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Introduction
The Kerameikos cemetery is the most known and investigated necropolis in Athens. The earliest graves (12th-10th century B.C.), were dug by A. Brueckner and K. Kübler between 1927 and 1930. These burials were published by W. Kraiker and K. Kübler in the volumes of the series Kerameikos. Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen (Kraiker-Kübler 1939; Kübler 1943). In 1964 B. Schlörb-Vierneisel brought to light a few tombs in the area of the Sacred Road, published two years later (Schlörb-Vierneisel 1966). From 1966 to 1995 several ancient graves (SM115-SM148) were dug by W. Hoepfner, B. von Freytag gen. Löringhoff, U. Knigge and published by F. Ruppenstein (2007).

The tombs of these earlier phases can be divided into three different burial grounds (Fig. 1), crossed by the Eridanos stream: the most ancient is the one North to the river, found under the Classical Pompeion building (Pompeionnekropole); the other two burial grounds are the one on the South bank of the Eridanos (Nekropole südliche des Eridanos) and the one dug in the area of the Sacred Road (Heilige Straße).

Since their first publication, the study of these graves has been crucial to shed light on the transition from the Late Bronze to the Early Iron Age, thanks to the regular and continuous use of the cemetery. In Attica this is a time of change, not only for the adoption of the iron as the main material for making weapons and tools; the use of the multiple burials is abandoned in favor of single burials and the inhumation ritual is gradually substituted by the cremation. The Kerameikos site has been considered the cornerstone of the chronology of the Submycenaean and Protogeometric phases, but the methods that have been used for the dating are not univocal and also the chronological divisions are not always homogeneous and well defined (Fig. 4).
An example of such critical state of the research is given by the Submycenaean\(^1\) phase, at the transition between the Late Helladic IIIC Late (the Late Bronze Age with its Mycenaean culture heritage) and the Protogeometric period (the Early Iron Age, the so-called Greek Dark Age\(^2\)), due to the fact that it shows characteristics of both these cultural horizons. Its nature is still object of dispute. In a first moment it was considered by Desborough only a Western Attica regional pottery style (Desborough 1964), while after some years he asserted that it is attested also in other regions and it can be considered as a “culture” (Desborough 1972). On the contrary according to J. Rutter’s theory Submycenaean should be considered a pottery style contemporary to Late Helladic IIIC Late and it would be attested only in the funerary contexts (Rutter 1978). S. Deger-Jalkotzy wrote that Submycenaean “must not be eliminated from the chronological chart” (1998, 116), while most recently J.K. Papadopoulos affirmed that we still miss a clear stratigraphy in which Submycenaean is above Late Helladic IIIC Late and below Early Protogeometric: for this reason Submycenaean could be interpreted as a synchronic differentiation rather than a defined chronological phase (Papadopoulos \textit{et alii} 2011, 199-200).

In the framework of the University research project “The Kerameikos necropolis revisited”, presented at the Università degli Studi di Napoli, “L'Orientale” (hereafter UNO) and directed by Prof. A.M. D’Onofrio, to which I have contributed (2011-2013)\(^3\), I would like to propose a reexamination of the methodological approaches used in order to establish a relative sequence of the earlier graves of this cemetery. This review is related to my PhD research project entitled “The Submycenaean and Protogeometric amphorae of the Kerameikos cemetery of Athens and their ritual use”, started in 2011 (UNO, tutor Prof. A.M. D’Onofrio, Georg-August Universität Göttingen, tutor Prof. J. Bergemann).

\(^1\) The term “Submycenaean” was introduced in 1934 by T.C. Skeat (\textit{The Dorians in Archaeology}) to describe the pottery from Salamis cemetery.

\(^2\) Several studies have been dedicated to this period; in particular those of Snodgrass 1971 and Mazarakis Ainian 2011 should be mentioned.

