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# BACK TO THE BEGINNING

REASSESSING SOCIAL AND POLITICAL COMPLEXITY ON  
CRETE DURING THE EARLY AND MIDDLE BRONZE AGE

*Edited by*

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## The Construction, Deconstruction and Non-construction of Hierarchies in the Funerary Record of Prepalatial Crete

*Borja Legarra Herrero*

The Prepalatial period on Crete constitutes one of those key phases in European history during which a set of changes occurred that would have significant implications for the long-term cultural development of the sub-continent. Given the significance of these transformations, it is difficult to find satisfaction in current explanations, particularly as models tend to be structured around lines of questioning that have become stale and have led us into theoretical and methodological dead-ends (*e.g.*, evolution versus revolution and Marxism versus Processualism). This paper aims to reconsider some of the theoretical principles behind current interpretations of the record and to propose a fresh approach to the question of explanation. This is not merely a theoretical exercise; to reinvigorate the study of change for Early Bronze Age Crete, we need to go deep to the roots of our understanding of the archaeological record. Some of the most obvious limitations in our studies do not reside with stagnant theoretical approaches, but with the perpetuation of traditional assumptions and interpretations of the data. Our perception of the evidence has been formulated primarily through the excavation and publication of archaeological contexts many decades ago, mostly before the Second World War. Relatively little work has been done since to update such basic data and many of the newer interpretations of Prepalatial Crete are flawed, because they continue to be based on outdated or vague chronologies for individual sites and on over-simplistic readings of the archaeological data that were established before theoretical debates took a central stage in the archaeological discipline.

This is particularly true of the funerary data, which are a very particular corpus of evidence, requiring special consideration in its interpretation. In the case of Crete, we rely still on straightforward readings of the record, an interpretational

stance that has been consistently criticised over the last 20 years (Hodder 1987; Morris 1991; Brown 1995; McHugh 1999; Parker-Pearson 1999; Charles 2005). The interpretation of funerary data depends on social, ideological and economic factors, particular to each culture, if not particular to each community. Interpretations that have been developed in other geographical spheres may not be applicable to Prepalatial Crete. Therefore, we need to revise much of the interpretation of data from cemeteries by employing a more explicitly Cretan-oriented contextual approach. Such an approach needs to incorporate the ideological and emotional implications of funerary contexts and to attempt to recognise the particular way in which such principles shaped the archaeological record of Cretan cemeteries. Such a revision of the interpretation of funerary data is particularly relevant in the case of Crete, as our understanding of the Early Bronze Age and the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age on the island is overwhelmingly based on the funerary record.

But before we start to look at the nature of the funerary data on Crete, I will outline some basic theoretical notions upon which this analysis is based. Far from creating an elaborate new theoretical framework, I intend to clarify how I conceptualise some familiar but rarely properly defined terms. Surprisingly, such a simple task has the effect of facilitating a fresh start by allowing us to discard many of the most recurrent theoretical assumptions in the study of Prepalatial Crete.

### *Some theoretical principles*

There is no such thing as a simple human society. The term complex can be used to describe any human society regardless of their type of organisation, including so-called egalitarian cultures. This connects with ideas put forward by Crumley about heterarchy, which have been used of late in Cretan studies (Crumley 1995; 2001; 2003; Schoep 2002; Schoep and Knappett 2004). Crumley used the term 'heterarchy' to describe the complex network of relationships within a community that are not hierarchical. These can also be called horizontal relationships, as they are interactions between people or groups of people that share similar social positions. These could be relationships between two brothers, an economic transaction or a wedding celebration between two families. Such relationships have existed in every human society, independently of its particular socio-economic structure, from the Palaeolithic to the present (Crumley 2003). 'Heterarchical' is not opposed to 'hierarchical' and the term does not refer to a

stage in social evolution, but to the large corpus of horizontal relationships that articulate many parts of any human society. Therefore, heterarchical relationships always existed on Crete and these were always complex and multilevel, with a wide range of meanings attached to them (Schoep 2002; *contra* Schoep and Knappett 2004).

Horizontal relationships are not the same as ‘equality’. No human communication is perfectly equal. Even within horizontal relationships there is room for inequality (Fowles 2002). Traits like age and sex, as well as personal qualities, such as oratorical skill, create unequal relations. Moreover, we need to take into consideration that the pursuit of benefits (economical, ideological, prestige etc) constitutes a significant part of most social interactions and that there is always a power struggle between the two sides of such a dialogue. So why call them heterarchical or horizontal? Because they operate within an ideological, political and social framework that advocates equality even when this is not necessarily achieved (Osborne 2007).

Horizontal networks have nothing to do with simplicity and can yield on their own a very complex way of organisation, as has been proven by the Cretan mortuary record. The Ayia Kyriaki Tholos (Figures 11.1–2) was constructed during the EM I period (Tomkins 2007b). It is a small tomb placed in an agriculturally poor, marginal landscape during a period for which all evidence suggests an absence of hierarchical societies in the region (Whitelaw 1983). However, some of the rocks used for its construction exceed 500 kg and it would have taken at least 10 to 15 adults to move them, particularly since they not only needed to be lifted, but also manoeuvred in a particular fashion before reaching their final position in the structure of the tomb. To assemble such a labour force (possibly only adult males), a significant number of groups had to be contacted and co-ordinated, indicating that social networks in the period were long-reaching and sufficiently complex to tap into significantly large pools of labour. In practical terms, a team of 10 people would have required some level of organisation, coordination and supervision in order to construct the tomb and this may have required that the prevailing horizontal relationships had to accommodate a temporal hierarchical organisation for the construction of the tomb. There is nothing simple in the construction of the tomb and yet it was built mainly via horizontal relationships that facilitated the mobilisation of the necessary workforce and allowed the organisation of this workforce during construction.

This story has two corollaries and comes with a warning. First the warning: in the funerary domain effort, resource gathering and workforce mobilisation

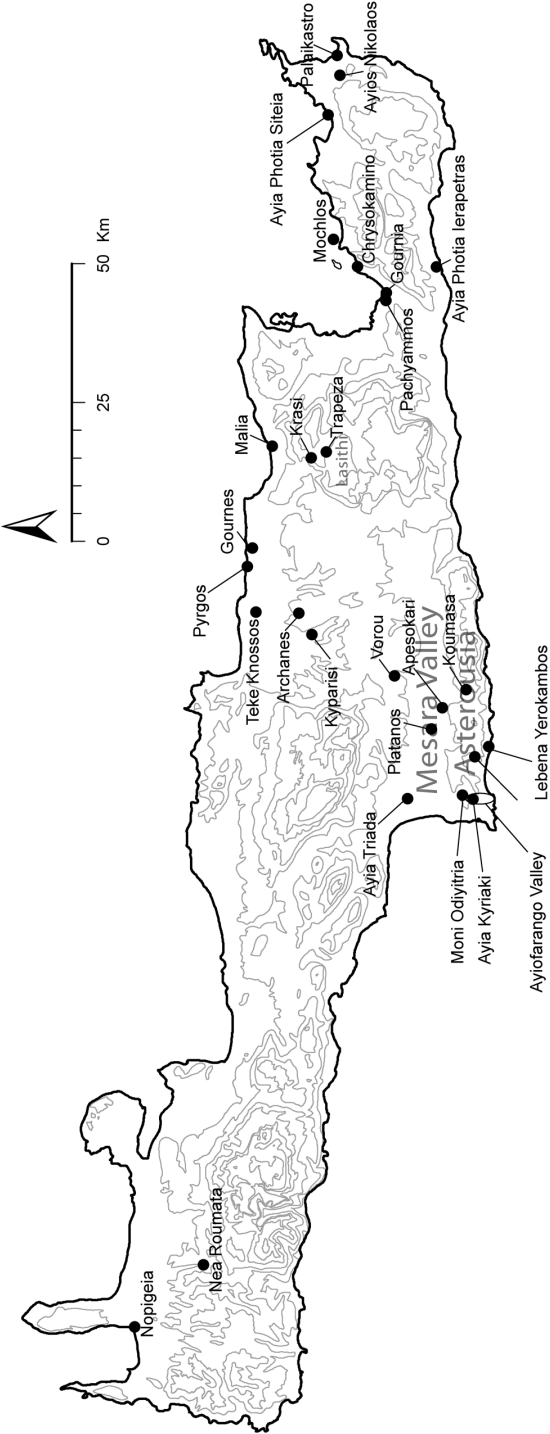
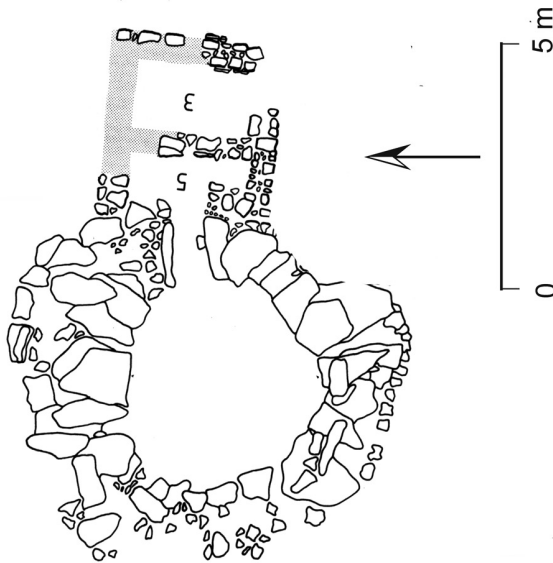


