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SACRED LANDSCAPES IN ANTIQUITY

CREATION, MANIPULATION, TRANSFORMATION

edited by

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Paperback Edition: ISBN 978-1-78925-327-6

Digital Edition: ISBN 978-1-78925-328-3 (epub)

Transforming landscapes: exploring the creation of a sacred landscape in north-east Cyprus at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age

Louise Steel

[...] relationships to places may also find expression through the agencies of myth, prayer, music, dance, art, architecture and in many communities, recurrent forms of religious and political rituals. Thus places and their meanings are continually woven into the fabric of social life, anchoring it to features of the landscape and blanketing it with layers of significance that few can fail to appreciate.

(Basso 1996, 57)

Introduction

This paper examines the transformative power of communal ritual during periods of social change. Specifically, it explores the creation of a modified ceremonial landscape in north-east Cyprus at the transition from the Middle to Late Bronze Age. With reference to landscape theory and anthropological approaches to ritual performance, it interrogates how this created landscape was incorporated within ceremonial practice, how it was experienced and how it was used to mediate relations within and between settlements of the region during a period of social upheaval.

Archaeological background

The transitional Middle–Late Bronze Age on Cyprus (henceforth Middle and Late Cypriot periods, MC–LC, *c.* 1700–1600 BC; Table 10.1) was a period of social upheaval, characterised by the widespread abandonment of villages that had hitherto been occupied over countless generations as well as their ancestral burial grounds (Steel 2004a, 152–4). There was a dramatic change in the distribution of habitation through the landscape with a clear shift towards previously uninhabited areas (Fig. 10.1). New coastal centres established at Enkomi and Morphou-Toumba tou Skourou acted as regional economic nodes controlling production (metallurgical and pottery) and maritime exchange. This

transition was not peaceful; violent destructions are attested at some sites and social unrest has been inferred from the sudden and unprecedented appearance of mass burials, usually attributed to human agency (warfare) or to plague (Steel 2004a, 153–4). Alongside this backdrop of disruption and turmoil was increasing competition over social and economic capital: agricultural land, control over land routes, access to new maritime trading markets and, above all, control over the island's rich copper resources, all of which were contested by newly emergent elite groups within the small island communities. Certain changes appear to illustrate the development of a hierarchically organised society, possibly even the kernel of an early state system (see discussion in Knapp 2013b). Chief amongst these were the adoption of a Minoanising writing system (Ferrara 2012, 56–63), increasing use of cylinder seals, gradual urbanisation and centralised control over the production and export of copper (Knapp 2008, 133; 2013a, 348–9). These significant societal transformations were likewise accompanied by shifts within household activities and technological production within the settlements, most evident in ceramic production (Crewe 2007; Steel 2010, 108–9; 2013b, 227).

The evident locational and emotional upheaval to the island's communities undoubtedly influenced their perceptions of the world around them and how they interacted with space. While there has been considerable investigation