\(^3\) Prof. J. Bergemann (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen) and Dr. G. Torella are the other two members of the research project.
The relative sequence in the Pompeion burial ground

“The basis of stratigraphy is the superposition of strata and interfaces. It is precisely this superposition which is partly lacking on some sites, which can only be divided into phases and periods based upon the artefactual content of the deposits. [...] Without falsely being called 'horizontal stratigraphy', this type of artefactual correlation often takes place in the post-excavation analysis of a site” (Harris 1989, 127-128).

The main characteristic of the Kerameikos earlier graves is the lack of a vertical micro-stratigraphy. In the Pompeion burial ground only a few tombs overlap (SM135 is cut by the later SM134 and SM128 cut the grave SM127; Hoepfner 1976, 10; Ruppenstein 2007, 239), while in the other cases the scholars have adopted several criteria to date them. The main problem is to find a method that can help us to establish a relative sequence of these graves. Some scholars have taken into account the characteristics of the graves, that coexist, or even prevail, with the stylistic analysis of the objects found in the tombs. Kraiker (1939), for example, assumed that the earlier graves in the Pompeion area are recognizable by their orientation: they would be arranged in parallel rows orientated North-East South-West, dug in the South-West area of the burial ground. He thought that afterwards the tombs spread to the North and East and that they were the later graves of a cemetery located South to the Eridanos, in the Agora area. His method influenced all the latest scholars who took into account the orientation of the graves rather than the development of the style of their grave gifts.

C.-G. Styrenius (1967) followed Kraiker’s theory and assigned the graves arranged in parallel rows to the earlier period. He divided the Submycenaean into four phases: Early, Middle, Late A and B. In his work he stated that “the basis of the division of the graves into this number of phases was horizontal stratigraphy combined with stylistic analysis of the pottery” (1967, 151). He was conscious that this method was not safe, but considered it worth trying and his results are not so different from Kraiker’s study.

A complete re-examination of the Kerameikos cemetery has been made by G. Krause (1975). He organized the chronological phases in *Zeitstufen*, dividing the Submycenaean period into *Zeitstufen* 1, 2a and 2b, while the Transitional and Early Protogeometric periods were joined into
Zeitstufe 3. In order to date the burials he took into account the style of the grave goods together with the horizontal stratigraphy and the burial costumes. For this reason his results about the topographical evolution of the Pompeion burial ground are not very far from those of Kraiker. Also according to Krause the earlier graves are the ones organized in parallel rows in the South-West area of the necropolis and the others are later because of their different orientation.

J.K. Papadopoulos, together with a history of scholarship, made a critical review of I. Morris’ and J. Whitley’s monographs (1993, 175-206). In particular the Author pointed out that in the analysis of the Pompeion necropolis Morris adopted the same Zeitstufen used by Krause, giving rise to results that are “a frightfully circular argument” (1993, 185). According to the scholar in Krause’s method the variations in funerary costumes are due to a diachronic change and it is the base for the creation of a chronological sequence. Morris used Krause’s relative sequence, using the same variables to evidence a synchronic differentiation (Papadopoulos 1993, 185). In his response to Papadopoulos, Morris confirmed that in Krause’s method, at least in principle, there is a danger of circularity (1993, 209), but it is limited only to the Pompeion burial area and do not involve the argument of his work.

P. Mountjoy (1988) and F. Ruppenstein (2007) privilege the examination of the objects found in the burials to the analysis of the characteristics of the tombs; for this reason their results, even if different, contradict Kraiker’s view of the topographical evolution of the Pompeion burial ground (Fig. 2).

