

Mourning women: the Tanagra larnakes and the Minoan connection  
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Ever since their discovery half a century ago, the painted larnakes from Mycenaean chamber tombs in Tanagra, Boeotia, have posed a problem for Aegean prehistorians. Larnax burials are a Minoan custom and not attested on the Mycenaean mainland outside of Tanagra. How or why this custom was transmitted from Crete to Boeotia is unclear. Minoan colonization or immigration is generally considered unlikely since all pottery from the tombs is purely Mycenaean; moreover, the style of decoration on these larnakes is Mycenaean and has parallels with both Mycenaean fresco and Mycenaean pottery painting, suggesting they are the product of Mycenaean workmanship. This paper combines evidence from Mycenaean chamber tombs further north along the North Euboean Gulf coast, which include odd features and contain female (but not male) skeletons which appear to be Cretan, with the evidence provided by the striking iconography of mourning women on the larnakes themselves. I suggest the possibility that Minoan women were brought from Crete to live in these coastal communities along the North Euboean Gulf and, although largely invisible in the material record, become visible here in the typically female sphere of burial. Assuming these Minoan women were responsible for the larnax burials solves the paradox created by the Mycenaean decoration on a Minoan burial form.