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The Secret Lives of the Early and Middle Minoan Tholos Cemeteries: Koumаса and Platanos

BORJA LEGARRA HERRERO

Perhaps no other type of archaeological context has attracted so much interest in the study of the 3rd and early 2nd millennia B.C. on Crete as the tholos cemeteries. Tholos cemeteries are defined by the presence of tholos tombs, stone-built round tombs measuring approximately 3 m in diameter (e.g., Krasi: Marinatos 1929, 106) to 13.1 m (e.g., Platanos Tholos A: Xanthoudides 1924, 88), which were used collectively, sometimes for more than a millennium (e.g., Lebena Gerokampos: Alexiou and Warren 2004). Some of the Early Minoan (EM) and Middle Minoan (MM) tholoi may have been corbelled, although this possibility is still the subject of debate (Warren 1973; 2007; Pelon 1976; Belli 1984, 120–124; Branigan 1993, 41–56; 1994).

The large number of known tholos cemeteries (Fig. 3.1), most of them found in South-Central Crete, has allowed researchers to engage in the detailed study of the social, economic and ideological structure of the region (Branigan 1970, 1984; Blackman and Branigan 1977; Relaki 2004) to a degree that would be difficult to achieve in other parts of the island or using other types of data during the Early and Middle Bronze Age on Crete (but see Watrous, Hadzi-Vallianou, and Blitzer 2004).



The long history of research on the tholos cemeteries (the first excavation of a tholos took place in 1903 at Hagia Triada; see Halbherr 1903; Paribeni 1903) resulted in the early establishment of a research agenda that included some assumptions that have become intrinsically linked to our views of these contexts without subsequent critical appraisal. A new wave of archaeologists is starting to show that the traditional approaches and explanations attached to the long history of research on the tholoi are inadequate and that new views based on new theoretical and methodological foundations are required (Papadatos 1999; Whitelaw 2000; Relaki 2003, 2004; Bardsley 2004; Watrous, Hadzi-Vallianou, and Blitzer 2004; Catapoti 2005; Campbell-Green 2006; Goodison 2006). This fresh perspective in the understanding of the tholos cemeteries has been based mainly on the new publications of tholos tombs from Archanes-Phourni (Maggidis 1994; Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997; Panagiotopoulos 2002; Papadatos 2005), Lebena (Alexiou and Warren 2004), the re-excavation of Hagia Triada (Di Vita 1990–1991, 1996–1997, 1998–2000; La Rosa 1992–1993, 2001b; Cultraro 2000, 2004; Palio 2004; Todaro 2004), the re-evaluation of Kamilari (Girella 2003), and the publication of Moni Odigitria (Campbell-Green 2006; Branigan 2008; Vasilakis and Branigan 2010). Previously excavated and published tholos cemeteries have only been included in this reassessment of the subject to a very limited extent, even though they still offer important data that contribute to our attempts to create new theoretical models for the significant role of mortuary behavior in Early and Middle Bronze Age Crete.

This present study focuses on the reassessment and re-interpretation of two large tholos cemeteries, Platanos and Koumasa, which have been staples in discussions not only of tholos cemeteries, but also, and more importantly, in the creation of explanatory models about social, political, and economic organization on Crete in the 3rd and early 2nd millennium. It is argued here that a more detailed look at the evidence of these cemeteries that were excavated long ago, paired with a fresh approach free of the traditional assumptions, reveals a much more complex picture of a constantly changing heterogeneous region than has been assumed until now. Targeting these two important cemeteries not only challenges the weaknesses of traditional models at their core, but it also brings a key corpus of material back into the current discussion of interpretations of

tholos cemeteries and the more general discussion of Early and Middle Bronze Age Cretan communities.

The Long Tradition and Some Outstanding Problems

The history of research on the tholos cemeteries is almost as old as that of archaeological work on Crete; the assemblage of a probable tholos tomb at Hagios Onouphrios in South-Central Crete was published as early as 1895 (Evans 1895; Branigan 1970, 1; for a detailed account of the history of research, see Branigan 1993, 1–15). Unfortunately, the excavation of tholos cemeteries was normally conducted under the restricted conditions of rescue excavations, usually after the cemetery had been looted. And, in fact, only a few excavated cemeteries have been published. At present, of the more than 60 known tholos cemeteries, only the one at Archanes-Phourni (Fig. 3.1) can be considered ideal from a research standpoint: it was not looted, it was excavated using modern techniques, and it is extensively (though not yet completely) published (Maggidis 1994; Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997; Karytinis 2000; Lahanas 2000; Panagiotopoulos 2002; Papadatos 2005).

Besides the conditions of the archaeological deposits themselves, this long history of research has added more problems to the study of the tholos cemeteries. If the communal use of the tombs for centuries created highly disturbed deposits within the cemetery—a process that was exacerbated later by looting—then the early excavation of cemeteries, in accordance with the standards of that time (usually in the form of rescue excavation with limitations on time and resources) have precluded the detailed application of archaeological techniques for the better understanding of the difficult depositional and post-depositional history of the cemeteries. A clear example of this is the fact that the rapid rescue excavations usually only explored a small area around the tholos tombs and in front of the entrance, ignoring the possibility of other buildings at the back or sides of the tholos tombs.

The few cemeteries that were excavated extensively, such as Hagia Triada (Banti 1930–1931; Stefani 1930–1931; Di Vita 1990–1991, 1996–1997, 1998–2000; La Rosa 1992–1993, 1999a, 1999b, 2001a),

show that other buildings related to the cemetery may be present in the immediate vicinity of the tholos tombs, and, in many cases, tholos cemeteries could have been larger than presently known. At present, the understanding of the cemeteries relies almost entirely on the study of the tholos tomb components in each cemetery. Other features, even when excavated, have been largely ignored, or, as in the case of the annexes, treated merely as subordinate to the tholoi. This is why this study prefers to call the sites tholos cemeteries, as all of them include features apart from the tholos tombs that need to be considered carefully as part of an architectural whole.

But our interest resides in another, more prominent problem that stems from the lack of chronological definition of the assemblages produced by the old excavations and the incomplete publication of the cemeteries. These two features of the scholarship have resulted in the creation of vague interpretative models in which the cemeteries have been considered. They are vague in two different ways: chronologically, because the tholos cemeteries have been viewed within a uniform model that has no detailed chronological framework for the changes occurred within the long history of use of the cemeteries (see, e.g., Branigan 1984; Murphy 1998); but also spatially, because every single tholos cemetery has been included in the same explanatory model, regardless of their particular location or characteristics (see, e.g., Cultraro 2001, 107–115; Belli 2003; Goodison 2006). Only variations based on inferred socioeconomic differences have been taken into consideration (Branigan 1984; Murphy 1998; Sbonias 1999; Cultraro 2001, 107–115), but this does not cover the whole range of variables that affect mortuary behavior (Ucko 1969; Hodder 1980, 1982; Pader 1982; Parker Pearson 1982), nor has this inferred general behavior been explained through a comprehensive consideration of the particular social dynamics in South-Central Crete. It has become clear that the traditional interpretations of the tholos cemeteries, with their disregard for variability, context, and lack of detailed analysis, are not sustainable (Papadatos 1999; Relaki 2004; Campbell-Green 2006). Tholos cemeteries not only changed through time, and with them their role as a social arena for Cretan communities, but at certain times they also show considerable differences that transcend any simple distinction between rich and poor cemeteries or communities.

