

THE MINOAN FALLACY: CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND MORTUARY BEHAVIOUR ON CRETE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE BRONZE AGE

Summary. We are becoming increasingly aware of regional data patterning in the archaeological record of Prepalatial Crete, yet a theoretically informed and methodologically systematic study assessing the significance of such differences is still lacking. This article investigates variation through the rich mortuary record of the period and explores the significance of such diversity for our understanding of Prepalatial Crete. A detailed analysis using mortuary data reveals a complex spatial and temporal variation in the record which raises questions about social, political and ideological differences between communities on the island during the early periods of the Early Bronze Age. Prepalatial Crete emerges from this analysis as a complex context resulting from an intricate combination of local and regional histories and trajectories and far from the unified culture that the term 'Minoan' implies.

INTRODUCTION

At first glance Crete seems the ideal subject for archaeological study. It is a clearly delimited geographical region, a large island set some distance from the neighbouring mainlands (Fig. 1) and, as such, represents a coherent unit of study, further delineated by a particular local culture and history (Cherry 1986, 20). The archaeological signature of Crete has been considered to be particularly distinct during the Bronze Age, and thus correlated with a unique cultural history for the island during the third and second millennia BC. This Cretan culture was labelled 'Minoan' (Evans 1906; for the history of the term 'Minoan' see Karadimas and Momigliano 2004).

The term 'Minoan' has recently been the subject of numerous critiques as it incorporates many assumptions about Cretan populations that, in most cases, bear little relation to the archaeological record (Bintliff 1984; Starr 1984; Hamilakis 2002b; Papadopoulos 2005; Whitley 2006). This study does not intend to reiterate these criticisms, but rather to explore a far more elusive assumption embedded in the term 'Minoan' that has pervaded our studies of the third millennium BC in Crete: the idea that the island was inhabited by a single human population with a more or less homogeneous culture during the Early Bronze Age (hence EBA), i.e. the very existence of a 'Minoan' culture (cf. Renfrew 1972, 47; Day and Relaki 2002, 233; Cadogan 2006, 11–12). The implication in the use of the term 'Minoan' of a shared culture for the whole



Figure 1
Crete and the Aegean.

island does not constitute an innocuous shorthand, but, rather, has deep repercussions for our understanding of the prehistory of Crete, particularly during the EBA, when we are still trying to understand many significant technological, social, political and economic changes.

A 'MINOAN' EARLY BRONZE CRETE?

Although new models have started to explain Prepalatial Crete in terms of smaller scales such as geographical regions or human groups and factions (Cherry 1986; Manning 1994; 1997; Haggis 1999; Sbonias 1999, 46–7; Hamilakis 2002a, 198; Schoep 2002, 21; 2006, 58; Relaki 2004, 180–2; Schoep and Knappett 2004), they have not explored the implications that such new local scales may have for our understanding of the Cretan EBA, and they simply interpret such newly defined groups within the island as socio-economic and political agents within the common 'Minoan' culture. This can be explained to a large degree by the strong grip that the appearance of palatial societies in the Middle Minoan (henceforward MM) IB period has over the study of EBA Crete. Most of the studies of EBA Crete have been dominated by the need to find explanations for the appearance of the palatial societies (cf. Hamilakis 2002b). Since the 'palace' (for an updated discussion of the term 'palace' see Day and Relaki 2002; Driessen 2002; Schoep 2006) is considered a widespread phenomenon on the island, it has been assumed that the changes that led to the palatial system occurred also on an island-wide scale. Therefore it is assumed that culturally similar populations on Crete underwent comparable

socio-economic changes in the Prepalatial period. Whitelaw (2004) has pointed out different socio-economic trajectories within the island, but does not question the common 'Minoan' cultural framework, thus limiting the reach of these conclusions about the multilinearity of Cretan prehistory. The basic assumption of a common cultural horizon for the island has remained mostly unchallenged and with it the belief that Cretan populations had similar social, economic and ideological structures.

It is true that recently the question of possible cultural diversity in Bronze Age Crete has been briefly raised (Hamilakis 2002b, 17; Langohr 2006; Whitley 2006, 62), particularly as different ethnic and cultural groups seemed to have co-existed on the island in later historic periods (Homer, *Od.* 19.172–9; Strabo 10.472–8). But for the EBA, only Soles has mentioned such a possibility and he did not investigate the repercussions that it might have for our understanding of Cretan prehistory (Soles 1988, 60–1). Also, this suggestion is based on a simple interpretation of the varied cemetery typology, i.e. on stylistic grounds, a way of approaching cultural diversity that other archaeologists have seriously questioned (Papadatos 2007; Shennan 1989). Outside this, only in very specific cases have cultural questions been raised, and always limited to very specific cases such as the possible evidence for off-island populations in Crete in the cemetery of Agia Photia Siteia during the EM I period (Renfrew 1996; Schofield 1996; Day *et al.* 1998; Betancourt 2000; Cadogan 2006).

However, when looking at the Cretan record in detail, the understanding of the island as a coherent whole during the Prepalatial period presents obvious problems. Recent studies have shown significant variation in the material record of Crete, such as in ceramic wares (Andreou 1978; Walberg 1983; 1987; Carinci 1997; Day *et al.* 1997; Whitelaw *et al.* 1997; Day and Wilson 1998; Van de Moortel 2002). In many ways, the material record of Prepalatial Crete shows a stylistic diversity not matched in later periods (cf. Betancourt 1985, 71).

But more significant differences than those referring to material stylistic traits are starting to be suggested between the various Cretan regions. Diverse scripts may have co-existed on the island in the Protopalatial period (Grumach and Sakellarakis 1966; Palaima 1990; Weingarten 1992; Sbonias 1995; 1999; Schoep 1999; Krzyszkowska 2005), hinting at the existence of different languages. Different ceramic production schemes (Betancourt 2003; Day *et al.* 1997; Whitelaw *et al.* 1997; Day and Wilson 1998), consumption choices and value systems (Whitelaw *et al.* 1997; MacGillivray 1998; Knappett 1999; Wilson and Day 2000; Tsolakidou *et al.* 2002) have been suggested for different parts of the island. We have even started to identify very different socio-economic trajectories (Whitelaw 2004). Although all these studies highlight the need to understand local and regional patterns and trajectories, they have failed to comprehensively assess variation on the island in the light of the new discoveries. All this evidence suggests the possibility that communities on Crete lived in completely different ways, to the point where the possibility of culturally different groups should be considered (cultural here refers to the sum of traits of a human group, particularly to its language, ideological, social, political and economic structures, and not to perfectly defined ethno-cultural units). Establishing this has the potential to radically change our understanding of Prepalatial Crete, as it would mean different regions possibly having undergone very different processes of change during the Prepalatial period, which need to be understood in their own right. Specific local trajectories may need to replace traditional island-wide models, shattering our ideas of a 'Minoan' culture.

This study, however, does not suggest that our views should shift from one extreme to another. Between the traditional perception of a homogeneous island culture and the notion of human populations with completely different traits co-existing on the island lies a continuum of

possibilities that need to be explored. What is being underlined here is the need for a critical evaluation of the patterns that exist in the record, so as to make an accurate assessment of the nature of the differences observed, and also to construct explanatory models for Early Bronze Crete that begin to assess the significance of the variations between communities. While not necessarily rejecting the word 'Minoan' as a chronological term, we may need to discard 'Minoan' as a cultural notion, because it obscures the diversity of the record and may not correspond to the reality of life on EBA Crete. Moreover, the Minoan 'fallacy' has actively established in our studies of Prepalatial Crete certain misconstructions that lead to erroneous analytical avenues; for example, traditional approaches have tended to extrapolate the results of studies focused on a specific site (Warren 1972; Branigan 1991) or region (Blackman and Branigan 1977; Haggis 2002; Watrous *et al.* 2004, 253–76) to the remaining populations on Crete. The result is not only the confusion of different local trajectories, but the creation of incompatible explanatory models that prevent constructive discussions. Challenging the assumption of 'Minoan' culture moves the starting point of our studies from homogeneity to heterogeneity, and it would revolutionize our understanding of EBA Crete, by creating more complex models that fit the material record better and produce a more accurate understanding of EBA communities on Crete.