According to Mountjoy (1988, 1-37) the most ancient graves here date back to the Late Helladic IIIC Late; the scholar is able to better define this phase thanks to the “stratified material from Mycenae, Tiryns and Lefkandi and the tomb material from Perati Phase 3” (Mountjoy 1988, 5). The burials that, according to the stylistic analysis of the pottery, belong to this phase are SM4, SM17, SM19, SM27, SM42, SM51, SM61, SM62, SM63, SM69, SM87, SM91, SM106. These thirteen Late Helladic IIIC Late burials have changed our perception of the whole necropolis, anticipating the start of the use of the Kerameikos area to bury the dead. Moreover, these graves are spread into several areas of the Pompeion cemetery and they are not concentrated into the group organized in parallel rows identified as the most ancient by Kraiker.
The last volume of the series *Kerameikos. Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen*, published by Ruppenstein (2007), is an important updating for the study of this burial ground. The Author took into account all the earlier Pompeion burials until the Transitional period, adding them thirty-two unpublished graves (SM115-SM148, except the later graves SM132, SM137 and SM139). He privileged a stylistic analysis of the objects found in the burials, dividing them into groups (*Stilgruppen*). These stylistic groups are the base of his relative chronology (Ruppenstein 2007, 41). The intention is to “search for regularities in the co-occurrence of stylistic groups of the same and different vessel types” (Ruppenstein 2009, 392).

According to the Author the regular co-occurrences of stylistic pottery groups can be explained only with chronological reasons (Ruppenstein 2009, 392-393). Following this principle, Ruppenstein divided the tombs into *Stufen*: the Submycenaean period includes *Stufen* I, II and III, while the Transitional phase corresponds to *Stufe* IV. The *Stufe* I contains also a Late Helladic IIIC Late tomb (grave SM138; Ruppenstein 2007, 24-25). The burials with no gifts are classified into *Stufe* I-III and *Stufe* IV according to the orientation and the position of the tombs. These Submycenaean graves with no objects cannot be taken into account for a topographical examination of the necropolis (Ruppenstein 2007, 245).

Ruppenstein did not accept the Mountjoy’s dating of the aforementioned graves to the Late Helladic IIIC Late. In his work these thirteen graves were classified into *Stufe* I (SM17, SM19, SM42, SM61, SM62, SM63, SM69, SM87, SM106), II (SM4, SM27, SM51) and also III (SM91) (Ruppenstein 2007, 243, table 40a).

Among the burials previously divided into *Stufen* according to the analysis of the grave goods, the author is able to identify some groups of graves (*Grabgruppen*) through the nearness and the orientation of the tombs. In this case the characteristics of the graves are taken into account only after the stylistic examination of the objects, so Ruppenstein’s results are different from Kraiker’s ones. In the *Stufe* I the author recognized at least seven of these groups of graves. The burials SM61, SM62, SM63 and SM64 form, according to the scholar, a first group; SM129, SM105 and SM106 can be considered a second group. Other groups are the burials SM87, SM88, SM89 (to which we could add the grave SM86), and the tombs SM142, SM143, SM144. A further group is formed by the graves SM17, SM19 and perhaps SM10. In two cases (SM130, SM131 and the
cremations SM138, SM67) the nearness could indicate a link between the burials (Ruppenstein 2007, 245-246). According to the author in the *Stufe* II the previous groups tend to widen out, even if it is not possible to establish exactly their limits (Ruppenstein 2007, 246). In the *Stufe* III there is a shift of the graves from the centre to the edges of the necropolis area; probably in this phase the space was not enough and the burial ground moved in the area far from the Eridanos flood. The tombs SM97, SM98, SM100 could constitute a group (Ruppenstein 2007, 246). The trend started in the *Stufe* III continues in the *Stufe* IV; in this phase three well defined groups are observable. The first one is formed by the graves SM145, SM146, PG A and PG B. The burials PG1N, PG2N and PG3N constitute the second groups, while the six tombs SM115-SM120 form the third group (Ruppenstein 2007, 246).

Also in the case of Ruppenstein’s analysis the earlier graves (*Stufe* I) are located in all the area of the Pompeion burial ground and are not characterized by a particular orientation.

