

Article

Of Winged Women and Stone Tombs: Identity and Agency through Iron Age Lycian Mortuary Architecture

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Abstract: The people collectively named the Lycians in modern scholarship are the best represented of the western Anatolian first millennium BC cultures in terms of philological, historical, and archaeological data. This article seeks to better understand the meanings behind Iron Age Lycian mortuary monuments and religious images, and how they reflect Lycian identity and agency in a time of political turmoil. By studying the Lycian mortuary landscape, tombs and images, we can begin to comprehend Lycian perceptions of the afterlife, religion and cultural identity. In particular, we look to the images of the so-called “Harpies” and “Running Men” to better understand evidence of the afterlife, connections to the past and the creation of their own identity of what it means to be Lycian. The study of Lycian mortuary trends, monumental architecture, and religion gives us a small but tantalizing view into the Lycian understanding of religion and death, and how they wielded their own culture as a tool for survival in a politically fraught world.

Keywords: Lycia; mortuary architecture; mortuary landscape; religious images; stone tombs; winged women; western Anatolia



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1. Introduction

Lycia, a region located in southwestern Anatolia, is sometimes called the Land of Tombs. Modern visitors to the region easily understand why. Littered throughout the landscape are the remnants of hundreds of stone tombs, dating from the Early Iron Age through the Roman period. In terms of first millennium BC western Anatolian societies, the Lycians are perhaps the best represented in terms of philological, historical, and archaeological data. However, it is their tombs that tend to capture the imagination the most. Much scholarship has engaged with these religious and mortuary monuments; 19th century scholarship, in particular, focused on how the Lycians and their tombs fit into the Hellenistic world. Lycian culture was situated between the Greek and Achaemenid spheres, and many aspects of their culture, particularly elite culture, were affected by these major powers.

Lycian studies are often part of Classical rather than Near Eastern scholarship. As a result, the carved scenes preserved on Lycian tombs, as well as any mentions of deities in tomb texts, are most often interpreted through the lens of Greek religion. Greek elements tend to be over emphasized, as they are better known and attested, while Lycian traits are less well established in the literature. Kuban reports from his research into Greek versus Lycian traits across Lycian tombs that less than 10 percent of the recorded iconographic and architectural traits are Greek rather than Lycian, similar to that of Greek to Lycian inscriptions in the same datasets (Kuban 2016, p. 413). What is clear is that during the eighth to fifth centuries BC, Lycian religion was not yet completely Hellenized. The Lycians retained their own pantheon, religious practices and views of the afterlife, quite distinct from what is known elsewhere in the Mediterranean world.

While we have little textual evidence from the Lycian people themselves, these monuments present our best insight into the sacred and the architecture created to celebrate and remember the sacred. Mortuary material reflects the cultural moment in which it was

created, though the ways a people treat their dead is also quite conservative. Aspects of religion and culture are directly reflected in the mortuary architecture of a people, from placement in the landscape, to the various style of tombs and graves created, to the choice of iconographic scenes invoked on the tombs themselves.

This article seeks to better understand the meaning of mortuary landscapes, monuments and religious images utilized by the Lycians, how this reflects Lycian identity and agency in a time of often fluctuating political control and unrest, and impacts expressions of cultural values and identity, especially in mortuary-related activities. By studying Lycian tombs and images, we can begin to comprehend Lycian perceptions of the afterlife, religion, and cultural identity.

2. The Lycians

Lycia is located in the southwestern corner of Anatolia, making up the modern-day provinces of Antalya and Muğla (See Figure 1). Unlike the other western Anatolian Iron Age civilizations (i.e., Lydia, Caria, Phrygia), we have a relatively large number of texts from Lycia: around 400 to date (Tekoğlu 2016), primarily found at the site of Xanthos and from epigraphs. From these texts, we know the native name of the Lycians was *Trmmis*. Late Bronze Age (ca. 1600–1100 BC) texts in Hittite, Egyptian, and Ugaritic mention a people called the *Lukka*, generally assumed to be the Bronze Age Lycians, based on the likely location of the *Lukka* lands and the similarity in name. The *Lukka* people are mentioned by the Egyptians as fighting on the side of the Hittites during the Battle of Kadesh in 1274 BC, and later as part of the group collectively known as the Sea Peoples (Bryce 1986, p. 7); they were also mentioned in letters from Ugarit (Gander 2016, p. 80). Beyond the evidence of names, how connected are the Iron Age peoples, called the Lycians, to the Bronze Age people called the *Lukka*?



Figure 1. Map of Lycia (By Caliniuc—This file was derived from: Asia Minor in the Greco-Roman period—general map—regions and main settlements.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=74974031> accessed on 14 February 2021).

Archaeological data reveal a continuation of some cultural aspects within Lycia, from the Bronze Age through the Hellenistic era, including the design and materials used in architecture, burial typologies, and religious material culture, as will be further discussed later in this paper. The Lycian language, *Trmilli*, is descended from Luwian, an Indo-European language that originated in central Anatolia by ca. 1500 BC (Tekoğlu 2016). The earliest known levels of Lycian cities, in particular the large city of Xanthos, generally date to around the eighth to seventh centuries BC (Draycott 2015, p. 10), though it is believed the settlement at Xanthos itself may go back as far as the 13th century BC, based on textual

records and archaeological data from nearby sites (Işık 2016a, p. 169). What complicates this picture is that while archaeological data exist from the Lycian region in the Bronze Age (e.g., Becks 2012; Momigliano and Aksoy 2015), and from the sixth century BC onwards (e.g., Demargne 1958, 1969; Metzger 1963), less is known about the region between the end of the Late Bronze Age cultures and the re-emergence of “Classical” Lycia by the sixth century BC. The sizable interruption in our data allows for uncertainty about the origins of Iron Age Lycian culture (Becks 2016).

In legendary terms, a people called the Lycians are named by Homer in the *Iliad* (Homer 2015), offering not a historical view of the Lycians, but rather a window into how the Lycians were viewed from a mythological standpoint. According to Homer, the Lycians fought on the side of the Trojans in the Trojan War, under the command of Sarpedon and Glaucus, who both played important roles. Sarpedon was slain by Patroclus, causing the final confrontation between Patroclus and Hector, while Glaucus was an important Trojan commander. Though the *Iliad* was likely not written down until the eighth century BC at the earliest, the name of Sarpedon, as suggested by Durnford (2008), may in fact be a Bronze Age Luwian word for a military rank, translated perhaps as “commander” or “overlord.” This implies the names used by Homer for the Lycian commanders may in fact be, if not Lycian, then at least Anatolian in origin.

Later Greek accounts of Lycian origins conflict with the Homeric account. According to Herodotus (Herodotus 2009 *Histories* 7.92), “The Lycians came from Crete. They used to be called Termilai, but later took their name from an Athenian, Lykos son of Pandion,” though he otherwise has little to say about the history and origins of the Lycians.