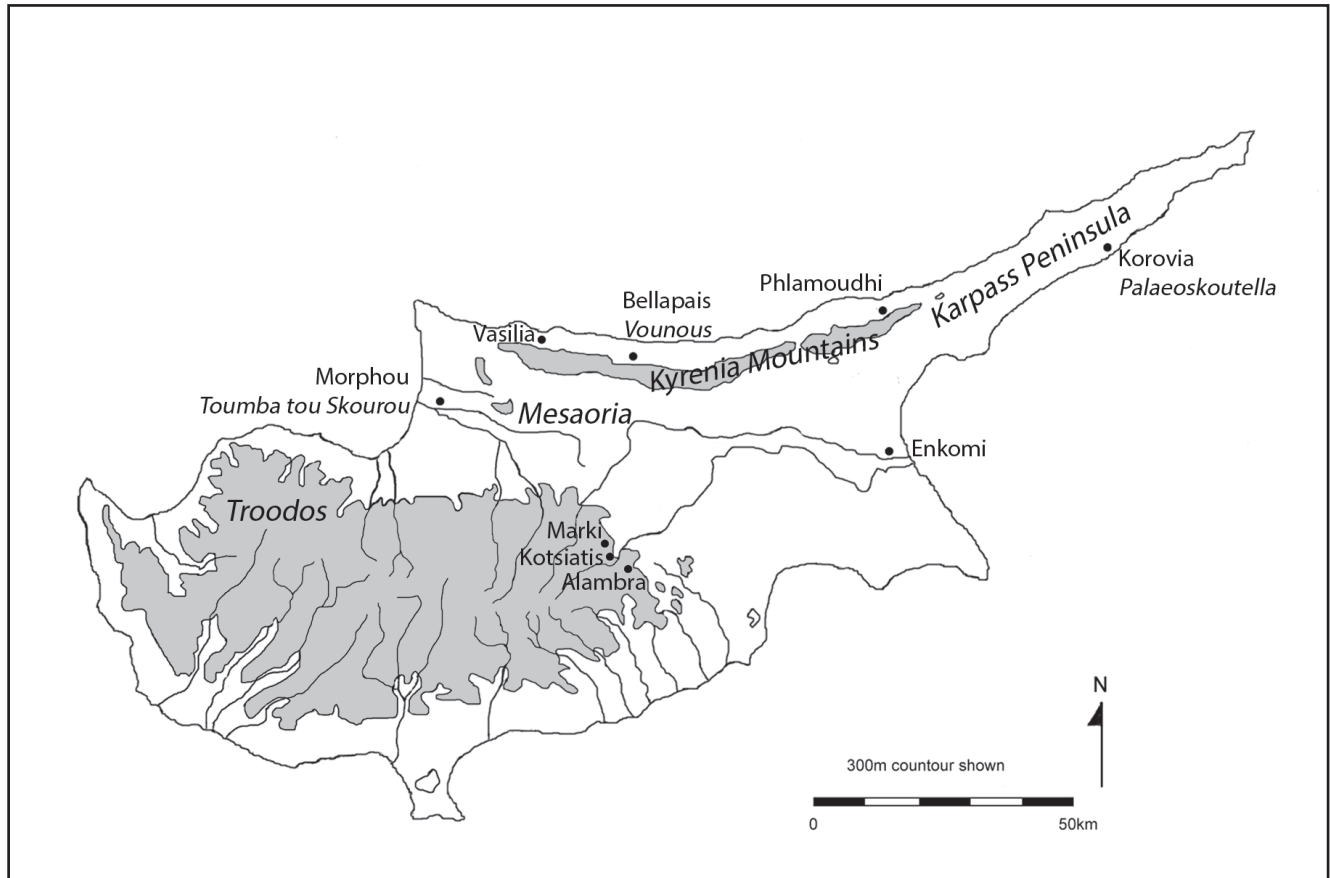


Fig. 10.1. Map of Cyprus.

Table 10.1. Relative chronological phases on Cyprus (after Crewe 2007, table 1).

Relative chronological period	Approximate date BCE
Middle Cypriot (MC) III	1750–1650
Late Cypriot (LC) IA	1650–1550
Late Cypriot (LC) IB	1550–1400
Late Cypriot (LC) IIA–B	1400–1340/15

into the monumentalisation of urban spaces during the LC II period, *c.* fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BC (Knapp 2009; Fisher 2014), there has been limited engagement, if any, with the altered experiences of liminal spaces in the hinterland during the transitional MC–LC periods. Indeed, during such a period of social ferment we might expect the manipulation of ritual performance and ceremonial spaces to be a means of consolidating and reifying an emerging new social order. Certainly, the ceremonial landscape of north-east Cyprus was dramatically transformed at this time with the construction of new communal spaces for ritual action in which social relations were mediated. Most

spectacular is Korovia-Palaeoskoutella, a special burial location covered with earth and rubble tumuli (Sjöqvist 1940, 106–28); another possible ritual centre has been identified at Phlamoudhi-Vounari (Symeonoglou 1975, 72–3; al-Radi 1983), although interpretation of this site is disputed (Horowitz 2008, 80–2).

Monumentalising ritual landscapes

Recent understanding of people's place in the landscape draws heavily on concepts of phenomenology and embodiment, namely the idea that landscapes are shaped by human practice and are experienced bodily. People's movement through landscapes and their engagement with specific natural features, locales and humanly created monuments imbue spaces and places with meaning and make them culturally resonant (see, for example, Tilley 1994; Bender 2006; Harmanşah 2014). Fundamental to my own understanding of the creation of ritual landscapes in the Cypriot Bronze Age is the concept that landscapes are dynamic and have agency; as much as they are palimpsests of human action (Bender 1993) they equally and actively shape human social, political and ritual action.

Landscape theory highlights how certain spaces become embedded in human consciousness as locales where the spiritual or supernatural world is present or accessible. These become the focus of ideological practice and ritualised action, developing into significant places for social reproduction and the expression of a community's identity. Through this social action and experience space becomes place (Casey 1996), it is objectified and imbued with meaning through repeated, embodied practices. Underlying this is a complex relationship between landscape, ideologies and memory. Inscribed practices – physically manifested through visible commemorative activities, such as the creation of monumental structures and communal repeated actions – embed places within the ritual landscape (Connerton 1989; Rowlands 1993; Harmanşah 2014).

'Control of space lies at the heart of social power' (Chapman 2000, 184) and the ideologies of emergent political and economic elites are articulated through physical manipulation of the landscape; places are inscribed, shaped and altered through the construction of monuments that are incorporated within ritual action. Monumentality expresses power relations and is intended to maintain and authorise the political landscape of society (DeMarrais *et al.* 1996), whereas funerary monuments are places where ancestral memories might be mediated and perpetuated over generations. Monumentality and inscribed landscapes articulate the rhetoric of these social relations, expressing dynamics of inequalities and power to those who use and/or view them. This dynamic is communicated through strict control of special places, for example through the juxtaposition of the inclusivity and exclusivity of space. Ritual ceremonial places are characterised by restriction of access and the creation of exclusive spaces where esoteric knowledge is enacted, alongside more inclusive areas in which large numbers of people are able to gather and take part in or observe ceremonial action. Furthermore, the act of constructing and maintaining a monument, as well as the inclusivity of communal places, fosters social cohesion and a sense of group identity (Bradley 1998, 72; Knapp 2009, 47). These monuments might be appropriated by local elites as a means to reify their social, political and economic positions, while diverse embodied performative practices, such as ritual processions, serve to weave these monumentalised sacred landscapes within a wider system of settlements (rural and urban communities) scattered throughout the cultural landscape (Harmanşah 2014, 3), thereby crafting an evocative sense of place that is experienced communally (Basso 1996).

