

ΚΥΔΑΛΙΜΟΣ

Τιμητικός Τόμος

για τον Καθηγητή Γεώργιο Στυλ. Κορρέ

ΤΟΜΟΣ ΔΕΥΤΕΡΟΣ



ΚΥΔΑΛΙΜΟΣ
ΤΙΜΗΤΙΚΟΣ ΤΟΜΟΣ ΓΙΑ ΤΟΝ ΚΑΘΗΓΗΤΗ
ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟ ΣΤΥΛ. ΚΟΡΡΕ

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Return ticket

'Minoan' and 'Mycenaean' tholos tombs at Knossos¹

Lucia Alberti

"La tombe de la Képhala [...] ne peut donc être interprétée, étant donné sa date, que comme le résultat d'une sort de choc en retour."

Pelon 1976, 448

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ: ΕΙΣΙΤΗΡΙΟ ΕΠΙΣΤΡΟΦΗΣ. «ΜΙΝΩΙΚΟΙ» ΚΑΙ «ΜΥΚΗΝΑΪΚΟΙ» ΘΟΛΩΤΟΙ ΤΑΦΟΙ ΣΤΗΝ ΚΝΩΣΟ

Το ζήτημα της προέλευσης του θολωτού τάφου έχει αναλυθεί διεξοδικά κατά τις τελευταίες δεκαετίες, αλλά η διαπραγμάτευσή του παραμένει ανοικτή.

Σκοπός αυτής της εργασίας είναι όχι η ανάλυση των τεχνικών πλευρών του θέματος, που έχουν ήδη αποτελέσει αντικείμενο πλούσιας βιβλιογραφίας, αλλά η διερεύνηση της πιθανής διαφορετικής σημασίας και χρήσης δύο ταφικών μνημείων, που προφανώς ανήκουν στην ίδια κατηγορία: του «μινωικού» και του «μυκηναϊκού» θολωτού τάφου. Γίνεται ιδιαίτερη αναφορά σε παραδείγματα που προέρχονται από πολύ συγκεκριμένη περιοχή, την πεδιάδα της Κνωσού, όπου οι δύο τύποι φαίνεται να ακολουθούν ο ένας τον άλλο. Ακόμα και αν πρόκειται για παρόμοια μνημεία – και οι δύο τύποι έχουν κυκλική κάτοψη και ταφική χρήση, ο τρόπος λειτουργίας τους είναι πολύ διαφορετικός. Στη μία περίπτωση ο τάφος είναι κτισμένος σε επίπεδη επιφάνεια και όχι λαξευμένος με οποιονδήποτε τρόπο, ενώ στην άλλη ο τάφος είναι πρώτα λαξευμένος στο έδαφος και στη συνέχεια έχει κτιστεί και καλυφθεί με εντυπωσιακό τύμβο, έτσι ώστε να φαίνεται ότι είναι κατασκευασμένος κάτω από το επίπεδο του εδάφους. Σε ποιο βαθμό, επομένως, αυτές οι κατασκευαστικές διαφορές, συνοδεύονται από ανάλογες διαφορές στη λατρεία, στη θρησκεία ή στην ιδεολογία;

FOREWORD

The origin of the tholos tomb is a topic that has been carefully analyzed in the last decades, but it seems that there is still something to say.

The aim of this paper is to analyze not the technical aspects, already well reported in a very rich literature, but to investigate the possible different meanings and uses of two funerary monuments that apparently belong to the same category: namely the 'Minoan' tholos and the 'Mycenaean' tholos. But with particular reference to examples embedded in a very specific territory, the Knossos valley, where the two types seem to follow one another.

¹ It is an honour to participate in this volume dedicated to the 'Charon' who was my guide through the meandering avenues of Aegean archaeology and also in the physical labyrinth of the University of Athens during my PhD. Prof. Korres has been and is for me a point of reference, not only in an intellectual capacity, but also and especially as a human, a *persona* who made my love for Greece and Greek people deeper and truer. From a 'Minoan' from Italy to a 'Mycenaean' from Messenia, this contribution is a very small thanks and a devoted greeting. I wish to thank the editors of the volume, and especially Dr. Pigi Kalogerakou, who has displayed much patience and dedication, and Dr. Don Evely who edited the English text with the usual competence and kindness.

DEFINITIONS

A tholos tomb is first of all a circular tomb. If it is a 'Minoan' tholos, of the type common in the Messarà from Early Minoan till at least Middle Minoan III, it is built above the ground, very probably with a stone roofing, even though there has been postulated for the tombs with the greatest diameters a lighter roofing in wood and plaster (fig. 1). Another consistent characteristic is a small entrance without a dromos. Sometimes in front of the entrance there is a paved area and some small rooms, used as ossuaries and storage of other material used in rituals².