The vast majority of historical documents regarding the Lycians come from outside sources, such as Herodotus. Any history will have its blind spots and limitations. Herodotus was writing for his time and with his understanding of the world (though he himself was from nearby Caria, located to the northwest of Lycia in western Anatolia) during the 5th century. As a consequence, he places the Lycians in the context of a 5th century understanding of the region, and from a highly Hellenized viewpoint. His history of Lycia highlights in particular how the Lycians were variously allied with the Greeks or the Achaemenids. As a result, Lycian studies largely began within the Classical view, emphasizing aspects of Lycian culture that were recognizable and quantifiable as Greek or Achaemenid (e.g., Fellows 1840; Cook 1963; even as late as Childs 1978).

Modern archaeological and philological evidence indicate the Lycians were a native Anatolian group, with clear cultural ties to Bronze Age Anatolia, becoming increasingly Hellenized by the fifth to fourth centuries but still with unique cultural attributes. In the last few decades, scholarship has tended towards better understanding the Anatolian origins of Lycian culture (e.g., Borchhardt and Borchhardt-Birbaumer 1992; Işık 2010, 2016b). Scholars are still learning about Archaic Lycia, from the tenth to sixth centuries BC, where we have practically no textual information and comparatively little archaeological data.

By the Middle Iron Age (ca. 800–550 BC) period, the major Lycian cities were established. While Xanthos was the largest, it was not a true capitol city. Instead, it was the powerful center of a number of semi-autonomous city-states, similar to the model known from the earlier Neo-Hittites elsewhere in Anatolia (Işık 2016b). Historical mentions of Lycia begin in the sixth century BC and inform us that the Lycians were conquered by the Achaemenid Persians in 545 BC, becoming part of the Achaemenid Empire (Fedak 1990, pp. 41–42). According to Herodotus (1.176), Xanthos was at least partially destroyed in this conquest, though the archaeological data do not entirely corroborate this claim (Işık 2016a).

The Lycians remained under Achaemenid control until 479 BC, as a satrapy. They still spoke their native language and were relatively autonomous in their day-to-day life. The Lycians appear to have often switched sides between the Greeks and the Achaemenids. They joined the Delian league following the Greco–Persian war and returned to Achaemenid control by 430 BC, fighting on the side of the Achaemenids in the Peloponnesian War, while maintaining cultural contact with Greece. They remained under Achaemenid control until their conquest by Alexander the Great (Kolb 2016).

This brief historical summary reveals the conflicting loyalties of the Lycian rulers and peoples. After the possible first destruction of Xanthos in 545 BC, the Lycians seemed adept at aligning with whoever offered stronger protection, thus keeping their population and cities safe. We know little directly about how the Lycians identified themselves through these centuries of political upheaval. Did they embrace these mythological origins, seeing themselves as the descendants of great heroes such as Sarpedon? Giving themselves a heroic past and mythologizing that past helps create unity and a strong sense of identity in a people, and yet the archaeological record is all that we have to help us answer such questions.

3. Identity and Agency in Lycian Mortuary Monuments

Agency and identity models can help to better understand the cultural meanings embedded in the mortuary monuments of the Lycians and the choices made in symbols, iconography and religious figures. This study is not about the creation of Lycian identity, but rather the continuation of an older identity during times of change, a reification of identity, religion, and culture through highly visible religious mortuary architecture.

Religion can simultaneously be a force of social cohesion (for example, by creating kinship or identity with the new Greek and Achaemenid spheres) and an instrument to maintain an older Lycian concept of identity. The creation and use of material culture (in this case, the creation of highly visible and publicly placed mortuary monuments) play an active role in the continued construction of Lycian identity, even as the concept of Lycian identity was constantly shifting due to new and ever-changing political ties. In particular, mortuary architecture was used to create this sense of identity in the public sphere, from how the elites and the wealthy were memorialized down to how even the most common farmer was buried.

The agency model (e.g., [Dobres and Hoffman 1994](#); [Dobres and Robb 2000](#); [Gardner 2004](#), to name a few) offers a model to understand what peoples of the past (“agents”) achieve through their actions, both intentional and unintentional. The building of monuments requires the efforts of many people in a society, from the initial planning, to placement of the monuments, to the choice of construction materials, and then the final building process. A larger number of people within a community, from elites to family members to craftsmen, are directly involved in the creation of these monuments. So-called “agents” work within the basis of their own knowledge and understanding of their world and their place within it. In this case, Lycian agents worked together to create these mortuary monuments, utilizing materials and iconographic styles that were both familiar to them and reflective of their moment in time.

As stated by Mol and Versluys, the study of ritual and religion in the archaeological context can help us to understand not only how religion was practiced, but also what it did for the creation of community and creation of “communal belonging” ([Mol and Versluys 2015](#), pp. 252, 254). The Lycian identity, then, was never a single concept, frozen in amber throughout time, but a living community that ebbed and flowed, allowing for change while also keeping some sense of its own past and what it meant to be Lycian. In particular, this process can be understood through the study of mortuary architecture, as a reflection of those changes, helping Lycians to understand which aspects of their past to keep, while incorporating new cultural traits to form connections to the Greek and Achaemenid worlds. All cultures are ultimately hybrids of their connections, and the Lycians are no exception to this.

In particular, mortuary contexts are ripe for this type of understanding, as all members of society interact with them, from the satrap or ruler of the region down to the lowest classes. Lycian mortuary architecture in particular is interesting for the way it is highly public and central, in particular in the way that mortuary monuments were placed within the center of Xanthos. These monuments were able to create a sense of community and belonging, a visualization of what it means to be Lycian, for all to see and participate in, even as Greek and Achaemenid groups were steadily becoming a larger and larger part of everyday Lycian life. The symbols of Lycian culture, visible to visitors, conquerors and

Lycians alike, would be read as having different meanings depending on who saw them; thus, the use of both Greek and Achaemenid symbols with Lycian themes.

Additionally, architectural monuments, in particular those that are highly visible within the built urban landscape, can act as visible memory aids within the built environment (Lawrence and Low 1990; Steadman 2010) that could be read and understood by the living populations, with a correlation between religion and religious architecture (explored in, for example, Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003; Verkaaik 2013; Lang 2019). Other studies have investigated types and sizes of burial monuments created by a society against social structures, and consider how the mortuary monumental styles of the past still exert power in later mortuary symbolism and ideology (e.g., Bettencourt 2010).

Mortuary architecture in the Lycian world in particular, is a form of “lived” religion (McGuire 2008), where it “focuses on the actual everyday experience, on practices, expressions, and interactions that could be related to religion” (Raja and Rüpke 2015, p. 4); i.e., the lived and everyday practices that make up life. In the case of the Lycians, the mortuary landscape was integrated into everyday life, a constant reminder of their own past and their identity as Lycians.