Figure 11.1. Map of Crete with sites mentioned in the text.





b) Detail of tholos wall



a) Agia Kyriaki A in the EM I period, after Blackman & Branigan 1982 with variations

Figure 11.2. *Agia Kyriaki A.*

need not automatically imply the existence of some sort of hierarchy based on prestige or wealth. Many other interpretations of such evidence are possible. This may be clear in the case of Ayia Kyriaki, but we need to apply the same cautious investigation of the data to other phenomena within tombs, such as the deposition of high value materials. The presence of imported objects and examples of highly skilled craftsmanship in tombs cannot be related to the wealth of the interred, neither to their privileged social position. As it has been pointed out via the use of several ethnographic examples by Pader (1982: 57–59) and Parker-Pearson (1982), in many occasions there is no relationship between the quality and number of items deposited with a corpse and the wealth and social position of the deceased in life. As Pader has suggested (1982: 61), the assumption that valuable items must be related to hierarchical dynamics obstructs our ability to consider the possible use of these objects to indicate social positions in a horizontal structure, such as heads of family or gender roles. A link between valuable items in tombs with aspects of vertical differentiation must be proved through a detailed analysis of the deposition of grave goods within the context of the particular funerary customs of a society. It is only then that can we use such evidence to support the idea of a hierarchical social structure.

The first corollary is that we should not be surprised by the fact that more detailed archaeological studies are beginning to pick up these kinds of unequal relationships within heterarchical social structures (Tomkins 2007a). Such dynamics represent neither the first hierarchical relationships on Crete nor the starting point of a long cumulative trajectory that led subsequently to the appearance of the state. They are natural movements within a human society. This brings us to the second corollary: while such inequalities should not be mistaken for hierarchical structures, equally they should not be set aside as being insignificant. There is a wide variety of non-hierarchical societies and it is, therefore, necessary to look more closely at the particular types of social organisation operating on Crete. The heterarchical structure of two Cretan communities may have been very different and may have represented very different ways of living. Finally, we must not forget that horizontally organised structures are as prone to change as those organised vertically and the investigation of change in horizontal structures must form an integral part of any investigation of the history of Cretan populations.

Hierarchical societies are defined here as those in which vertical relationships are set up, maintained and sanctioned, in other words institutionalised, and are considered to represent a qualitative leap for Cretan communities. Vertical relationships are those between two individuals, who are theoretically similar in

terms of age and sex and social roles, but who occupy different social positions, one with more power than the other. As in horizontal relationships, this refers not to the actual social practice, but to the institutionalisation of the inequality of this relationship within the social, economic and ideological structure of the society. Societies in which heterarchical structures are interlaced with clearly defined vertical relationships that are not yet institutionalised are termed here 'ranked societies'. Such a term covers a wide range of societies with very different types of social structure (see Wason 1994: 44–56) and, as it happens with heterarchical societies, its particular meaning has to be defined for each society studied individually. Fully developed hierarchical societies are those where a certain social group within a community has achieved a privileged social status that was institutionalised and passed on exclusively to members of the same group (*i.e.*, clearly stratified societies). In such societies heterarchical relationships still determine many important aspects of the social functioning of the group together with the new vertical social dynamics.

The investigation of a society in terms of horizontal and vertical relationships cannot be pursued separately. When the two types of relationship exist in a given society, they do not exist in isolation but are part of a whole (Crumley 1995). This means that if there were important changes in the way a society organises its horizontal relationships, like kinship systems or trade mechanisms, vertical relationships, if they exist, would be also affected and vice versa. In many ways vertical relationships complement horizontal ones and both are tightly integrated. In this sense, vertical differentiation has to be sanctioned within the larger context of horizontal relationships. A great example of this is provided by the work by Wiessner (2002) in Papua New Guinea, where she shows how entrepreneurs can only bloom when their activities are sanctioned by the wider group. Her work also shows that new strategies set up by entrepreneurs are far from permanent and can be easily rejected by a group at a later stage. This brings us to a key question about hierarchical societies: Why do some vertical differences become permanent and develop further when others do not?

### *The funerary data*

Before examining the funerary data in more detail, I would like to provide a brief overview of its nature and quality. Apart from a few notable cases, the quality of the excavation and publication of most cemeteries is poor. Most excavations took place early in the twentieth century or were the result of

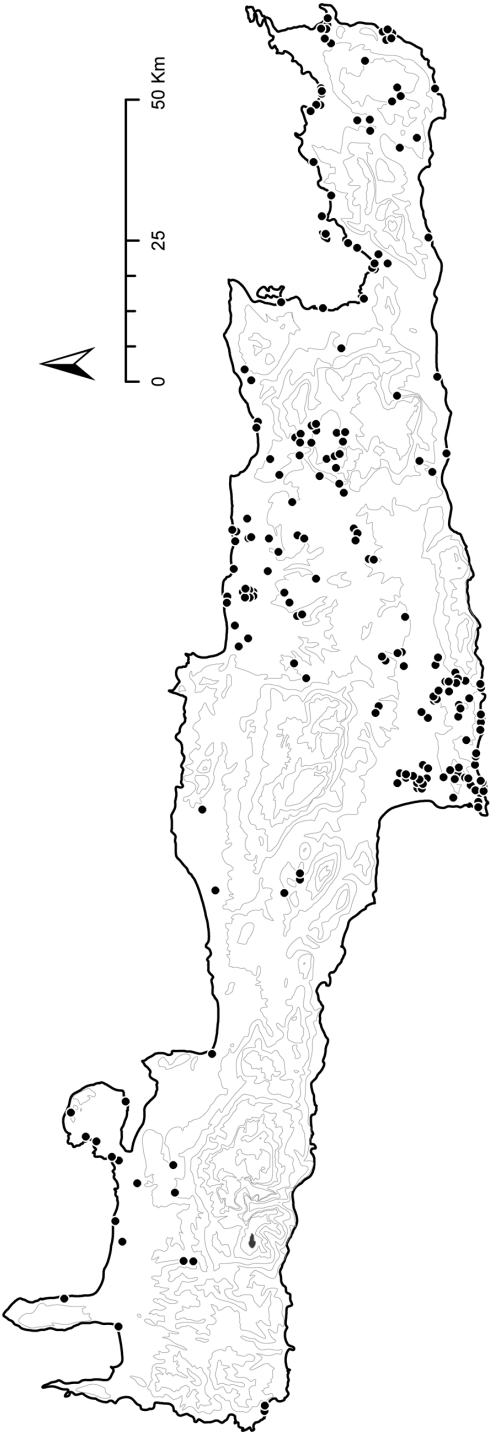


Figure 11.3. Pre- and Protopalatial burial sites in Crete.

emergency interventions by the Greek Archaeological Service. However, we seem to forget that such activity has led to a fairly comprehensive sample of central and east Crete and that we now know of more than 200 cemeteries and more than 400 funerary contexts dating to the Early and Middle Minoan periods (Figure 11.3). While data from most contexts are sparse, the sheer quantity of cemeteries known allows us to gain a better understanding of the record, as long as the material is approached with the right methodology. For example, we can focus on the better preserved cemeteries and use them as core sites against which other cemeteries of the same period can be compared.