Monuments clearly form part of the cultural landscape and are integral to people's consciousness and experiences. This is true generations after their original construction, in many cases long after they have fallen into disuse and those who constructed them are long forgotten. They inscribe the landscape and shape the embodied material experiences of the surrounding population; these are structures that

are intended to endure and as such play an important role in the material culture of remembrance (Rowlands 1993). As such, they might be considered to be inalienable possessions (Weiner 1992) that acquire multiple biographies and histories throughout their use through their association with the people who variously built, used and experienced them. Even so, the memories attached to monuments are not permanent but will be altered over time as new experiences and memories are attached to them (Bradley 2002, 82–6, 109–11).

Looking specifically at mounds such as barrows and tumuli, however, Ingold (2013, 76–80) questions the assumption that these were designed as monuments to last in perpetuity, and indeed the notion that we can accurately date their construction to a specific moment in time. While we might consider such structures to be the result of deliberate action that shaped and inscribed the landscape, Ingold moves the emphasis away from monumentality to performance and the ongoing act(s) of making/*mounding* as part of ritual action. He suggests the intention was not necessarily to create a structure and to monumentalise the landscape, but rather to gather and perform ceremonies repeatedly at the same place possibly over generations; whilst doing so, people's actions of adding to and/or removing earth or stones at specific points in the locale gradually but continually reshaped the physical space.

The ritual landscape therefore embodies a deep sense of the past that may include mythologies, traditions, entanglement with individuals and repeated communal gathering and performances; as such, it is integral to a community and people's sense of identity and competition for social and political capital. 'Places thus serve as meaningful nexuses of human interaction and as sites of immediate everyday experience' (Harmanşah 2014, 2). These relationships are expressed through myriad embodied performative acts and become embedded in the mythology of place (Basso 1996, 57). The communal experience of place and shared embodied performances evokes Durkheim's notion of collective effervescence – group performance in which the actors achieve an altered state of consciousness through repeated actions within liminal contexts; the intense emotional, spiritual and physical experiences involved serve to strengthen bonds between individuals (Buehler 2012, 73).

[I]f collective life awakens religious thought on reaching a certain degree of intensity, it is because it brings out a state of effervescence which changes the conditions of psychic activity. Vital energies are over-extended, passions more active, sensations stronger; there are even some which are produced only at this moment. A man does not recognize himself; he feels himself transformed and *consequently he transforms the environment*.

(Durkheim [1912] 1995, 424, my emphasis)

These shared embodied and spiritual encounters, grounded in ceremonial action and lived experiences outside of normal social practice, can also be characterised as *communitas*. This is an achieved emotional and spiritual state, rooted in turmoil in which the natural order is upturned and through which identities are mediated and tradition is reinforced (Olaveson 2001; Turner 2012). It has been suggested that such transformative communal ritual experience is particularly important during periods of tumultuous social events (Buehler 2012, 74), such as those suggested for the MC–LC transition. Consequently, we might assume that changes within a ritual landscape might reflect significant changes in a community's *habitus*, specifically their strategies of competition for social capital during times of stress (see Papantoniou 2012, 78) and communal ritual action. The abandonment of traditional places thus might be viewed as a conscious strategy to create a deliberate break with the past, while the creation of new ritual spaces facilitates the establishment of new traditions to be used in the mediation of changing social relations.

Early–Middle Cypriot precursors

A brief survey of ritual performance in the Early–Middle Cypriot (EC–MC) periods will help contextualise the significance of the transformation of the ritual landscape in north-east Cyprus during the mid-second millennium BC. Present evidence suggests that extramural cemeteries provided the primary focus for social gathering and ritual performance; these were conceivably the main arena where social relations were mediated and individuals competed to accumulate social capital (2014, 620–2). In particular, Webb and Frankel (2010, 200, 203) highlight the performance of elaborate ceremonies in the cemeteries of the north coast – ‘theatrically charged events involving feasting, dancing’, animal sacrifice and possibly the use of animal hides, horns and antlers as costumes. There is considerable evidence for the embellishment of mortuary ritual, with multi-stage funerary treatment, prestige display, libations, animal sacrifice and feasting. Based on the elaboration of a small number of tomb entrances, the iconography of the Kotsiatis models and the presence of large jars at the entrance to some tombs, Webb and Frankel (2010) have surmised, at least in the island's northern cemeteries, that the tombs were the focus of an ancestor cult (see also Keswani 2005, 349–50; Steel 2013a, 58–9, 67–9). In contrast, there is no evidence for the marking of sacred places in the wider Cypriot landscape, which were the focus for repeated ceremonial performance, nor were special spaces set aside in the settlement (Webb 1999, 17), although a plaster installation from Marki has been likened to the tomb facades and Kotsiatis shrine models (Webb and Frankel 2010, 202) and was possibly incorporated within some ceremonial action within the settlement by members

of the community. Additionally, Webb (2014, 623) suggests that communal feasting within and beyond the household was an important means of ritual communion within the settlement; in these household contexts there was a symbolic focus around the hearth associated with ritualised breakage and structured deposition of clay zoomorphic figurines. Nonetheless, the cemeteries provide the primary arena for communal gatherings and the mediation of social identities during this period. In the turbulent, formative years of the MC–LC transition, however, there was a significant shift in ritual action in the communities of north-east Cyprus, which I suggest was in part a response to transformed social realities at this time.