*The burial ground on the south bank of the Eridanos river*

According to Morris “in the Ag. Triada cemetery there is a genuine stratigraphic sequence” (1993, 210). As the author point out in the same paper, this affirmation cannot be considered true for the earlier graves from the Transitional to the Late Protogeometric periods. In the matrix published by Krause (1975, table 30)\(^4\) we can state that only two groups of graves overlap and they both belong to the end of the Protogeometric phase (PG35-PG38 and PG46, PG40-PG42). As for the Pompeion burial area, also in this case the relative sequence of the tombs has to be established through other criteria.

Kübler divided these earlier graves into a stylistic sequence taking into account the shape and the decoration of the objects found in the tombs. The Author recognized an Earlier phase (*Frühstufe*), a Transitional and Ripe phases (*Übergang zur Mittelstufe* and *Reifer Stil*) and a Later phase (*Spätstufe*) (Kübler 1943, 13, 22-23). The Transitional phase between

\(^4\) See also the matrix in Morris 1993, 212; in this case the group PG35-PG38 is not present and the second group is formed by the tomb PG41, cut by PG40, that is cut by PG42. According to Kübler 1943, 41-42, this sequence is not correct.
Submycenaean and Protogeometric (Übergangszeit) recognized by Kraiker (Kraiker- Kübler 1939, 140-144) is not present in Kübler's sequence.

V.R. d’A. Desborough (1952) used principally, but not only, the Kerameikos graves to study the Protogeometric pottery. He considered the shape and the decoration of the vases, identifying a Transitional stage, in which both the Submycenaean and the Protogeometric characteristics are visible, an Early, Ripe and a Late phase (Desborough 1952, 294). As I. Lemos pointed out, in Desborough’s work while the Late phase is characterized by an increment in the variation of the shapes and the decorative motives, the Ripe phase is not very well defined (Lemos 2002, 4). Lemos (2002) analyzed the Protogeometric evidence from all the Aegean area and the Kerameikos necropolis had a very important part. The scholar based almost her whole analysis on the pottery style, recognizing a Transitional phase, and the traditional division into Early, Middle and Late Protogeometric (Lemos 2002, 8-24).

As for the Pompeion Submycenaean burials, also in the case of the graves south the Eridanos stream Krause (1975) did not consider only the style of the grave gifts, but also the characteristics of the tombs. He add to the aforementioned Zeitstufe 3 (Transitional and Protogeometric periods) the Zeitstufe 4, that corresponds to the Middle Protogeometric, and the Zeitstufe 5, the Late phase of the period.

Also Ruppenstein (2007) took into account some graves of the burial area south the river, the ones that should be dated to the Transitional phase between Submycenaean and Protogeometric. According to his stylistic analysis, ten of these graves belong to the Stufe IV (PG1, PG3, PG13, PG14, PG22, PG23, PG24, hS74, hS76, hS92a) and other three belong to the Stufe IV-V (PG2, PG25, hS101). His dating partly contrasts with Kübler’s one (in the attribution of PG3, PG13, PG14, PG24 to the Transitional phase and not to the Early Protogeometric; moreover, Kübler dated PG25 to the transition to the Middle Protogeometric) and also with Schlörb-Vierneisel’s analysis. The latter dated the graves found in the area of the Sacred Road hS101, hS74 and hS76 to the Early Protogeometric, hS92a to the Early-Middle Protogeometric, while the grave hS117a, not considered by Ruppenstein for its lateness, to the Middle-Late Protogeometric (Schlörb-Vierneisel 1966, 5-7).