A second point worth stressing is that, thanks to this comprehensive sample, we are in a position to identify new patterns and recognise the diversity of the record. With only limited knowledge of each cemetery, we have tended to group them in large interpretative categories, in which indicators of local and regional variation and detailed histories of each cemetery often get lost. It is essential that we recover information on the short-term phases of use, as well as local and regional traits in the mortuary customs of each cemetery. Such a task has a direct impact on how we address some very basic, but key questions regarding patterns in the use of cemeteries, such as the identification of out-of-the-ordinary cemeteries and the reasons behind their peculiarity. A more in depth investigation of the funerary record leads to a more solid structure for our studies. This is why, in the analysis presented below, the data have been divided into three temporal blocks: EM I–IIA, EM IIB–III and EM III–MM IA.

### *The EM I–IIA period*

There are some significant innovations in the funerary record of EM I with the appearance of new types of tombs. Tholos cemeteries appeared around the Asterousia Mountains in south-central Crete (Figure 11.4), whereas Cycladic style cemeteries were established on the north coast such as Ayia Photia near Siteia (Davaras and Betancourt 2004). I have already highlighted elsewhere the differences between the mortuary behaviour of EM I and IIA Crete (Legarra Herrero 2009). Here, I will explore briefly the socio-economic aspects of the EM I–IIA cemeteries that are of particular significance for the understanding of social organisation on Crete during this period.

Rock-shelters and caves are types of tombs found throughout Crete during this period as well as the preceding Neolithic period (Figure 11.4). Nobody has paid much attention to this type of interment (but see Tomkins in press) and it has

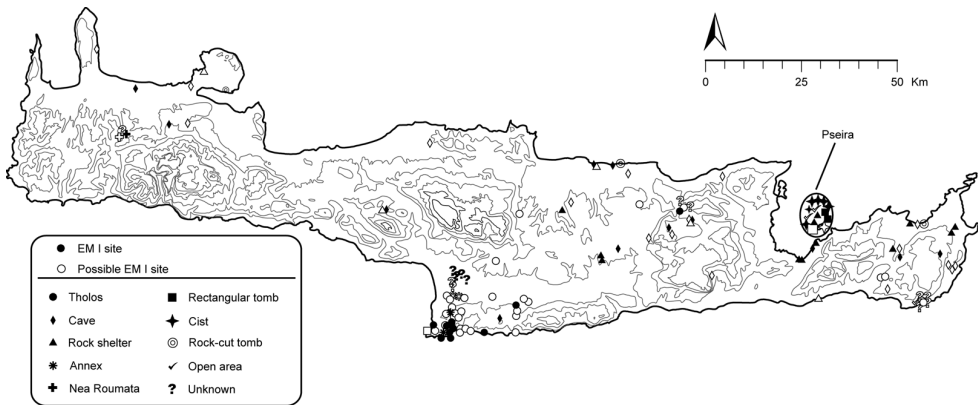


Figure 11.4. EM I funerary contexts.

been implied that it was used for the mere disposal of dead bodies (Faure 1964). But this is far from true. Rock shelters were not used randomly, but in groups of at least three or four. This is clear in the cases of Gournia Sphoungaras (Hall 1911; 1912), Ayios Nikolaos near Palaikastro (Tod 1903) and Ayia Photia near Ierapetra (Boyd 1904; 1905), just to name a few. If we assume that clusters of built tombs were used by different groups and do not represent sequential use, the same should apply for groups of rock shelters. Moreover, the fact that off-island material was being deposited in these tombs as early as EM I suggests that they contained significant grave goods. The earliest silver object known on Crete is a silver bead found in one of the Ayios Nikolaos rock-shelters near Palaikastro (Tod 1903) and EM I Cycladic inspired ceramics have been found in a burial cave in Kyparisi (Alexiou 1951). Rock-shelter tombs are not the product of a careless deposition of the dead nor are they simply quick solutions practised by itinerant communities, but instead represent well thought out choices by the communities concerned and may reflect a certain social structure based on small social groups with a particular set of mortuary customs that included the deposition of off-island materials.

In the region of the Asterousia Mountains, the tholos is the standard type of grave in EM I. Cemeteries consisted of only one tholos tomb, comprising a circular chamber, no greater than 5 metres in diameter and with one or two anterooms framing its entrance (Figure 11.2). Within the broader picture of funerary customs on Crete, EM I tholoi in this region are remarkably homogeneous in terms of plan, size and depositional pattern within the tomb, which comprises large number of ceramic vessels. Much interest and discussion has centred on the tholos tombs in the Asterousia region, particularly in the

Ayiofarango Valley. The traditional model, (Bintliff 1977: 639–40; Blackman and Branigan 1977; Branigan 1984; Murphy 1998), where the tholos is identified as a territorial marker for a population living in a settlement nearby, has been reassessed on account of a recent detailed study, which has ascertained that there is no evidence for significant EM I–IIA settlements in the Asterousia mountains (Whitelaw 2000: 150–51); and this seems to be corroborated by the results of the new Moni Odiyitria survey (Sbonias this volume). A new model has emerged (Whitelaw 2000; Relaki 2004), suggesting that the agriculturally poor land of the Asterousia Mountains was exploited by small hamlets scattered across the landscape, each of them probably housing no more than one or two nuclear families or their equivalent. These hamlets would have been quite vulnerable and could not have survived for more than a few generations, at which point a new hamlet would have been founded nearby. The hamlets would have been far from self-sufficient and would have needed to be part of wider social networks, such as kinship groups, to survive. The tholos may have formed a material way of actively maintaining and developing relationships between the small human groups living in the different hamlets (Relaki 2004; Sbonias this volume)

This model presents a very particular form of social organisation, based on a regionally articulated system with a set of norms shared by a diffused population, in which the tholos cemeteries can be included. However, we should bear in mind that this model only fits well in the small and relatively remote case of the Asterousia Mountains. It does not suit the new tholos cemeteries that start to appear in EM IIA to the north on the Mesara plain and at other more distant locations (*e.g.*, Archanes). While the tomb type may have been similar, the context was quite different: both Archanes (Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997) and Koumasa in the Mesara Plain (Xanthoudides 1924: 4–50) were communities with access to an agriculturally fertile landscape. These new cemeteries reflect intra-community relationships and strategies of exploitation of the landscape that were very different to those embodied by the Asterousia tholoi. Furthermore, many of the new EM IIA cemeteries had two tholos tombs built together, which contrast with the EM I–IIA single-tholos cemeteries in the Asterousia Mountains and suggest a very different set of connections between cemetery, settlement patterns and social networks.