At this point it is necessary to stand back and look at the tholos cemetery in a broader perspective. Cemeteries are not an object of study *per se*, but their study can offer a very insightful approach to the study of the societies that use them (Binford 1971; Parker Pearson 1982). The proposed shift of research toward variation (which here is defined as the investigation of differences and similarities) is not only a simple methodological change, but it represents also a fundamental transformation in the way we understand the relation between cemeteries and society. Current approaches have viewed the tholos cemetery as a direct reflection of the social structure of the community that used it (Blackman and Branigan 1977; Whitelaw 1983; Branigan 1984; Watrous 1994; Murphy 1998; Sbonias 1999). Cemeteries reflect the kind of society that use them, and, therefore, they can be used to understand Minoan society, particularly because they are placed within a stage of the social evolutionary spectrum (i.e., chiefdoms, ranked societies). But modern archaeological research views the cemetery in a very different light, as a complex social arena where society is not reflected but actively constructed and reconstructed, and where direct links between society and cemetery are never straightforward (Hodder 1980; Bartel 1982; Pader 1982; Parker Pearson 1982, 1999; Wason 1994; Carr 1995; Pearson 1998; Charles 2005).

The cemetery is such a powerful social arena for interaction and negotiation of social relationships because it has unique ideological, religious, and sentimental characteristics created by the traumatic event of death. Such characteristics empower the cemetery as a social arena, but they also contort and restructure the social canvas of the everyday life of the community that is not directly reflected in the mortuary arena. Society transforms itself in the cemeteries through dealing with the reality of death and the changes it brings to the composition and social organization of a community. Such interruptions in the normal life of the community are ideal for the transformation of social relationships (transformations involving efforts to change it, but also efforts to maintain it unchanged, as both dynamics need to be deployed actively). For archaeologists this means that the social structure deployed in the cemeteries does not necessarily match the social structure through which everyday life was organized, but at the same time it does offer an excellent window for its study, as well as for the study of interaction and the processes involved in social stability and transformation.

Under these circumstances the understanding of a cemetery must rely on the study of variability, defined as the study of both differences and similarities that can be achieved through a contextual approach (Carr 1995, 193–194; Hodder and Hutson 2003, 183–187). We need to understand the characteristics that are common to the human groups that occupy a certain region in terms of how they deal with death and the deceased. The location of a community in a culturally similar region (for a discussion of the definition of region in South-Central Crete, see Relaki 2004) with extensive social, economic, and ideological links means that there are regularities in the way they employed cemeteries as social arenas. At the same time, each community is unique, and the way they use their cemeteries changes because they adapt the common rules to their specific needs. Studying variability permits us to interpret regularities in the use of cemeteries that will facilitate the discovery of patterns in the way mortuary behavior relates to the social, ideological, and economic relationships within and between communities of South-Central Crete. Moreover, it allows the identification of the individualities of each community's mortuary behavior and an interpretation of their meaning.

This paper suggests that such a detailed study of variability is possible through the study of newly excavated material and a reconsideration of old published material, both of which are necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the record and the fullest contextualization of new data. It is time to reclaim the old data and use it to identify variations among sites and the changes that occurred in these cemeteries. The identification of changes that occurred in the 1,000-year history of use of the old excavated cemeteries, and hence their social role, can be achieved through a careful and integrated look at both the assemblages and their associated architectural features. Also, more attention needs to be paid to variation between contemporaneous cemeteries. Differences normally have been explained in a simple hierarchical model, where larger cemeteries or the ones with more high-value items (both Koumasa and Platanos have been thought to belong in these categories) were considered to reflect communities that functioned as local centers and were developing toward a clearly defined regional hierarchical structure (Branigan 1984; Watrous 1994, 730–731; Murphy 1998, 38; Sbonias 1999; Cultraro 2001, 107–115; Watrous, Hadzi-Vallianou, and Blitzer 2004, 244–269). But such a simple interpretation has many problems.

The position of a community in synchronous or longer-term developmental contexts cannot be based on the simple reading of the cemetery assemblages in terms of rich against poor; instead, it requires a contextual approach to the commonalities and differences in mortuary behavior among the South-Central Cretan communities. If we are to begin to understand variations and patterns in the record, we first need to understand the meanings and ways in which architecture and assemblages were deployed as a social means of interaction in South-Central Crete. A detailed investigation of the data provides us with a much better idea of the mechanisms used for the negotiation of social position and status, and, therefore, we can then better understand key traits in the social structure of South-Central Cretan communities.

While recent studies have explored the potential of a more flexible approach to the tholos cemetery record (Papadatos 1999; Relaki 2004; Campbell-Green 2006), we still have a limited data base for the application of such new perspectives, since the largest part of the record continues to be handicapped by old assumptions and the descriptive orientation of previous studies. As an illustration, this study focuses on two of the classic sites that feature in most of the studies of Early Bronze Age Crete—Koumasa and Platanos. The aim is to show that it is possible and necessary to re-visit cemeteries that were excavated in the distant past in order to challenge some of our misconceptions about tholos tombs, particularly in terms of socioeconomic issues and the history of the region. Furthermore, it aims to show that old data can still be useful for the creation of new models for South-Central Crete. Koumasa and Platanos are perfect examples; both are key sites for our understanding of the EM and MM periods, they are usually considered to be comparable sites with similar local and regional roles and developmental histories (Branigan 1984; Murphy 1998; Watrous, Hadzi-Vallianou, and Blitzer 2004, 245), and they both provide examples of how problematic data can still be relevant for current studies.

Koumasa

The Koumasa cemetery (Fig. 3.2) was excavated by Xanthoudides in 1904 and 1906 and published a few years later (Xanthoudides 1924,