Again we have a contraposition between two different criteria used to create a relative sequence. One is based on a strictly stylistic analysis of
the grave goods, especially pottery, while the other one considers also the type of the grave, its orientation and location. Do the results of these two methods differ so much from each other? Unlike the case of the Pompeion burial ground, from this point of view the area south the Eridanos is less complicated. If we match Kübler's and Krause's results, we can observe that they get to similar conclusions (Fig. 3). In both cases the earlier graves (Transitional and Early Protogeometric) gathered in the northern area of the burial ground, the one closer to the river. The very few tombs that are classified as Middle Protogeometric are located into two groups slightly southern, while the ones that belong to the Late Protogeometric phase form a sort of raw further to the south. The Geometric burials occupy the area south the Protogeometric ones. The main differences between Kübler’s and Krause’s results concern: the grave PG5, that belong to the transition to the Middle Protogeometric (Übergang zum Reifen Stil) for the former, and to the Early Protogeometric (Zeitstufe 3) for the latter; the graves PG30 and PG31, later for Kübler (Spätsstufe) and dated to the Middle Protogeometric (Zeitsstufe 4) by Krause. Lemos, who used the stylistic analysis of the pottery, dated PG5, PG30 and PG31 to the Middle Protogeometric (Lemos 2002, 14).

It must to be said that several Protogeometric graves were destroyed by the building of the Grave Mound erected in the 6th century B.C., because a great amount of potsherds had been brought to light during its excavation (Krause 1939, 109-130). The necropolis nowadays known is only a part of the one that was in the Kerameikos area during the Protogeometric period.

It is worth focusing now on the few burials that overlap. While in the two overlaps in the Pompeion burial ground the graves belong to different phases (Stufe I and Stufe III), so an explanation could be that the tombs were no longer visible in the later period, the cases in the area South to the Eridanos river are different. The first group of burials is formed by PG35, that is cut by PG36 and PG37; the latter is cut by PG38 (Kübler 1943, 37-39). All these graves date to the Late Protogeometric, so the cut of a tomb has to be considered an intentional action. The tomb PG35 has no traces of grave markers, but in this period the burials were indicated with a small heap of earth (Lemos 2002, 152), so its presence should has been evident. The tomb PG37 is the first Protogeometric grave to have a marker; it was an amphora, of which remain the base and a few fragments, found perpendicular above the ash urn (Kübler 1943, 38-39). It is a female grave,
quite rich even if not the richest of the necropolis, that was cut by another female grave, PG38. Also this later burial had a grave marker, a belly-handled amphora high 69 cm, put perpendicularly above the ash urn; opposite to the amphora there was a limestone block (Kübler 1943, 39). These are the only two Protogeometric burials with a grave marker. The cut of the tomb PG35 and PG37 has been certainly voluntary.

The other group of graves is formed by PG46, cut by PG40, that is covered by PG41 and cut by PG42; the Early Geometric grave G2 cuts PG46 (Kübler 1943, 41-42, 44). The PG40 is a rich male grave, while PG41 is probably female (Strömberg 1993, 137); G2 is a rich male grave. In the Protogeometric burials there are no traces of grave markers, but, as previously explained, the tombs also in this case should have been visible and intentionally cut.

**Conclusion**

The creation of a relative sequence of the earlier Kerameikos graves is still a matter with a difficult solution. The main dispute is between the scholars who adopt a multi-dimensional approach (Kraiker, Styrenius, Krause), taking into consideration the location and the type of burial, the orientation of the deceased, together with the analysis of the grave goods, and the ones who consider more distinctive the stylistic evaluation of the objects found in the grave, especially pottery (Kübler, Mountjoy, Ruppenstein). It is worth underlining that, also among the authors that belong to the second group, the matter is treated in a different way.

A study on the creation of a relative sequence should aim at the reduction of the risks linked to the subjectivity. The lack of a vertical stratigraphy makes way to a juxtaposition of the burials that can be interpreted in several ways. The tombs could have been organized along a main route, or around a more ancient group of burials, or again following criteria that elude us just because some of the evidence is lost (Tronchetti 2003, 138). If the assessment of the multiple characteristics of the graves prevail, there is the danger that a synchronic differentiation could be confused with a diachronic variation.