During EM I, north-central Crete displayed quite a different type of mortuary behaviour, which was far more heterogeneous than in any other region, as different types of tombs (caves, rock-cut tombs) and different types of assemblages have been found in the cemeteries of the area (Legarra Herrero 2009). Such heterogeneity in deposition is particularly noticeable with regard to

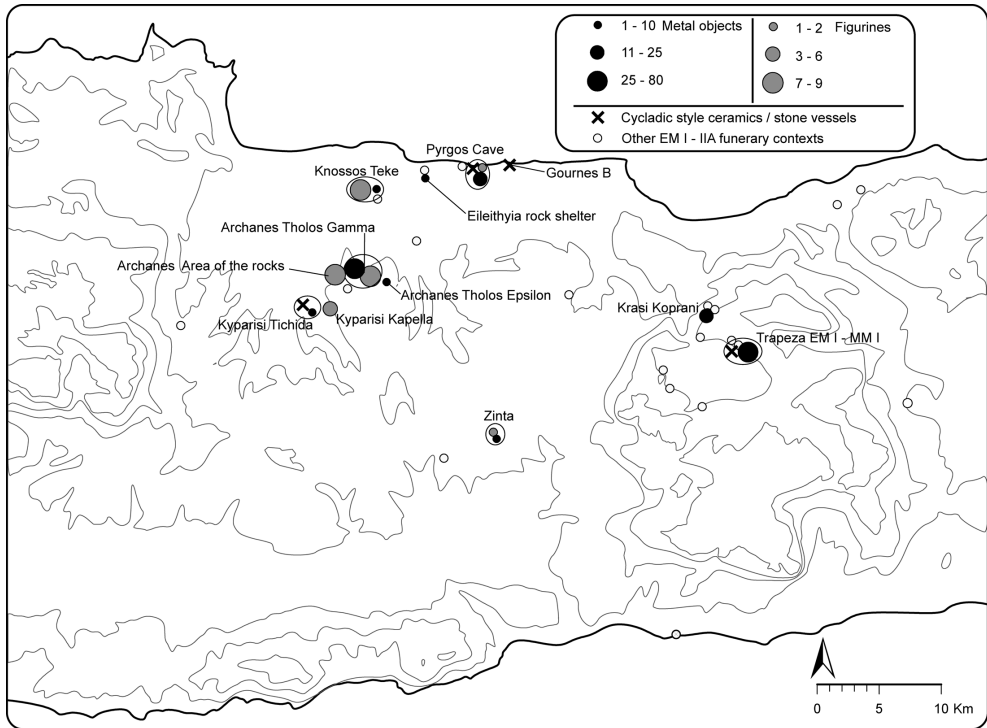


Figure 11.5. Off-island materials in EM I–IIA funerary contexts in north-central and central Crete.

one of the key defining traits of EM I–IIA Cretan mortuary behaviour, namely the presence of objects with off-island connections. This trait is common to most tombs on the island, regardless of type and location. However, it is on the north coast that deposition of this type is most diverse, in a manner unparalleled in other parts of the island. Such types of material were not easy to come by and we can be certain that they had particular values attached to them that were not only economic, but also ideological (Papadatos 2003; 2007). In the Asterousia region, the objects seem to have been fewer, mostly made locally from imported metals such as copper and belonging to limited types, such as daggers. On the north coast, off-island materials are far more common and widely distributed, with, for example, silver and gold found in almost every well-preserved cemetery, and indicate local choices based on very different value systems in the two regions (Legarra Herrero 2004). In EM I certain cemeteries contain objects with Cycladic stylistic traits, as in the case of the typically Cycladic ceramic vessels at Kyparisi (Alexiou 1951; Day *et al.* 1998: 138–39) and Pyrgos (Xanthoudides 1921: 152–53). Others contain objects that were made from off-island materials,



but carried Cretan stylistic traits, such as the metal objects at Krasi (Marinatos 1932). In EM IIA, items with off-island stylistic traits are rare and there are differences in the scale of deposition, with communities closer to the north coast having a larger number of off-island objects (Figure 11.5).

It would seem that throughout Crete, but particularly in north-central regions, off-island objects were socially significant and may have been important for the general organisation of these communities. The ubiquity of such objects suggests that they were perhaps attached to certain key positions in the community (such as heads of families) or fulfilled a ritual role. By EM IIA, the stress seems to have been placed on objects made locally, but out of foreign materials (Branigan 1968: 56, 102–3; Tselios 2006; Papadatos 2007) and the production or modification of items may have been as socially and ideologically significant as their possession and use.

However, it is not possible to link directly particular concentrations of off-island items in tombs with the development of more hierarchically structured societies. Concentrations seem to have occurred in communities located directly on the coast (*e.g.*, Pyrgos Cave) or along important trade routes (*e.g.*, Krasi on the way to Lasithi or Archanes on the route to the south). However, such concentrations prove little on their own and could be explained by improved access to such items by communities that used and deposited them in tombs more frequently. We have identified a wide number of items with off-island connections in the record and linked them to significant social roles present in each community regardless of its size and social organisation. Communities with good access to imported material may have found it easier to deposit such items in tombs, giving them the opportunity to engage more often in the socially meaningful production of such objects. Opposed to this, communities with more restricted access to off-island objects may have had to resort to handing down such items from one generation to the next. We still need to locate off-island items in meaningful contexts in order to be able to relate concentrations of such objects with hierarchical dynamics.

There are two examples in EM IIA Crete where the deposition of such objects forms a specific pattern, suggesting the existence of developed processes of vertical differentiation. The clearest example is Archanes (Papadatos 2007). The first use of this cemetery was in the EM IIA period and took the form of two tholos tombs (Gamma and Epsilon) and what may have been a small number of anterooms in front of them. The tholoi are similar in size and building techniques to other examples elsewhere. However, the EM IIA levels in both tholoi contained very different assemblages (Papadatos 2007). In Tholos Gamma, a significant quantity of Cycladic material was found in the form of folded-arm

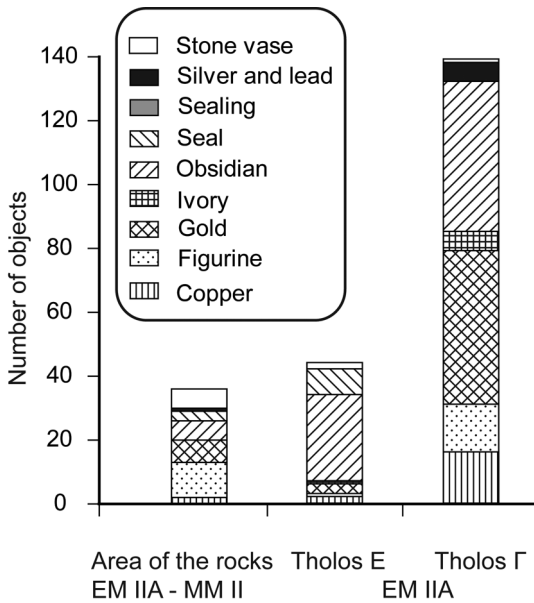


Figure 11.6. Deposition of non-ceramic EM IIA objects at Archanes Phourni.

figurines, some of them actual imports. A large number of silver objects were also uncovered, a material rarely found on Crete. Tholos Epsilon lacked all these types of materials (Figure 11.6; Panagiotopoulos 2002). Tholos Gamma's population made a point of interring a different material culture, with an emphasis on off-island objects. What makes Archanes different is not the concentration of off-island material, but their explicit manipulation to mark a clear difference between two groups within the community.

A similar pattern can be identified at Mochlos, where two tombs were constructed in EM IIA, Complex I/II and Complex IV/V (Seager 1912; Soles 1992). There is very little evidence to support an EM IIA construction for the other tombs in the cemetery (Seager 1912: 76; Soles 1992: 48, 58, 82, 422). The EM IIA layout at Mochlos may have been very similar to that of Archanes; however, in this case, it is not tholos tombs that are favoured but the locally developed rectangular tombs, conventionally known as house-tombs. The two Mochlos tombs contained a large quantity of gold and silver jewellery, some of which may date back to EM IIA. Soles has tried to reconstruct the stratigraphy of these tombs, but the presence of MM I objects in the lower strata hinders the reconstruction of the depositional history of the tombs. This situation is, in some ways, different to Archanes, as the two burying groups at Mochlos may have had direct access to the material, thus resulting in more similar assemblages between the tombs. While the presence of the two tombs would suggest competition, there is very little information available to assess whether the deposition of items was used to mark competition in the EM IIA period. The privileged situation of Mochlos in Creto-Aegean trade networks may have modified the use and meaning of the more readily available off-island materials in this community (Carter 2004).