ASSESSING VARIATION IN THE CRETAN PREPALATIAL MORTUARY RECORD

There are various ways in which archaeologists have approached the problem of assessing possible cultural differences between human groups. Among them, the one that has received more interest lately is the idea of identity, as a way of identifying specific human groups through their own definition of themselves (Shennan 1989; Jones 1996; 1997; Thomas 1999; Meskell 2001). Indeed, there is an incipient interest in the archaeology of EBA Crete regarding the study of identity. The cemetery of Agia Photia Siteia represents a clear case (see discussion below; Day *et al.* 1998; Betancourt 2008), but other studies are beginning to explore such questions in less obvious contexts (Day *et al.* 2006, 62–4). Unfortunately, there are several problems with such approaches in the particular case of EBA Crete. First, we do not know whether supra-community group identity was ever a concern for Cretan populations. Hodder (1978; 1979) suggested that group identity takes a back seat in many human populations unless there is a conflict that activates the definition and clear use of a particular identity. It is possible that while very different communities existed on Crete, these were neither clearly defined cultural groups with an 'ethnic' identity to match (if an 'ethnic' identity ever existed in prehistory; see Shennan 1989, 14–17 and Papadatos 2007 for Crete), nor did they consider important the communication of a clear group identity larger than the community level. Second, to study identity through the material record, we must prove rather than assume that a particular object was used to communicate a particular identity (Shennan 1989, 21). However, looking at the EBA Cretan material record, it is difficult to see how we can identify such cases. The poor nature of the record does not allow for the kind of high-resolution, contextual analyses necessary for the investigation of identity through material culture. Foreign objects in an assemblage do not necessarily signify the communication of an identity (Day *et al.* 2006, 62–4), but may simply represent exchange and trade. Even the case of the cemetery of Agia Photia Siteia in north Crete, with its strong and clear Cycladic traits, can be interpreted in various ways given the lack of understanding of its surrounding human landscape and its poor contextualization in the island record (Day *et al.* 1998; Davaras and Betancourt 2004; Karantzali 2008).

Given the shortfalls of the present evidence, other methodological and theoretical approaches rather than identity need to be brought in for the investigation of variability (characterized by both differences and similarities) amongst Cretan populations. It is clear that, given the abundant mortuary record of Prepalatial Crete, only the study of mortuary behaviour (defined here as the meaningful repetition of an act as identified in the archaeological funerary record) has such potential. Mortuary ritual has the potential to be an emotionally and ritually charged social context where a varied number of human relationships are displayed and, more importantly, negotiated (Hodder 1980; 1982; Parker-Pearson 1982; Shanks and Tilley 1982; Cannon 1989; Morris 1992; Wason 1994; Byrd and Monahan 1995), making its study a valuable way of assessing variability between human groups as we can pick up how different mortuary behaviour relates to different social structures. Such a study has a clear potential for the case of Prepalatial Crete, where there was considerable investment of effort in the creation of prominent cemeteries and in the conduct of funerary rituals over thousands of years, which indicates that mortuary behaviour was a significant social arena for these communities.

Therefore, the study of cemeteries on Crete brings together a range of archaeological information in a highly significant context and allows us to go beyond stylistic analysis in our investigation of differences between human populations. By identifying the ways in which a cemetery was used, its internal structure and the activities that took place there we can start to recognize the social aspects that mortuary behaviour engaged in and the ways in which these were activated. The focus here is on behaviour, not on the material traits. Such an approach allows us to compare the way in which different Cretan communities behaved in terms of mortuary rites, and, more importantly, the different social ideological and political structures and strategies that explain the variety of mortuary behaviours on the island. The aim is to identify communities that shared, or did not share, a similar way of life: the ways in which a group is organized, its kinship, gender, economic and symbolic relationships; but also to look at the structural way in which all these relationships were interlaced. For example, some groups may be more strictly regulated by common rules while others leave more scope for agents' own decisions; in some cases relationships may be woven into an hierarchical structure, while other societies encourage more equal relations. Having defined such differences in the record, we can start to compare them within an island context. While identity and languages may fall outside the scope of this article, the definition of communities that lived under different social organizations and structures would produce a major change in our understanding of Crete during the EBA.

At this point it is necessary to clarify certain points about the understanding of supra-community groups. This study agrees with Relaki's critique of the term 'region' and her reworking of the concept of what she has called 'networks of relevance' (2004), which advocates defining supra-community groups using relevant social relationships rather than putting together communities that lived in the same geographical area. While Relaki's idea was developed to study social factions within a socio-cultural homogeneous environment, her definition of supra-community groups can easily be applied to our investigation and introduces various important corollaries. First, supra-community groups did not necessarily exist as distinct entities, and thus would not have appeared as a clear pattern in the archaeological record (Shennan 1989; Meskell 2001; Relaki 2004, 172; Papadatos 2007). Networks have no clear boundaries, and supra-community links must be redefined depending on the particular community being studied. However, this does not necessarily produce an indefinable homogeneous distribution across the entire island. Differences may appear in the record, not within clearly bounded zones but within

focal areas that drop off and blend into neighbouring parts of the island; this kind of patterning has been identified for the distribution of ceramic wares in the Prepalatial record (Wilson and Day 1994; Day *et al.* 1997; Whitelaw *et al.* 1997). Second, human-defined relationships are subject to continuous processes of negotiation and counterbalancing and supra-community groups are in a state of constant change (Kramer 1994; Chapman 1996; Wandsnider 1998; Mathieu and Scott 2004; Relaki 2004, 173; Lock and Molyneaux 2006). Therefore, our study has also to pay attention to changes through time and what implications this has for the social, political, and ideological structure of Cretan populations.

Having outlined the practical and theoretical basis for our approach to the material record, it is time to look at the data. We mainly focus on the first part of the EBA because of limitations of space, but also because we have sufficient evidence for these periods that allows us to look into the questions we are interested in through the comparative analysis advocated in this article (Fig. 2).

EARLY MINOAN I

The EM I period witnessed a significant departure from Neolithic mortuary customs in terms of the total number of tombs, the number of deposited items per tomb and architecture of the tombs (Fig. 3). Within this general picture, it is necessary to break down the study of the island into different areas, since the heterogeneity of EM I customs is another characteristic that sets them apart from earlier burial customs. The island can be divided into three areas in the EM I period based on mortuary behaviour: one around the Asterousia Mountains, another focused along the north coast (i.e. the entire stretch of the north coast, from west Crete to east Crete), although not all the sites found in this area are characterized by this second behaviour, and a third comprising certain sites on the north coast and the remaining sites on the island. The first two types of behaviour, which appeared in the peripheries of the island, showed a definite break from older Neolithic customs, while the third type, which was focused mainly on the island interior, had clear roots in Neolithic burial traditions (Fig. 3).

The first type of behaviour was centred on the Asterousia Mountains, although some examples may have existed in cemeteries outside this area, such as at Krasi Koprani in the Lasithi area (Marinatos 1932). This mortuary behaviour involved a new architectural type of burial place, a round built communal tomb called a tholos, but more importantly represented a very different approach to burial customs. Unlike Neolithic tombs, the tholos was a communal tomb intended for a larger group of individuals. In addition to this new architecture, other new material characteristics shaped this particular mortuary behaviour, such as large depositions of ceramic vessels in tombs (Fig. 4; Agia Kyriaki Tholos A, Blackman and Branigan 1982; and Lebena Yerokambos, Alexiou and Warren 2004).

Given the distribution and chronology of this type of mortuary behaviour, it seems clear that it developed around the Asterousia Mountains in EM I (Fig. 3). The close connection of the tholos tomb cemeteries with these mountains indicates that they must be explained by some characteristics particular to the communities living there. This new mortuary behaviour could be related to new necessities of mobile or unstable, fragmented communities that populated this area (Whitelaw 2000; Relaki 2003). The progressive infilling of the landscape of south central Crete in EM I (Blackman and Branigan 1977, 67; Hope Simpson *et al.* 1995, 393; Watrous *et al.* 2004, 226) may indicate that new populations exploited this mountainous region, or that pre-existing ones had to modify the way they exploited the resources of the region in the face of