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5 An example is given by the burial ritual: even if the most of the Submycenaean graves are inhumations, we have a few contemporary incinerations; at the same time, even if in the
The stylistic analysis of the pottery is not less problematic, especially for the earlier phases. As Mountjoy pointed out “the Pompeion pots are so badly made that it is difficult to base dating on the shapes of individual vases. [...] The vases dated here to LH IIIC Late are perhaps the worst proportioned of all” (1988, 19). We should state that also the later pottery in some cases is not really carefully made, even if it is well proportioned.

Moreover, as Ruppenstein underlined (2003, 183), a pottery style does not always correspond to a single chronological phase and two different styles can be contemporary. If the pottery that belongs to the same stylistic groups is generally found together in the same tomb and not in association with vases of other stylistic groups, it is possible that this pottery corresponds to a chronological phase (Ruppenstein 2003, 188). Obviously this method can be adopted only if we analyze closed contexts. In the case of the Kerameikos necropolis almost all the graves contained only one buried and they were not reused, so the objects found inside were all deposited at the same moment. The pottery styles do not seem to be strictly related to the gender, the age or the status of the dead (Ruppenstein 2003, 188; 2009, 392-393) and they could reflect a chronological development useful to establish a relative sequence of the graves (although we should say that the anthropological data are very limited).

Even if in this way it is possible to identify a chronological sequence in the Kerameikos cemetery through the analysis of the pottery, it is still difficult to understand the real duration of the phases of this sequence. For example the length of the Protogeometric stages and the criteria to determine it are still not well defined; the Late Protogeometric is considered a longer phase if compared to the previous ones (Desborough 1952, 294; Morris 1991, 121-122; Lemos 2002, 26)\(^6\), but the only explanation to justify its duration seems to be the higher number of graves.

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\(^6\) According to Desborough (1952, 294) the Early Protogeometric lasts ca. 45 years, the Middle Protogeometric ca. 20 years and the Late Protogeometric ca. 60 years. In Lemos’ chronological sequence (2002, 26) the Transitional, Early and Middle phases last one generation (ca. 25 years) each one, while the Late stage two generations. According to Morris (1991, 121) the Late Protogeometric lasts “perhaps more than 75 years”.

Transitional phase to the Protogeometric period almost all the graves are cremations, we still have a few inhumations.
The argument is complex and it cannot be carried on here, but it should be stressed that the conventional division into Early, Middle and Late stages maybe need to be reviewed, in particular in the case of the Middle Protogeometric: the Kerameikos burials that can be dated to this period are so few that is it legitimate to wonder if there is a real and convincing chronological differentiation between this phase and the later one.
REFERENCES


The Relative Sequence of the Earlier Kerameikos Burials …: a Methodological Approach


FIGURES
Fig. 1 - Plan of the Kerameikos necropolis; the Pompeion burial ground and the burial areas on the south bank of the Eridanos river are marked with a red circle (after Krause 1975, table 1)
Fig. 2 - Pompeion burial ground with Ruppenstein’s *Stufen* (Ruppenstein 2007) and Mountjoy's LH IIIC Late graves (Mountjoy 1988). The tombs SM115-SM148 were published by Ruppenstein after Mountjoy's paper, so they have not been analyzed by the scholar (after Ruppenstein 2007)
Fig. 3 - Transitional to Late Protogeometric graveson the South bank of the Eridanos river according to Kübler’s (Kübler 1943) and Krause’s (Krause 1975) dating. Kübler and Krause proposed two different dates for the tombs PG5, P30, PG31; PG25 is dated by them to the Middle Protogeometric, but it is considered transitional by Ruppenstein (Ruppenstein 2007) and Early Protogeometric by Lemos (Lemos 2002). The graves without the number belong to the Geometric period (after Kübler 1943, fig. 1)
S. Dalsoglio

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Fig. 4 - The chronological sequence proposed by the main authors for the Submycenaean and Protogeometric periods.