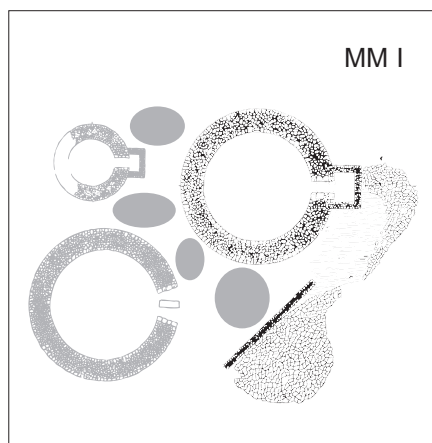
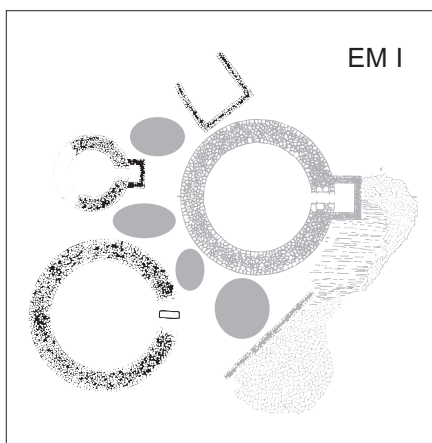
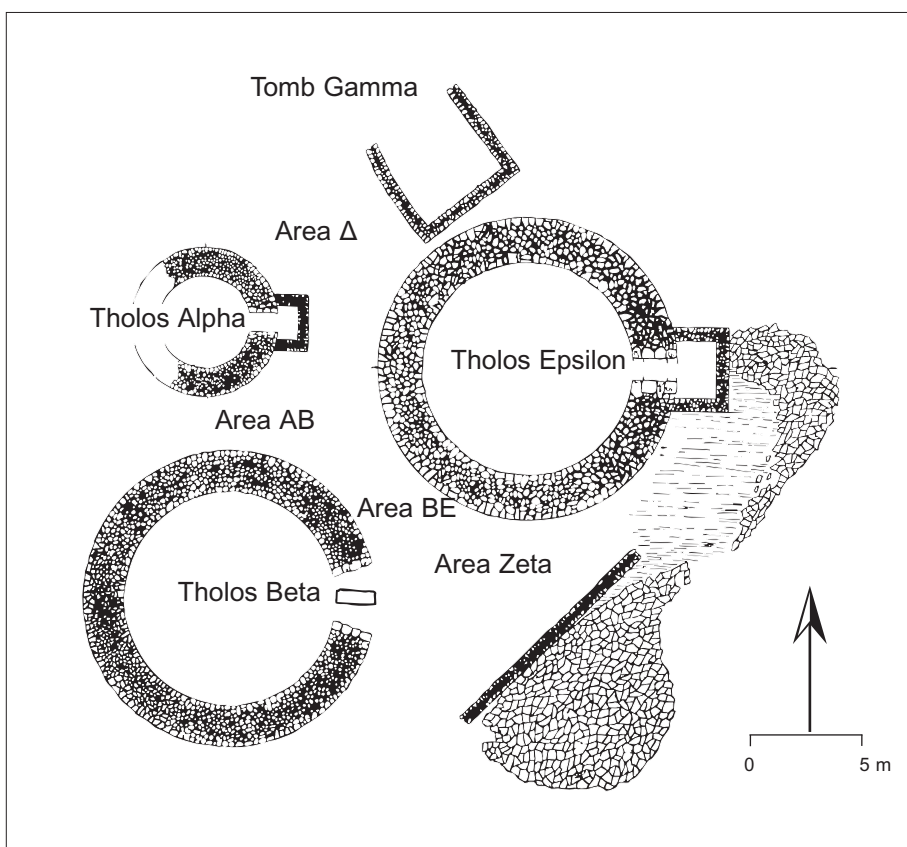


Figure 3.2. Koumasa cemetery (after Xanthoudides 1924). Gray shading indicates areas without clear dating.

1–50). The cemetery has never been re-excavated, and although we must rely on Xanthoudides' publication, some of the material recovered has been re-assessed in different studies (to name only a few examples, see: Branigan 1968a, 63; Zois 1968, 73–81; Renfrew 1969; Karagianni 1984, 63, 70, 77, 91; Sbonias 1995; Vasilakis 1996, 84–86; Papadatos 2003b; Pieler 2004, 111, 114; Koehl 2006, 71, 75–76) and is now better understood, allowing a reconsideration of the patterns of use for the cemetery as a whole.

The cemetery is located on a low hill at the boundary of the Asterousia Mountains and the Mesara Valley. Xanthoudides reported that a settlement was located on the hill immediately above the cemetery, although limited investigations have yet to establish occupation during the period of use of the cemetery (Xanthoudides 1924, 49; Rutkowski 1989). The presence of a MM sanctuary in the community is debated (Xanthoudides 1924, 49–50; Rutkowski 1989; Georgoulaki 1990). The cemetery is composed of three tholos tombs—Alpha, Beta, and Epsilon—two of which are larger than average (Beta [9.5 m] and Epsilon [9.3 m]; compare with other tholos tomb measurements in Belli 1984; Goodison and Guarita 2005), and another two features—rectangular Tomb Gamma and the paved area southeast of Tholos Epsilon that is known as Area Zeta. Another three areas—AB, BE, and Delta—have not been defined by any features, but rather by the deposits of material found within them. It is therefore unclear whether the objects were deposited in these areas purposefully or whether they represent material re-deposited (in the past or the present) from other contexts.

But what is the chronology and history of all these features? Were they all constructed and used simultaneously (Branigan 1993, 111–114)? If not, what is the story of the cemetery? To answer these questions, two different aspects need to be addressed: the architectural features and the character, distribution, and association of the material assemblage.

The Koumasa cemetery can be defined by the simplicity of its layout. Tholoi Alpha and Epsilon have only an anteroom at the entrance of the tomb, and a similar layout was suggested for Tholos Beta (Xanthoudides 1924, 8); no annexes or other related buildings are known for the cemetery, with the exception of Tomb Gamma and some rooms outside Tholos Epsilon together with paved Area Zeta. Xanthoudides suggested that such annexes and associated buildings may have existed, given the debris

found in the areas between the tholoi (Xanthoudides 1924, 33). This, however, does not seem to be the case: the tholoi and Tomb Gamma were in a very good state of preservation (at Tholos Epsilon, even the closing slab was found in place; Xanthoudides 1924, 33), and it seems strange that only the annexes would have perished. The debris mentioned by Xanthoudides may have come from the tholos tombs. Moreover, the details provided by Xanthoudides regarding the areas outside the tholos do not seem to fit our understanding of annexes. The excavated ante-rooms outside the tholoi are clearly contained and were probably never embedded in larger annex complexes. The small area between Tholos Epsilon and the paved area outside it is quite small to house a significant annex complex, whereas the interments and burn marks outside Tholos Beta (Xanthoudides 1924, 33) do not have parallels in any other known annex. It seems that annexes at Koumasa, if they ever existed, may not have had significant architectural features in terms of size and quality of construction, as is seen in other cemeteries.

Simple layouts are typical of EM I–II tholos cemeteries. The well-understood tholos cemeteries at Lebena Gerokampos (Alexiou and Warren 2004), Hagia Triada (Carinci 2004; Todaro 2004), Hagia Kyriaki (Blackman and Branigan 1982), and Moni Odigitria (Vasilakis 1992; Vasilakis and Branigan 2010) show that tholos tombs constructed in EM I–II had, at most, one or two anterooms (Branigan 1993, 63; Murphy 1998, 37–38); only in later periods were these expanded into large annex complexes. Even newly established MM tholos tombs were being constructed with large annexes at Apesokari and Kamilari (Apesokari Alpha: Schörgendorfer 1951; Kamilari Alpha: Levi 1961–1962). At Koumasa, only Tomb Gamma disrupts the simplicity of the layout, but only EM II material has been published from this context (Xanthoudides 1924, 34–50); the simplicity of its plan contrasts with the rectangular buildings found in EM III and MM I tholos cemeteries such as Hagia Triada (Banti 1930–1931; La Rosa 1999b; Cultraro 2000; Di Vita 1998–2000), thus suggesting an EM IIA date for the construction of this building. The architectural features of the Koumasa cemetery resemble EM I–II layouts rather than later ones. Also, it is worth noting that although Koumasa underwent important archaeological changes in EM III and MM I, it adapted architecturally to the common EM III–MM I funerary architecture in a very restricted way (perhaps only with the construction of paved Area Zeta),

and the cemetery retained a uniquely simple layout during its MM I phase of use.

The material assemblage of the cemetery is harder to assess as we know that only a very limited part was published, probably the most outstanding and complete material. However, since it was excavated by the same excavator as Platanos and the sites were published together, the publication of both cemeteries should be biased by the same interests, thus permitting a preliminary comparison of the assemblages at the two cemeteries. The Koumasa assemblage, as it was published, differs significantly from that of Platanos and from assemblages in other tholos cemeteries.