The Lycian mortuary monuments, monuments of mourning, and monuments of remembrance were highly visible within the urban landscape, and were a form of not just memory but also of the reification of identity through mortuary themes. As will be illustrated further in the next section, mortuary monuments changed throughout the Iron Age, from the earlier, Anatolian-style tumuli at the very start of the Iron Age to the creation of Greek-style Temple tombs by the 4th century. These monuments have a hybridity to them, Anatolian and Greek, with Achaemenid themes. The use and reuse of earlier mortuary styles, while incorporating new architectural and iconographic concepts, reveal a need to both incorporate the past while incorporating new concepts from powerful outside influences. In a time when the Lycian peoples were being conquered and incorporated into the Achaemenid and Greek spheres, mortuary monument-building was a way to create a visible and constant reminder of who they were and who they had been. The use of Greek and Achaemenid themes would be familiar to these outside groups, but also would have contained a separate meaning for the Lycian natives, taking native Anatolian and Lycian themes and making them both familiar and new.

This study uses as a case study both the Lycian mortuary landscape as a whole, and mortuary-based images of the so-called Winged Women and the Running Men (or the Twelve Gods). Such themes are familiar in Classical iconography. For example, winged women were known from Greek tales and associated with death but took on a completely different meaning for the native Lycians, as will be further later in this paper. The use and reuse of both Greek and Lycian themes would result in a different understanding depending on who is viewing and interpreting these images. Placing religious and mortuary monuments in the city center, in particular, within the largest city, Xanthos, creates a sense of identity and continuation with the past, while also looking towards the future. These religious monuments to the dead and to the past (as monuments to the dead are necessarily about the past), create a bond between the past and the future in a period of upheaval and change, allowing for some control over their own culture.

4. The Urban Mortuary Landscape and Hittite Antecedents

The Lycian mortuary landscape included religious themes from the Anatolian Bronze Age that would be recognizable to anyone from the area, while still also having some, if changed, meaning, to Greek or Achaemenid visitors or rulers. The scenes on these tombs are of a religious nature, displaying Lycian identity and Lycian religion in a time of change. The agency of the Lycian populations is present in how they created their urban landscape and how they maintained it over time through the creation of highly visible religious mortuary monuments with familiar (and, at times, ancient) scenes. To better understand the importance of Lycian monuments, we will first present an overview of the urban mortuary landscape and their Anatolian antecedents.

Within Lycian cities, mortuary monuments were often centrally located, starting with the earliest habitation levels. The oldest known Lycian tombs, in particular the pillar tombs, were constructed in the middle of the urban center, rather than on the outskirts of a city or in a separate necropolis. This kind of visibility was also common in the Hittite capital, Hattuşa, where numerous mortuary monuments were visible throughout the city's built landscape. Each deceased Hittite king was given his own *hekur-house*, the cult center of the deceased king, placed centrally in the city, rather than outside the city walls (van den Hout 2002).

According to Hittite ritual texts, it was here that offerings to the cult of the dead king were made after he had been properly laid to rest. These houses were more akin to a temple to the deceased rather than a tomb, though they may also have been the repository for the king. Unfortunately, there are no positively identified remains in the archaeological record of these monuments. There is some speculation that the stony outcrop called Nişantaş, located in the Upper City of Hattuşa, is the *hekur-house* of King Tudhaliya IV (ca. 1237-1209 BC), constructed by his son King Şuppiluliuma IV (van den Hout 1994, pp. 50–52). If so, then the numerous large stone buildings found throughout Hattuşa may also be similar monuments to the dead. These monuments were placed around the city, in order that the kings of the past would not be forgotten, rather than burying their kings outside the city in cemeteries, as was the common practice for the remainder of the population. Perhaps the Lycian royal burials and mortuary monuments are a later reflection of this practice.

A different parallel to the Hittite world are the funerary niches found in and around Lycian tombs. Throughout the Hittite world, small stone niches were often placed near both burial sites and religious monuments. Such niches are observed at the site of Hattuşa, at all three of the city's monumental gates, at the entrance of Chamber 2, a likely entrance way to the underworld, and throughout the mortuary complex at Yazılıkaya. These niches are here interpreted as locations for offerings for the dead and bear a striking similarity to those found in and around Lycian tombs.

The way that the Lycian people presented their mortuary monuments reflect a far older Anatolian tradition, dating at least as far back as the Late Bronze Age. The Lycian creation of visibility for the exalted dead within the urban landscape reflects their own Anatolian origins, bringing the sacred into the public sphere for all to see. Thus, these monuments were not something that must be traveled to in order to be appreciated, but rather a part of everyday life, a constant reminder of both their own past and the Lycian leaders who went before. Offerings to the dead could be made right in the urban center, incorporating these two factors. The sacred becomes not mundane, but rather a living facet of everyday practice as well as a connection to the past.

5. Lycian Mortuary Architecture

Beyond the placement of the mortuary landscape, the way in which architecture itself was employed by the population of Lycia further reflects how the population made specific choices about their own tombs and the tombs of their families, using a variety of lenses on their own identities.

Since the instigation of archaeological explorations of Lycia in the nineteenth century, Lycian mortuary architecture has attracted the most attention from scholars—and for good reason, as the tombs are the most visible remnants of the Lycian peoples, and little domestic archaeology had yet been published, though this is changing. Much research has focused on architectural style and tomb inscriptions, which make up most extant written Lycian. Especially in older scholarship from the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth century, the architecture and art of these mortuary monuments were often considered borrowed from, and in imitation of, either Greek or Achaemenid contemporary styles. There was less regard for native contribution or innovation, or how the Lycians themselves would have understood their burial customs.

However, Lycian monumental tombs were constructed in a variety of styles and reflect the different influences present in Iron Age Lycian culture, from the Anatolian tumuli, to the native Lycian styles of the House Tombs and Sarcophagi, to the Hellenistic House

Tombs. Lycian tomb style in particular reflects a uniquely Anatolian style of architecture, with similarities to Bronze Age Anatolia as well as a number of innovations unique to Iron Age Lycia. The expression of specific beliefs regarding life and death transcends tomb types, but the study of burials also reflects how elites constructed their own religious and cultural roles differently. A study of how Lycian mortuary architecture may have differed more regionally is beyond the scope of this study, with much of what is known about Lycian mortuary architecture originating from the city of Xanthos and its environs.

Each major style of tomb will be briefly explained below.

5.1. *Tumulus Tombs*

The oldest type of monumental tombs known from Iron Age Lycian are the tumulus burials, with an ever-growing number being discovered. Tumulus tombs are largely found in the countryside, with none having yet been found near Xanthos itself. Though they are the oldest of the Lycian tomb types described here, studies of Lycian tumulus tombs only date back to the 1970s and far fewer studies have been published to date on these styles of tombs (Hüllden 2011, p. 497). Tumuli are artificial mounds, with a burial chamber placed either in the center of the mound or below it. Tumulus tombs date back to the early Late Bronze Age within central and western Anatolia and are especially common in the Lydian and Phrygian regions of western and central Anatolia (Fedak 1990; Hüllden 2011). The tumulus tombs of Lycia are of a different type than the typical Anatolian tumulus tombs, but likely share similar origins.