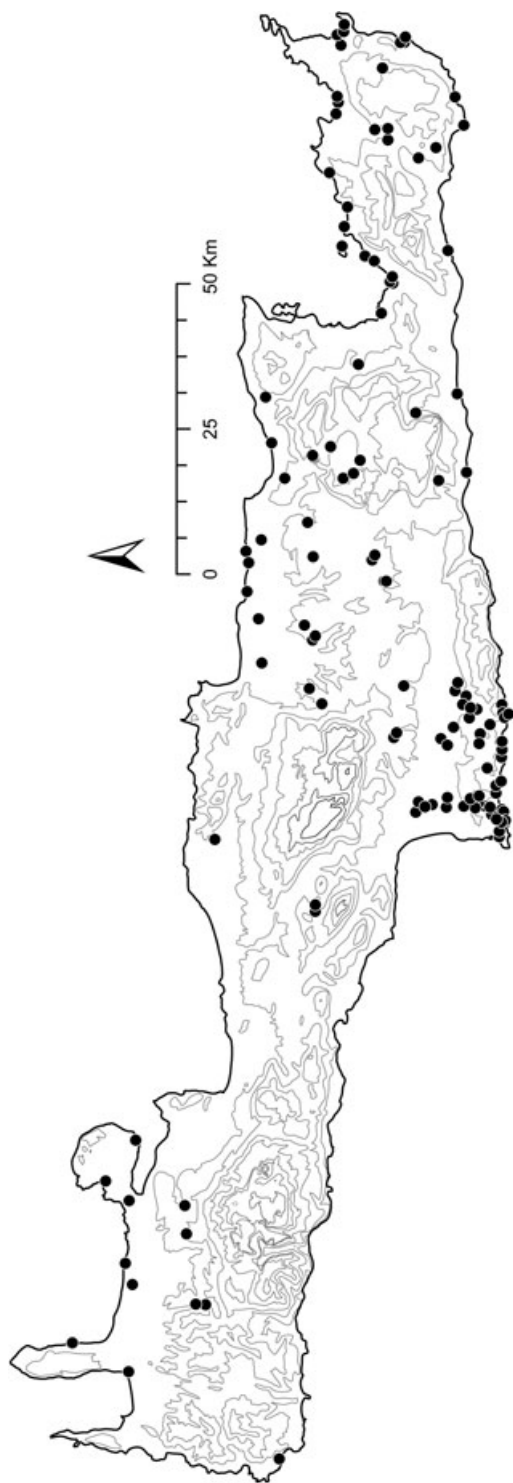


Figure 2
Burial sites in Early Bronze Age Crete.

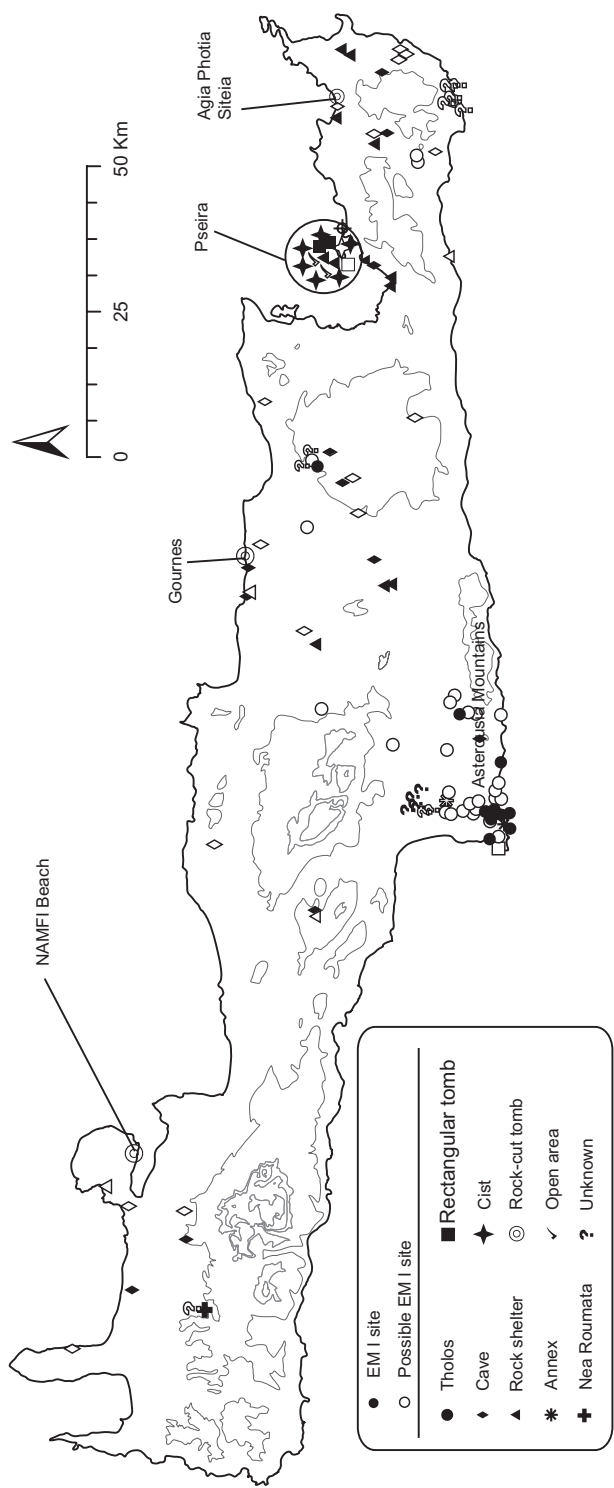


Figure 3
EM I funerary contexts.

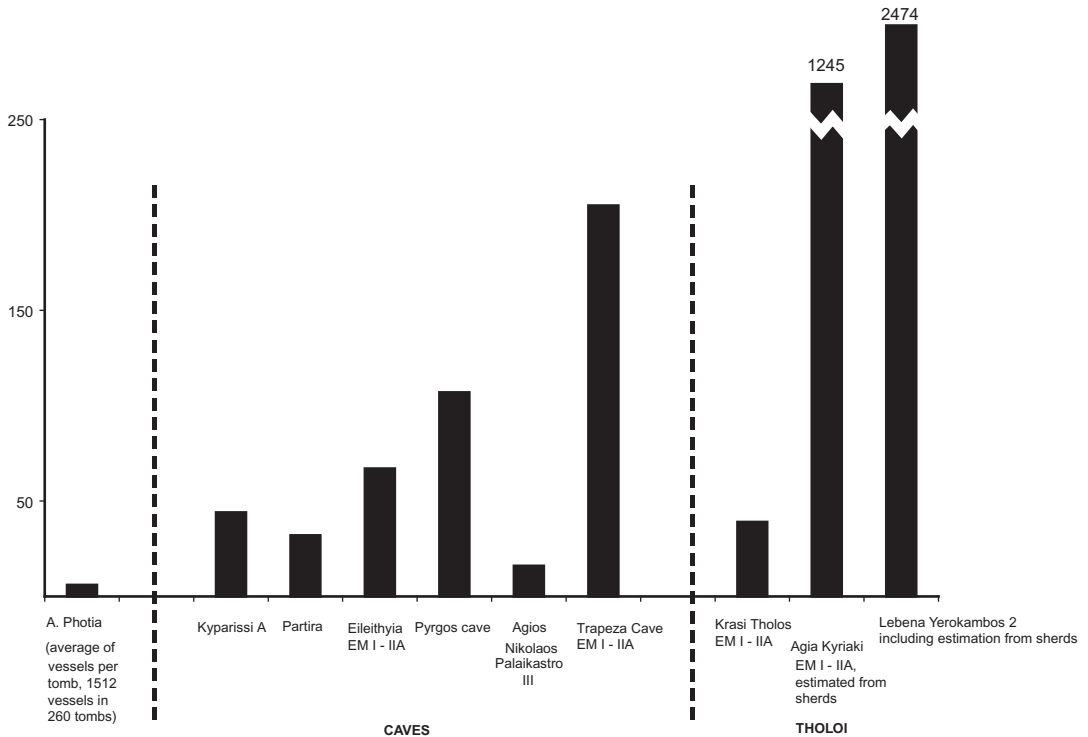


Figure 4
Number of ceramic vessels in EM I contexts.

increasing demographic pressure. Whatever the case, the new mortuary behaviour could have developed to solve some newly emerging social tensions brought about by these transformations. The use of new communal tombs and the deposition of large quantities of ceramics indicate the gathering of a community, probably on the occasion of funerary-related events. These gatherings may have provided services and opportunities to the dispersed populations. Fragmented groups may have had a need to reinforce their community links as these were broader than the dispersed populations in which everyday life was organized. Belonging to a larger group may have regulated important social relationships, such as marriage or access to productive land in an increasingly contested landscape, and so these relationships needed to be given a material focus and continuously strengthened through repeated gatherings. In addition, funeral rites may have been used as opportunities to engage dispersed populations in face-to-face socio-economic relationships. Finally, the tholos may have provided a material way to claim access to different seasonal exploitation areas (Whitelow 1983; Branigan 1984; 1998; Murphy 1998), which would have been particularly valuable in such an agriculturally marginal landscape.