Korovia-Palaeoksoutella

The ritual landscape of north-east Cyprus was transformed in the final years of the Middle Bronze Age. Perhaps the best example of such manipulation of ritual space is illustrated by the unique funerary monument at Korovia-Palaeokoustella, in the remote Karpas Peninsula (Fig. 10.2). Here in MC III the landscape was altered by the construction of a massive tumulus on top of a prominent hill, encircled by an estimated 20 smaller tumuli placed at regular intervals. The placement of the monument is imposing, and this is further accentuated by the monumentalisation of the locale. As extant, the central tumulus covered an area of around 17.5 by 22 m and stood to a height of over 3 m, creating a ‘mighty outline on the central area of the top plateau’ (Sjöqvist 1940, 119) that dominated the surrounding landscape. This physical shaping of place at Palaeokoustella contrasts significantly with typical practices evidenced within the mortuary landscape throughout the preceding EC–MC period; only occasionally have tumuli been identified at other cemeteries, such as at Alambra-Mouttes (Webb 1992, 94), but nowhere so prominent as the Palaeokoustella tumuli.

The Swedish Cyprus Expedition (SCE) investigated seven of the tumuli at the site. Four of the mounds (Tumuli Two, Four, Five and Seven) covered rock-cut chamber tombs, but only two of these contained human remains and grave goods. A double burial was found in Tumulus Four, together with a modest range of ceramic vessels, and the large central mound, Tumulus Seven, contained 14 burials accompanied by an impressive array of bronze objects and ceramic vessels (Table 10.2). The tombs beneath Tumulus Two and Five were completely devoid of human remains as well as extant grave goods, although a small number of sherds were recovered in Tumulus Two (Table 10.3). The excavators speculated as to whether these tombs had been emptied of their contents in remote antiquity (Sjöqvist 1940, 111–12, 116, 127) and we might envisage such action as part of the rituals that were performed at the site (Keswani 2004, 47; 2005, 358). If we extrapolate this

Table 10.2. Finds from burial tumuli, Korovia-Palaeoskoutella.

Object type	Tumulus Four	Tumulus Seven
<i>Pottery</i>		
Red Polished		
Bowl		1
Red on Black		
Jug	4	30
Miniature jug	1	
Bowl	3	24
Amphora		6
Amphoriskos	1	
Red on Red		
Jug		6
Bowl		6
Amphora		1
Black Slip		
Globular jug	3	5
Amphora	1	7
Bowl		1
Red Slip		
Bowl		1
Plain White (handmade)		
Jug		2
Jar	1	2
Bowl		4
Cook pot		1
Plain White (wheelmade)		
Jar		2
Black Lustrous Wheelmade		
Jug		1
White Painted Wheelmade		
Jar		1
Light on Dark Ware		
Jug		1
Coarse Ware		
Jar		1
<i>Other</i>		
Terracotta		
Spindle whorl	2	7
Lead		
Spindle whorl		1
Bronze		
Knife		1
Pins		5
Rings		6
Chains		1
Fragments		1

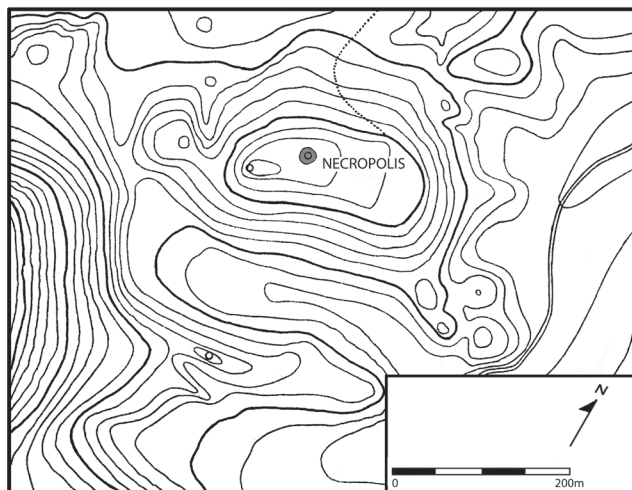


Fig. 10.2. Plan of Korovia-Palaeoskoutella.