There are two more cases of potentially similar cemeteries, where the poor condition of the evidence, however, prevents definitive analysis. The first is the deposit from Teke, north of Knossos, consisting of silver daggers and folded-arm figurines (Marinatos 1933a; Alexiou 1975). This may represent a cemetery similar to Archanes, but the objects had no context and their interpretation is therefore highly speculative. The second cemetery is Koumasa in the Mesara (Xanthoudides 1924: 4–50), where two large tholos tombs were constructed in EM IIA. Here, a number of items were found that resemble the Archanes assemblages, such as Cycladic folded-arm figurines and silver objects, in this case daggers. There were also a significant number of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic ceramic vessels dating to the EM IIA period, which is quite atypical and has no parallels in any other cemetery. There are no parallels for a similar cemetery in the Mesara or Asterousia mountains during the EM IIA period, but given the uncertain provenance of most of the objects within the cemetery, we cannot assess clearly whether social competition was actually played out in this cemetery during EM IIA.

The cases of the Pyrgos cave (Xanthoudides 1921) and Krasi (Marinatos 1932), where significant concentrations of off-island items have been found, do not seem to correspond to the Archanes or Mochlos situations. While our knowledge of the two cemeteries is somewhat limited by their early publication and potential preservation issues, the significant amount of information published allows one to suggest that their character is very different to that of the cemeteries at Archanes or Mochlos. At Krasi only one tholos was found within a cemetery that seems to have been well preserved at the time of excavation. Similarly, at Pyrgos, it seems that the area around the cave was indeed explored, as a small rock-shelter in the vicinity was reported to have contained two skeletons and material contemporaneous to the use of Pyrgos cave (Xanthoudides 1925; Wilson 1984: 261–64); however, no other cemeteries of similar date were found nearby.

It would appear, therefore, that even when preservation and recovery may somehow limit our otherwise comprehensive understanding of the funerary record of the period, evidence for significant dynamics of social differentiation may only be found in a small number of EM IIA cemeteries, where social organisation had the right ingredients to allow such changes. Interestingly, the cemeteries identified as having clear differentiation dynamics were constructed in EM IIA and this may indicate that such social changes only began to become significant on the island during this period and were associated with new funerary customs.

*The EM IIB–III period*

In conjunction with a major readjustment of Cycladic trade (Broodbank 2000: 317; Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki *et al.* 2007: 87, 92–94), most of the cemeteries along the north coast seem to have been abandoned in EM IIB (Figure 11.7). The shrinking of Cycladic trade networks during this period may have delivered a strong blow to these communities, particularly if their social structure relied heavily on the procurement, transformation and display of imported material by pivotal social figures. The disappearance of such a significant social arena as burial can only be explained by profound changes in these communities at the most basic level of their social, political and economic relationships. As we move away from the north coast we find cemeteries that were still in use in EM IIB. This is clear in the Asterousia and Mesara regions, where the tholos cemeteries remained in use and even some new ones appeared, such as Ayia Triada (Todaro 2004). However, the picture is far from homogeneous and, although there is no single horizon of abandonment, at some point during the EM IIB and EM III periods almost every cemetery underwent a short period of disruption (Legarra Herrero 2009: fig. 11). Such occurrences may not mark abandonment, so much as perhaps changes in the affiliation and group identities of the population using the cemetery. Such episodes of disruption are not documented outside the EM IIB–III period in the Mesara (apart from at Ayia Triada, where a change in the use of the tholos may have occurred in the MM IB period; Carinci 2004: 99) and they suggest a very specific transformation in EM IIB–III south-central Crete, compared to the longer abandonment periods reported in north central Cretan cemeteries (Legarra Herrero 2009).

Only in the case of Mochlos does an earlier cemetery on the north coast continue into EM IIB and indeed thrive. EM IIB sees the construction of a large number of tombs and the deposition of a significant number of off-island materials (Soles 1992). EM IIB Mochlos was a unique cemetery within the Early and Middle Bronze Ages, not only because of its unique trajectory of use, but also because of its specific structure, numbering more than 20 tombs by EM IIB. Moreover, if we consider the differential erosion and conservation processes operating between the south slope tombs and the ones on the west terrace (Figure 11.8), then a very different picture emerges for EM IIB Mochlos from what has previously been presented (Soles 1988; Watrous 2005; Colburn 2008). Given that even some of the smallest tombs were crammed with material (*e.g.*, Tomb VIII; Figure 11.9), it makes sense to assume that empty tombs may be explained by the action of erosion, particularly as the empty tombs are grouped in clusters perpendicular to the steep slope. The resulting scenario is a

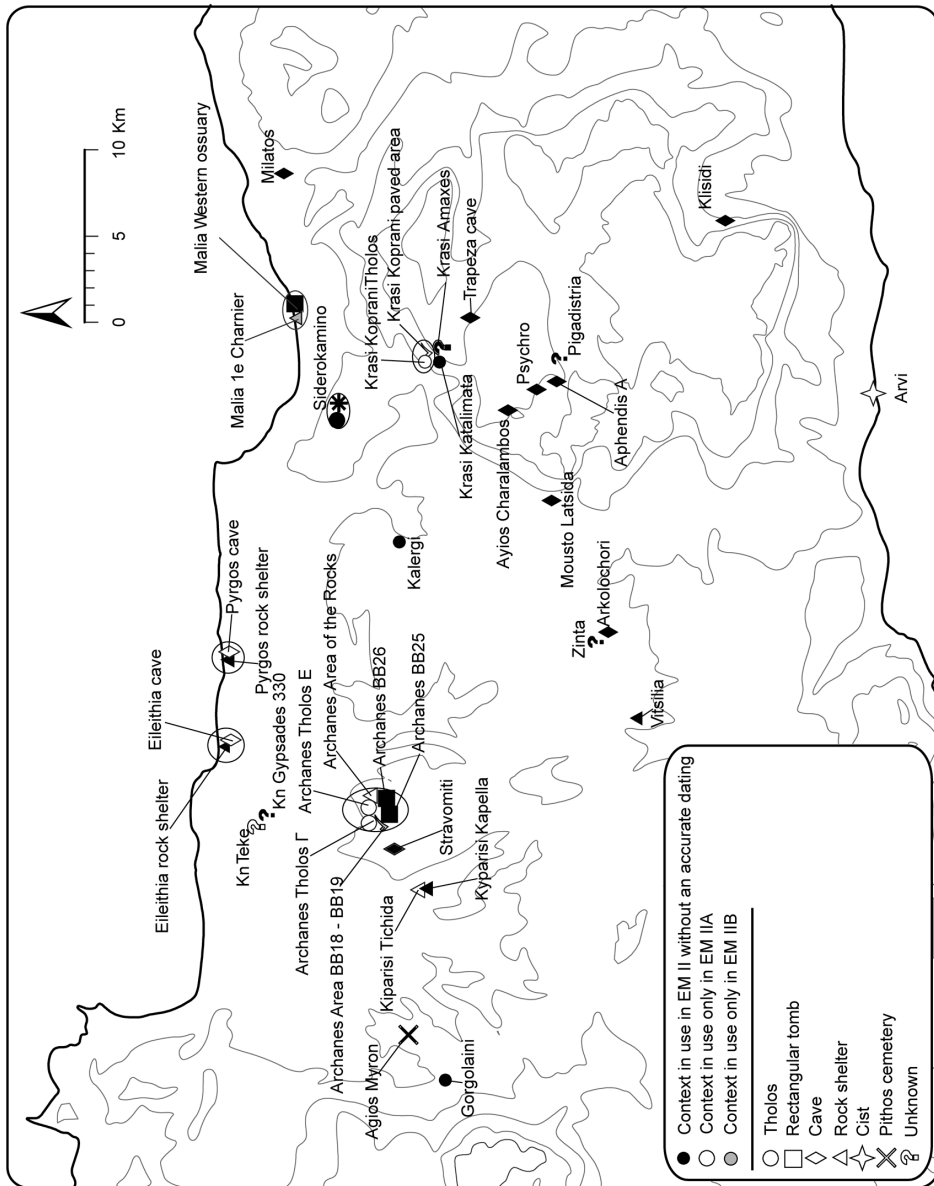
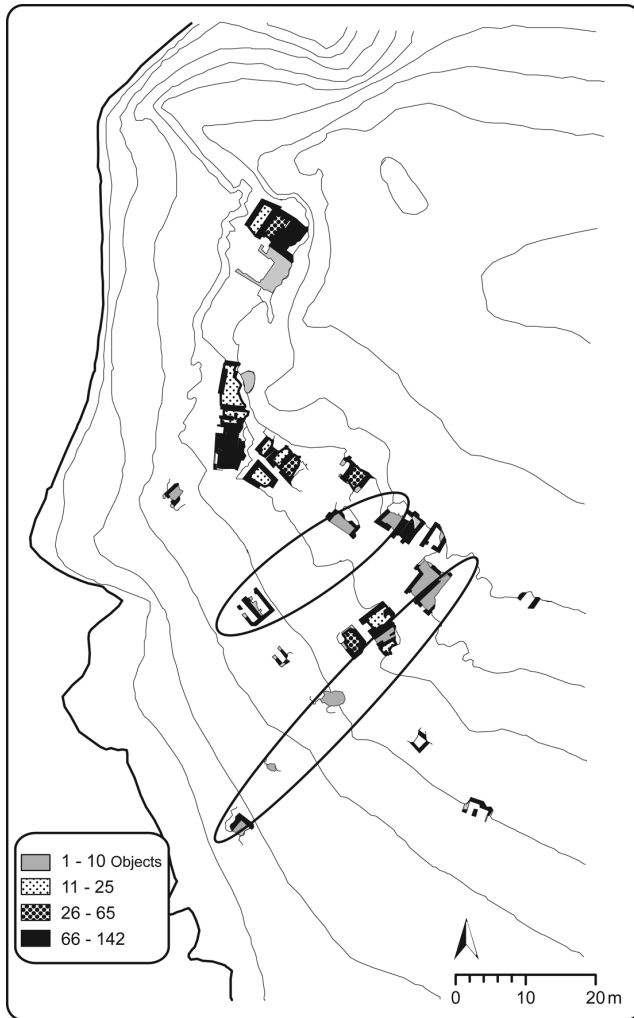