The second type of mortuary behaviour can be found at four EM I sites situated right on the north coast (Fig. 3): Agia Photia Siteia (Davaras and Betancourt 2004), Pseira (Betancourt and Davaras 2002; 2003), Gournes (site at the former American base, Galanaki 2006) and perhaps the site at the NAMFI beach in west Crete (Moody 1987, 205 and catalogue). This

particular mortuary behaviour is characterized by its links with off-island burial customs. The cemeteries are made up of a large number of small cist or rock-cut tombs, typically found in the Cyclades and in limited areas of Mainland Greece, but not on Crete. In the case of Gournes and Agia Photia Siteia, the rock-cut tombs are virtual copies of those found in other parts of the Aegean (Zaphiropoulou 1983; Sampson 1987; Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 17; Cultraro 2000, 481; Davaras and Betancourt 2004, 238) and contained mainly Cycladic-style material culture (Day *et al.* 1998; Davaras and Betancourt 2004; Galanaki 2006). The EM I Pseira cemetery (Betancourt and Davaras 2003) shows particularities within this mortuary tradition. It shares many traits with the cemeteries of Agia Photia Siteia and Gournes: numerous tombs form the cemetery and most of them constitute a typically Cycladic type of tomb, the cist; this type differs from those found in the other two cemeteries, perhaps indicating a relationship that the Pseira community had with a different part of the Cyclades. But Pseira's cemetery also differed in the way it manifested its Cycladic influences, with Cycladic mortuary behaviour deployed in a less pervasive manner than at Agia Photia Siteia. Pseira was a cemetery where Cycladic and Cretan burial customs were combined. At Pseira, the cists were not direct copies of their Cycladic counterparts; they manifest architectural variations (Betancourt and Davaras 2003, 123–7). The Cretan influence in the Pseira cemetery is clear in the material assemblage, which included no material with Cycladic influence (Betancourt and Davaras 2003, 129).

The strong off-island links have led some authors to suggest that these communities represent Cycladic populations on Crete, who had perhaps established trade colonies (Sakellarakis 1977, 109–10; Betancourt 2003); however, while such a situation is possible, it is not automatically explained by the recovered material record. Even when profound characteristics of the mortuary behaviour at these three cemeteries, such as the number of interments, show a departure from the core traits of Cretan burial customs, it cannot be assumed directly to reflect the origin of the population (Karantzali 1996, 251–2; Day *et al.* 1998). What Agia Photia Siteia, Gournes and Pseira do clearly show is that a few communities on the north coast consciously chose to employ off-island elements in their mortuary behaviour. This may to some extent be explained by the actual origin of the populations but not necessarily only by this. The most interesting point for this study is that such mortuary behaviour can only relate to a very particular social structure and ideology, given the distinctive layout of the cemeteries and their choice of off-island materials.

The third type of mortuary behaviour developed from Cretan Neolithic burial customs and was defined by the use of caves and rock shelters (Fig. 3). The geographical distribution of this type of mortuary behaviour is less regionally specific than that of the first two and spanned the entire island. Caves and rock shelters had a number of interments that clearly represented a social unit smaller than that buried in the tholoi and larger than that found in the rock-cut and cist tombs. Although in some cases a cave may have been the only burial site for a community, such as the Trapeza cave (Pendlebury *et al.* 1939), at least three or more rock shelters and caves seem to have been used at most cemeteries (e.g. Agios Nikolaos Palaikastro, Duckworth 1903; Agia Photia Ierapetras, Boyd Hawes *et al.* 1908; Sphoungaras, Hall 1912). In accordance with the smaller size of these tombs, the grave goods deposited are less numerous than in the tholoi (Fig. 4) and in many cases included some off-island materials in a variety of forms, such as small metal objects (Agios Nikolaos Palaikastro, Tod 1903) and Cycladic-style ceramics (Kyparissi A, Alexiou 1951). This pattern is difficult to detect in the poorly known EM I record, and so will be considered in more detail in the next section during the EM IIA period, the record of which is better preserved.

That the burial record of the region around the north coast had many Cycladic links during the EM I–II periods has been well documented (Branigan 1968b, 225; Karantzali 1996; Broodbank 2000, 300–9; Papadatos 2003a); however, little attention has been paid to the variety of ways in which these links were materialized: from cemeteries with off-island influences so strong as to be a direct transfer of Cycladic mortuary behaviour (Agia Photia Siteia) to the inclusion of a few objects made from off-island raw materials (Krasi), to cases where no off-island influence was found at all (Partira, Mortzos 1972). This reveals variation in the attitudes the different communities had regarding Aegean connections, and the varying degrees of importance these links had in the social organization of different communities. Such variation points towards communities actively adapting off-island influences to their particular needs.

These differences between communities become more manifest when we look in detail at the different mortuary behaviours that existed on the island in EM I. The mortuary behaviour of the Asterousia Mountains was quite homogeneous, revealing a firm sense of parity between the communities. It is suggested here that this was the reflection of important inter-community dynamics that were determined by clearly delineated horizontal rules between equal groups. The homogeneous mortuary behaviour placed the different communities in a very similar position with regard to their relationships with the landscape and with each other (Relaki 2004, 179). Moreover, it is likely that cemeteries were important arenas for the creation, active maintenance and negotiation of these horizontal links between communities. Therefore, communities shared a very similar social organization within the region (Relaki 2004, 179–80) that seems to be determined by the nature of inter-community relationships.

On the north coast the situation was quite different. Here, influences from the Aegean mixed with the Cretan Neolithic tradition created a much more fluid situation in which very different communities regularly interacted and co-existed in close proximity to each other. Cemeteries were never pulled together into an integrated system of uniform mortuary customs as existed in the Asterousia Mountains, and it can be assumed that this reflects similarly heterogeneous relationships between communities. While the presence of off-island materials in cemeteries implies inter-community relationships in this area, these never had the strong integrating influence of those in the Asterousia Mountains. Off-island influences were open to various interpretations and materializations: from communities that made an effort to distinguish themselves as non-Cretan populations (independently of their actual origin), to differing degrees in which Aegean and Cretan influences were interlinked. It seems that the emphasis on the north coast is in each community's internal relationships, which presents the possibility of communities with different social organizations co-existing close to each other. Profound differences in the layout, material record and tomb use of the cemeteries with strong Cycladic influences (i.e. Pseira, Gournes, Agia Photia Siteia) suggest that these communities' social structures are fundamentally different from neighbouring communities (e.g. Agios Antonios, Haggis 1993; and Agios Nikolaos Palaikastro). Indeed, there is no clear pattern in the EM I cemeteries of north central Crete, indicating a high degree of heterogeneity between communities in this part of the island.

EARLY MINOAN II

The EM IIA and EM IIB periods are two very different phases with respect to mortuary behaviour (Fig. 5). EM IIA is characterized by the further development of the patterns in mortuary behaviour seen in the EM I period, while EM IIB is marked by the inception of a phase