action back to the MC–LC transition, Tumulus Five stands out for being completely empty, with not even a single sherd or bone fragment being left behind. Similarly, the treatment of this structure is different to that attested elsewhere at the site and, I would argue, marks this as a special liminal place incorporated in some form of ritual action, namely a form of cleansing and/or purification of place aimed at restoring social order (Douglas 1966). As part of this ritual cleansing the tomb structure was significantly modified. The *stomion* was destroyed, the tomb chamber and *dromos* were filled with rubble and *chavara* waste and the area above the *stomion* and *dromos* was paved over by irregular flat stones (Sjöqvist 1940, 116, fig. 45.2), creating a flat surface and thereby plausibly transforming it into a performative space. Whether the tomb beneath Tumulus Five had actually ever been incorporated within funerary ritual, as the resting place for one or more burial, certainly merits some consideration. Although there is plentiful evidence for the manipulation of human bones as part of Cypriot funerary ritual throughout the Bronze Age, which is usually attributed to ceremonial performance associated with an ancestor cult (Keswani 2005, 352–3), it seems unlikely that every single bone from earlier burials would have been collected together and removed from these facilities while leaving no physical trace, not even the tiniest fragment of bone. Instead, we might speculate that two chamber tombs were deliberately abandoned and purified, or indeed were left unused before they had received any human remains, perhaps reflecting a shift in the community's relationship with place and the ancestors.

The other tumuli (One, Three and Six) were built over levelled rock into which complexes of rock-cut basins and pits were cut; the most intricate of these lay beneath Tumulus One (Sjöqvist 1940, 108–9; Keswani 2004, 48). These were filled with dark sticky soil, ash and splinters of animal bone

Table 10.3. Sherds from tumuli with no burials, Korovia-Palaeoskoutella.

Pottery	Tumulus One	Tumulus Two	Tumulus Three	Tumulus Five	Tumulus Six
Red Polished			26		
Black Slip	264	9	120		80
Red Slip	108	11	41		45
Red on Black	295	33	40		56
Red on Red	22		s		9
Plain White	20	6	22		14
White Painted V	6				
Coarse Ware					4
Total	725	61	249	0	208

(Sjöqvist 1940, 106–9, 113, 118–19), apparently the debris of diverse repeated embodied ceremonies enacted at the site, presumably accompanying different stages in the complex mortuary rituals. This appears to be a development of ancient funerary rituals practised in northern Cyprus; certainly, plaster-lined pits were cut into the *dromoi* of the tombs in the EC cemetery at Vasilia (Webb 1992, 91). Significant quantities of fragmented pottery were found in some of the pits and basins (Table 10.3); Red-on-Black ware was predominant, comprising around 34% of the total pottery recovered. From these remains we might suggest that the ceremonial performances accompanying funerary ritual included animal sacrifice, liquid libations (plausibly blood, water or wine), and commensality ‘a rite of incorporation, of physical union’ (van Gennep [1909] 1960, 29) binding together the participants and mediating relations between the living actors, the dead and the ancestors. Alongside these we might suggest other embodied practices that have left no trace in the archaeological record, but which would have embedded the place within the consciousness of the participants, for example dancing, music, specialised costume(s) and storytelling (see Basso 1996, 56). The combination of repeated embodied rituals performed at a special, liminal place in the landscape would have evoked powerful memories of experiences and emotions, drawing the participants together in a state of ‘effervescence’ or *communitas* and thereby reiterating the significant role that Palaeoskoutella played in the creation and affirmation of identity.

Chief amongst the pottery used in rituals at Palaeoskoutella was a new ceramic style – the Red-on-Black ware. Sixty pieces were recovered in Tumulus Seven alone, primarily jugs and bowls (Table 10.2). This strictly ceremonial style was imported to the site from the north coast, probably from the production centre at Phlamoudhi-Melissa (Smith 2008b, 61–2). I would argue that the special, ceremonial nature of this pottery (Steel 2013b, 185), reiterated by its use within a liminal space, was such that it could not be subsequently transformed into an object of daily use and returned to the

living space. Instead, it was broken deliberately at the end of the feasting and libation ceremonies and was ritually disposed of at the site in purpose-built pits and basins, along with other debris from the ceremonies. Certainly, numerous studies have highlighted the deliberate breakage and specialised disposal of special purpose objects (Meillassoux 1968; Chapman 2000, 23–6; Webb 2014, 623). The interweaving of these novel ceremonial objects, their use in ancient embodied funerary rituals and their interweaving in the lives of the actors who used and disposed of them was a form of enchainment that bound the participants to place.