Tumulus tombs primarily survive in the highlands of central Lycia, most notably at Phellos and in the Yavı mountain region. These tombs are built mounds of stone, as opposed to the earthen mounds common elsewhere in Anatolia. Within, large blocks form one or two-chambered tombs. The tombs are circular in shape, often with domed or corbel-vaulted ceilings. The sizes of tumulus tombs range quite a bit, from smaller mounds only a few meters in diameter to larger ones of up to 19 m in diameter (Hüllden 2016). After the dead were interred within, the chamber was covered with earth and stones, creating an artificial mound. Because of this, these tombs tend to have some of the best preservation of all the Anatolian tombs. The human remains were sometimes cremated, another trait commonly found across the western and central Anatolian world. Tumuli are known in Lycia from as early as ninth century to the fifth century BC, and perhaps as late as the fourth century BC, making them some of the oldest tomb types in Iron Age Lycia, though the dating is not very secure (Hüllden 2011). Tumulus tombs, then, are a bridge between Bronze Age and Iron Age burial practices, though far more work remains to be conducted on these styles of burial.

5.2. *Stone Built Tombs*

More famous than the tumuli are the various types, described below, of built stone mortuary monuments. The first known monumental tombs are found in Iron Age Anatolia, from the seventh century BC, coinciding with the first appearance of stone cut tombs in the Phrygian region of Anatolia, north of Lycia. Phrygian tombs, like the later Lycian tombs (post 6th century), were built in imitation of native architecture, though of a radically different style than the wooden buildings of Lycia.

As previously mentioned, the stone monuments are the best-known of the Lycian burials. While we know little directly of the social structure of Lycian society from historical records, previous studies of Lycian tombs and coins give some indication of the Lycian hierarchical system. As established via studies of Lycian stone tomb inscriptions and decorations by Zahle (1983) and Bryce (1991), such tombs were primarily erected for the use of the upper echelon of Lycian society, with the more ornate tombs for the highest dynastic classes, and the less ornate tombs, such as house tombs and sarcophagi, seemingly constructed for well off families of Lycia, often with connections in various major Lycian cities. By comparing names from tomb inscriptions with the names known from coins minted in Lycia itself (e.g., Kolb 2016; Vismara 2016), the names of the ruling dynastic

family of Lycia, as least from the 6th to 4th centuries BC, are known, as well as the names of a number of other important elite families.

This style of tomb is unique to Lycia and cannot be said to result from a Hellenistic influence. The placement of the tombs within the city center, as well as their elevated positions within this area is reminiscent of the location of tombs in the Hittite capital of Hattuşa, as is the use of more open-air worship than the more temple-based worship of contemporary Greece (Işık 2010, 2016b).

5.2.1. Pillar Tombs

A uniquely Lycian style tomb is the pillar tomb, which is also the oldest type of monumental tomb known from the region (See Figure 2). To date, around 50 pillar tombs are known (Kolb 2016, p. 38) from Lycia, mainly from within Xanthos. The construction of the earliest known pillar tomb, the so-called “Lion Tomb,” dates to ca. 540 BC (Zahle 1975, p. 93). Scholars assume this tomb type was built for the highest classes of the Lycian hierarchy, such as the heads of royal dynasties (based on the size and textual references found on the tombs) and to have been first invented in Xanthos (Kolb 2016, p. 38).



Figure 2. Pillar tomb. (“Lycian Tomb” by indie_shots is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0).

The pillar tomb is shaped as a monolith with a tapered triangular top which stands on top of a rectangular stone base. The top pillar is generally a single chamber, measuring only a few meters within the chamber, large enough to contain a full sized man. The base may either have been directly on the ground or further elevated on a stepped foundation. Likely, pillar tombs were for single internment in the top chamber. Little is known of how the bodies were laid out, as none of the pillar tombs was found intact. Likely, the body was simply lain inside the chamber. No benches or other features were built inside the chamber itself. The exteriors of pillar tombs were plain or decorated with cut stone friezes. By the mid-fifth century BC, pillar tombs were no longer constructed in Lycia (Fedak 1990, pp. 41–43; Kolb 2016, pp. 38–41).

5.2.2. Sarcophagi

Sarcophagi are a common style of burial through the Mediterranean world. Lycian sarcophagi, however, are dissimilar in size or shape to the later Roman Sarcophagi known from museums around the world. The largest difference between sarcophagi and pillar tombs is the size of the foundation, which was larger and taller in the pillar tombs than the sarcophagi. Despite the different name used in the literature, it can be said that Lycian sarcophagi were a later, shorter variation on the earlier pillar tombs. To date, 64 Lycian sarcophagi are known (Bryce 1991, p. 73).

Lycian sarcophagi were larger than the typical Roman version, and often were raised on a decorated or plain platform, similar in size and shape to the pillar tombs. Lycian sarcophagi have five parts, which are, from bottom to top: a stepped base; the *hyposorion* or lower burial chamber; a massive, flat plate; the boxlike sarcophagus chamber; and a lid, often tapered and triangular, as with the tops of the pillar tombs. Sarcophagi were either opened via a small door located on one end of the sarcophagus or by lifting the lid, though not all sarcophagi had movable lids. The *hyposorion* is a second grave chamber associated with the main burial. The *hyposorion* likely held secondary burials, such as servants or family members of the main internee (Önen 1984, pp. 6–7). Outside the tombs, carved niches for burial offering were sometimes present (Özer 2016, p. 430). None of these attributes are known from Roman sarcophagi.

Lycian sarcophagi were often decorated on the external surface, more than any other monumental tomb, and are our best source for Lycian iconography. Carved stone friezes were located on the body and lid of the sarcophagus itself (Özer 2016). By the Roman period, the sarcophagus became the main method of burial for the elite, non-royal classes, and remained in use long after other monumental burial styles had gone out of use. While sarcophagi are known from both the later Greek and Roman eras, Lycian sarcophagi are unique in their construction with a ‘gothic’ shape and large stepped foundations not found on the sarcophagi of other regions (Keen 1998, p. 183). The unique attributes of Lycian sarcophagi continued into the Roman period (Özer 2016, p. 432).

5.2.3. House Tombs

The house tomb is the most abundant and famous of the Lycian monumental tombs, and new tombs are still periodically discovered in the regions around Lycia, with nearly 1000 known examples to date (e.g., Gay and Corsten 2006). House tombs were built in the shape of small buildings, with crossbeams and roof beams carved in imitation of wood, and false windows and doors along the sides. Entrance to the tombs was through sealed stone doors, and never through the roofs, unlike sarcophagi. The interiors of house tombs are similar in size to those of the pillar tombs and sarcophagi.

This type of structure is often interpreted as an imitation of the domestic wooden houses of the Lycian peoples, thus the name. As no contemporary domestic structures are known archaeologically, due to both the poor preservation of wooden structures in Lycia, as well as to a general lack of domestic archaeology, this is merely conjecture. Traditional houses in the Lycian region resemble the shape of ancient house tombs, but as noted by Atik et al. (2013), this may be more about emulation of highly visible monuments in the landscape than true cultural continuation. Recent interpretations of the house tombs range from imitations of wooden funerary buildings (Thomsen 2002), heroic shrines (Marksteiner 1997; Draycott 2015) or even storage rooms (Hülden 2006). Whatever the origin, the shape and imitation wooden appearance of the house tombs is uniquely Lycian, not found in any other Near Eastern, Greek or Achaemenid tradition (Kuban 2016).