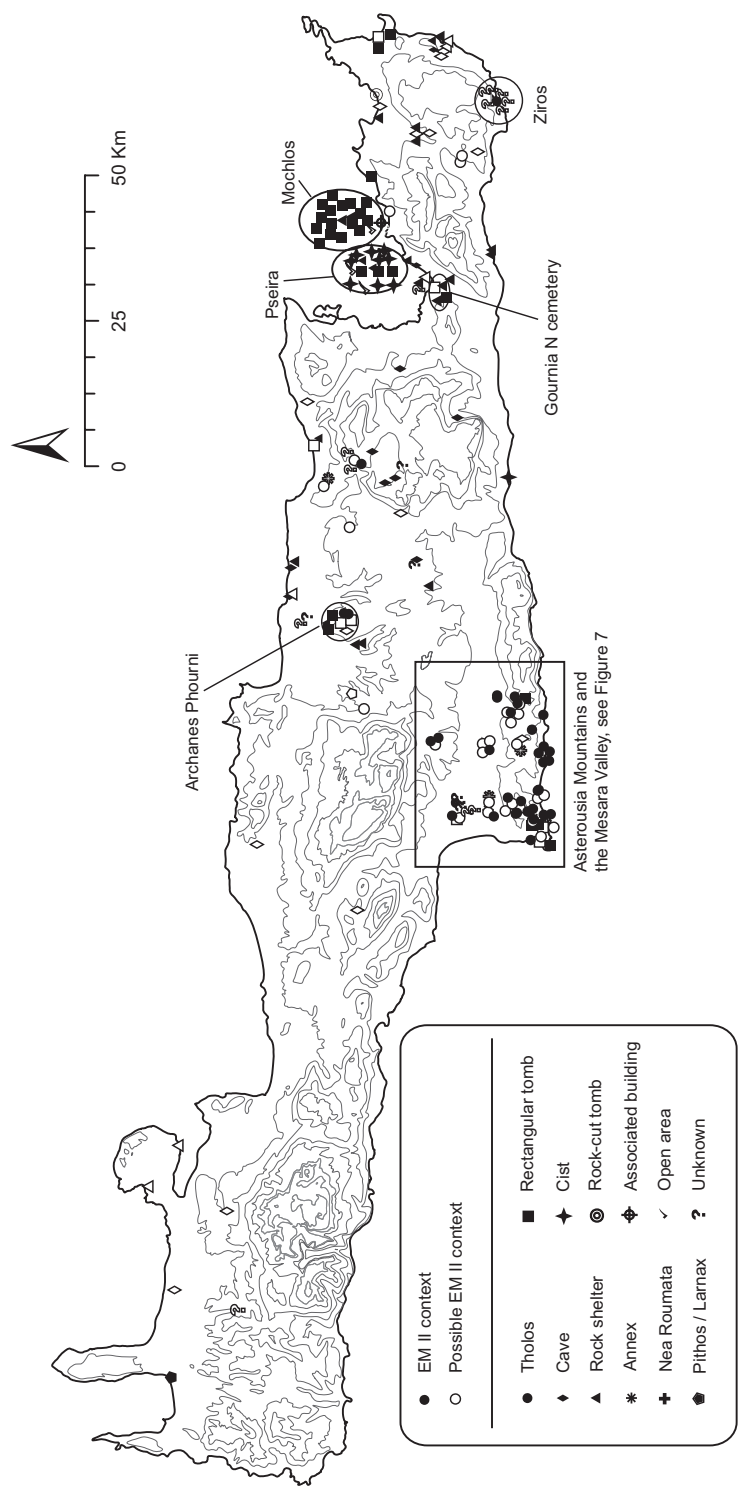


Figure 5
EM II funerary contexts.

of profound change on the island and a departure from EM I–IIA mortuary behaviour. Interestingly, the various areas of Crete had diverse histories in which changes followed different developments and chronologies that do not necessarily align precisely with the traditional EM IIA/EM IIB ceramic sequence, even though for clarity's sake we will follow here the traditional periodization.

Early Minoan IIA

The EM IIA period is better understood than the EM I period, as it has a better preserved archaeological record, with a larger number of known cemeteries (Fig. 6). Consequently, the complexity of mortuary behaviour can be more deeply explored and can be better connected with the living communities.

In general, EM IIA communities maintained EM I mortuary behaviour patterns, but with some significant changes, which make the division of the island into the three different mortuary traditions that were sketched out in the last section more difficult to recognize. While the mortuary behaviour in the Asterousia Mountains remained very distinctive, the mortuary record at sites in the north of the island became less clear, and therefore the analysis which follows will be structured by broad region rather than by mortuary behaviour.

The correlation between tholos tombs and the Asterousia Mountains continued, but this does not mean that there were no changes in mortuary behaviour. A larger number of tholoi are known for the period, and they seem to have begun to expand into the Mesara Valley, where a few examples appeared at this time (Fig. 7). Architecturally, two-tholoi cemeteries became common

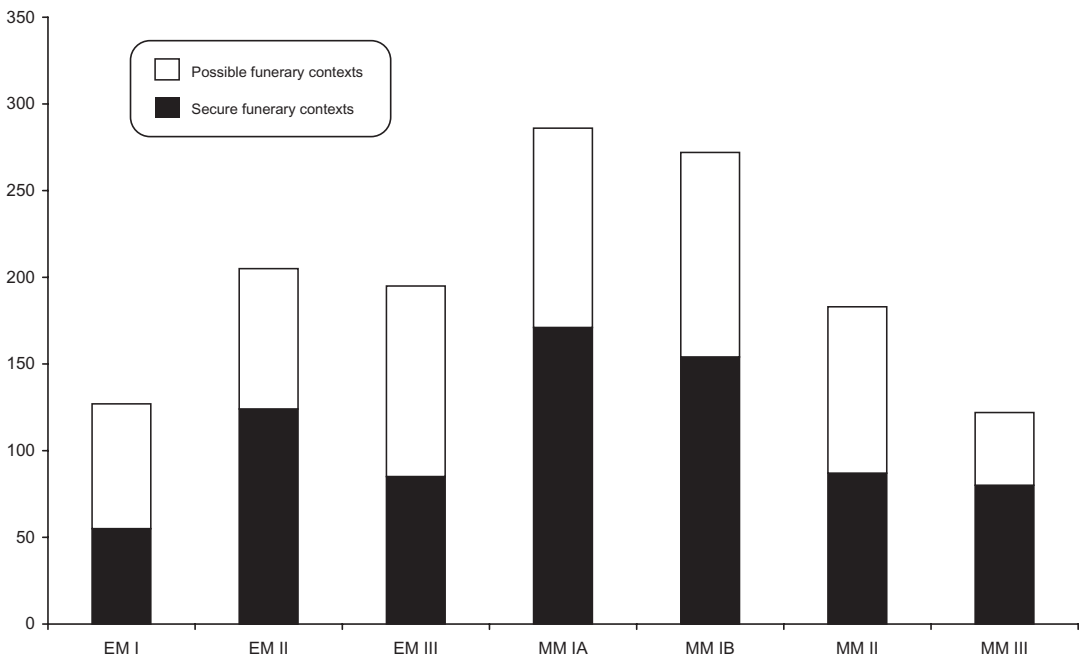


Figure 6
Number of funerary contexts per period.

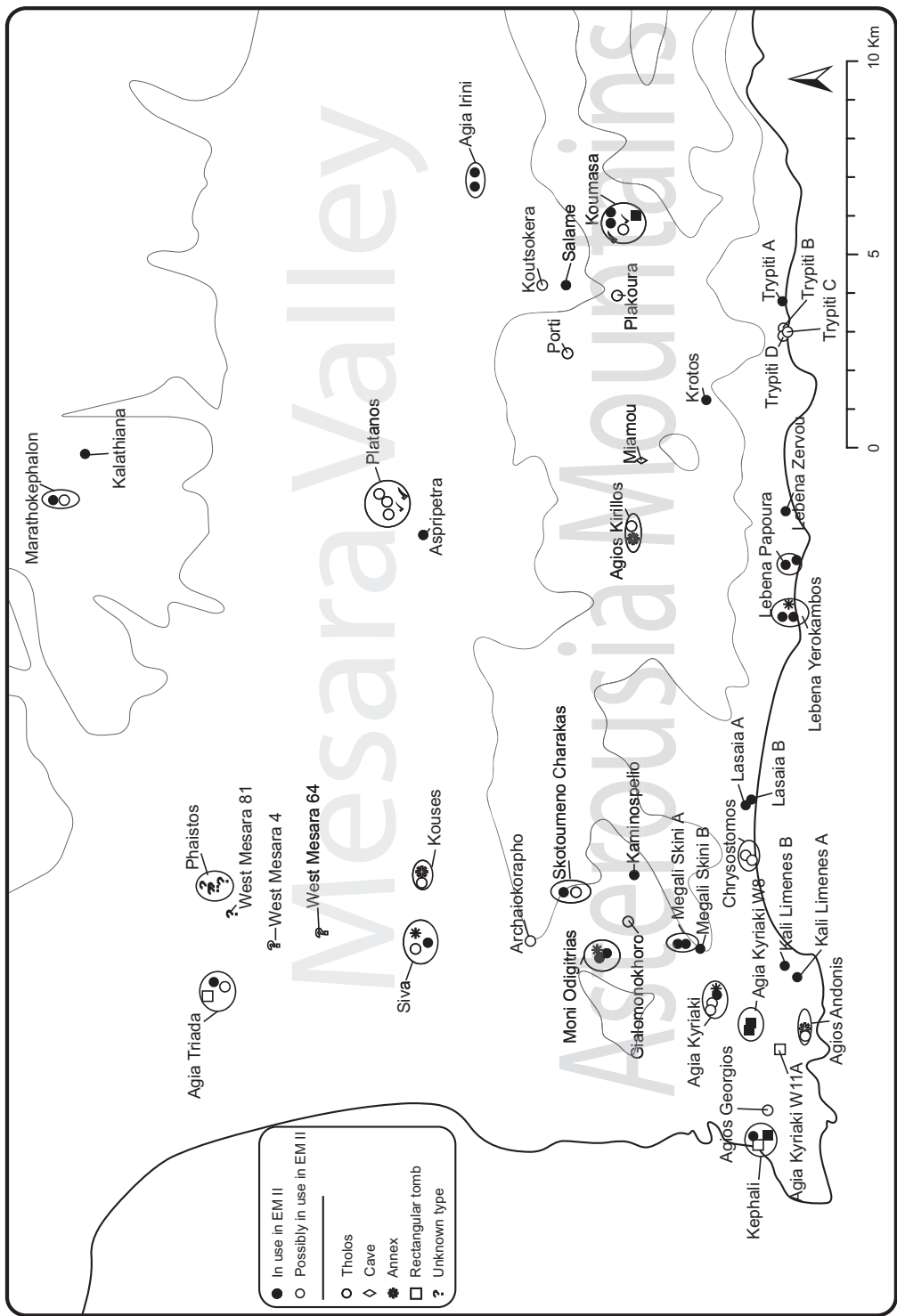


Figure 7
EM II funerary contexts in south central Crete.