I would suggest two phases of ceremonial action at Palaeoskoutella: the first consists of a series of embodied engagements with the deceased and the ancestors within funerary ritual, to be identified with the debris recovered from the basins and pits and the assemblages in the associated tombs; the second involves the formation of the mounds that covered the cemetery and marked the landscape. This second phase, I would argue, was a longer-term engagement with place, with groups of actors gathering on the hilltop on many occasions and perhaps choosing to commemorate their communion with the ancestors simply by leaving a stone or a handful of earth as a silent marker of their presence. Plausibly, this was an intentional shaping of the landscape, a deliberate inscription of place at the interface between the living and the dead and might be viewed as a form of social action embodying competition over social and economic capital. We might then consider this to be a conscious political act with the intention of ‘inventing’ new traditions and a new focus in the ritual landscape during a period of social stress and change. Alternatively, applying Ingold’s (2013) concept of ‘making’, we might read this as a longer-term transformation of place, during which time it was woven into the spiritual fabric of life through repeated communal gatherings and a gradual mounding on the summit of the hill, created by individual actors repeatedly adding handfuls of earth and stone and thus reproducing the site through embodied ceremonial performances. Such a reading of the

tumuli that cover the tombs and the associated pits and basin, and in particular the decision to ‘re-sculpt’ the empty tomb beneath Tumulus Five, leads us to a new understanding of a powerful and transformative relationships between human actors and place, one in which they were deliberately and consciously reproducing place, creating a focus for gathering and performing, while at the same time, perhaps more subconsciously physical, making, shaping and/or ‘mounding’ place. This reproduction of space helped the community to forge new traditions within their transformed ritual landscape.

Phlamoudhi-Vounari

Another site in north-east Cyprus that demonstrates physical manipulation of place during the transitional MC–LC period, also apparently associated with some form of ritual performance in which social relations were mediated, is Phlamoudhi-Vounari (al-Radi 1983; Horowitz 2008). *Vounari* is located in the narrow coastal strip north of the Kyrenia mountains, at a strategic location, nestling in the foothills by a narrow mountain pass to the Mesaoria plain, and less than 1 km from the coast.¹ Here there is evidence for deliberate monumentalisation of place – namely, the creation of an artificial conical hill of clay (Noller 2008), topped by a stone and plaster platform, which rises some 10 m above the level of the surrounding plain in an area that had previously been unoccupied throughout the EC and MC periods. The date of construction of the hill is unknown (Horowitz 2008, 73), but it seems reasonable to assume that it was created by an incoming population group that had settled at nearby Phlamoudhi-Melissa during the MC–LC transition (Smith 2008b, 45); certainly, the earliest datable activity on the summit of the hill dates to MC III and there are clear material links between the two sites (Horowitz 2008, 77). While the exact nature of Vounari is under debate (see discussion *infra*) it was undoubtedly incorporated within some form of ceremonial performance, and as such stands

out for being the first attested example of a ceremonial or ritual place on Cyprus with no explicit funerary connotations.

The length of time between the initial creation of the artificial hill and the first construction of a stone platform on its summit in Phase 2 (MC III–LC I) is unclear. Subsequently, the platform went through repeated phases of architectural embellishment (Phases 3–5; Horowitz 2008, 73–7; Fig. 10.3; Table 10.4), reflecting significant investment by the local community and furthermore illustrating how this place was embedded in communal ceremonial action over many generations. In Phase 3 plastered pavements were built around the outside of the stone platform and from

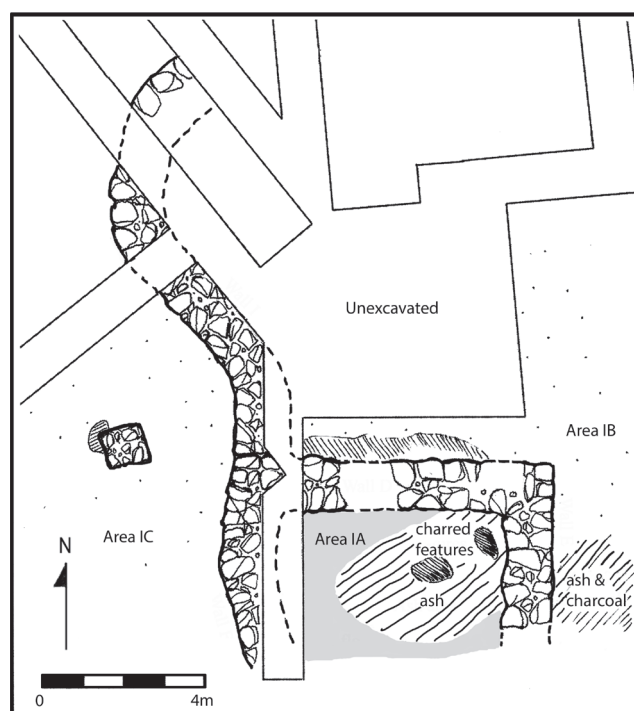


Fig. 10.3. Plan of platform at Phlamoudhi-Vounari.

Table 10.4. Phasing at Phlamoudhi-Vounari.