Although Xanthoudides mentions EM I ceramics (Xanthoudides 1924, 9), none of the illustrated material from the Koumasa cemetery can be dated earlier than the EM IIA period (Zois 1968, 71–96; Pelon 1976, 90; Wilson and Day 1994, 14; contra Branigan 1993, 146). EM IIA material has been found in Tholoi Alpha and Beta, Tomb Gamma, and Areas AB and Delta (Xanthoudides 1924, 9–11, 33; Zois 1968, 73–81). Only one EM II ceramic vessel from Tholos Epsilon was published, and it comes from the soil on top of the tomb (HM 4992; Xanthoudides 1924, 39). Only one kernos from this tomb could be dated earlier than MM I (HM 4999; Zois 1967, 720; Karagianni 1984, 70), and other material from this tomb dates to MM I (Platon 1969 [*CMS* II, 1 no. 156]; Walberg 1983, 102; Sbonias 1995, 119).

While the published ceramic vessels are too few in number for a comprehensible characterization of the assemblage, there are a few items that seem to date to EM IIA, which indicate an exceptional assemblage. In Tomb Gamma, three silver daggers were found in a probable EM II closed deposit (Xanthoudides 1924, 47; Soles 1992, 157–158). These are a very rare type of object, found elsewhere only in the (possible) funerary deposit at Teke-Knossos (together with typical EM IIA folded-arm figurines; Marinatos 1933, 298–304; Alexiou 1975; Vasilakis 1996, 82–84; Papadatos 2003a; 2003b), at Galana Charakia (Branigan 1968a, 63; Vasilakis 1996, 82–87), and at Mochlos (T. Tselios, pers. comm.). Silver is a very rare imported material on the island, particularly in the Mesara, and it may have been imbued with high social value (Branigan 1968b; Davaras 1975, 107; Legarra Herrero 2004, 43–45). Six folded-arm figurines were found at Koumasa, a significant number that has only been surmounted at Archanes-Phourni, although the latter were all found in

one tholos (Gamma) and in the area surrounding it (Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997, 236; Papadatos 2005, 29–32); one or perhaps two of those from Tholos Beta at Koumasa are actual imports from the Cyclades, an even rarer occurrence (inv. nos. HM 125, HM 127; Xanthoudides 1924, 21–22; Renfrew 1969, 19; Pieler 2004, 110). Folded-arm figurines are also rare in Cretan cemeteries and were probably deposited only during EM IIA (Papadatos 1999, 223; 2003a). They may represent a type of object with a high value attached to its symbolic meaning (Papadatos 2003b), an idea that is reinforced by the actual presence of imports from the Cyclades. Other possible valuable objects at Koumasa are gold items in Tholos Beta, but most of these seem to come from the upper levels (Xanthoudides 1924, 8), which may be MM I as indicated by the presence of numerous stone vessels (see below). Zoomorphic and anthropomorphic vases in Koumasa ware, typically EM IIA in date, are found in numbers larger than in any other known cemetery (Xanthoudides 1924, 39–41; Branigan 1970, 133; Warren 1977, 138; Miller 1984, 28–31, 557–558; Krause 1992, 224–227; Koehl 2006, 71, 75–76, 78).

Sixteen seals were recovered from Tholos Alpha and 19 from Tholos Beta, including EM III–MM I examples (Platon 1969, nos. 138–169; Platon, Pini, and Salies 1977, no. 26; Sbonias 1995, 88 nn. 94, 103); these are fairly low quantities when compared to the examples recovered from Hagia Triada Tholos Alpha (108 seals) and Platanos Tholos Beta (80 seals). Finally, not many stone vessels were found at the cemetery, with the exception of Tholos Beta, which produced 80 (Xanthoudides 1924, 17). Following Xanthoudides' description that places most of the material in the upper layers of Tholos Beta (Xanthoudides 1924, 8), combined with the presence of a substantial quantity of bird's-nest bowls (44 bird's-nest bowls; Warren 1969, 120) that can be most securely dated to the MM I period onward (Warren 1969, 8; Bevan 2007), it can be suggested that the majority of stone vessels in Tholos Beta was deposited in the MM I period; the same probably holds true for the nine gold items found in the upper stratum.

It seems that Tholoi Alpha and Beta and rectangular Tomb Gamma were constructed in the EM IIA period, and the discovery of contemporary material in Areas Delta and AB shows intensive use of the cemetery during this period. Area Zeta and Tholos Epsilon may have been constructed

as early as EM IIA, although the evidence here is far from conclusive. The presence of EM IIA objects in Area AB and Tomb Gamma may also indicate that much of the material that was originally deposited in the tholos during this period was cleared away, and that the EM IIA picture of the tholos cemetery may be obscured by secondary re-deposition. Items such as the folded-arm figurines or silver daggers, had they been found together in one of the tholoi, would have marked an exceptional burial group. While it is difficult to create a detailed chronology for each context in the Koumasa cemetery, the general impression seems to be that the architectural layout and the material assemblage recovered provides us with a snapshot of the life of this cemetery during the early EM II period. Our understanding of the cemetery's use in EM III and MM I is restricted to the upper stratum of Tholos Beta and the little evidence found around Tholos Epsilon.

In the process of trying to establish a chronology for Koumasa, we have stumbled upon the fact that Koumasa does not represent a typical EM IIA tholos cemetery. Architecturally, it is larger than average, with two tholoi—one uncommonly large (Tholos Beta) and one associated rectangular tomb (Tomb Gamma). A two-tholos cemetery in EM IIA is not a unique phenomenon; other examples are known, such as Lebena Papoura (Alexiou and Warren 2004), but it is by no means a general pattern: at Hagia Triada a second tholos tomb was added in MM I (Carinci 1999, 115 n. 2; 2004, 99). Moreover, the assemblage is quite peculiar, as it includes an exceptionally large number of typically high-value objects (silver daggers and folded-arm figurines), which, together with the anthropomorphic vases, set Koumasa apart from other contemporaneous sites. Unfortunately, it is not possible to ascertain the internal structure of the cemetery in EM IIA; as we have noted, only a small part of the material was published and some of it may have been found in secondary deposits. Furthermore, it is not possible at present to establish whether the exceptional material originated from only one tholos tomb or whether it was deposited in various tombs, which would dramatically change the way we understand the internal socioeconomic dynamics of the cemetery and the burial groups within the community.

After the EM IIA period, the Koumasa cemetery seems to have undergone significant changes: Tholos Alpha and Tomb Gamma may have been abandoned, and Tholos Epsilon was constructed or, if it had already

been built, acquired more significance within the cemetery. Other evidence for the MM I period is difficult to assess. It does not seem that the architecture of the site was transformed in EM III and MM IA to match the features appearing in the rest of the tholos cemeteries in the region in the form of large annexes and associated buildings. Even small cemeteries in the Asterousia Mountains were adapting their architecture to create complex annexes and associated spaces (e.g., at Hagia Kyriaki; see Blackman and Branigan 1982). At the same time, two large tholoi seem to have been in use—Beta and Epsilon. The deposition in Tholos Beta, including the gold objects and a large number of stone vessels, indicates that the Koumasa cemetery was still an important social arena. The swap from EM II Tholos Alpha and Tomb Gamma to Tholoi Epsilon and Beta in MM I may indicate profound changes in the social organization of the community, perhaps related to the establishment of a new settlement nearby (Xanthoudides 1924, 49; Rutkowski 1989). Unfortunately, without being able to assess Tholos Epsilon, it is difficult to identify changes in the internal dynamics of the cemetery and relate them to the changes in Koumasa's mortuary behavior in MM I. In any case, Koumasa's history suggests something quite different from the straightforward evolution toward socioeconomic complexity that has normally been suggested (Whitelaw 1983; Branigan 1984; Murphy 1998).

Platanos

The Platanos cemetery is located on the outskirts of modern Platanos village, not far from Koumasa, inside the Mesara Valley. This site was also excavated by Xanthoudides in 1914 and 1915 (Xanthoudides 1915; 1924, 2), and he published it together with Koumasa and other tholos cemeteries a few years later (Fig. 3.3; Xanthoudides 1924, 88–125). Our understanding of the cemetery has been limited by nearby modern buildings, but in this case the comprehensive excavation by Xanthoudides was complemented by small trials in later periods that brought some important deposits to light that have helped to date the cemetery more accurately (Platon 1953; 1955; Alexiou 1973a, 462–463; 1973b, 562–563; Ioannidou 1973; Gerontakou 2003, 303). As in the case of Koumasa, new studies of the older published material have also helped to clarify the

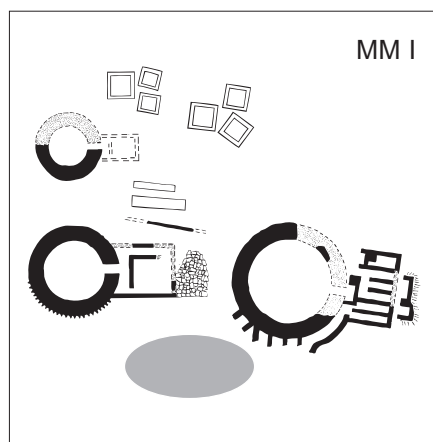
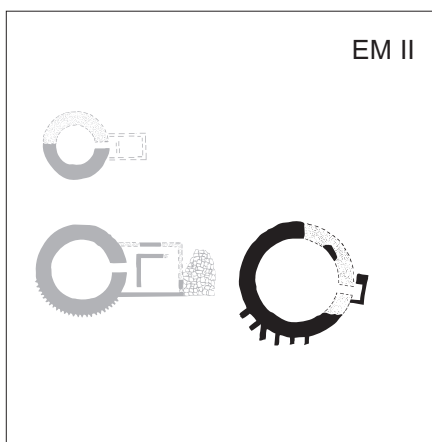
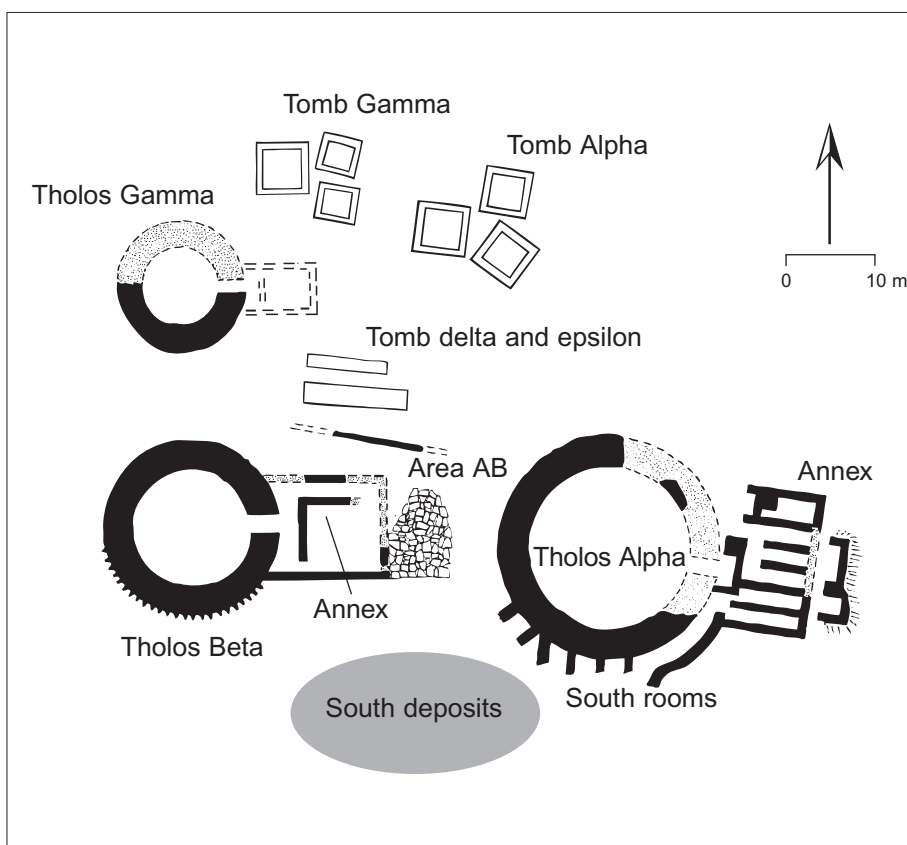


Figure 3.3. Platanos cemetery (after Branigan 1970). Gray shading indicates areas without clear dating.

nature and history of the cemetery (e.g., see: Branigan 1965; Kenna 1968; Warren 1969; Ward 1981; Sbonias 1995; Pini 2000, 107; Bevan 2001; Phillips 2004; Koehl 2006, 75–76).

As in the case at Koumasa, the cemetery consists of three tholos tombs: Alpha, Beta, and Gamma. However, there are also important architectural differences. Platanos has a much more complicated layout with at least nine other spaces, most of them defined by built architecture. Xanthoudides reported two rectangular tombs, alpha and gamma (non-capitalization of the rectangular tomb names follow Xanthoudides' original publication), but it is unclear whether each of these corresponds to three different small buildings (Xanthoudides 1924, 93; Branigan 1970, 12, fig. 2) or two large rectangular tombs with three rooms (Georgoulaki 1996, ill. 25:b). Tombs delta and epsilon were described as long trenches, half-constructed with built walls; they were considered ossuaries by Xanthoudides (1924, 93), although they could also represent rectangular tombs. The three tholoi had annexes, and the ones preserved near Tholoi Alpha and Beta were quite large. Tholos Alpha had various rooms abutting its south side, which may relate to deposits that had been excavated in the 1950s and 1970s near this area (for the south deposits, see: Platon 1953; 1955; Orlandou 1972; Alexiou 1973a, 462–463; 1973b, 562–563; Ioannidou 1973; Gerontakou 2003). Lastly, outside the annex of Tholos Beta there is a small paved area named Area AB. Traces of walls were also reported, which may have marked further divisions within the cemetery (Xanthoudides 1924, pl. LXII).

The architectural features of Platanos, with the large annexes and its complicated layout combining various rectangular tombs and other deposits, make it very different from Koumasa. It does, however, have clear parallels with EM III and MM I tholos cemeteries such as Lebena Gerokampos (Alexiou and Warren 2004) and Hagia Triada (Carinci 2004). Indeed, the Tholos Beta annexes are very similar in plan to those at Apesokari, which were constructed in MM I (Schörgendorfer 1951; Branigan 1998, 20, fig. 1.5; Catapoti 2005). This is not to say that the Platanos cemetery was constructed in MM I–EM II material was found in the cemetery, indicating that the first burials were made in this period. Nevertheless, given the architectural traits and the fact that the few published EM II items originate exclusively from Tholoi Alpha (Zois 1998, 155) and Beta (Warren 1965, 13; although he considers it a

possible survival that could place the construction of Tholos Beta in EM III or MM I), most architectural features may have been constructed in EM III or MM I.

Taking a more detailed look at the assemblage, it is surprising how little EM II material has been published, particularly because Xanthoudides took great interest in the EM IIA material from Koumasa. Only one ceramic EM II vessel was reported from Tholos Alpha (HM 6892; Zois 1998, 155), but Xanthoudides reported an even lower layer (Xanthoudides 1924, 89), which may suggest an EM II construction for the tomb (clearly defined lower strata in tholoi normally date to that period; e.g., Lebena Gerokampos Tholoi II and IIA: Alexiou and Warren 2004, 145, fig. 33; Archanes-Phourni Tholos Gamma: Papadatos 2005, 52). On the basis of the descriptions given by Xanthoudides, most of the non-ceramic material published from Tholos Alpha came from the upper level. Considering that the small number of ceramic vessels published can be dated to EM III–MM I (Xanthoudides 1924, 89, 95; Walberg 1983, 99), it can be suggested that the upper layer and the material within it also dates to this period. Xanthoudides proposed that Tholos Beta is later than Tholos Alpha, perhaps constructed at the end of EM III (Xanthoudides 1924, 92). Apart from an incised pyxis (HM 1904a; Warren [1965, 13] suggests that is probably a survival) and the possibility that some of the seals date to EM II–III (Sbonias 1995, 80 n. 49, 83 n. 62; see also Kenna 1968, 327 n. 61 for a different view), the assemblage has been dated to EM III and MM I (Warren 1969, 196; Walberg 1983, 99). Tholos Gamma may have been in use in EM II (vessel HM 6873 was dated to EM II by Xanthoudides [1924, 94] and Warren [1969, 196]), but it seems that the other published material can be dated to EM III and MM I (Koehl 2006, 76).

Very little pottery was published from the Tholos Alpha annex, but the presence of a large number of bird's-nest stone vases indicates a MM I–II date (Xanthoudides 1924, 99–100; Warren 1969, 8–9; Bevan 2007). No material was published from the rooms south of Tholos Alpha, but the assemblage from the south deposits is clearly MM IB–II (Gerontakou 2003). Rectangular tombs alpha and gamma seem to have contained MM I and Late Minoan material (Xanthoudides 1924, 93; Soles 1992, 193). The annex to Tholos Beta and other walls shown in the original plan are not datable because no material was reported from them. In Area AB various bird's-nest stone vessels and an imitation Egyptian stone vessel point

to a MM I date (Warren 1969, 8–9; Bevan 2001). The folded-arm figurine found in the area (Xanthoudides 1924, 121) may indicate an EM IIA use of the area, although it may have been moved from Tholos Beta and not be representative of the period of construction or use of the pavement.

It seems that a major building phase occurred at Platanos during EM III and MM I that resulted in a complex cemetery that has few known parallels; at Hagia Triada various associated buildings were constructed in MM I around Tholos A, but the two tholoi were used simultaneously only for a short period of time (Carinci 2004). This does not seem to be the case at Platanos, where both seem to have been in use for much or all of the MM I period. Similarly, other cemeteries such as Kamilari (Levi 1961–1962) or Apesokari (Schörgendorfer 1951), while having large and complex annexes in MM I, had only one tholos in use and no other known directly associated buildings.

The material assemblage of the Platanos cemetery requires detailed analysis, as its interpretation is more complicated than the first glance might suggest, particularly in Tholos Alpha, where the assemblage presents some peculiarities. Xanthoudides' report on the deposits locates the gold and daggers in the upper stratum, and these should be dated to the EM III and MM I use of the tomb. This is also suggested strongly by the large annex filled with MM I material, together with the parallels in stratigraphy from other known tholos tombs (for Archanes-Phourni, Tholoi Gamma and Epsilon, see Panagiotopoulos 2002; Papadatos 2005; for Lebena Gerokampos, see Alexiou and Warren 2004). However, the composition of the assemblage is strange for a MM I funerary deposit and resembles EM II funerary assemblages more closely. The comprehensive study of tholos cemetery assemblages is beyond the scope of this article and has been done elsewhere (Legarra Herrero 2004, 34, 43; 2007), and those studies show that while there is no clear chronological break in the composition of assemblages, there are some clear distinctions between EM I–II and MM I assemblages, as defined by the deposits at Archanes-Phourni Tholoi Epsilon (Panagiotopoulos 2002) and Gamma (Papadatos 2005) and Krasi's lower levels (Marinatos 1929).

EM I–II assemblages (lower strata at Krasi and Archanes-Phourni Tholoi Gamma and Epsilon) were defined by significant amounts of gold and silver objects, objects with Aegean connections, and a small number of seals and stone vessels (Fig. 3.4). EM III–MM I deposits are