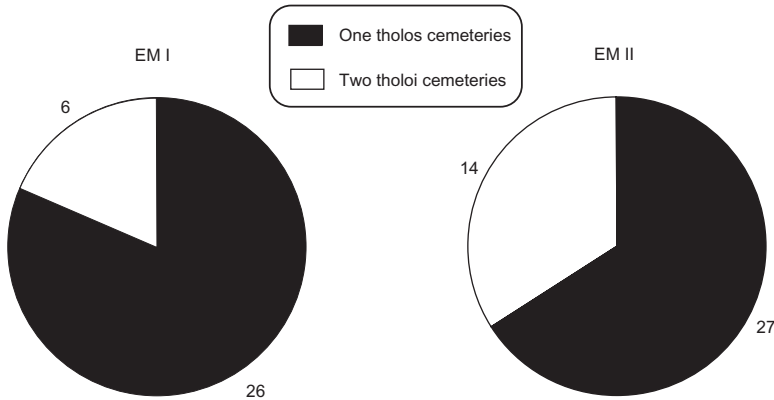


Figure 8
Evolution of number of tholos per cemetery.

during this period (Fig. 8). Following the suggested explanation regarding the role tholos cemeteries played for the Asterousia communities, the more frequent presence of two tholoi situated together may have been derived from significant changes in the relations between social units which would have modified the dynamics of intra- and inter-community relationships. Also, the expansion towards the radically different landscape of the Mesara Valley suggests that the use and meaning of the tholos was adapted to new circumstances. The links between tomb, community, kinship groups and landscape use may have been reworked. However, the exact repercussions these changes may have had on the organization of the communities in the region remain unclear at present. As regards material deposition, objects with off-island connections can now be recognized in most of the tholoi (folded arm Cycladic figurines at Koumasa, Xanthoudides 1924, 21–4), particularly metal objects (at Agia Triada Tholos A, Banti 1933), and sometimes in significant quantities. As the EM IIA folded arm figurines attest, some of the objects with Aegean connections were actual imports from the Cyclades, while the others were Cretan copies (Branigan 1971; Renfrew 1972, 451–5; Papadatos 2003b). Nevertheless, the majority were created locally out of imported material as in the case of the daggers (Branigan 1968a, 56, 102–3; Nakou 1995, 15–18; Tselios 2006), or were at least transformed to suit the tastes of the area (Papadatos 2003b).

The north coast experienced more profound changes than the Asterousia Mountains (Fig. 9). The Cycladic-style cemeteries at Gournes and Agia Photia Siteia were abandoned (Davaras and Betancourt 2004; Galanaki 2006, 231), but not the necropolis at Pseira, which continued in use (Betancourt and Davaras 2003). The fact that a new group of cemeteries drawing upon the EM I Pseira cemetery pattern of mortuary behaviour emerged on the north coast (Mochlos and Gournia, Soles 1992, 42 n. 5; Betancourt and Davaras 2003, 126) suggests that the social organization of the Pseira community was emulated more widely in the region.

New cemeteries with clear links to the novel layout and tomb type that developed in Pseira, the rectangular tomb, appeared around the Mirabello Bay and in east Crete: Mochlos (Soles 1992, 49, 57–9), the North Cemetery at Gournia (Soles 1992, 31) and Palaikastro (Dawkins 1905; MacGillivray and Driessen 1990, 398). The origins of the rectangular tombs can be traced to the Cycladic-style cist tombs at Pseira, as well as its progressive development into

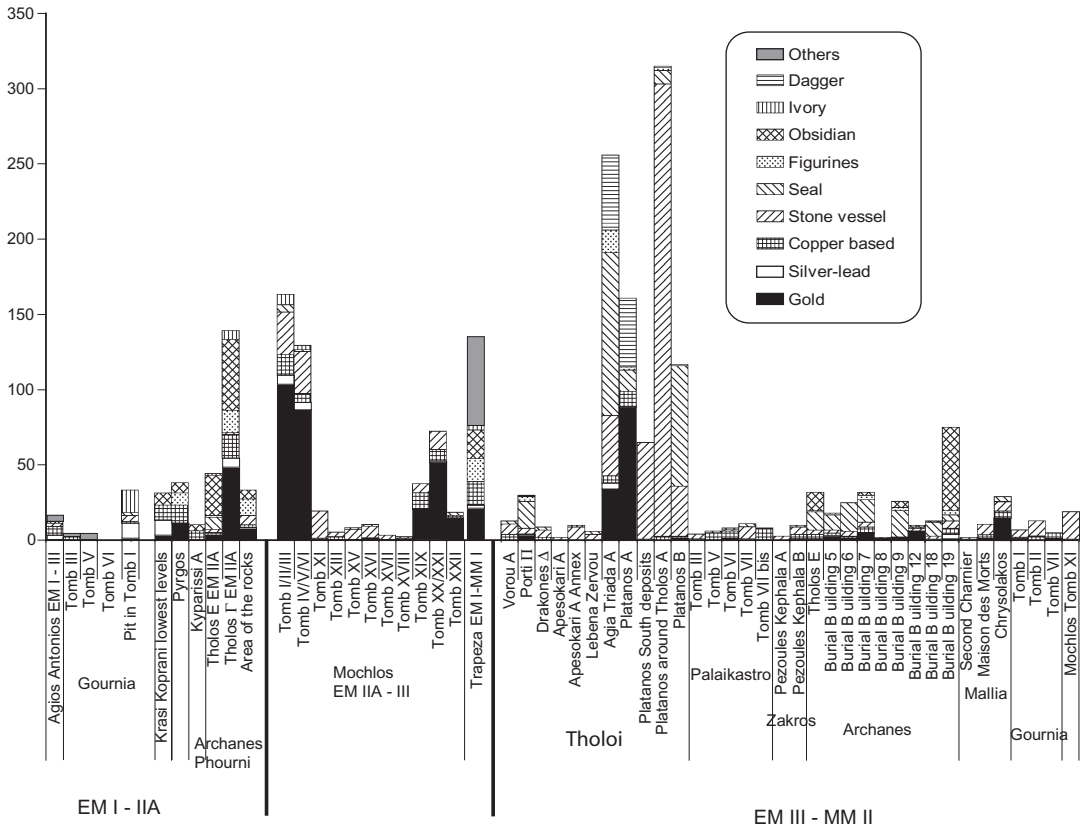


Figure 9
Non-ceramic assemblages in different funerary contexts by period.

the new type of tomb, thus indicating a local development (Karantzali 1996, 239; Betancourt and Davaras 2003, 126). Furthermore, the layout of the cemeteries that incorporated rectangular tombs during this period included certain innovations. Very few tombs dating to the EM IIA period have been discovered at Palaikastro (Tomb I at Gravel Ridge, MacGillivray and Driessen 1990, 398), Mochlos (Tombs I/II/III and IV/V/VI at the west terrace, Soles 1992, 1–62) or the Gournia North Cemetery (Tomb III, Rock Shelters V and VI, Soles 1992, 28–34, 36–8). These cemeteries contained a smaller number of tombs than the typical rock shelter cemetery, but, at the same time, the rectangular tombs were smaller than the tholos tombs, and were intended probably for a smaller social unit.

Despite these changes, cemeteries continued to show many characteristics of EM I mortuary behaviour, such as off-island influences in the material assemblage (folded arm figurines, Cycladic-style pottery, metal objects). Social relationships and social organization dynamics on the north coast seem to have been materialized to a significant degree by access to off-island material, given the ubiquity of significant quantities of such material in the mortuary record (Fig. 9). It seems that communities in north central Crete relied significantly on social dynamics that involved the circulation of off-island materials and off-island influenced

objects. But not all the communities gave the same social connotations to these objects. In communities in the interior of the island (Figs. 9 and 10; e.g. rock shelters at Kyparissi A, Alexiou 1951; Serpetsidaki 2006), off-island influences seem to have had limited significance. In communities near the coast, off-island influences seem to have had much more relevance and may have been instrumental in the setting, maintenance and negotiation of social relationships within and outside the community (e.g. Pyrgos cave, Xanthoudides 1921; and Krasi, Marinatos 1932).