Only the exteriors of house tombs were carved in an imitation façade, while the interior was left plain and roughly hewn. House tombs were either carved into a stone cliff with frontal façade, or constructed to stand alone, as with the pillar tombs and sarcophagi. In this case, the sides as well as the front were carved, giving a complete four-sided copy of a wooden structure (Çevik 2003, p. 110; Kuban 2016).

House tombs have between one to three stories, with ‘beams’ protruding from the sides from each story. If the house tomb was built to stand alone, it was often built on a stepped foundation, as were the pillar tombs and sarcophagi. A single or double door was placed at the center of the façade, above which was a round or square cross beam. Along this façade, a carved frieze or inscription may appear. Few house tombs had friezes over the door, though many were decorated with short inscriptions, usually indicating the name of the tomb owner and his family, and a short curse to be bestowed upon those who may be tempted to rob the tomb (Önen 1984, pp. 7–8; Bryce 1991, p. 73).

The interiors of house tombs were roughly hewn, generally with no decoration. Unlike pillar tombs or sarcophagi, one or more benches of either stone or wood were placed along the walls, upon which the dead were laid to rest (Keen 1998, p. 184). Along the benches, carved niches were often built into the tomb walls, as places for offerings to the dead, as discussed above. The number of burial benches does not necessarily reflect how many people were buried in a tomb, as older bodies were likely moved aside or stacked to add new burials (Çevik 2003, p. 105). According to Bryce (1986, p. 117), it may be that the main owner of the tomb would be given his own bench, while other members of the family would share the remaining benches, moving the previously entombed members when new members were added. Such a practice is indicated by a small number of tomb inscriptions. The construction of house tombs ended by the third century BC (Önen 1984, p. 8).

5.2.4. Temple Tombs

Lycian temple tombs are the least abundant of the monumental tombs (See Figure 3), with only six known, while a larger number of simple cut-rock tombs have been discovered around the edges of Xanthos and in and around Antalya (Cavalier 2003, 2017; des Courtils 2006, 2008, 2010). Temple tombs are also the youngest, all dating to the fourth century BC, and are the most Greek-styled of the Lycian monumental tombs. These tombs have a carved temple façade, similar to those of house tombs, though considerably larger, complete with one or more Ionic columns, an epistyle and a pediment. A portico on the front leads to the door to the interior chamber. The exteriors of all six temple tombs were decorated with scenes of feasting and fighting, though the friezes were often found in bad condition. Inside, the temple tombs were similar to the House Tombs, with simple stone or wooden benches and niches carved into the walls, but often little else in way of decoration and roughly hewn walls (Önen 1984, pp. 8–9).



Figure 3. Temple Tomb. (“Dalyan Lycian Rock Tombs” by Peter J Dean is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0).

5.3. Non-Monumental Tombs

For the humbler inhabitants of Lycia, there were more humble burials, though in nearly all of the current Lycian scholarship, such tomb types are never mentioned. A common style of such burials are pithos tombs (See Figure 4). In pithos tombs, the dead are interred in large jars, called pithoi, curled up in a fetal position. The jar is then buried, often with the top of the jar at ground level, or a small stone slab placed above the jar to mark the spot. Pithos burials can be either single or multiple burials. This type of burial dates back to at least the third millennium BC and is found throughout Anatolia as one

of the most popular methods of burial. Pithos tombs are known from outside of Anatolia, but not as commonly, and are considered a hallmark of Anatolian culture. Even in the Bronze Age, it was likely that pithos tombs were often, though not always, reserved for the lower echelons of Anatolian societies, with those from higher societal strata preferring more intricate tombs, such as cist tombs, or stone-lined tombs (Selover and Durgun 2019).



Figure 4. Idealized illustration of a pithos burial (drawing by Lilly Woodard). Notes: The author has obtained the copyright of this figure in this article.

Pithos tombs are present in the Iron Age Lycian context from at least the seventh century BC onward and are differentiated from earlier pithos burials by the presence of Lycian style pottery within the jars as grave goods. Mellink hypothesized that cist and simple inhumation burials were also likely present in Lycia, though none are currently known (Mellink 1976, p. 22), as few Lycian cemeteries have been excavated. The pithos tombs are rarely mentioned in any publications on burial styles of the Lycian period, with emphasis placed instead on the more ostentatious stone tombs that dot the countryside of Lycia. The pithos tomb was by far the most common type of burial, however, as the majority of the population was likely buried in such a fashion. Mellink remains one of the few authors who has published work about the non-monumental tombs of the time period. Cremation, a typical method of burial in the Hittite era and present in Anatolia after the Middle Bronze Age, was apparently not practiced in Lycia (Keen 1998, p. 185), with the exception of within tumuli.

5.4. Discussion

The Lycians practiced a variety of burial styles, from the monumental temple tombs on to the vastly under-appreciated pithos burials. Methods of burial tend to be one of the most conservative aspects of any culture (Parker-Pearson 1982; Gilmour 2002). While a people may, for example, change their pottery styles in a generation, and elite culture is often updated to be more in touch with international styles and to copy styles of colonial or imperial occupation, burial styles are the most likely to reflect the past. The various methods of monumental and non-monumental mortuary methods reflect this conservatism. The tumulus tombs and the pithos tombs in particular reflect a Bronze Age Anatolian past that was very much alive in Lycian culture, in conjunction with the urbanized mortuary landscape discussed in the previous section.

The common population have little reason to change how they bury themselves, and the fashions of Greek and Achaemenid conquerors have less impact on the everyday lives of the common people. They continued to live as they always had, as much as possible. We do not know much about the religion of the larger Lycian population, but the under-studied non-monumental tombs of Lycia indicate the connections of this region to its past. While elites, or at least the more wealthy members of society, were buried in tombs reflecting both the Anatolian origins of the Lycians as well as the imperial styles of the Greeks and Achaemenids, the burials of non-elites in particular indicate the conservative nature of the common people, with little change in how they understood mortuary methods and care of the dead.

The use of tumulus tombs, monuments to the highest elites, began by the Late Bronze Age and primarily only dates to the earlier Iron Age. The tumulus tombs in particular represent a transitional style of monument, bridging the gap from the Bronze to the Iron Age, largely dying out by the 7th century. Thus, the Tumulus Tombs are a fascinating window into how mortuary styles of the elites changed from before the arrival of Hellenism and Achaemenid influences, where elites were buried in Anatolian-style tombs in the countryside, rather than within city centers such as Xanthos. It was only with the arrival of Greek influence in the 7th century that urban-based stone monuments were created, when the elites of Lycia felt more of a need for this kind of connection to their dead and their past within their everyday lives.