Phases	Architectural activity	Dating	Associated pottery
Phase 1	Construction of artificial hill	Unknown (MC III?)	None
Phase 2	First construction of tower platform	MC III–LC IA (early)	Red on Black, White Painted, Plain White
Phase 3	Grander design of stone platform; plastered pavements	LC IA–LC IB	Red on Black, Base Ring I, Monochrome, Red/Black Slip Wheelmade, LC I pithoi, Tell el Yahdiyeh ware
Phase 4	Extensive renovation; buttressed on south side, new circuit wall, double gateway on north side	LC IB	Base Ring I, White Slip I, Proto White Slip, Black Slip Reserved Slip, Bichrome, Monochrome
Phase 5	Renovation of north gate	LCIIA (early)	Base Ring I, White Slip II, Monochrome, LC II pithoi
Phase 6	Abandonment	LC IIA (late) (until Cypro-Archaic I)	None

Phase 4 the platform was approached from the north via a grand double gateway, which was renovated in Phase 5: the external pavements and interior area accessed through the gateway might be considered respectively as inclusive and exclusive spaces for ritual action. The excavators suggested that the sides of the hill were originally plastered for enhanced visual impact (al-Radi 1983, 15–17). A detailed re-examination of the stratigraphy, however, suggests this was instead a slump of plaster from successive floors that had gradually weathered down the slope subsequent to the abandonment of the mound (Horowitz 2008, 76). Vounari was abandoned late in LC IIA, at a time when authority was increasingly being embedded within the newly established urban centres; in the case of the population of Phlamoudhi and the surrounding area, ceremonial action legitimising elite authority had probably been appropriated by the elites associated with the monumental structure at nearby Melissa

(Smith 2008b). In contrast, there is no further evidence for activity at Vounari until well into the Iron Age.

The artificial hill dominates the surrounding landscape and was visible from the neighbouring settlement of Melissa as well as from the sea. Moreover, Vounari's situation at a conspicuously strategic point indicates it to be a marker of place that was established by an incoming population to highlight and legitimise their claims over new territories and resources. The investment in labour involved not only in the initial construction of the hill but also the ongoing embellishment of the platform structures on its summit (Horowitz 2008, 73–7) emphasises community involvement in the creation of place: through its ongoing social interactions at Vounari the community became embedded in the landscape. Even more so than at Palaeoskoutella (*v. supra*), there was a deliberate break with ancient traditions and social action at Vounari: instead,

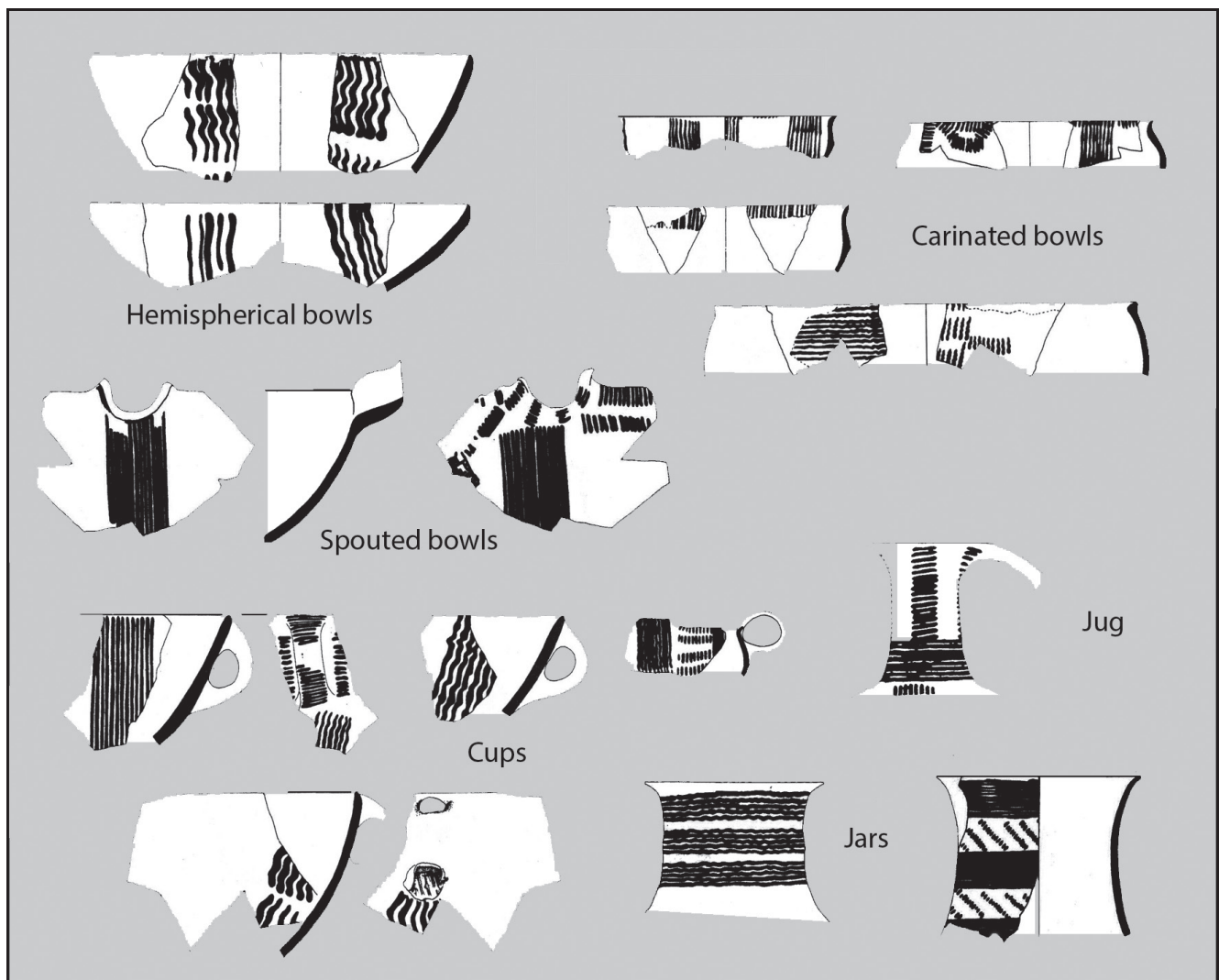


Fig. 10.4. Red-on-Black pottery from Phlamoudhi-Vounari.