Off-island material was a common feature of the mortuary behaviour of the different parts of Crete, and therefore a means of intra- and inter-community negotiation for the majority of Cretan communities. This general use of off-island material, however, was quite variable and the different regional mortuary behaviours show that it was adapted to the particular characteristics of each region. Preferences existed in the type of materials that were chosen, such as bronze daggers in the Asterousia area and silver ornaments on the north coast (Branigan 1968b; Nakou 1995; Legarra Herrero 2004). The adaptation of this material to the tastes of the different communities was not only made in terms of consumption choices and demand, but also as producers/transformers of most of the objects (Branigan 1968a, 56, 102–3; Papadatos 2003b; 2007; Tselios 2006). The common deposition of these materials as grave goods suggests that a similar high social value was placed upon them by communities in the different areas and this would have permitted their exchange. The exchange of objects that were widely considered valuable made interaction between quite different communities possible without the need for highly integrated connections, while at the same time it permitted a high degree of flexibility in the interpretation of this value in the particular setting of each community.

The EM IIA period should still be understood in terms of the stark differentiation in mortuary behaviour and social organization between areas of Crete. As in the EM I period, the most profound structural traits of the various communities remained essentially different: the Asterousia Mountains area continued its independent path, with its homogeneous mortuary record and particular material record, while the north coast maintained a heterogeneous situation in which quite different cemeteries co-existed. Perhaps the north coast needs to be understood in terms of even smaller regions. The east Mirabello region, with its rectangular tombs and particular history of development, may have represented a different state of affairs to other parts of northern Crete. However, it still shared the characteristic of heterogeneity noted in the rest of north coast mortuary behaviour, as the nearby cemeteries of Pseira, Mochlos and Gournia show very significant contrasts in their assemblages (Seager 1912, 11).

Early Minoan IIB

Problems in the identification of local EM IIB ceramic styles make the history of use of individual tombs during this period difficult to understand, especially in the Mesara Valley and Asterousia Mountains. Recent work at Agia Triada, Phaistos and Lebena (Alexiou and Warren 2004; Todaro 2004; 2005) has shed some light on the ceramic sequence in these parts of the island and thus it can be suggested that many, if not all, of the known EM IIA tholos cemeteries were in use during the EM IIB period. Identifiable disruptions in the stratigraphy of some of the tombs seem to have occurred only in an advanced stage of the EM IIB period or in EM III (Fig. 11; Lebena Yerokambos Tholos 2a, Alexiou and Warren 2004; Agia Triada Tholos A, Cultraro 2004; and possibly Platanos Tholos A, Xanthoudides 1924, 89).

Cemeteries in north central Crete followed a different trajectory. Many of the EM I–IIA cemeteries fell out of use at the beginning of EM IIB (Krasi, Karantzali 1996, 58; Archanes

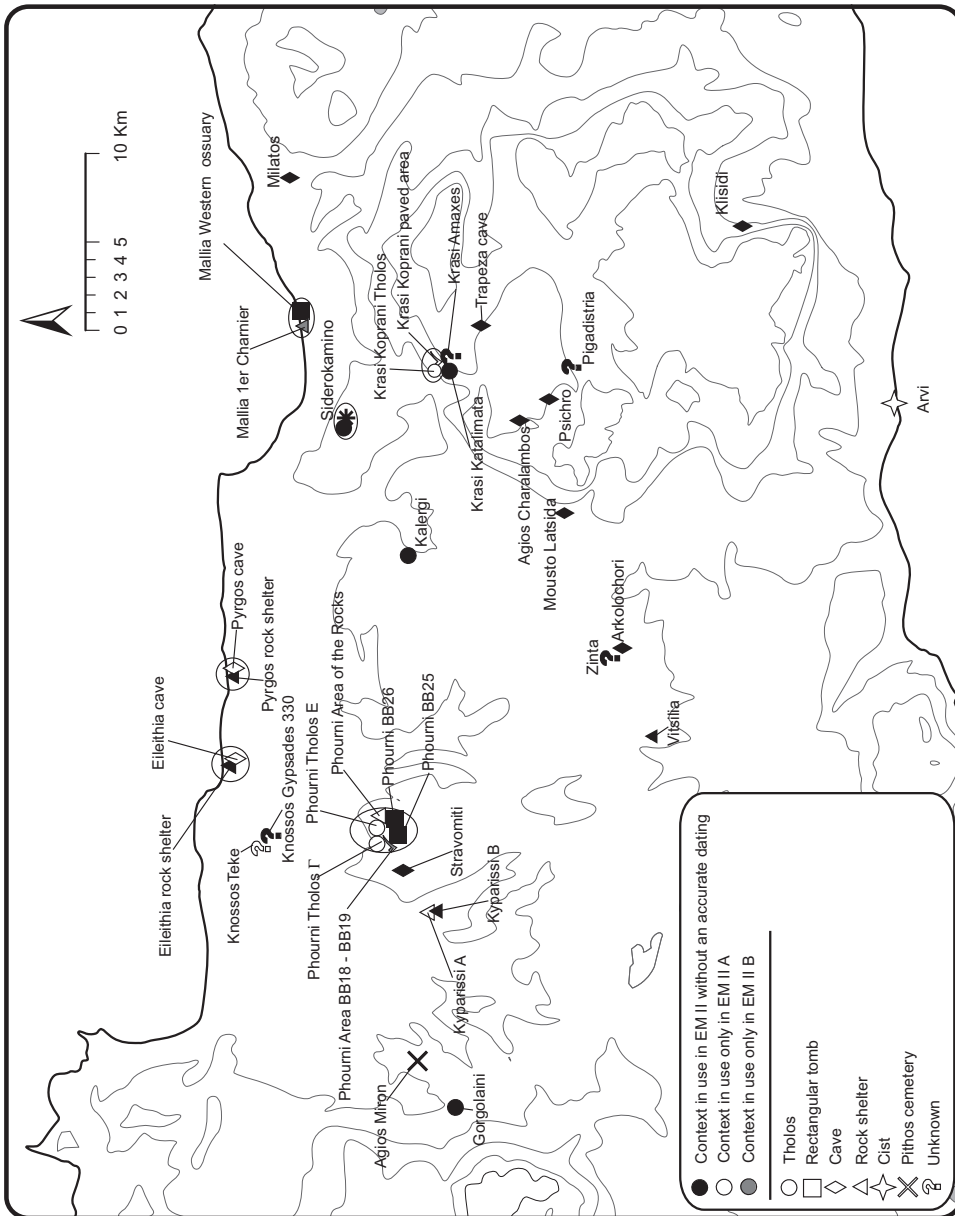


Figure 10

EM IIA-B funerary contexts in north central and central Crete.

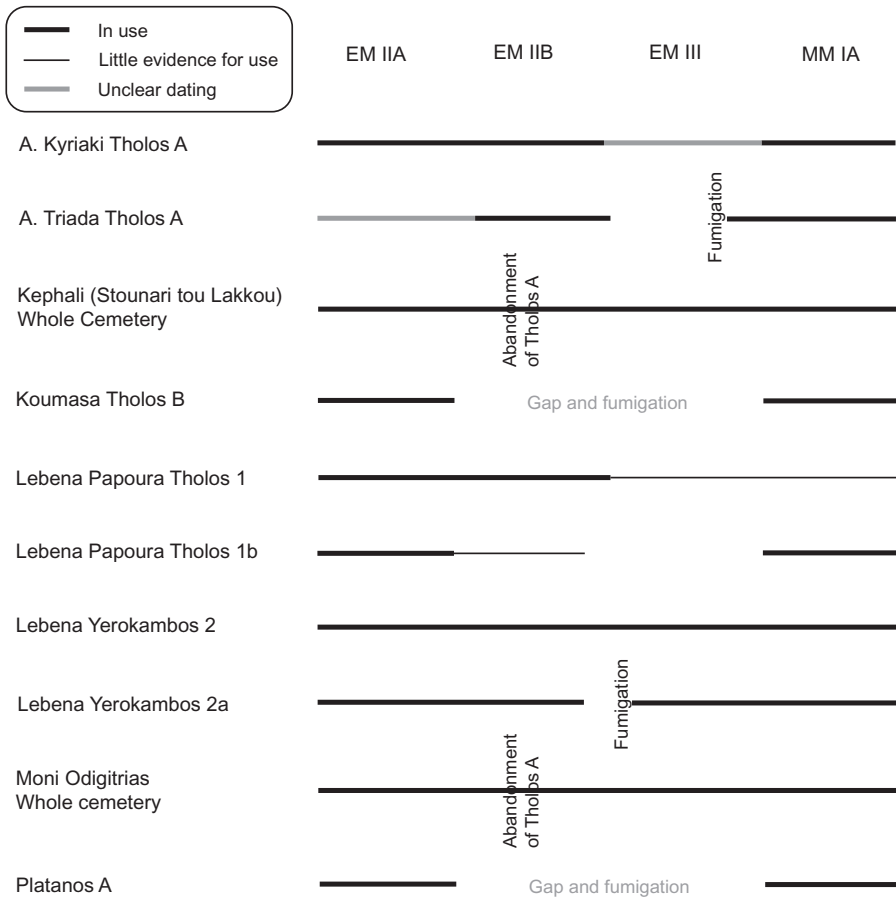


Figure 11
History of use of various tholoi in south central Crete.