We are not dealing here with that version of the 'Minoan' tholoi that dates from LM IIIC till the Geometric period: located in particular in eastern Crete, they have small dimensions and show substantial structural and functional differences from the earlier Cretan tholoi. Moreover, they are chronologically distant from the 'Minoan' tholoi we are discussing; if anything, they show some ties with the Mainland tholoi³.

The 'Mycenaean' tholos we are concerned with is a stone structure built to a degree below the soil's surface, with a vaulted or pseudo-vaulted roofing and a long dromos ending with an entrance to the chamber (the stomion), sometimes monumentalized. The entire structure is covered with an earth tumulus that conceals the stone structure. Often cist tombs are excavated inside the chamber (fig. 2)⁴.

From a chronological point of view 'Minoan' tholoi are dated to the 3rd millennium B.C. until the first centuries of the 2nd, with some later reuses, whereas "Mycenaean" tholoi start to be built at the end of MH III and are used till LH IIIB (about 1600-1200 B.C.).

From LM II (about 1470/1450 B.C.) 'Mycenaean' tholoi sporadically appear also in Crete. They are of the mainland type: built underground and with other architectural and structural characteristics similar to the continental tholoi. One of these, and the first to appear in Crete, is the Kephala tholos at Knossos. The category is not particularly frequently found on the island; when it appears, it seems not to be associated with any specific geographical area⁵.

When discussing the possible origin of some phenomena one has to confront, even briefly, with the terms used to describe it. In this specific case, the words 'Mycenaean' or 'Minoan' are involved. What meaning and what cultural stratification are to be assigned to these two terms? Ones, moreover, with a long "history" in our studies and involving a series of in-house problems, that are beyond the scope of this paper to discuss⁶.

The term 'Minoan' then will be used with a cultural – geographic and chronological meaning (as with Evans), namely for matters located geographically in the island of Crete and belonging to the culture/s of Crete during the Bronze Age. The term 'Mycenaean' will be similarly used for those located in mainland Greece and belonging to the LH culture usually identified as 'Mycenaean'⁷.

2 Bibliography on this topic is really endless. In this contribution references are limited to the minimum, for reasons of space. Always fundamental are Xanthoudides 1924. Pelon 1976. Branigan 1970 and 1993. More recent publications with updated bibliography are Alexiou and Warren 2004. Vasilakis and Branigan 2010. Branigan 2012.

3 Wace *et al.* 1921-23, 395. Gesell *et al.* 1983. Gesell 1990. Belli 1991 and 1995. Eaby 2009.

4 Hood 1960. Pelon 1976. Cavanagh and Laxton 1981. Cavanagh 1982. Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 44-46. Cremasco and Laffineur 1999. Recent analysis (Como 2007 and 2009) showed that it is not quite correct to define a Mycenaean tholos as a false-vault or pseudo-vault, because of the great technical know-how of the Mycenaean architects and artisans, which allowed them to come close to the construction of a real dome, long before the appearance of the arch: the excavation of the below-surface pit, the inseting of the stone courses of the upper component and the superimposed tumulus, all help to promote the unity and stability of the dome structure (Como 2006).

5 Belli 1995, 100-102.

6 Karadimas and Momigliano 2004. Cadogan 2006. See also Hamilakis and Momigliano 2006.

7 It seems that the terms 'Minoan' and 'Mycenaean' are still sufficiently 'dangerous': scientific modern literature is obliged to employ frequent circumlocutions. Probably the most innocuous one is 'so-called Mycenaean' and

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

Among the contributions down the years on the relationship between the tholoi of the Messarà and the mainland tholoi, the article of Sinclair Hood holds a central role. *Tholos Tombs of the Aegean* (1960), in a concise and significant way, concludes with this statement:

“Whatever the answers to those problems, the early circular tombs of Crete and the underground tholos tombs of the Aegean area in the late Bronze age must be connected. Both classes of monument belong to a single family even if they have individual characteristics” (Hood 1960, 176).

Earlier Wace, a scholar of distinction, cautiously affirmed the opposite in *Mycenae. The Tholos Tombs* (1921-23):

“It is safer to treat the Mycenae tholoi [...] as a separate group because the methods of construction are bound to vary from district to district [...]. Still more so should the architectural parallels of Crete be used with great caution, since the whole environment of the Minoan civilisation in that island was different from that prevailing at Mycenae and on the mainland” (Wace 1921-23, 284-285).