Figure 11.7. EM II A-B funerary contexts in north-central and central Crete.

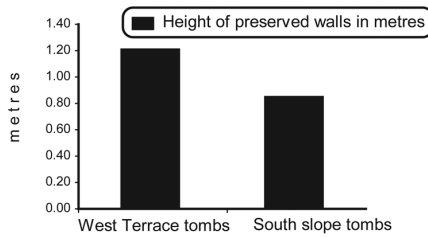
more flexible picture than the traditional dualistic view of the rich west terrace and the poor south slope. Each individual tomb seems to have been involved in a competition dynamic through the deposition of non-local materials. This is not to say that certain units were not more successful than others (*e.g.*, Tomb XIX; Figure 11.9), but it is not the actual outcome that is most important here, but rather the fact that such open and explicit competition between so many agents is not known in any other cemetery. It seems that this is a very particular structure that is limited to EM IIB (and perhaps also EM III and MM I) Mochlos. The large amounts of obsidian and metal objects that define this cemetery (Davaras 1975; Carter 2004), the long boat models found in EM II levels of the settlement (Seager 1909: 290; Soles pers. comm.) and the nearby EM I–EM III metallurgical workshop at Chrysokamino (Betancourt 2006) suggest that this community fostered entrepreneurial behaviour by actively pursuing the procurement of metals and obsidian in the Cyclades, effectively becoming one of the few communities through which such material could be procured on Crete. These unique economic circumstances may have been built upon and driven by a social structure in which smaller groups within the community openly competed for supremacy in these entrepreneurial activities.

### *The EM III–MM IA period*

EM III to MM IA is the time when the most profound changes occur in the mortuary behaviour of Crete, initiated by a major increase in the number of cemeteries (Figure 11.10). The most prominent development in this period is the way that, despite there still being cemeteries with different layouts and tomb types, all cemeteries on Crete now follow a similar set of transformations under a common funerary behavioural ethos. There seems to have been an intensive period of construction during the EM III–MM IA period that resulted in cemeteries becoming more complex spatially. Such architectural changes resulted in more tombs per cemetery than ever before. More significantly, however, these building efforts focused on the construction of buildings and areas for ritual and cult activities. In this way cemeteries exhibit a shift in focus from burial chambers to ritual areas and from the deceased to the living. For example, at Gournia Tomb II was built with new cult areas outside it (Soles 1992: 19–20) and at Ayia Triada several new buildings were constructed for ritual activities (La Rosa 2001). Newly constructed tholos tombs in MM I, such as Apesokari (Schörgendorfer 1951), included prominent ritual areas in their design. Every



a) Number of published objects by tomb



b) Preserved height of walls at Mochlos as reported in Soles 1992b

Figure 11.8. The Mochlos cemetery.

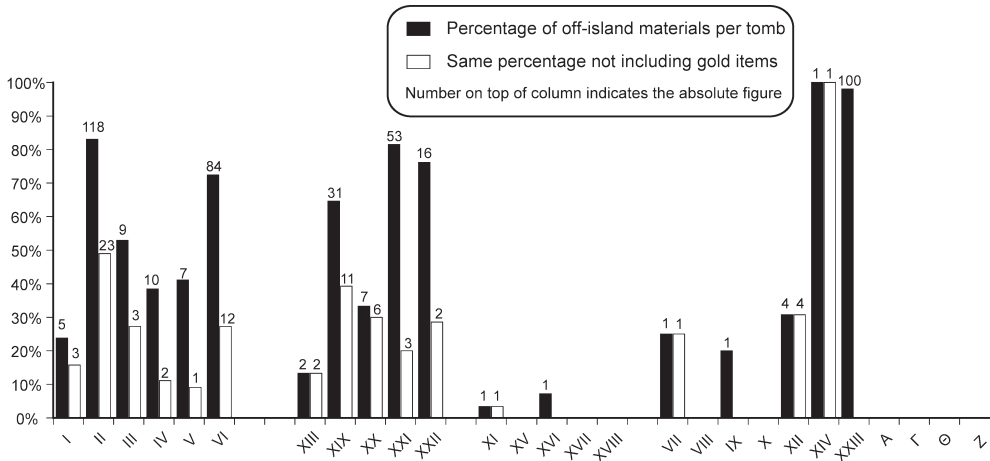


Figure 11.9. Items in off-island materials in the Mochlos cemetery by tomb.

tholos cemetery that was in use at this time is marked by an expansion outside the burial chamber, involving the addition of a number of rooms annexed to the tomb that served to create a far more complex set of ritual spaces.

The composition of the assemblages also changed during this period. In general, fewer out-of-the-ordinary objects, metal items and jewellery were deposited in the tombs. The assemblage is mainly formed by ceramic vessels, although stone vases and sealstones also appear in larger numbers in the tombs (Sbonias 1995: 145 fig. 4.12; Bevan 2007: 89–90). It is within the context of this trend that one should interpret the deposition of a number of Egyptian imitations and a very limited number of Egyptian imports (Phillips 2008: 225). These do not, however, seem to have marked out any particular individual inside the tomb and may have been used in the same way as any other type of stone vessel or seal (Bevan 2007: 96–99; Legarra Herrero in press).