Phourni, Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997, 383; Pyrgos cave, Wilson and Day 2000, 55; Kyparissi B, Serpetsidaki 2006), while a few new cemeteries are first documented, such as Malia (Andreou 1978, 124–5; Van Effenterre 1980, 233). In the Mirabello region cemeteries seem to have continued in use, as is the case of Pseira, which yielded a significant number of EM IIB sherds (Betancourt and Davaras 2003, 134), the tholos at Myrsini (Warren 1969, 195 n. 2) and the rock shelter at Agios Antonios (Haggis 1993, 27–8). The Gournia cemeteries constitute the exception as they produced little EM IIB material (Soles 1992, 2–3), in contrast to the preceding period. The other exception is the Mochlos cemetery, which saw great expansion during EM IIB, a unique pattern in the area and, indeed, on the entire island (Legarra Herrero 2007, 179–81). In east Crete, EM IIB material appeared at various cemeteries, such as Palaikastro (Tomb II at Ta Ellenika, Soles 1992, 182–3) and Zakros (Caves I and II at the Gorge of the Dead, Zois 1997, 42–3) and, although we have a limited knowledge of the EM II period in this region, it can be suggested that no major changes occurred in the use of cemeteries.

There are, therefore, important differences in the development of mortuary behaviour during EM IIB. The north coast seems to have undergone a profound crisis, as the abandonment of most cemeteries demonstrates. The Asterousia and Mesara regions, however, seem to have been less affected. Tholos cemeteries in the Asterousia seem to go through this period without major modifications, even though some disrupting episodes could have happened in some tombs by the end of the period. The Mirabello area defies a general characterization and, while Gournia seems to follow the north coast trend, most of the cemeteries seem to have undergone no major changes, with the exception of Mochlos. In east Crete disruptions have not been identified.

The variability of local and regional trajectories may be explained in terms of a reshuffle of the relationships that communities on the island had with the wider Aegean. This suggestion is based on the fact that off-island material lost its importance in the mortuary record, without vanishing completely. Manifestly, Cycladic objects, such as the folded arm figurines or ceramic vessels with typical Cycladic shapes, disappeared from the record and in EM IIB the only items found in the tombs which had off-island connections were metal objects and obsidian; these were most probably produced locally from imported material with little off-island influence (Carter 1998; 2004; Tselios 2006). This coincided with a recorded shift in the exchange networks of the Aegean, which left Crete out of the main trading system (Broodbank 2000, 317). Since it has been suggested that off-island material played an important role in social organization in the communities on the island, it is to be expected that a modification of the trade system would have had a profound effect on Cretan communities, though not all would have been affected equally. While Cycladic material was found in most cemeteries on the island in EM IIA, it has been emphasized that it was incorporated into mortuary behaviour in a variety of ways, according to the specific role that it had in different Cretan communities. Consequently, a change in the trade networks would have affected the diverse areas in different ways, particularly impacting on communities in which off-island material was a major mechanism in social relationships, which seems to have been the case in north central Crete. South central Crete seems to have not been affected greatly because communities did not rely so much on off-island materials and because they seem to still have access to copper and possibly other metals that allowed these communities to continue making socially valuable items, such as daggers (Whitelaw 1983; Nakou 1995). It is very probable that the raw material was still being imported to the island, perhaps by a few key sites, such as Mochlos. The mortuary behaviour at Mochlos shows that the community thrived during this period. Numerous tombs were constructed and most of them contained significant quantities of metal objects (Seager 1912; Soles 1992, 41–113), which indicates the important role of this site in long-distance trade (Branigan 1991; Whitelaw 2004).

In summary, Crete still seems to have been a fractured island at this time, with different areas engaged in quite different processes. The different regional paths that EM IIB communities took may ultimately be explained by very different social structures, which depended to different extents on off-island materials for their operation. The disappearance of whole cemeteries demonstrates the importance of off-island influences in the various social relationships – both horizontal and vertical – of north coast communities in earlier periods. The EM IIB gap in the cemeteries may reflect a period when important modifications were taking place in the social organization of the north Cretan communities, and this affected the way populations conceptualized and used burial activities in relation to their social relationships. The Asterousia and the Mesara regions followed a more steady path in which horizontal organization seems to have held the communities within a more stable social framework, probably due to the fact that

these communities were less dependent on relationships with the Aegean, and because social organization in these areas was more integrated in a regional social structure and thus more resilient in the face of external changes.

CONCLUSIONS

The main question posed at the beginning of this article was whether the relevant framework of study for the Prepalatial period is Crete, or, instead, whether we need to focus on smaller, more behaviourally coherent scales. The latter perspective seems to fit better with the evidence presented.

Obvious differences between communities have been identified for the EM I–IIA periods. Communities with different social structures existed together within the geographical contexts of the island, sometimes even in close proximity. These differences have been identified primarily through variations in the material character of the mortuary behaviour in the cemeteries (in terms of architecture and assemblage). It is particularly interesting in the case of the off-island materials, because it highlights the fact that overarching, top-down analyses fail to identify complexity by creating the superficial illusion of island-wide patterns. In the EM I–IIA periods, off-island material deposition in tombs can be seen as a feature that appeared at most Cretan communities and a quick overview of the material would identify this as a homogenizing pattern common to the whole island. However, when approached from a contextual point of view, this general pattern holds little meaning, as different populations adapted this widely-available resource to meet the needs of their local social organization, fragmenting this general pattern and rendering it understandable only at a regional level. Particular off-island objects were adapted to the social values and necessities of each community and region, not only in terms of consumption but also of production/transformation.

Material differences are only the tip of the iceberg, as the detailed analysis of the cemeteries reveals more significant differences, marked by the structural rules that determined the mortuary behaviour. These show obvious particularities in the way inter- and intra-community relationships were built and managed in the Asterousia Mountains and in the north coast communities. The second region seems to be organized more heterogeneously, under looser supra-community relationships that leave much room for interpretation within each community, depending on differing access to off-island objects. Off-island objects seem to have played an important role in the creation and maintenance of social relationships in some north central communities. The Asterousia communities may have been organized under more constraining rules of social organization that resulted in a far more homogeneous mortuary record in a clearly defined geographical area. Supra-community relationships were tightly integrated within a regional model, probably under clear social parameters, indicating the importance of supra-community links in this region (Relaki 2004).

A last indication of the differing nature of Cretan communities comes from the varied regional trajectories identified in the EM IIB period. Such differences show that under a similar external stimulus, human groups responded in various ways, and it is here suggested that this is because the particular social structures and organizations of each community forced each of them to respond very differently to changes that occurred in the off-island exchange networks.

Crete at the beginning of the Bronze Age should be studied in terms of its diversity. Therefore, the concept of ‘Minoan’ Crete as a uniform object of study should be abandoned. No template for the definition of a behaviourally coherent region exists and, very possibly, there was

no such thing as defined ethno-cultural groups either. In some cases, communities that shared a social structure and social traits defy any straightforward geographical patterning. Obstacles of this kind do not refer, however, to a flaw in our approach, but to the complex nature of Cretan societies which challenges traditionally assumed direct links between ethnicity, geography and culture. In this sense, there is no clear replacement for the term 'Minoan', but this should not be seen as a limitation for further studies but actually as an empowering fact that allows analysis to break away from the constraints of misleading nomenclature and approach the record with more relevant theoretical and methodological models.

Finally, the disaggregation of the 'Minoan' culture into relevant smaller social scales has important repercussions not only for our studies of Prepalatial Crete but also for later periods. EBA regional trajectories may become essential for the understanding of the appearance of the 'palaces' in the MM IB period. Differences identified between the 'palatial' sites (Schoep 2002) in MM I and in later periods (Adams 2006) may be explained to a large extent by differential histories during the Prepalatial period that led to very different situations in the Protopalatial period. The appearance of the 'palaces' in MM I may not be viewed as an island-wide, uniform dynamic, but as a complex process of different interlinked regional dynamics. It is also possible that the processes that led to the appearance of a palatial society were developed in one specific region obeying its particular history, and were later adopted by other regions. At present, evidence of MM I 'palaces' only exist in central Crete (Knossos, Phaistos, Malia) and it is possible that the palatial societies first developed in this particular area.

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