mortuary practice in the ancient Greek world is well-documented in archaeological and literary sources, as well as in the visual record. Scented oil and associated vessels would be used in the anointment of bodies of the deceased, and for the pouring of libations at the grave both during and following funerary rites. Simultaneously, perfumed oil vessels could be included as grave goods, possibly following their use in mortuary ritual, or as an object of particular status which belonged to the deceased. I wish to explore what relationship may have existed between the form and contents of Archaic and Classical perfume vessels categorized as plastic, and mortuary practices in the ancient Greek world. These more elaborately constructed and decorated oil vessels possess limited archaeological provenance, with the large majority having no recorded context. However, a certain number are known to have been found in burial sites. By thinking through the qualities and mechanics of perceptive engagement with case studies of this class objects- their visual, haptic, and olfactory impact - I seek to examine how the form and content of these objects may have operated in conjunction through their use to enhance particular atmospheres or associations of symbolic or religious importance in the context of mortuary practices.



Bjorn Ewald, *University of Toronto*

Title: ‘Don’t Fear the Reaper’? Imag(in)ing Death in the Roman Imperial Period

Abstract:

Ancient philosophers may have worked hard to convince others that death was, or should be, of little or no concern to the individual. But death always remained close and personal, and it engendered a rich and varied material and visual culture. My talk examines the ways in which death and dying were conceptualized in the Roman Empire, by exploring the nexus of bodies and images, monuments and actors that defined the funerary culture of the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE.