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## **Cretan tholos cemeteries: continuities and discontinuities during the Pre- and Protopalatial periods**

### **ABSTRACT**

Based on three main categories of evidence (architecture, pottery and other finds), close analysis of thirteen Pre- and Protopalatial period tholos cemeteries within south-central Crete provides a useful point of reference from which to consider recent theoretical and interpretive approaches.

Taking into account the similarities and differences in spatial behaviour over broad chronological phases, comparing examples of small (i.e. Miamou) and large (i.e. Platanos), central (i.e. Agia Triada) and remote (i.e. Skaniari Lakkos) cemeteries, one can argue that they represented communities interacting at a small scale, sharing some common mortuary traditions, which possibly converged through time into increasingly common patterns, potentially paralleling the changing scales of regional social and political integration. However, each cemetery appears to follow varying trajectories through three major phases (EM I-EM II, EM III-MM IA and MM IB-MM II).

In particular, the previously suggested homogeneous pattern of the earlier phase does not appear to be so clearly defined when taking into consideration the architectural and material data in detail. Even in smaller sub-regions, there are variations showing that communities are doing things differently. But still, for the Mesara and Asterousia regions, no cemetery followed a distinct, community-specific pattern of development; there are common patterns and comparable sequences of changes among them. The tholos tomb was the core of each cemetery, but additions and extensions differ from site to site throughout their history of use, and some changes do not happen simultaneously in all tholos cemeteries across the region, even if there is more standardization in mortuary tradition in this region than in others in Crete.

The aim of this presentation, therefore, is to outline the continuities and discontinuities in mortuary practices emerging from comparisons among the better documented tholos cemeteries that date from 3000 to 1700 BCE.

**KEYWORDS:** tholos tombs, Prepalatial & Protopalatial periods, south-central Crete, architecture; material culture, traditions, comparisons, social change

Minoan prehistory has provided a rich funerary record across the whole of Crete, though predominantly in central and east Crete, the long-term focus of most archaeological investigations. In the Pre- and Protopalatial periods, their elaboration indicates that cemeteries were important

social arenas, during a period when the island starts to experience new and increasingly rapid social dynamics (Branigan 2010, 25-31; *ibid* 2012, 7-14; Manning 2018; Whitelaw 2012). Landscape naturally divides the island into different regions, such as the mountains, which form the central spine of the island (Watrous 2004, 29). This natural geographical division seems to have played an important role in the division of the island into several territories. Legarra Herrero (2014) summarises these divisions into the following main regions: the south-central area; the north-central and central areas; the Mirabello Bay and the Ierapetra region; east and west Crete. The different mortuary practices that developed in the distinct regions within Crete are not synchronous across the whole island, and in some cases not even within a region itself.

My research study focused on the south-central area of Crete, specifically the central and western Asterousia Mountains, and the southern part of the Mesara Plain, exploring variations within a small-scale area.

The aim of this paper is, therefore, to outline the continuities and discontinuities in mortuary practices through comparisons among the better documented tholos cemeteries in south-central Crete dated from 3000 to 1700 BCE. Thus, my doctoral research involved detailed analysis of thirteen tholos cemeteries within one specific region, in terms of their architectural remains along with the material culture deposited within them (Fig. 1).

The dataset comprises four categories of sites studied, depending on how the data was accessible for analysis: 1) Skaniari Lakkos and Miamou as the principal unpublished cemeteries;

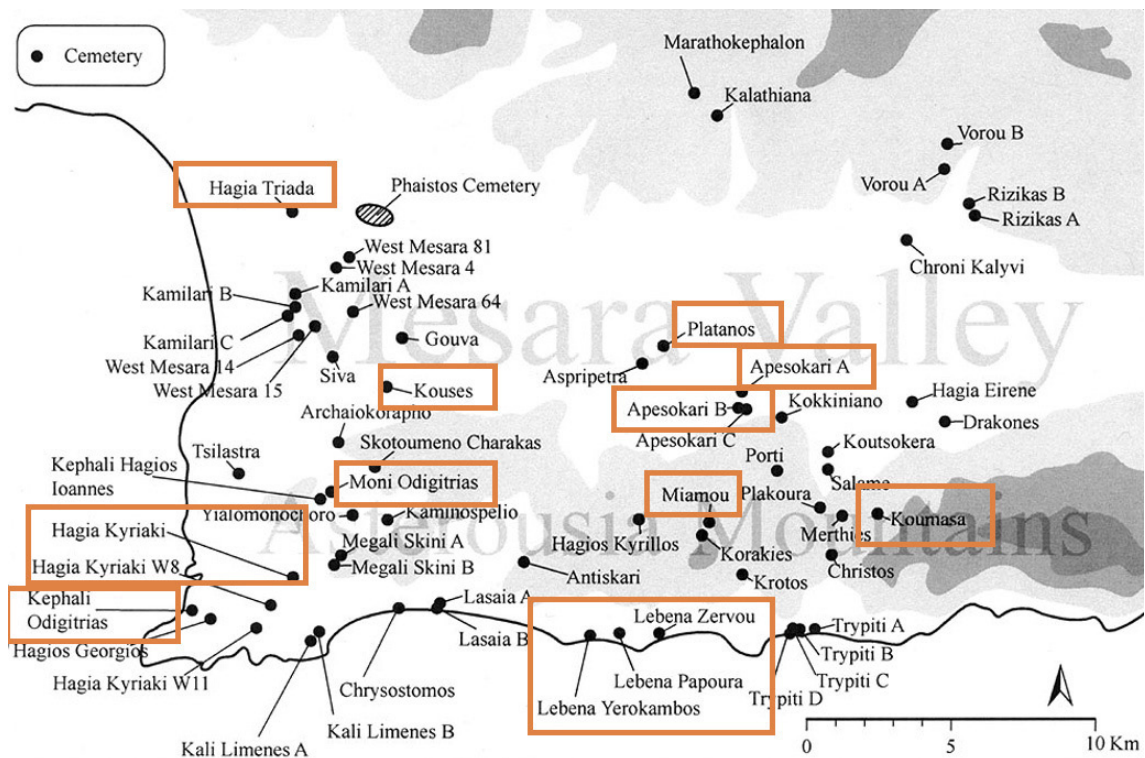


Fig. 1. Spatial distribution of studied tholos cemeteries in south-central Crete (modified after Legarra-Herrero 2014, 8).

Early Minoan I	3000 – 2650 BC	<b>Prepalatial period</b>
Early Minoan IIA	2650 – 2450 BC	
Early Minoan IIB	2450 – 2200 BC	
Early Minoan III	2200 – 2050 BC	
Middle Minoan IA	2050 – 1950 BC	
Middle Minoan IB	1950 – 1900 BC	<b>Protopalatial period</b>
Middle Minoan II	1900 – 1750 BC	

Fig. 2. Chronological table of Pre- and Protopalatial phases (modified after Momigliano 2007, 7).

2) the major cemeteries at Koumasa and Platanos, which have been re-studied, including previously unpublished material from Xanthoudides' excavations (Xanthoudides 1924) (as well as updating with data from the recent Koumasa project carried out by Prof. D. Panagiotopoulos 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b); 3) data from the then ongoing studies of Apesokari A (Flouda 2023) and B tombs (Vavouranakis 2012, 2015, 2016; Vavouranakis & Bourbou 2015), and Kouses were incorporated; and 4) the most recently published sites at Moni Odigitria (Vasilakis & Branigan 2010), Lebena (Alexiou & Warren 2004), Agia Triada (La Rosa 1985, 1992, 2010, 2012, 2013; Todaro 2003) and Agia Kyriaki (Blackman & Branigan 1982) were also reviewed. After examining each cemetery dataset and observing the main patterns, comparisons were made regarding the broad architectural development and depositional behaviour patterns relevant to burial traditions, as emerging through the changes that took place at the cemeteries under study.

These comparisons are tracked through three broad chronological phases: a) EM I-II; b) EM III -MM IA; and c) MM IB-MM II (Fig. 2). For each phase, similarities and differences are identified in terms of architecture and material culture (pottery and other finds). It is worth clarifying that changes at a more granular chronological level can be identified within each of these three major chronological phases, which are adopted to facilitate comparisons. Pragmatically speaking, much ceramic material and most other finds cannot be dated to specific sub-periods, so this is the framework that defines the resolution at which patterns can be recognised. Stylistically, similarities in ceramic styles allow us to group a lot of material into specific combinations of periods, but at the most general level into the preceding three broad phases. Additionally, these phases repeatedly appeared as relevant periods of time in the changes that can be documented at individual sites and seem to represent major transitions across the island. At some sites that were studied in detail, certain material is dated more precisely within these broad divisions.

During the first major phase (EM I-II) one can conclude that architecture does not indicate strong homogeneity (Fig. 3). The tholos tomb may be the core of the cemetery, but things change gradually from EM IIA from site to site within the same region. There is no static tradition. Within both geographical zones in the region – the Mesara Plain and the Asterousia Mountains - there is some more complex architectural activity. More data comes from the western Asterousia (i.e. Skaniari Lakkos) and the central Asterousia (i.e. Miamou and Koumasa), with the use of annexes, additions of delimited open spaces representing a venue for new activities possibly related to extending the treatment of individual corpses in time.

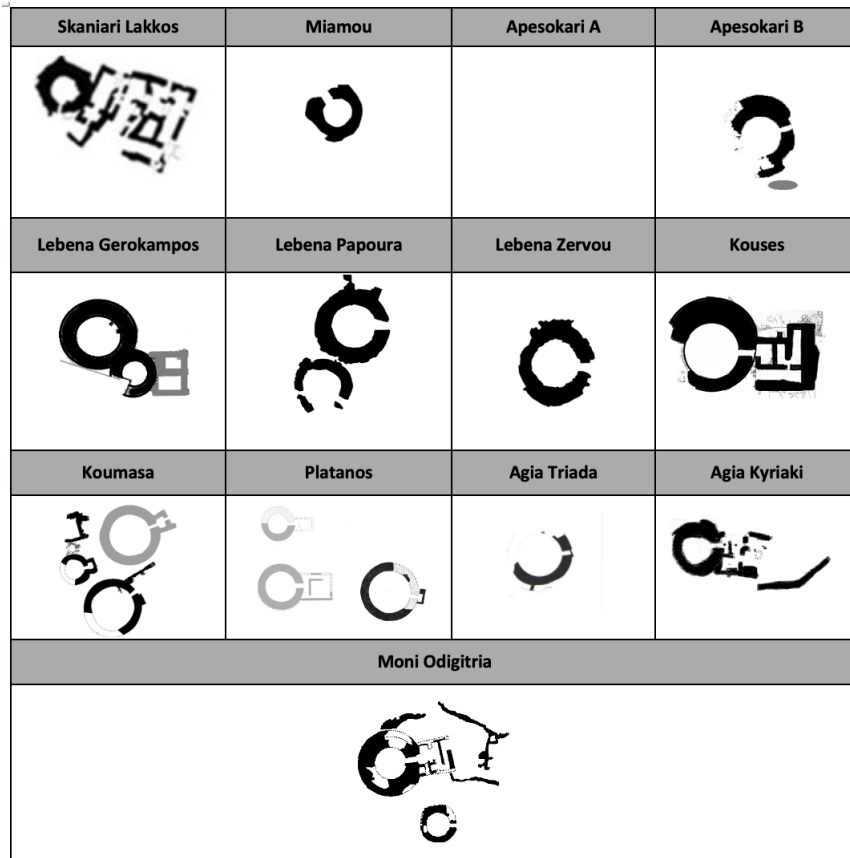


Fig. 3. Architectural plans within studied cemeteries during EM I-II phase.

For the cemeteries studied in detail, there is a similar architectural approach regarding construction elements, such as a trilithon entrance with a preference for facing east, and walls made of large blocks of stones. In terms of architectural planning, small differences within small regions are documented from the late EM I period (Fig. 4). At Agia Kyriaki, for example, some additional rooms were attached to its tholos from the earliest period of its use (EM I). The so-called annex is a newly emergent feature, but one becoming more apparent in the EM II period, and more common in the following phase. Among the studied cemeteries, annexes are seen at Koumasa (in both Tholoi A and B), Lebena Gerokampos (Tholos IIA), Moni Odigitria (Tholos B) and possibly Miamou. The presence of defined external spaces is also noticeable in some of the cemeteries, such as the two forecourts at Skaniari Lakkos, the courtyards at Moni Odigitria, the open paved area at Agia Kyriaki, and possibly the one (designated AB) at Platanos (Fig. 3). This increasing spatial complexity is reinforced by the presence of a second or even a third tholos tomb and other burial buildings within the same cemetery. Examples include Skaniari Lakkos, where two additional rectangular burial buildings are constructed during this phase, one adjoining the tholos and the other located nearby. Lebena Papoura, Lebena Gerokampos and Moni Odigitria see the addition of a second tholos tomb, while Koumasa has two tholos tombs and one rectangular burial building and a possible third tholos tomb. Platanos may also have more than one tholos tomb in use in this phase.

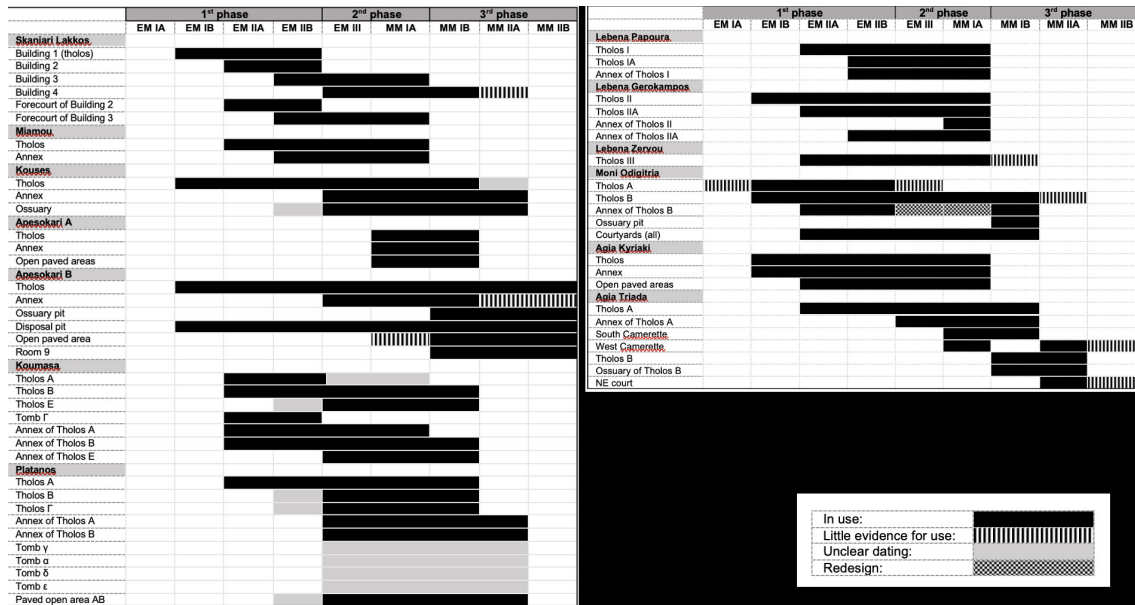


Fig. 4. The architectural development of the studied cemeteries during the three major phases of use.

This architectural development (Fig. 4) could indicate a response to increasing community population or even increasing social separation through time of what were probably kin-based burying groups within the communities in the area. What is also clear is the coexistence of circular and rectangular types of burial structures within a cemetery. This is clearly seen in the unpublished case of Skaniari Lakkos, strengthening the appearance of other rectangular tombs, self-contained and not directly connected with the existing tholoi in other cemeteries (i.e. Koumasa).

The *material culture* (Fig. 5) displays a broadly homogeneous picture across sites, suggesting similarities in funerary rituals and a relatively common spatial structure of activities. There are some variations, nonetheless, possibly pointing towards specific local preferences in individual cemeteries.

EM I – II	Burial	Communal	Cooking	Drinking	Pouring	Serving	Storage	Symbolic	Other	Total
Agia Kyriaki		84		494	325	150	190	2		1245
Lebena Gerokampos		4		99	60	38	268	2	19	490
Moni Odigitria	4	83	159	854	409	556	273	25	43	2406
Skaniari Lakkos	2	1	51	180	80	86	44	4		448
Miamou		1	2	2	4	4	1			14
Koumasa			1	7	38	4	29	17		96
Platanos				1	4	2	4	1		12
Lebena Papoura				10	7	7	39		4	67
Lebena Zervou				2	7	4	2			15
Agia Triada*				25	8		15			48
<b>Sum</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>1674</b>	<b>942</b>	<b>851</b>	<b>865</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>4841</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>34.0</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>18.0</b>	<b>18.0</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>1.5</b>	

Fig. 5. Functional groups of vessels used within studied cemeteries during EM I-II phase.

Pottery mainly came from the interior of the tholoi. Even if deposited outside the tholoi (in disposal pits/ areas), there were few alternative spaces, but in both cases pottery was fragmented in most cemeteries, due to the disturbances driven by the re-use of their spaces and the continuous and extensive looting of these sites both during and after their use. The one exception is Lebena (the least looted examples), while the other cemeteries from this phase produced more sherds than complete vessels. Most ceramic evidence comes from Moni Odigitria, Agia Kyriaki, Lebena Gerokampos and Skaniari Lakkos, so what may be a west Asterousia pattern dominates our detailed data. During this phase, most pots are drinking (34%), pouring (19%) and storage (18%) vessels (Fig. 5).<sup>1</sup> Among storage vessels, the distinction between large jars and pyxides should be noted. There are local preferences for specific types of vessels during this phase. Agia Kyriaki, Moni Odigitria and Skaniari Lakkos show a clear preference for the deposition of drinking vessels, whereas Lebena Gerokampos and Lebena Papoura show a preference for storage vessels, especially pyxides. The drinking vessels from this phase are of large size, suggesting a communal or shared character for activities related to liquid consumption, as indicated by the strong presence of pouring vessels. Additional evidence related to a communal setting for gatherings and some element of collective consumption comes from the oversized vessels (fruit stands, chalices, pedestalled bowls) at some of the cemeteries, such as at Agia Kyriaki and Moni Odigitria.

The large number of pyxides probably indicates a burial practice directly related to the deceased, as these vessels could include offerings to them as mourners' gifts to the dead, or hold possessions of the dead. Therefore, the Lebena cemeteries could imply a tradition that is mostly oriented to grave good deposition rather than general ceremonies or post-funerary practices. The ceramic assemblage from the tholos cemeteries, as established in EM I, mainly changes in quantity, since by EM IIA there is an increase in pottery deposition seen in all cemeteries, e.g. at Moni Odigitria (where the number of vessels dated in EM I doubles in EM II). However, the preference for particular vessel types used remains similar to what was seen in the EM I period, suggesting the continuation of comparable activities and ceremonies accompanying death and burial. One noticeable exception is the distinctive presence of symbolic vessels (such as the miniature vessels that could be associated with some of the zoomorphic and anthropomorphic pouring vessels - rhyta), particularly at Moni Odigitria and Koumasa (Fig. 5) – space mainly recovered from the exterior spaces of the cemetery, implying their association with funerary rituals. By the end of this phase, the cup, which continues to be abundantly represented, changes slightly in form to smaller handleless cups (e.g. at Moni Odigitria, Skaniari Lakkos, Miamou), pointing to a clear shift in vessel size and usage, as will be seen more clearly in the following phase.

Only some categories of finds other than pottery (Fig. 6) can be broadly placed in the main chronological phases distinguished, when their stratigraphical context is known, allowing meaningful inter-site comparisons; otherwise, most cannot be dated with certainty due to their long popularity and slow typological change. The impact of looting has been more severe for such finds (particularly seals, figurines, jewellery, metals) and varies considerably between sites.

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<sup>1</sup> At this point, a distinction should be drawn between burial vessels, which include pithoi and larnakes, and storage vessels, which include pyxides and other large vessels (e.g. jars).

EM I – II	Daggers (triangular type)	Figurines (Cycladic type, or other schematic type)	Seals	Stone vases
Agia Kyriaki	0	8	0	4*
Lebena Gerokampos	2	4	23	7*
Lebena Papoura	1	2	14	4*
Lebena Zervou	0	1	4	1*
Moni Odigitria	1	1	16	20*
Skaniari Lakkos	0	0	1	1
Miamou	0	0	0	2*
Koumasa	5	21*	11	155*
Platanos	14	9*	17	28*
Agia Triada	40	17*	38	40*
Apesokari B	N/A	N/A	2*	N/A
Kouses	N/A	1	1	4*

Fig. 6. Daggers, figurines, seals and stone vases belonging to the EM I-II phase.

The most diagnostic items, when found, are daggers, seals, stone vases and figurines, as well as objects with off-island connections which mainly came from tholoi, while more mixed types of objects were recovered from their associated buildings and exteriors.

In the second phase (EM III-MM IA), both *architecture and material culture* point towards significant but gradual changes. These probably reflect the new demands of changes and increasing variations in the social organisation of both the Mesara Valley communities and those in the Asterousia Mountains.

In terms of *architectural developments* (Fig. 7), new tholoi or rectangular tombs are now built in the cemeteries already used in the previous phase (such as Tholos E at Koumasa, Tholoi B and Γ at Platanos and the rectangular tombs γ, α, δ and ε). Similarly, another rectangular building (4) is constructed at Skaniari Lakkos, and Agia Triada has two more complexes added (South and West Camerettes). Among the studied cemeteries, most of the tholoi built in the preceding phase continue to be in use in this phase too. The exceptions are Skaniari Lakkos tholos (1) and rectangular burial building (2), possibly Tholos A at Moni Odigitria and Tomb Γ at Koumasa.

Annexes are already apparent at a few cemeteries in the previous phase, but become more widespread in this phase (Fig. 4). Eight cemeteries seem to have at least an annex room in front of their tholos tomb (Agia Kyriaki, Koumasa B and E, Lebena Papoura I, Lebena Gerokampos IIA, Moni Odigitria B). Some reconstructions are seen during this phase, along with the addition of new rooms. Examples come from the redesigned annex of Tholos B at Moni Odigitria and at Agia Kyriaki, where extra rooms are added. New annexes are seen at Apesokari A and B, at Kouses, at Koumasa for Tholos B, at Platanos for Tholoi A and B, at Lebena Gerokampos II and at Agia Triada for Tholos A.

The use of ossuaries first becomes evident in this phase. In some cases, specific built structures were used for the purpose (i.e. Room Γ at Kouses, the ossuary in Building 3 at Skaniari Lakkos). Some of these structures have a number of finds beyond human remains, but the dominance

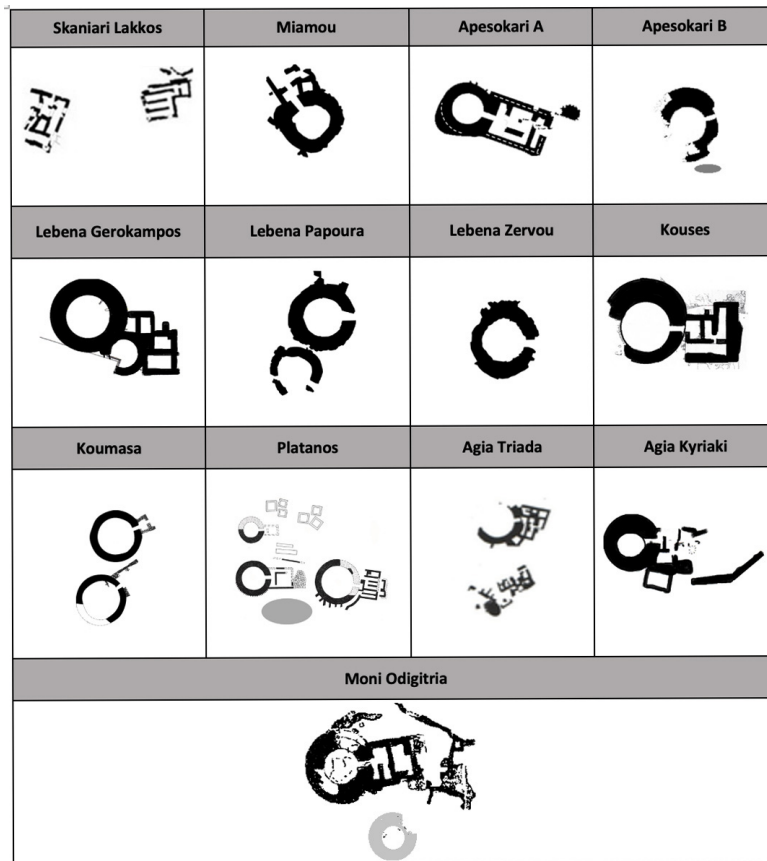


Fig. 7. Architectural plans within studied cemeteries during the EM III – MM IA phase.

of bones is significant. For example, only eighteen vessels came from the space known as the ossuary in Building 3 at Skaniari Lakkos. So, for the samples we studied, the differences between ossuaries and specific rooms in annexes can be based on the balance between human remains and material culture depositions.

Overall, cemeteries present more complex layouts during this phase, and new structures suggest intensive building investment and new, more differentiated patterns of mortuary behaviour (i.e. actions that grouped, re-arranged and re-deposited human remains and objects in discrete locales). The tholos tomb seems to continue to serve as the core of the cemetery, with new behaviours developed and manifested through the other added structures in front and around it.

*Material culture* deposition is also followed by changes; a less varied set of ceramic vessels are in use, with consumption vessels of smaller size (i.e. goblets, teapots) (Fig. 8). The small, conical cup is the dominant shape, suggesting a more individualised rather than communal practice. The appearance of cooking vessels and ashy deposits in some yard areas may indicate group activities at the cemetery, rather than just carrying food for the dead and depositing it in the tomb with a few offerings (e.g. Skaniari Lakkos with forecourts and Moni Odigitria with the burnt deposit and the presence of cooking pots in the outer courtyard). Drinking vessels now constitute 52% of the total ceramic assemblage (Fig. 8), expanding from 34% in the preceding phase. Pouring, cooking

EM III – MM IA	Burial	Communal	Cooking	Drinking	Pouring	Serving	Storage	Symbolic	Other	Total
Agia Kyriaki	24		12	564	47	51	14			712
Lebena Gerokampos				104	48	91	8	1	5	257
Moni Odigitria	13	17	89	806	175	424	84	11		1619
Skaniari Lakkos	2	1	24	111	86	72	32	4	3	335
Miamou			2	23	8	1	1			35
Koumasa				8	40	8	1	10		67
Platanos				7	12	5	5	20	1	50
Lebena Papoura				12	7	9	2		7	37
Lebena Zervou				2	5	9	1			17
Agia Triada*				31	15	2	5			53
<b>Sum</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>1678</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>672</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>3182</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>52.0</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>21.0</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	

Fig. 8. Functional groups of vessels used within studied cemeteries during the EM III – MM IA phase.

and serving vessels make up similar percentages during both phases. However, some variations in vessel preference are seen among the studied cemeteries. For example, Agia Kyriaki, Lebena Gerokampos, Lebena Papoura, Miamou and Moni Odigitria produced larger numbers of drinking vessels than pouring vessels, whereas the opposite applied at Skaniari Lakkos, Lebena Zervou, Koumasa, Platanos and Agia Triada. This may imply a differential use of the jug, which means that in some cemeteries it may have been used predominantly as ritual equipment for offerings to the dead, rather than for general ceremonies involving practices of consumption among the living. What is also evident now is the decrease in storage vessels, in particular the deposition of pyxides. The presence of burial containers (pithoi, larnakes) is also apparent by now, suggesting the slow adoption of a new way of burial. This new material indicates a change in what was considered appropriate to deposit with the dead and how the body itself was treated. There is a reduction in the deposition of storage vessels (pyxides in particular) with the dead, along with recognition of the need to remove material from the tombs for re-deposition in other spaces. This overall change may indicate a shift in the emphasis in mortuary behavior, from depositions with the body to the commemoration of activities among the living in the context of mortuary rituals.

Additionally, a shift in the import of foreign goods – mainly from the east Mediterranean – or local imitation of them also appears in this phase (Fig. 9). The evidence of seals and stone vases indicates a developing taste for more elaborate objects, involving increased technological expertise, which could imply a sort of differentiation in production and consumption, and perhaps more apparent inter- and intra- community competition between burying groups.

The formalisation of exterior spaces within cemeteries and the need for compartmentalisation apart from the original tholoi could suggest the inclusion of more individuals in more complicated funerary rituals, as well as increasing social sub-divisions within the community. Last of all, a more complicated mortuary ritual can be detected, involving cleaning, secondary treatment of the dead, the use of ossuaries and careful selection and re-organization of bones and the introduction of burial containers.

<b>EM III – MM IA</b>	<b>Daggers (long type)</b>	<b>Figurines</b>	<b>Seals</b>	<b>Stone vases</b>
Agia Kyriaki	0	-	0	5
Lebena Gerokampos	4	-	1	11
Lebena Papoura	1	-	4	4
Lebena Zervou	0	-	0	2
Moni Odigitria	7	4	6	38
Skaniari Lakkos	0	3	3	10
Miamou	0	5	1	6
Koumasa	31	*	7	11
Platanos	58	*	30	312**
Agia Triada	21	*	22	35**
Apesokari B	N/A	N/A	2*	N/A
Apesokari A				
Kouses	N/A	1	2	9

Fig. 9. Daggers, figurines, seals and stone vases belonging to the EM III – MM IA phase.

Finally, in the third phase (MM IB-MM II), the gradual abandonment or only sporadic use of some of the spaces within the cemeteries is quite clear, particularly by the MM II period (Fig. 10). A gradual geographical shift is also visible, since the cemeteries in the mountains started to decline first, as occupation also declined in these agriculturally marginal environments. In contrast, the cemeteries in the Mesara Valley seem to continue a little later and to receive some further changes in structure and depositional behaviour, until they too cease to be used.

New structural additions are seen at Agia Triada, Moni Odigitria and Apesokari B. Either the plans of the existing annexes are altered, or new constructions are added (i.e. extra rectangular rooms, pits used as ossuaries or new paved courtyards), even extending to a new tholos tomb (Tholos B at Agia Triada). Moni Odigitria and Apesokari B added ossuary pits, while some redesigning and re-use of the already existing structures are seen, mainly in Agia Triada and perhaps in Platanos. New annexes and other rooms are added at Agia Triada and Apesokari B. Finally, new paved open spaces are documented at Agia Triada and Apesokari A and B, possibly the latter two during the previous phase. As for the other studied cemeteries, Lebena Papoura, Lebena Gerokampos, Agia Kyriaki and possibly Lebena Zervou and Miamou are completely out of use during this phase.

The mortuary setting thus displays similarities with the previous phases (Fig. 4). There are no new types of architectural elements established during this phase, but there is a new type of burial, like the pithos burials outside with few offerings. This probably reflects the declining use of traditional cemeteries, though without any independent measure of the number of burials in each phase it is not possible to determine whether this also represents a decline in the amount of material deposited to accompany individual burials. The addition of another (if smaller) tholos tomb at Agia Triada deviates from this general pattern, but the overall picture of cemeteries as community foci stops.

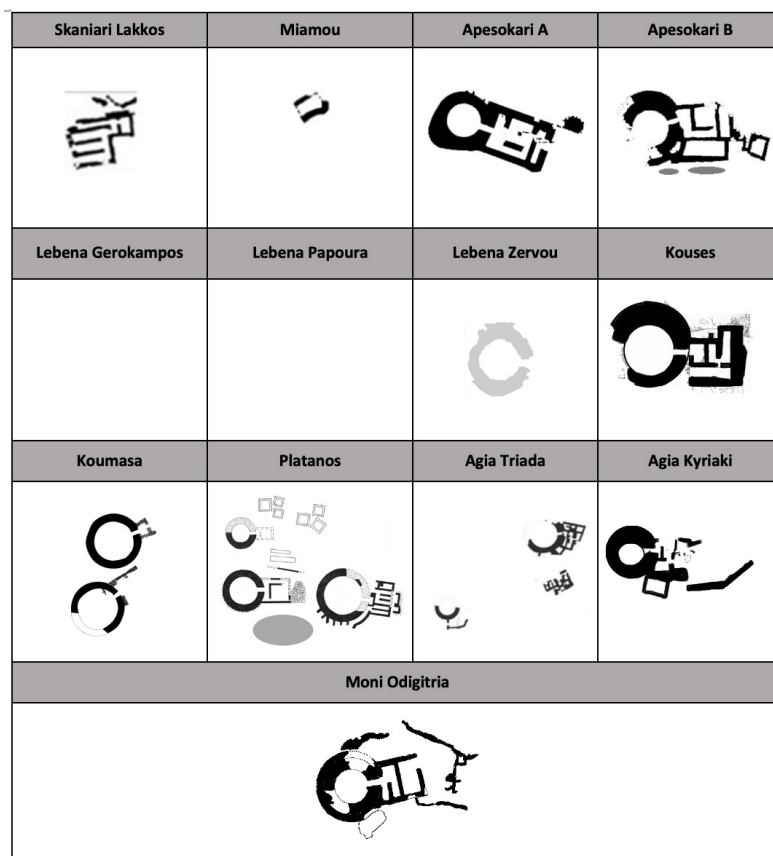


Fig. 10. Architectural plans with studied cemeteries during the MM IB-II phase.

There are slight variations in the objects found, since Platanos did not produce a large ceramic sample compared to Agia Triada and Moni Odigitria – though the ceramics in the latter mainly date to MM IB. However, the number of ceramic vessels found thus far is very low compared to the previous phase, with conical cups and jugs remaining the dominant shapes (Fig. 11). Most of

MM IB – II	Burial	Communal	Cooking	Drinking	Pouring	Serving	Storage	Symbolic	Other	Total
Agia Kyriaki										
Lebena Gerokampos										
Moni Odigitria	2		25	128	23	44	10			232
Skaniari Lakkos	5		1	23	67	13	2		1	112
Miamou				3	1					4
Koumasa						1				1
Platanos				4		1				5
Lebena Papoura										
Lebena Zervou					3					3
Agia Triada (Tholos A)	2			35	24					61
Agia Triada* (South & West Camerette)				108	91	26			91	316
<b>Sum</b>	<b>9</b>		<b>26</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>12</b>		<b>92</b>	<b>734</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>1.0</b>		<b>4.0</b>	<b>41.0</b>	<b>28.0</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>		<b>13.0</b>	

Fig. 11.: Functional groups of vessels used within studied cemeteries during the MM IB-II phase.

<b>MM IB – II</b>	<b>Seals</b>	<b>Stone vases</b>
Agia Kyriaki		
Lebena Gerokampos	6/ 2	
Lebena Papoura	8	
Lebena Zervou	1	
Moni Odigitria	23/ 7	
Skaniari Lakkos		
Miamou	1/ 3	
Koumasa	8/ 11	
Platanos	31/ 24	36*
Agia Triada	15/ 24	25*
Apesokari B	?	
Apesokari A		
Kouses	6/ 4	

Fig. 12. Daggers, figurines, seals and stone vases belonging to the MM IB-II phase.

these vessels were deposited in the exterior spaces of the tomb complexes, still suggesting ritual emphasis based on drink consumption or liquid-based practices around the tombs.

As for the non-ceramic material, ivory was replaced by local materials again, such as soft stone, bone and a new soft, white, glazed and fired paste, which is now in common use (already seen at the end of MM IA period). There is also a shift to greater simplicity in stylistic patterns, and the abandonment of large seal sizes. The adoption of the Egyptian scarab form and the introduction of a foreign technique imitating faience (white paste) indicate the adoption of new traditions from outside the island. This phase also sees a decline in stone vase deposition in funerary contexts (Fig. 12). The main difference distinguishing stone vases in this phase from those in previous phases is their larger size and forms, which are now closer to those found in domestic contexts. The earlier stone vases were mainly small and very shallow with thick walls, pointing towards less practical usage, as they seem intended for use exclusively in funerary contexts.

To conclude, taking into account the similarities and differences in behaviour, space and broad chronological phases, comparing between examples of small (i.e. Miamou) and large (i.e. Platanos), central (i.e. Agia Triada) and remote (i.e. Skaniari Lakkos) cemeteries, one can argue that they represented communities interacting on a small scale, sharing some common mortuary traditions which possibly converged through time into increasingly common patterns, potentially paralleling the changing scales of social and political integration. However, each cemetery appears to follow varying trajectories through these three major phases.

In particular, the previously suggested homogeneous pattern of the earlier phase is not so clearly defined, as detailed consideration of more architectural and material data have now revealed. Even in smaller sub-regions, there are variations showing that communities follow

some local traditions. But still, for the Mesara and Asterousia regions, no cemetery followed a distinct, community-specific pattern of development; there are common patterns and comparable sequences of changes among them. The tholos tomb was the core of each cemetery, but additions and elaborations differ from site to site throughout their history of use, and some changes do not happen simultaneously in all tholos cemeteries across the region, even if there is more standardization in mortuary tradition in this region than in others in Crete.

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