The stone tombs themselves offer a further glimpse into Lycian elite culture in the Iron Age, as they shifted into the urban centers, and used a new language of mortuary and religious architecture, drawing on styles of domestic architecture with no known antecedents. Styles of stone built tombs shifted over time, from the earliest pillar tombs, to the creation of sarcophagi and house tombs, to the 4th century temple tombs. The styles of pillar tombs, sarcophagi and house tombs should really be considered more as variations on a theme than as distinct styles of burial, reflecting then the need to create a uniquely Lycian style of tomb, one that has both ties to the Bronze Age past as well as to Iron Age Lycian religion and deference to the dead, while the temple tombs, few though they are, and dating only to the 4th century onwards, become ever more Greek in style, further deflecting this change over time.

Beyond the placement and styles of mortuary monuments, the iconographic themes present on these tombs shed even further light into how the Lycians reified their own identity.

6. Lycian Religious Iconography: Winged Women and Running Men

Many Lycian tombs are ripe with religious iconography and give us a tantalizing view into the various deities and mythologies beloved of the Lycians. As stated earlier, we have little textual information on Lycian religious beliefs, and so it is through the scenes and figures featured on Lycian tombs in particular that we have any understanding of the religion itself. While a wide variety of Lycian themes are known, this study will focus on two in particular, which we will refer to as the Winged Women and the Running Men, as examples of Lycian religion and its ties to both the past and its own identity.

6.1. Winged Women

In later Lycian tombs, post 4th century, scenes recognizable as Greek-inspired are common. Greek themes, as further discussed below, on tombs even lead a minority of scholars to conjecture that the artists may have been native Greeks imported to complete the artwork on tombs (Keen 1998, p. 186). However, later Lycian tombs often combine both Greek and Lycian mythology, and give us our best understanding of earlier Lycian religion. For example, within the so-called Kızılbél tomb, excavated by Mellink near Karataş Semayük, and dating to between 515 to 500 BC, a warrior scene was painted on the interior walls. The excavators interpreted the scene as the death of a warrior as he is escorted to the afterlife. The warrior looks back over his shoulder, as if taking one last look at the world of the living before leaving it forever. The scene itself is a common enough

theme within the Greek world and is painted in a recognizably Greek fashion. However, above the departing warrior is a winged woman, carrying a lotus flower in one hand and holding the other in a protective gesture over the warrior (Mellink et al. 1998). These winged women often appear in Lycian tombs and iconography.

The Winged Women remain one of the enduring mysteries of Lycian culture. Little is known about Lycian religion, other than what can be inferred from tantalizing snippets from tomb texts and the few known Lycian textual monuments. The Winged Women are often referred to as either harpies or sirens in much of Lycian scholarly literature (e.g., Tonks 1907; Tritsch 1942; Draycott 2008) based on the mythological creatures of the Greek world. However, I would argue both interpretations are incorrect, and in particular that the terms “siren” or “harpy” are not appropriate names for these otherworldly beings, and so I refer to them simply as Winged Women for the remainder of this article.

Unfortunately, there is no agreement among Lycian scholars about the name of these winged deities in the Lycian texts; indeed, it is contested if they are even mentioned directly. One possibility is a group of goddesses called the *Eliyana* on the Letoon Trilingual and a small number of other tombs (Keen 1998, p. 205), though these women are shown to be goddesses of vengeance, should a tomb be desecrated, with no mention of their role as helpers of the dead.

The Lycian Winged Women appear as human females with bird wings, most often shown clothed in draped dresses, rather than bare breasted. Their faces are calm, with open eyes and peaceful expressions, though understanding expression on ancient art is difficult. They can have talons rather than arms or legs, but also appear in fully human form (See Figures 5 and 6).

In whatever form, the figures are consistently associated with death—likely as messengers for the dead, accompanying the deceased person to the afterlife. The figures of these Winged Women appear most often on monumental tombs, either near depictions of the dead, or, as in the case of the ill-named “Harpy Tomb,” actively carrying small figures in their arms (Tonks 1907). It is unclear if these figures being carried are meant to be children, because of their small size, or adults, made diminutive by the motherly care of the Winged Women. The women themselves appear more clearly as benevolent beings, there to usher people to the next life (See Figure 6).



Figure 5. Winged Women with Architectural Details. (“Greek Marble Sculpture from Tomb of King Kybernis of Xanthos, 480 BC” by Gary Lee Todd, Ph.D. is licensed under CC PDM 1.0).



Figure 6. Winged Women, Detail from the “Harpy Tomb” (“Greek Marble Sculpture from Tomb of King Kybernis of Xanthos, 480 BC” by Gary Lee Todd, Ph.D. is licensed under CC PDM 1.0).

It is even possible that the unique shape of Lycian tombs, mentioned in the previous section, could have been shaped in this way to help facilitate the Winged Women. For example, many monumental Lycian tombs were often quite tall, with some scholars suggesting that this height allowed the soul of the dead to leave with the assistance of the winged women so often depicted around the tombs (e.g., [Atik et al. 2013](#)). In other cases, tombs, including sarcophagi, often contained false and stone doors that could have been used by these deities to enter and exit the tomb.

Winged Women were not common figures in earlier Anatolian art, such as among the Hittites. There are numerous figures of winged female sphinxes, as seen at the Sphinx Gate at Hattuša or the orthostates at Alaca Höyük, ([Koşay and Akok 1973](#)), though goddesses only rarely appear with wings in the Hittite world. The best-known use of wings in the Hittite world is in the winged sun disk, a ubiquitous aspect of any royal scene, and meant to represent the Hittite king and royalty. [Karademir and Özdemir \(2013, pp. 94–95\)](#) make a connection between birds and death in the Hittite world, as a common sacrifice to the underworld gods and at the death of Hittite kings and queens, as well as wings being a common attribute of underworld gods.

Other possible antecedents mentioned in the literature include the winged Ba-bird of the Egyptian religion or the Anzu bird from Mesopotamia, both of which have associations with the underworld and death ([Tonks 1907](#); [Karademir and Özdemir 2013, pp. 92–93](#)), while both Egyptian and Mesopotamian goddesses are at times depicted with wings when appearing as protective deities.