“So far then as the Cretan evidence goes, it does not seem possible that the tholos tomb was brought to Mycenae from Crete [...]” (Wace 1921-23, 395).

Indeed, the supposed relationship between the Minoan tholoi of the Messarà type and the Mycenaean tholoi of the continental type has been subject of a long debate: one that has meant also investigating in several and different ways the relationship between Minoan Crete and Mycenaean Greece⁸. After the methodological storm of the 1960s and the advent of socio-anthropological approaches to Aegean archaeology, two distinct approaches to this phenomenon of the tholoi have emerged. On one hand some scholars see irrevocable differences between the two, while on the other others argue for a progressive rapprochement so as to postulate a reciprocal sourcing of the two types. Those who underline differences highlight especially three elements: the chronological gap, the architectural and structural differences, and the functional differences⁹. Those who see a possible connection, point out that the chronological gap is progressively reduced by new discoveries. Consequently, any architectural and structural differences are seen simply as local adaptations of the same basic and original idea¹⁰.

Further this topic, as with many such in Aegean archaeology through the decades, seems to be affected not only by the new methodological approaches, but also by the more common trends or fashions of our contemporary society. One of these, and of great relevance at present, is a tendency to seek out underlining continuities and to stress the apparent ‘not-differences’, in a sort of cultural relativism embracing different phenomena. Of course the culture and the

‘so-called Minoan’, used for example by Wright 2006.

8 See the reconstruction of Galanakis (2007) on the beginnings of this epistemological debate, which characterized and still influence our discipline, even if now in conjunction with different methodological approaches and outcomes.

9 Wace 1921-23. Cavanagh and Laxton 1981. Cavanagh 1982. Dickinson 1984; 1994, 224-227. In particular G. St. Korres believed that the first tholoi in Messenia did not have any relationship with the funerary traditions of south Crete and that there was no descent from Messara to Helladic tholoi. It is interesting, however, to note that some of the first tholoi of Messenia were not completely excavated into the ground, but were partially built on the ground (Korres 1984). Even more intriguing and opening further considerations is the Koryphasion tholos, one of the earliest, where the assemblages included numerous Minoan and Minoan-type items (Lolos 1989).

10 Evans 1929. Hood 1960. Branigan 1970, 158-160. Kanta 1997.

personal tastes of any scholar play a role too: it seems not exactly a coincidence that among the supporters of the independence of the mainland tholos are to be counted many scholars expert in Mycenaean archaeology ... and among the supporters of its derivation from the Minoan tholos, are those scholars with the Minoan equivalent!

THOLOI AT KNOSSOS

More or less contemporary with the construction of the last epigeic tholoi in Crete, the first tholoi appear on the Mainland, around the end of the MH. Among the first are the Messenian tholoi seemingly derived directly from MH tumuli, and again the Thorikos tholoi. These last very often do not belong to any recognizable category: their originality and some unusual architectural features give them an appearance of uncertainty or experimentation¹¹. During LH I-II, on the other hand, tholoi assume a more stable character and develop better building techniques, achieving sometimes an impressive monumentality. The grave assemblages, even if they contain some imports from Crete or local reproductions of Minoan items, are indigenous conceptions¹².

In Crete, in the phase immediately before, namely MM IIB-MM III, the Knossos valley acquires the multi-chamber necropoleis of Aelias and Mavro Spilio, and the Gypsades tholos. The following phase, LM I, does not show any significant burials¹³. In spite of the economic and technological wealth of the Palatial life-style, and its massive cultural and commercial influence inside and outside the island, no significant finds of tombs and necropoleis have been made: the only exceptions are the Temple Tomb, a unique structure, and the Poros chamber tombs, important more for their assemblages than for their monumentality or design¹⁴.

With LM II, on the other hand, an intense burial activity begins at Knossos: new types of tombs and cemetery-sites appear, in areas not before used for burial, with rich assemblages of weapons and bronze vessels. Such are without comparison in Crete, but are comparable with habits on the Mycenaean mainland¹⁵.

In this new typological setting, at the beginning of LM II, the Kephala tholos was built. For the first time in Crete, a hypogeic tholos appears, built partly underground. Something alien to the Minoan tradition, it would seem¹⁶.

Thus, in the Knossos Valley two tholoi are reported. That on Gypsades dates to MM III, but with ossuaries used until LM I. That at Kephala was built in LM II and used in LM II-III A and even in LM III C. A mere kilometre or two apart and divided by a very short time span in their usage, two tholoi of seemingly different typologies and so origin give the appearance of a sequential relationship.