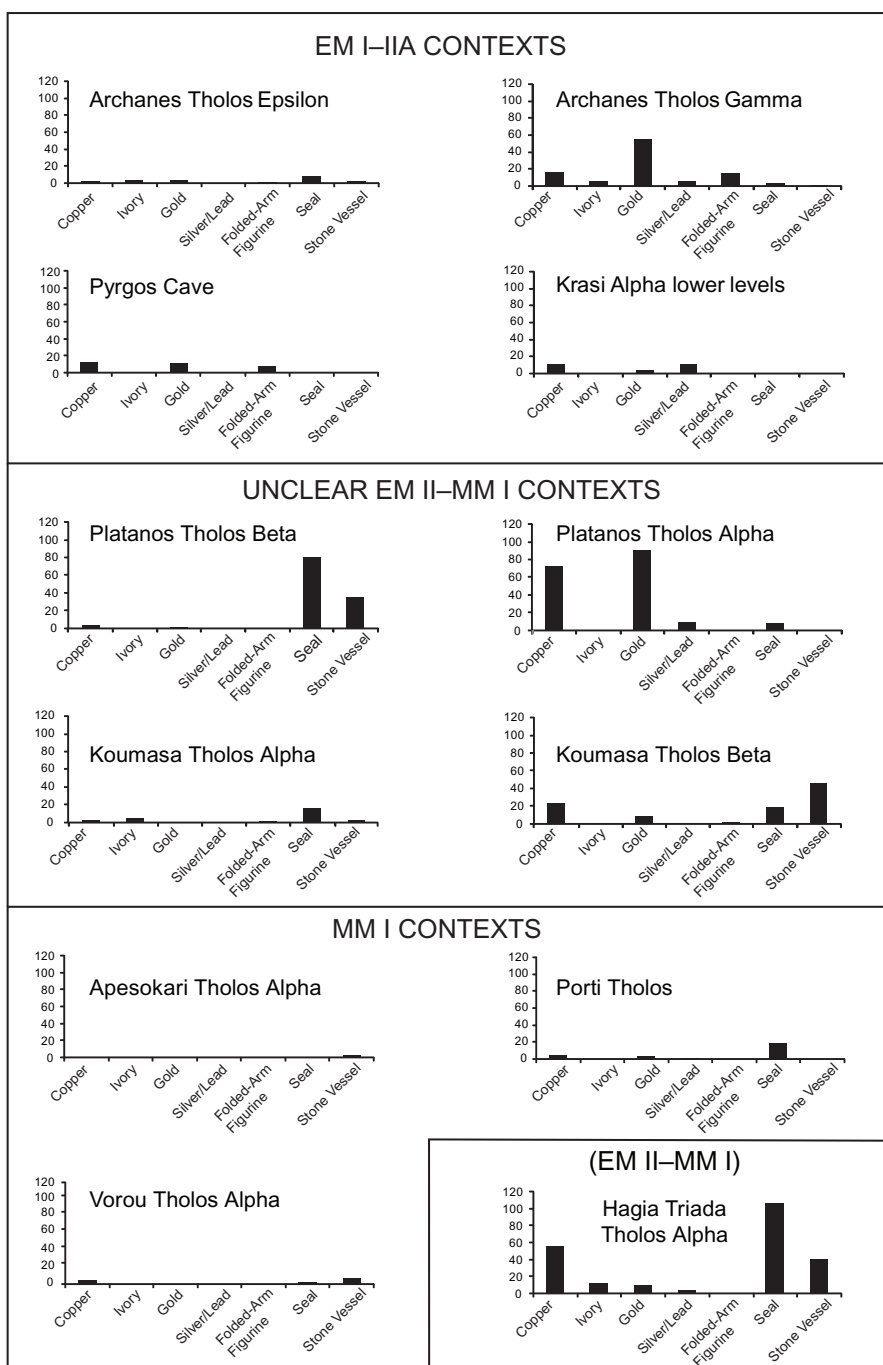


Figure 3.4. Non-ceramic assemblages in selected burial contexts in Central Crete.

better characterized by smaller numbers of copper-based objects, silver and gold, orientalia, and significant numbers of seals and stone vessels (upper strata at Tholoi Gamma and Epsilon at Archanes-Phourni, upper stratum at Koumasa Tholos Beta, Apesokari Tholos Alpha). The composition of the assemblage from Platanos Tholos Alpha seems to follow the first pattern rather than the second (Fig. 3.4). The large amount of gold found in the upper stratum of Tholos Alpha (Xanthoudides 1924, 89) is uncommon in MM I burial deposits, even in those without evidence of looting (Fig. 3.4). Even more uncommon is the significant number of silver objects. Extremely large numbers of stone vases were found in the annexes (around 300; Xanthoudides 1924, 98) and in the south deposits (64 vessels; Gerontakou 2003), but not in the tholos chamber, as in the cases of Platanos Tholos Beta, Koumasa Tholos Beta, and Hagia Triada Tholos Alpha. Around 60 daggers come from the upper stratum of Tholos Alpha, as opposed to the 14 found in the lower level (Xanthoudides 1924, 106–107); this is an unusually large number. At Hagia Triada Tholos Alpha, where the second largest concentration of daggers in a tholos was found, 48 daggers were found in both strata dating to EM II–MM I (Banti 1930–1931; Cultraro 2004). Only six seals were recovered inside Platanos Tholos Alpha, and no material with off-island connections was found. If we accept that this assemblage dates to the MM I period, we are obliged to suggest that Platanos is abnormal not only in terms of rich metal depositions, but also because it represents an abnormal assemblage by the mortuary behavior standards of this period. Moreover, the conspicuous lack of stone vessels and seals in Tholos Alpha contrasts with the assemblages of the annex and the south deposits. In the latter, more than 300 stone vessels were found along with approximately 15 seals, some of them described by Xanthoudides as the most important ivory seals (Xanthoudides 1924, 111). No metal object is described as coming from the annex or the south deposits.

The Tholos Beta assemblage at Platanos also contained large quantities of non-ceramic objects, which this time were dominated by the presence of seals (80) and stone vessels (33), as well as a Babylonian cylinder seal (Kenna 1968, 324–328; Platon 1969, no. 306; Ward 1971, 75) and three Egyptian-style scarabs (Platon 1969, nos. 267, 283, 332; Warren 1980, 494–497; Ward 1981; Yule 1983, 363 nn. 12, 22; Pini 2000, 107; Phillips 2004, 164; Ben-Tor 2006). Only one gold object was found in the tomb,

but Xanthoudides suggested that this tomb may have been looted in pre-historic times, in contrast to Tholos Alpha (Xanthoudides 1924, 89, 92), and many of the gold objects may have been removed. It seems that Tholos Beta also contained an exceptional assemblage. Material with Egyptian parallels has been found in other tholos cemeteries in the form of stone vessels (e.g., Hagia Triada; see Warren 1969, 105–111; Bevan 2004) and scarabs (Pini 2000; Phillips 2004, 2006; Ben-Tor 2006), but never in such large quantities as in the case of Platanos Tholos Beta. This together with the significant number of stone vessels (33) and seals (80), is sufficient to indicate that the assemblage of the tomb was quite exceptional, but with a very different composition from Tholos Alpha that was more in line with the kind of assemblages found in MM I cemeteries, and with close parallels with Hagia Triada Tholos Alpha's EM II–MM I assemblage (Fig. 3.4).

Platanos clearly stands out in the funerary record of MM I South-Central Crete, given its layout and the assemblages in Tholos Alpha and Tholos Beta. Interestingly, there seem to be different choices made in regard to the types of items determined for deposition in Tholos Alpha (gold, daggers) and in Tholos Beta (seals, orientalia, stone vessels) as well as how these assemblages relate to those in their respective annexes. As Xanthoudides warned, this pattern may have been produced in part by differential looting of metal objects in the two tholoi, but this cannot account for the differences in stone vessel and seal deposition within the tholoi. We can, however, suggest a couple of scenarios to explain these patterns. The first is based on the more traditional approach that suggests similar extended kin groups were interred in each tholos. The differences in the assemblages may express a choice by the two groups in the way they display their social status, as this may have relied on different social roles (e.g., administrators, traders, warriors, priests). This, however, does not explain the differences in the structure of the assemblages between the two tholoi and their annexes. In a second scenario, the tholoi may not be differentiated on the basis of kinship but rather in terms of social status. The majority of the population would be interred in one tholos, and particular individuals with a privileged social position (e.g., chief, big-man, priest) would be interred in the other. Daggers have been suggested to be important representations of status and power in South-Central Crete (Whitelaw 1983; Nakou 1995), and their number in Tholos Alpha may reinforce the

idea that only persons of certain status were being interred in this tholos. This model better explains the depositional pattern in Tholos Alpha and its annex, as the different status could be accompanied by a distinct ritual. Similar scenarios are indicated at MM I Archanes-Phourni and Malia, where a focal building was created in EM III or MM I times (the Tholos Beta complex and Chrysolakos, respectively). Unfortunately, we do not know the compositions of the MM I assemblages from those contexts, so we cannot compare them with the Tholos Alpha deposition pattern.

I would like to return to the large number of stone vessels found around Tholos Alpha, as it is an exceptional feature that has no parallels in any other cemetery on the island and requires some explanation. It should be noted that the stone vessels are found in the same contexts in which we would normally find large deposits of conical cups: in rooms within annexes, sometimes concentrated in one specific room, as in the case of the stone vessels in Room alpha in the Platanos Tholos Alpha annex (other examples include: Room Mu at Lebena Gerokampos [Alexiou and Warren 2004, 159–160]; Room Lambda at Hagia Triada Tholos Alpha [Banti 1930–1931, 160, 178, fig. 4]); or in non-burial contexts near the tholoi, as in the south deposits outside Tholos Beta at Archanes-Phourni, which contained jugs and other types of vessels (Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997, 204–205). It is possible that this represents a qualitative leap from the ritual activities in other tholos cemeteries; for example, at Platanos Tholos Alpha, ceramic conical cups were replaced by more valuable stone vessels.