Patterns of deposition also changed in the cemeteries, with large ceramic deposits found outside tombs, marking significant group rituals. This was the case for areas around Tholos B at Archanes (Lahanas 1993; Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997: 169–80, 204–8) and the Ieros Lakkos in the MM I cemetery at Gournes (Hatzidakis 1921) and they have no parallels in the EM I–IIA periods. Moreover, the evidence from Lebena Yerokambos and Ayia Triada shows a complex sequence of rituals in non-burial areas, with different buildings having different assemblages and layouts and, therefore, likely to be hosting different activities (Cultraro 2000; Alexiou and Warren 2004: 158–79). Two- and three-stage funerals, lasting days, weeks or continuing intermittently over longer periods, would have allowed people from more distant areas time



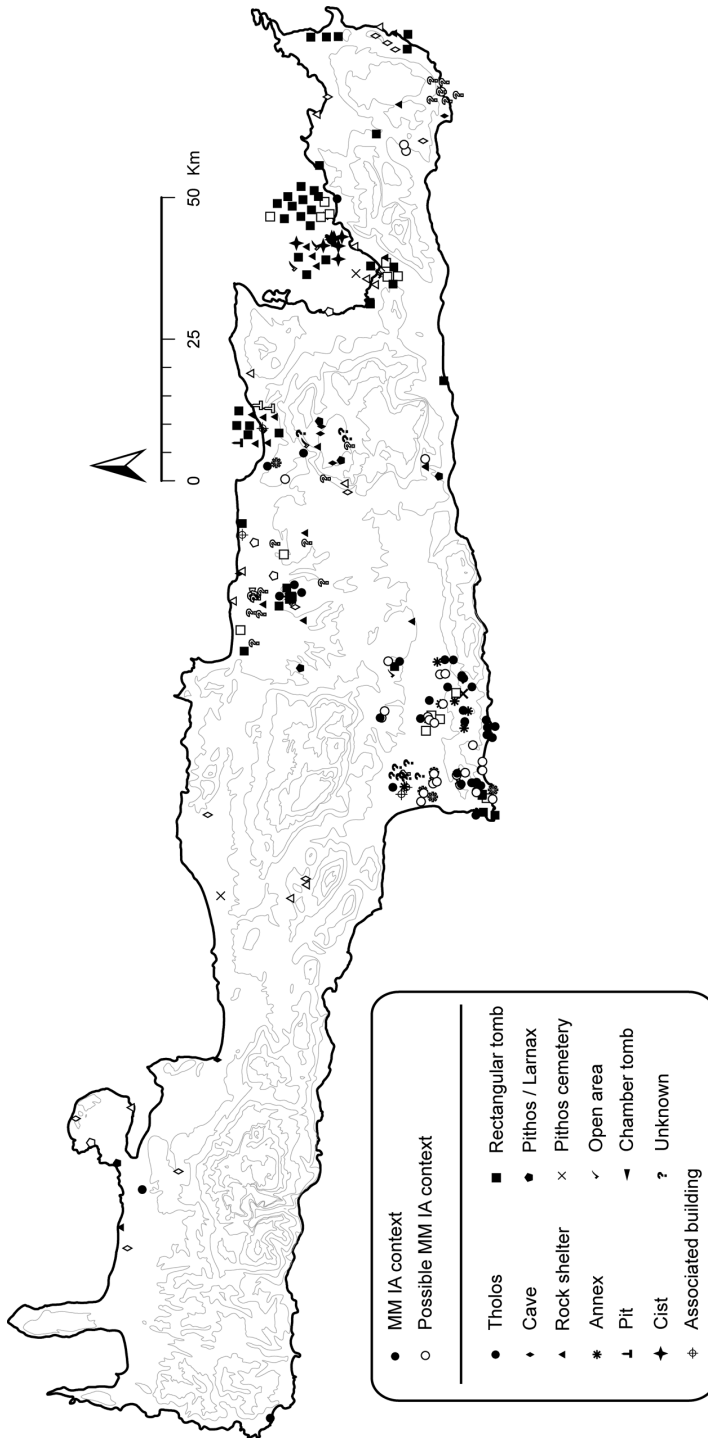


Figure 11.10. MM IA funerary contexts.

to learn about them and thus attend. In this way cemeteries were adapted to be able to draw people from a wider geographical area and became arenas suited for the negotiation of social matters at a larger regional scale.

Within this new ethos on the island, some cemeteries stand out as being different. This time, the clearest example is the cemetery of Platanos on the Mesara plain (Figure 11.11; Xanthoudides 1924: 88–124). During the MM IA period Platanos was a large cemetery with two large tholoi and a third smaller one. The cemetery had a large number of other contexts, such as large annexes around Tholoi A and B, paved areas and delimiting walls. The differences that mark this cemetery out are not so much qualitative as quantitative. Although the quantity of gold items found in the upper stratum of Tholos A arguably set it apart from its contemporaries (Xanthoudides 1924: 89), what really rendered the Platanos cemetery different was the fact that many of its new MM IA features were taken to a new scale. The number of seals found is particularly large and the complexity of the layout is remarkable. However, perhaps the most outstanding feature is the large number of stone vessels (>300) deposited in the rooms outside the chamber of Tholos A and in a room south of the tomb (Xanthoudides 1924; Gerontakou 2003: 88–124). This distribution parallels the deposition of ceramics in other cemeteries. The assemblage of stone vessels in Room Alpha in the annex of Tholos A resembles closely the deposit of conical cups in Room L at Ayia Triada or Room AN at Lebena Yerokambos (Xanthoudides 1924: 98; Alexiou and Warren 2004: 169–71; Cultraro 2004: 323). The three deposits were found in a room of the annex near the tomb's entrance, they comprised only one type of vessel and date to the MM I use of the cemeteries. Moreover, the carrying capacity of stone vessels is not much larger than that of conical cups making the two types of vessel comparable. Group rituals at Platanos were boosted in every sense, from the architectural contexts where they occurred to the type and quality of objects used in them.

Several other contexts essentially replicated the situation observed at Platanos. At Malia, the EM III–MM I building of Chrysolakkos constitutes an impressive complex with a number of spaces intended for different activities (Demargne 1945: 25–69) and is undoubtedly a focal point in the large cemetery. At Archanes, the complex formed by Building 7 and Tholos B (Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997: 169–80, 206–8) seems to have been the most important building of the cemetery in the MM IA period. Here, although the architectural features are unclear, the gold sheets, seals and figurines found in the MM IA levels, suggest a rich deposit and probably a special character for this area. Such a singular role is also supported by substantial deposits of MM I

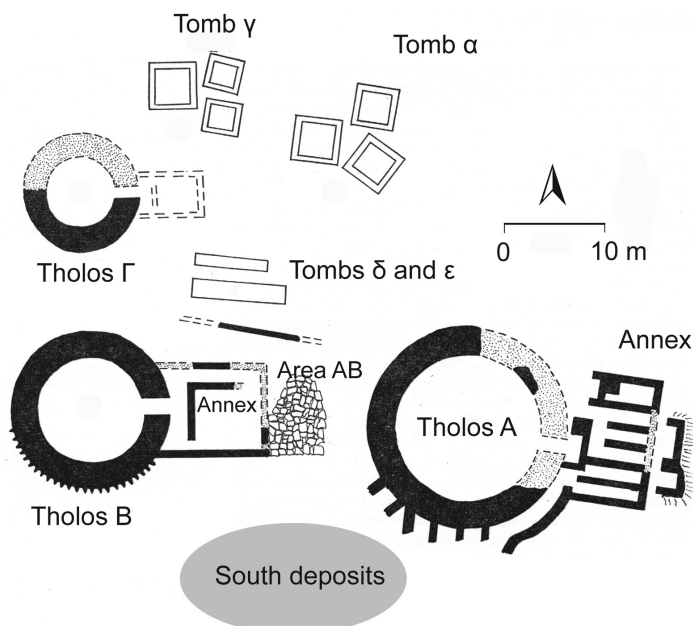


Figure 11.11. The Platanos cemetery during the MM IA period (after Branigan 1970).

ceramics nearby (Lahanas 1993) and the presence of several MM IA paved areas around the complex. These large focal complexes are not found in the Mirabello area or in East Crete, apart from Palaikastro, where there is some evidence for the use of ashlar blocks near the large ossuary of Tomb VII (Bosanquet 1902: 294; *contra* Soles 1992: 192 n. 190). However, there is insufficient evidence to associate the blocks with the MM I tombs.

What is interesting about these central complexes is that they mark difference by manipulating the most distinctive features of the new mortuary behaviour. I have argued that the new mortuary customs in EM III–MM I (longer and more complicated funerary rituals, larger importance of group ritual in cemeteries) facilitated the representation of a community within a larger territory through funerary rituals, probably in response to a new social framework defined largely by regional competition (Sbonias 1999). Such changes come along together with a marked increase in the number of tombs in each cemetery that may indicate a growing significance of the household as a social unit. It is probable that broad kinship ties, such as those within extended families, may have lost some of their significance from earlier periods and social links such as co-residence may have gained far more ideological and social relevance as ways of creating powerful new networks of affiliation for the households. Such new organisation may have placed

far more emphasis on the concept of co-residential communities, which became the main agents that competed for resources and political and ideological power on a regional scale, rather than the kinship groups that may have structured regional social dynamics during earlier periods. The large significance of the co-residential community is intimately associated with the appearance of new regional settlement hierarchies led by large communities such as Platanos.