In the Greek world there are the sirens and harpies. Both are winged birdlike women often associated with death: immortal, demonlike beings, the daughters of gods. Harpies were primarily depicted as bare-breasted winged women, often shown attacking people, snatching away food or women, while sirens were associated with the seas and with music, and are primarily depicted as birds with human female heads, and are associated with storms ([Draycott 2008, p. 148](#); [Bremmer 2016, “Harpies”](#)). While sirens appear on grave stele in Athens during the Classical period, they often are shown playing the lyre and do not seem to have any function regarding the soul of the dead ([Karademir and Özdemir 2013, p. 97](#)), though sirens are associated with the underworld, as seen in fifth-century plays ([Draycott 2008, p. 148](#)). Sirens are generally depicted as vengeful, angry beings who seek to harm mortal men, and are often shown as seductive and dangerous. Perhaps

the best example is found in the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus meets the sirens, and is nearly driven insane by their song. Only by being tied to his boat does he survive:

First you will come to the Sirens who enchant all who come near them. If anyone unwarily draws in too close and hears the singing of the Sirens, his wife and children will never welcome him home again, for they sit in a green field and warble him to death with the sweetness of their song. There is a great heap of dead men's bones lying all around, with the flesh still rotting off them. Therefore pass these Sirens by, and stop your men's ears with wax that none of them may hear; but if you like you can listen yourself, for you may get the men to bind you as you stand upright on a cross-piece half way up the mast, and they must lash the rope's ends to the mast itself, that you may have the pleasure of listening. If you beg and pray the men to unloose you, then they must bind you faster. (Homer 2013. *Odyssey*, Book VII: 38–54)

The Winged Women of Lycian tombs do not fit this description. Nor do they have obvious parallels in the Hittite, Greek or Mesopotamian world, despite being a central aspect of the Lycian understanding of the afterlife. Throughout the Near Eastern world, there is a strong connection between winged deities, birds, and the afterlife. The Lycian Winged Women are perhaps an extension of this, but with a unique religious meaning to the Lycians.

In Greek religion, the souls of the dead travel to the underworld on their own or are accompanied by Hermes, with no references to birds or winged deities, beyond the wings on the hat and shoes of Hermes or the winged messenger Iris. There is a tradition of birds or bird imagery in Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Hittite religions—one distinctly lacking in the Greek world. The use of Winged Women in mortuary contexts then would have been recognizable to the native Lycian populations as a representation of the afterlife.

6.2. *The Running Men*

A closer association with the Hittite world is the so-called Running Men, also sometimes called the Twelve Gods. Though both names are used in the literature, I refer to them as the Running Men when referencing the use of these figures from Lycian tombs and texts. These twelve figures have a strong connection to the Underworld. The most famous Bronze Age depiction of this theme is found at the Hittite mortuary monument of Yazılıkaya, located outside of Hattuşa. On the wall of Chamber B are shown twelve identical running men, wearing tall conical hats without horns, horns being a sign of divinity. They carry curved swords in one arm, the other arm held against the body in a fist, a sign of respect and reverence in Hittite iconography. The Running Men are thought to be death gods (Seeher 2011), though their exact duties remain unclear. Perhaps they help protect the newly arrived soul as it travels to the realm of the gods.

In the Lycian world, the Running Men are mentioned on the Inscribed Pillar¹, where they are named the *mahai tusūti*. The Running Men are known also from a number of carved stone scenes in the Lycian countryside. Unfortunately, the pictorial representations of the Running Men only date to the Roman period. In the Roman period, the Running Men are in a single line, all identical, and often with dogs (Keen 1998, p. 206). While little is known of the Running Men, they appear to be an important integral component of Lycian understanding of the afterlife, likely invoked in a central monument at Xanthos (which has unfortunately not survived), indicating an ongoing association between these figures and death.

6.3. *Other Lycian Deities*

The center of Lycian religion by the fifth century was the Letoon, a sanctuary dedicated to the goddess Leto, mother of Artemis and Apollo in the Greek religious tradition. Leto herself, however, is not mentioned in Lycia until the fourth century BC, with the earliest dedicatory inscriptions found at Letoon and Xanthos (Keen 1998, p. 196). Archaeological excavations at Letoon (Metzger 1979; Hansen and LeRoy 2012) have indicated an earlier use of the site, as the sanctuary of Eni Mahanahi, a mother goddess, of whom little is known

from the earlier phases. Her name in Lycian literally means “mother of the gods” (Bryce 1981, p. 81). The worship of a mother goddess figure is a common Anatolian religious attribute, with nearly all of the first millennium Anatolian cultures maintaining a similar figure, be it the Phrygian Matar or Lydian Kuvava. The mother goddess figure, called the Sun Goddess of Arinna by the Hittites, was a central figure in Anatolian religions, and discussions of the connection between the Anatolian Mother Goddess and Lycian religion are already well attested (e.g., Işık 2010, pp. 75–76).

In the Lycian world, Eni Mahanahi, mentioned in Lycian texts from at least the seventh century BC, is eventually incorporated into Leto, and is appropriated by the Greeks into their own mythology. In the later Hellenistic period, Letoon becomes a major religious pilgrimage site, as the location of the birth of the twins Artemis and Apollo (Keen 1998, pp. 195–96). Ultimately, Leto becomes an amalgamation of an earlier Lycian goddess and the Greek deity. Brown makes a convincing argument about the antiquity of an Anatolian Apollo, starting in the Bronze Age, as a form of a Hittite Hunter god, continuing into the Lycian period (Brown 2004).

In addition to Eni Mahanahi, we know the names of a small number of Lycian gods, though we know little else about them. These include the storm god Trqqas, likely a later iteration of the earlier Luwian storm god Tarhunt; the goddess Maliya, a name often used in Hittite place and personal names, who is later folded into Athena; the goddess Pedrita, who is incorporated into Aphrodite, Ertemi later becoming Artemis, and Kakasbos, a river god. On the basis of Lycian tomb texts, Bryce suggests that the incorporation of older, Anatolian-style gods of Lycia into the Greek pantheon was in place by around the fifth century BC. Unfortunately, there are no known myths, stories, or attributes of these gods, though the parallels with earlier Anatolian religion are clear (Bryce 1983; Lebrun 1998; Payne 2008).

A final parallel with the Hittite religion is the *teseti*, the oath gods, mentioned often in Lycian texts (Bryce 1981, p. 85). Oath gods are also common in Hittite texts, called the *NIŠ DINGIR* or *lengai*. In Hittite texts, these gods are invoked as punishing deities, should anyone dare to break an oath or treaty (Oettinger 1976), while in the Lycian world, the *teseti* are also invoked to protect both tombs and treaties.

6.4. Discussion

The above examples are not an exhaustive study of Lycian religion (for further information, see Bryce 1986; Megrelis 2013; Şahin 2016), nor it is meant to be. Rather, I present here examples that model the ways in which Lycian religion and the themes the Lycians chose to place upon their mortuary monuments give further indication of how they were carving out a sense of identity across the centuries and throughout times of conquest and colonization. Lycian religion is not well understood by modern scholars, and likely would not have been of major importance to the Greek or Achaemenids who were in contact with the Lycians. The Lycians themselves went to great lengths to choose themes for their mortuary monuments that reflected their own past and their understanding of the afterlife and for which they were able to use familiar styles of art.

Finally, we will look next at how scholars have previously understood the Greek and Achaemenid influences in Lycia.