The rituals performed around Tholos Alpha were profoundly different from any that may have been performed in contemporaneous cemeteries. The large annexes indicate new ways of performing ritual across South-Central Crete. The annexes (for a catalog of annexes, see Petit 1987), the open areas (e.g., Hagia Kyriaki [Blackman and Branigan 1982]; Kamilari [Levi 1961–1962]; and Moni Odigitria [Vasilakis 1992]), and the large deposition of vessels (e.g., West Camarette at Hagia Triada [Banti 1930–1931; La Rosa 2001b]; and the North Deposit at Vorou [Marinatos 1931]) suggest that group ritual becomes one of the main foci of burial activity in MM I South-Central Crete and that it was spatially controlled by the new architecture and probably clearly defined, as the recurrent patterns in the funerary architecture document. At Platanos, it is this new focal activity that was qualitatively exaggerated

around Tholos Alpha that shows how the community started to adapt and manipulate the key features of the new ritual on their own terms. In other words, it highlights what kind of activities and dynamics were socially important for MM I communities.

It is difficult to assess Platanos before the MM I period, because significant modifications and large-scale deposition may have obliterated the earlier deposits. We have enough early material to confirm that the cemetery was first used in EM II and that it was composed of Tholos Alpha and perhaps Tholoi Beta and Gamma. Despite the fact that negative evidence has only a limited value given the history of use of the cemetery, it is true that even when it was excavated by the same archaeologist as Koumasa, the published EM IIA material was very limited and may suggest that Platanos did not match Koumasa's exceptional character in the EM IIA period.

When Appearances Deceive

Koumasa and Platanos look similar at a first glance and are often treated together. They are, however, two very different cemeteries with varying mortuary behavior trajectories that provide evidence for two significantly different communities in diverse periods. The Koumasa evidence seems to illustrate better the EM IIA situation, while Platanos better illustrates the MM I. These disparities cannot but relate to diverse ways in which each community used its cemetery in each period. Both funerary contexts show that very different strategies were used to negotiate the particular social, ideological, and economic aspects of each period. The common feature is that the cemetery always represented a powerful social arena regardless of its period of use and the changes it experienced.

In general, we could suggest that MM I mortuary behavior is a more complicated affair, with various spaces delimiting and focusing the ritual in a way that is difficult to appreciate at Koumasa. The architecture shows a more complex separation of spaces that frames more involved ritual processes. Mortuary behavior and ritual activities were more focused on the deposition of the body and the accompanying material in EM IIA, and on group participation in MM I. This is not to say that one

pattern completely replaces the other, but rather that the balance in MM I seems to have tilted toward the group participating in the burial ritual and their performances in differentiated spaces. This could have possibly involved the differential participation of different social groups within and beyond the burial group, in varied activities separated in space and potentially in time. While the EM IIA Koumasa community seems more focused on marking the status and position of certain individuals with grave goods, the Platanos community is more concerned about the participation of the living. This is a very significant difference, and it may indicate the very different ways in which the two communities were structured and represent very different mechanisms for the management of the social relationships both within and between burial groups. Koumasa may have been organized around clear and strongly marked social positions (i.e., heads of family [Whitelaw 1983; Karytinis 1998] or religious figures), perhaps because these individuals were key decision makers in the atomized groups around which everyday life was organized (Whitelaw 2000; Relaki 2004). The MM I Platanos community may have been structured around social arenas and the participation of the whole community (and indeed others) in public events. It is possible that this much more inclusive strategy was used by a community living together in a settlement (as opposed to the more fragmented EM II settlement pattern) because they could easily and frequently engage in ritual practice in the cemetery.

The different social structure between the two periods becomes clearer when we think of the way in which both cemeteries express their exceptionality in the funerary landscape of Crete. Koumasa has clear Aegean connections, as illustrated in the community members' choice of material, but, more importantly, this is displayed mainly inside the tomb through material objects that are intimately linked to the deceased. This material, while not necessarily owned by the deceased in life, established a connection with the individual when it was deposited in the tomb, thus helping to mark their status. As a result, the ritual seems not to have been staged in front of a large group of people—only a small group could attend the interment within the chamber of the tomb. While it is very probable that rituals took place outside the tholoi, the lack of clear evidence in the form of material deposits outside the tombs or architectural features may indicate that formal, large communal rites did not feature prominently in the sequence of ritual activities that marked the burial.

The focus for the display may have been within the community, affecting mainly relationships within and between the groups buried in the different tholoi in the cemetery. Small groups living dispersed in the landscape (Whitelaw 2000; Relaki 2004) may have found it necessary to affirm their position within the extended kin networks that were entitled to use the tholos cemeteries. Perhaps some of the small groups managed to acquire a privileged status, as possibly indicated by some of the material at Koumasa; but, given the limited patterning in the material record, this is far from clear.

At Platanos, potentially high-value material is deposited in the tombs and is probably linked to the deceased. However, that the architecture, particularly the annexes, indicates a more complex ritual, suggests that the ritual was longer and better choreographed for the active involvement of a larger group outside the tombs and for public display to an audience. I would suggest that a longer sequence of rituals allowed an expansion of the radius of influence of the mortuary ritual (Keswani 2004, 82; Oestigaard and Goldhahn 2006). A series of rituals that lasts days, weeks, even years, allows people from more distant areas to attend and to deliver the messages conveyed by the ritual to a larger population that comes from a wider geographical area. Also it permits elaboration of the ritual, and it gives more time to prepare the material means of marking differences (Keswani 2004, 15). Significantly, at Platanos the public aspects of the ritual show exceptional elaboration, with a greater effort in constructing different spaces and the large-scale deposition of stone vessels outside Tholos Alpha. It seems that group ritual was modified to mark or define some sort of privileged status. The mortuary behavior is better designed here for the display of distinction by one group to another. The architectural and depositional elaborations associated with Tholos Alpha may indicate a strong community where the interest resided in displaying and asserting their power of the whole community at a regional level. This is not surprising; it has been suggested by various authors that there is a clear and strong regional competition dynamic in South-Central Crete by MM I (Sbonias 1999; Relaki 2004).

What nobody has been able to define until now is how the Platanos cemetery managed to engage in this competition and express its dominant position. The simple deposition of rich material is not a particularly effective mechanism, as we have seen at Koumasa. It has to be reinforced

and modified to permit it to communicate at a larger social and regional scale, and to relate more efficiently to the high status marked by the burial ritual to the burial group and community that performed it. However, we cannot forget Tholos Beta, with its significant assemblage, and the other contexts in the cemetery, which show that there were also some internal divisions within the Platanos community that needed to be taken into consideration. The community may be a central social context for its members, but kinship relationships and other intra-community relationships were negotiated at a local level.

Conclusion

This article has outlined some of the clearest and more important traits in the use of two tholos cemeteries in South-Central Crete, which are usually treated as directly equivalent sites. It is intended to serve as a first step toward the understanding of the material record of this area, encouraging new studies of the old material. Even under adverse circumstances, a new approach to old data can yield interesting results that validate the construction of new and more complex explanatory models. A more detailed look at the data is possible, particularly if armed with approaches that pay more attention to variation and the active role of each cemetery in the human landscape of South-Central Crete. While the identification of particularities—both temporally and spatially—raises new questions, these are more relevant for our discussion, and they push our knowledge forward toward a much more detailed assessment of the societies that inhabited EM and MM Crete. In the end, it is clear that addressing old and new questions about socioeconomic organization in EM and MM Crete requires both new research with open-ended models and a more accurate look at the archaeological record.

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