Within this regional competition, new individuals may have emerged as visible representatives of a community. However, it was not prominent individuals that were emphasised at Platanos, Archanes or Malia. Until the appearance of the so-called LM II warrior graves around Knossos, we do not find any individually-articulated skeletons accompanied by grave goods clearly positioned in tombs (Preston 1999). Instead, each individual underwent the same process of loss of identity by being interred in the collective tombs. Skeletons were not the subject of any particular reverence and were swept away together with their grave goods to make room for new ones. The individual was lost in the larger social unit represented by the tomb (households probably for the smaller tombs and perhaps larger units in some of the larger tombs). Rather, it is notions of the group and the co-residential community that are reinforced in MM I cemeteries. This is highly significant, because this persistent absence of individuality in the funerary record is a phenomenon very much specific to Crete. It is this particular emphasis on community that is behind the changes that define mortuary behaviour on Crete between EM I and MM I. While individual burials are known from this same period in the Cyclades (Doumas 1977), Peloponnese (Cavanagh and Mee 1998) and Anatolia (Joukowsky 1996: 156–57, 160–63), they are practically unknown on Crete. The only two exceptions, EM I Nea Roumata (Preve 2006) and EM IIB Nopigeia (Karantzali 1996: 89–90), are in West Crete and may indicate a very different trajectory for this part of the island. Although pithos and larnax burials appear for the first time in central and east Crete during the EM III period, these are found inside communal tombs and were apparently used as ossuaries without any significant link to individual interments (Haggis 1996: 650–1; Papadatos 2005: 59). Such containers may mark the use of large tombs such as tholoi by smaller social units, such as households. Pithos and, more rarely, larnax burials are found also buried outside tombs and these do indeed tend to be used for single individuals (Seager 1916). However, they are always found in relation to collective tombs, as in the case of Vorou (Marinatos 1933b) and the Îlot du Christ at Malia (van Effenterre and van Effenterre 1963: 103–13). The only exception is Pachyammos, but here it is quite possible that we are missing the related cemetery (Seager 1916). Such individual burials in pithoi may represent individuals that

for some reason were not entitled to interment within the communal groups and perhaps, therefore, mark a lack of affiliation and an inferior social position within the community. The significance of the community was reinforced in EM III–MM I by the appearance of a whole new range of other venues for group ritual, such as the newly built ‘palatial’ buildings (Pelon 1993; Momigliano 2000; Whitelaw this volume; *contra* Driessen 2007; Schoep 2007), the spread of peak sanctuaries around Crete (Nowicki 1994; Haggis 1999) and the new impulse in the use of caves for cult (Rutkowski and Nowicki 1996; Tyree 2001; Tomkins in press).

The emergence of a strong regional competition between settlements was most probably accompanied by the development of vertical dynamics within the larger communities. However, it is not clear how these developed, as evidence for the high-status individuals and groups at the top of the hierarchical spectrum in each community is conspicuous by its absence, not only in cemeteries, but throughout the entire MM I record. I would like to suggest the possibility that strictly pyramidal hierarchies and exclusive social strata may not have existed yet in the MM I period. There is no reason why other types of social organisation could not have coordinated and organised the building of a Palace or driven regional competition. Even the LM Palaces seem to represent group activities and we still struggle to find evidence of individual agents within them (Davis 1995; Koehl 1995). The larger MM I communities may have been ruled by communal institutions, such as a council of male adults with a certain economic status. While individual entrepreneurs within such an institution may have exploited this social situation to gain status and power, society may not have passed the point where such individual positions steered clear of the established communal institutions and were able to create a clearly stratified order until later in the Protopalatial or Neopalatial periods, depending on the particular socio-political trajectory of each Cretan region.

## *Conclusions*

### *Non-construction*

There is no starting point for the appearance of hierarchies and we can assume a long history of inequality since the first settlement on the island. This would have been punctuated by vertical movements towards hierarchisation that were subsequently integrated back into horizontal structures. This may have been the case in EM IIA, where vertical dynamics seem to have been short-lived, with a limited impact on the broader socio-economic context of the island. Vertical

processes would have only been present in a restricted number of communities and the form they took may have been specific to each of these. Similarly, at EM IIB Mochlos, a quite unique situation developed that is not applicable to other known Prepalatial communities. It is only in EM III–MM IA that we see a major development, namely the increase of competition between communities within a far more networked island. This time round, hierarchisation processes have a significant impact on settlement patterns, regional resource management and inter-settlement relationships and will continue to develop in the Protopalatial and Neopalatial periods.

#### *De-construction*

EM IIB and EM III emerge as periods of change, not because of the collapse of hierarchical relationships, but because of a general change in social organisation. Changes in the off-island trade networks at the end of EM IIA may be at the core of profound structural changes in the lives of Cretan communities, but I would not necessarily reject other reasons, such as short-term climatic variations, or stress brought on by demographic pressure. The particular social organisation of each region would have led communities to show differential resilience to these factors and to follow different trajectories of change, ranging from a more dramatic crisis on the north coast in EM IIB to a more flexible transition in south-central Crete that seems to have spread into the EM III period.

#### *Construction*

We have seen at least three different ways of constructing vertical differentiation on Crete as reflected in the cases of EM IIA Archanes, EM IIB Mochlos and MM IA Platanos. These processes were very different, even though they overlapped slightly chronologically. In EM IIA, the first emergence of vertical dynamics appears to have been based on new trade networks and the use of off-island prestige materials. Such vertical dynamics seem to have involved mainly different groups within a community and had a limited sphere of influence beyond the community in question.

EM IIB (and probably EM III) Mochlos was unique, although it is possible that there were a few more communities along the north coast following a similar trajectory. This example turns on the particular position of Mochlos as a trade gateway to the island during this period and is expressed in a similarly unique socio-economic situation, in which there seems to have been open intra-community competition between several smaller groups.

In MM IA, vertical differentiation was linked to a new type of social

organisation that seems to have spread to most areas of the island. Such an organisation seems to have placed a new emphasis on the co-residential community and its role in wider regional socio-economic and ideological relationships. The way hierarchical relationships developed in this period was completely different to earlier efforts and was centred on new ritual activities in cemeteries, which imply the mobilisation of larger groups in ceremonies and which were intrinsically connected to the display of community power at a regional scale. The funerary landscape becomes more clearly hierarchical, with communities striving for a regional supremacy that would affect even those smaller communities where evidence for vertical differentiation is lacking. Intrinsically related to these developments was the fact that, in contrast to EM IIA variability, Crete now seemed to be a far more homogeneous social arena that provided a similar social language to facilitate settlement interaction.

Traditional views of big-men and chiefs may be difficult to apply in this case, as they refer to phenomena without a clear parallel in Cretan communities. This line of thinking engages us with a history of Prepalatial Crete, which, despite the potential inclusion of entrepreneurs, chiefly figures and privileged social positions, is not necessarily explained by these agencies or by the appearance of hierarchical dynamics. Broader social changes regarding community organisation and inter-community interaction affected mostly horizontal relationships. These are far more relevant for the understanding of changes in Cretan populations during the Prepalatial period. It is only after changes in the overall structure of a society occurred that new hierarchical dynamics were possible.

Also, widening the focus from chiefs and big-men towards a broader sample of Cretan populations allows us to break away from teleological frameworks. Such models are thus replaced by a far more chaotic and contingent vision of Cretan prehistory, composed of a multitude of strategies, local and regional, long- and short-term, working together simultaneously. These may have proved successful in turning communities into more stable structures or may have led them to instability or collapse. Such an understanding of Cretan history apprehends better the human nature of the populations that inhabited the island and hence improves the relevancy of our interpretations.

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