7. Greek and Achaemenid Influence in Lycia

By the end of the Archaic Age (ca. 800–550 BC) in Lycia, the archaeological data corroborate the beginnings of Hellenization in the region. By this time, the temple tombs exhibit strong Greek influence, including typical Greek architectural elements such as Ionian and caryatid columns (Borchhardt 2016; Kolb 2016). Four of the major Lycian monuments—the Xanthos Inscribed Pillar, the Merehi Sarcophagus, the Lion Sarcophagus and the Nereid Monument—display Greek religious scenes in their friezes, in combination with Lycian iconography, such as a banquet scene (Kolb 2016, p. 37). Most scholars now agree local Lycian sculptors likely carved these monuments, despite the Greek appearance

(e.g., [Hülden 2016](#)). These sculptors are surmised to be from the same local workshop and schooled in contemporary Greek style. In the literature, in the past the carvings were deemed “provincial” in their making and in the type of stone used (e.g., [Childs 1981](#), pp. 69–70). While the general architecture of the Lycian tombs is distinctly different from that of Greek architecture, the art of Lycia and certain specific architectural motifs, specifically columns, are considered to be Greek inspired.

However, Achaemenid influences were also present in Lycian art and architecture, such as the positioning and dress of Lycian kings on funerary monuments ([Keen 1998](#), p. 190). Perhaps the best example of Achaemenid iconography is the previously mentioned “Harpy Tomb,” discovered at Xanthos. The east side of the pillar displays a seated figure with surrounding attendants. The central figure is interpreted as the ruler of Xanthos. According to an older explanation of the Harpy Tomb, as written by Tritsch in 1942, the Greek style of symmetry is not present in this scene, as the figure is far larger when compared to the worshippers around him, with empty space above the small worshippers, stressing the importance of the figure in a manner never attested in Greek art. This scene is similar to the typical Achaemenid audience scene, as found at the Palace of Persepolis, with a similar angle in the staff held by the king and the style of the king’s dress and beard ([Tritsch 1942](#), p. 43).

In at least four other Lycian Sarcophagi (e.g., generally designated as the Payava tomb, the Nereid monument, the Herron monument and the Lycian Satrap monument, [Nieswandt 2016](#)), Lycian rulers are shown seated, holding a lotus, flanked by relatively smaller standing attendants, a common iconographic approach to indicate relative importance of figures in a given scene throughout the ancient Near East, especially in Egyptian and Mesopotamian art. These depictions suggest the possibility that Lycian kings appropriated Achaemenid-styled ceremonies and dress and general Near Eastern methods of signifying rank. What is interesting is the hybridity of what is called “Greek” style carving, depicting an Achaemenid-styled scene, carved on a uniquely Lycian structure.

In an attempt to classify Lycian iconography, some scholars in the past have over-extended their attempts at uncovering parallels. Some scholars have found a resemblance between the stepped foundations common in Lycian tombs to the stepped pyramidlike shape of the tomb of Cyrus (e.g., [Cormack 1980](#), p. 36). However, this tomb does not have the same stepped foundation as found in Lycian tombs, but rather is stepped throughout. Further, the stepped foundation, as first attested on the Pillar Tombs, dates to before the Achaemenid conquest of Lycia. If the Pillar Tombs were originally built of wood, then this style would date back even further than 540 BC, and thus before the Achaemenids had any direct contact with the Lycian peoples.

8. Conclusions

The Lycian peoples had both a visible continuity with the Anatolian world as well as a number of their own innovations, some of which further spread to other regions of Anatolia or originated in other Anatolian regions. These include the shapes of the pillar, house and sarcophagus tombs, and architectural features such as tapered tops, short to long pillar bases, and the use of stepped foundations. These original attributes are present on all four types of built Lycian monumental tombs. The use of domestic styles of architecture in the tombs can be traced to Phrygia, while the style of wooden domestic architecture is uniquely Lycia, likely dating back to the Bronze Age. The placement of mortuary architecture within the city, visible to all, and elevated to better catch the eye, reflects the importance the dead continued to have upon the living landscape.

This Lycian mortuary and religious architecture and imagery reveals the liminal location of the Lycian people within their time. They were able to successfully combine elements of both the past, such as the Running Men, tumuli, or simple pithos tombs, with a religion uniquely their own, seen in the Winged Women, the house tombs, and placement of religious monuments within the city centers, and finally, shaping these images and materials to still be familiar to powers that controlled their future, bringing in Greek style

temple tombs and integrating Greek religious iconography into Lycian stories. Religion is central to any culture, and the choices made by the Lycian people, from the commoners to the wealthy and elites, reflect how they convey their shifting identities while remaining true to their religious history. In particular, the study of how the tombs changed over time, from the large, rural creation of tumulus tombs in the Bronze Age style, to the centralized stone tombs that populated the center of Xanthos, reveal further the increasing importance of these monuments to the people of Lycia as outside influence became ever greater.

The urbanized landscape reflects the need for visibility of the religious and mortuary past, while the use of various types of tombs allows for a variety of choices for the population, all with embedded meaning that would be understood by the Lycian population. The use of iconographic figures on the tombs themselves reflect the most important scenes and beliefs of the afterlife and how one achieves access to it. The creation of an entirely unique and Lycian style of mortuary material culture, one that is urbanized and visible, accessible across all social classes, allowed the people of Lycia to continuously recreate their own identity, during times of upheaval and political stresses. All Lycian social classes could and did share in this concept of religion, as seen in the various ways they participated in mortuary practices.

A study of Lycian mortuary architecture and themes allows us to study the creation and meaning of Lycian mortuary monuments in a time of great stress and political danger. These are highly visible monuments, located not in a separate, sacred place, such as the Letoon Sanctuary, but directly in the center of the city of Xanthos, where anyone could see them as part of everyday life, tying together the use of mortuary monuments in urban centers from the Hittite period and continuing this concept into the Iron Age. This then created a strong statement for the people of Lycia about the place of mortuary monuments and mortuary religious imagery. While Greek influenced scenes do appear on Lycian tombs, some of these scenes may be misinterpreted as Greek. The Winged Women in particular need to be reconsidered, not as harpies or sirens, but as their own, uniquely Lycian beings.

While what it means to be Lycian changed through time, as they adopted more Greek and Achaemenid themes in both their secular and religious life, these concepts remained. The population of Lycia itself changed, with new groups intermingling, new religions creating new identities, while this ancient landscape remained, still visible into the modern day. Many of the meanings of these monuments were lost to time, to the people of Lycia, and as they themselves became new peoples. However, the sense of identity that these mortuary monuments created in the past remain in the present, with these stone-built monuments still representing a concept of being Lycian into the present population, with the creation of modern everyday life reflecting these monuments in the past. This does not necessarily imply any sort of “cultural continuity” or memory of the past times, but rather a recognition of the past, with an idea of a shared bond and a shared landscape, that is still meaningful to the modern population of Lycia.

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Note

- ¹ This is a trilingual (Greek, Lycian and Milyan) stone stele, also known as the Xanthos Pillar, dating to ca. 400 BC, which was found on the Xanthos acropolis in 1838 by Charles Fellows. It was a funerary marker of an Achaemenid strap of Lycia, either Kherei or Kheriga, and remains the longest known Lycian inscription. The Inscribed Pillar was central to the initial translation of the Lycian language (Childs 1979).

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