the novel type of monument illustrates the introduction of new traditions, changing forms of ceremonial performance and altered interactions with space, all of which were undoubtedly manipulated by different groups within the community in their competition for social and economic capital. As such, it represents a remarkable transformation in people's relationship with space and their manipulation of their natural and material worlds.

Hector Catling initially identified Vounari as an isolated fort (1962, 159, no. 138) and subsequently it was classified as a small rural sanctuary. However, a more recent examination of the architecture, phasing and finds has resulted in a very different interpretation of the site. Horowitz (2007; 2008) proposes that the Vounari corresponds to a tertiary nodal site within Knapp's settlement hierarchy model (1997, 58–9), which acted as a regional centre for myriad economic exchanges, central storage, administrative control and food consumption. Even so, Horowitz does recognise the imposing aspect of place embodied in the artificial hill and platform, 'built to impress and to dominate the landscape' (Horowitz 2008, 80), and conjectures that social and economic interactions at Vounari were mediated through ceremonial performance, comprising elite sponsored feasting and gifting within an imposing communal setting. Nonetheless, it is difficult to extract supporting evidence of administrative action and the movement and storage of commodities at Vounari from the fragmentary archaeological remains (see discussion of material remains in al-Radi 1983, 24–31, 38–48; Horowitz 2008, 77–80). Instead, the finds are more in keeping with a small, largely isolated rural community (al-Radi 1983, 37) and their deliberate marking of place.

Large quantities of fragmentary pottery were found at Vounari, associated with the stone platform. The storage jars identified in Phases 3–5, together with the grinding stones and a small number of cooking pots, were plausibly required to provision extra-household consumption and feasting. Certainly, the presence of large quantities of particularly fine Black-on-Red ware drinking sets (made up of very fine small bowls, juglets, bottles, larger jugs and bowls; Fig. 10.4) supports the notion of communal consumption. The Black-on-Red style, which was produced at nearby Melissa, was considered highly desirable and acquired considerable symbolic and ideological value beyond the local region during this period of social turmoil and change; as such it was widely distributed throughout north-eastern Cyprus (*v. supra*) and was incorporated within communal feasting and funerary ritual but was not used in daily household practices. Only the very best examples of Red-on-Black pottery were brought to Vounari (Horowitz 2008, 77) and, as at Palaeoskoutella (*v. supra*), this special pottery was seemingly ritually broken at the place of consumption, binding the social actors to place.

We might envisage therefore that the monument at Vounari was used for large gatherings of the local (and possibly wider) community. Embodied practices performed

here included ritual consumption of food and drink – a code of hospitality developed to bind together the neighbouring community during a period of social change. Commensality was an ancient and honoured tradition of social action for the Bronze Age communities of Cyprus (Steel 2004b), but at Vounari we see it transformed into a new ritual experience. Communal action moved away from the funerary arena into a new type of shared and monumentalised place, which gradually became embedded within the local landscape as a focus for repeated ritual performance over many generations, shaping a new relationship with space. This custom of shared consumption, performed at a special place outside of normal social practice and no doubt accompanied by other embodied rituals, would have evoked powerful emotions amongst the participants; it was a transformative experience that allowed the newly established community at Phlamoudhi to negotiate and legitimise social relations, whilst simultaneously marking their place in the landscape.

Conclusions

To conclude, therefore, these two case studies illustrate the modification of the ceremonial landscape in north-east Cyprus associated with the creation of new traditions at a time of social stress. Time-honoured traditions of ritual action within the mortuary landscape were gradually abandoned; significant places in the landscape were marked, shaped and transformed; and new forms of specialised ritual equipment were incorporated within ancient practices of commensality alongside other embodied practices involving enchainment. The deliberate break with the past, the gradual creation of a new ritual landscape and the transformation of ceremonial action all reflect significant changes in the Cypriot *habitus*, and were conscious strategies developed to mediate social relations during this period of significant social upheaval.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Ralph Häussler for inviting me to contribute a paper to the Sacred Landscapes conference at Lampeter in 2014. I am grateful to Luci Attala for insightful comments concerning materialities and making, also for advice on the anthropological literature on ritual performance and *communitas*. Many thanks also to Stephen Thomas for reading and commenting on various drafts of this paper.

Note

- 1 The sites of Phlamoudhi-Vounari and Melissa were excavated by a team from the Columbia University, New York between 1970 and 1973. Much of the material from the excavations has been unavailable for study since 1974, as it is in the still occupied part of northern Cyprus. Most recently, the field notes and some of the material that is in New York have been published (see Smith 2008a).

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