The Gypsades tholos

Excavated in the 1950s by Hood and located not far uphill from Hogarth's Houses, the monument enjoys a dominant position in the valley, even if located on a relatively low hill. From there, in fact, it is possible to enjoy a wide view, including counterclockwise from south to

11 At this earlier phase belongs, for example, the ellipsoid tholos of Thorikos, in which the circular structure is not yet completely adopted. Servais and Servais-Soyez 1984.

12 But see Lolos 1989.

13 Alberti 2001 and 2013. Hood 1958 and 2010.

14 Hatzaki (in preparation). Dimopoulou 1999.

15 Alberti 2004, 2014 and 2018.

16 Hutchinson 1956. Preston 2005.

north, Jouktas, Aelias hill with its cemeteries, the Palace and the settlement, the Kairatos river up to the coast and the sea¹⁷.

It is a small tholos with a diameter of about 4 meters, built somewhat carelessly from small stones of irregular shape (fig. 3). When excavated, the perimeter was not complete, because the area had been used as a quarry in Roman times. It is built completely above ground; its entrance is slightly wider in comparison with those of the tholoi of central-south Crete, and closed with a stone slab. In the chamber were recognized two phases, on two different floors: the older one, dated to MM IIB, goes with the construction of the tomb; the more recent, separated from the previous one by a 30 cm of earth, contained a deposition in an oval larnax and another on the ground, both found *in situ*. Some pottery and some MM figurines were recovered, but no jewellery nor seals. In a phase following the construction, two small rooms were built in front of the entrance and used as ossuaries. The materials found in the ossuaries and in the space between the ossuaries and the entrance were of LM IA date¹⁸.

The architecture, the building technique, the presence of ossuaries confirm the connection and derivation from the burial customs of south Crete¹⁹. The late date drove Hood to interpret the Gypsades tholos as a sort of bridge between the Messarà sort and the Mainland tholoi appearing later in Crete²⁰. The Gypsades tholos, in fact, is one of the last of this earlier Cretan typology to remain in use: built at the end of MM II, it was continuously in use at least until the end of MM, with the ossuaries going beyond that into LM IA.

The dominant position and the fragments of the assemblages surviving the looting lead one to consider it as an important tomb.

The Kephala tholos

Among the new typologies of tombs arising at Knossos in LM II is a continental tholos (fig. 4). The Kephala tholos, dated to LM II, is hypogeic and built with big squared blocks. Some of them are probably reused from a Neopalatial building, because they show both mason's marks and traces of later activity, in order to make them trapezoid so as to fit the tholos' construction²¹.

The tholos is cut into the soft local stone, *kouskouras*, set into a low rising slope of the hillside. The dromos is very narrow and had a closing wall at both sides with a stone covering on the top. Near the chamber are two niches, to the left and right of the dromos; they are lined with stone but show the natural rock at the back. This section of the dromos has been defined by Hutchinson and Preston as the *forehall*, even if there is no widening or distinction from the rest of the dromos, simply because Evans called by the same term the entrance with its two niches in the Royal Tomb²². This section of the dromos has been correctly identified as the *stomion* by Pelon, a definition that ties it to the continental tholoi²³. On a block to the right of the

17 Alberti 2011 and 2015.

18 Hood 1958. Alberti 2001.

19 Pelon 1976, 23. Branigan 1970, 4.

20 Hood 1960. According to Branigan (1970, 158-160) only this tholos, Kamilari I and, perhaps, Kamilari II were built at so late a phase and went on to be used for all MM III. In the opinions of Levi (1961-62) and Pelon (1976, 22) Kamilari I was built, before, in MM IB, and used till MM III, as confirmed also recently (Girella 2013). Certainly, some tholoi of EM and MM I were used also in subsequent phases. It is important here to recall Building 4 in Archanes-Phourni, in which hundreds of LM I conical cups were found, though contemporary burials were not identified (Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997, 223-229, 430-431).

21 Hutchinson 1956. Hood, as cited in Belli 1995, 100. Preston 2005.

22 Evans 1906, 136-139. Hutchinson 1956, 76. Preston 2005, 68-70.

23 Pelon 1976, 421.

entrance, there are cut two signs, typical both of Linear A and B, which Hutchinson interpreted as something to be read by the visitors of the tomb²⁴. The chamber is circular and shows four rectangular grave pits excavated in the floor. The vault was found collapsed.

The materials found inside were in a greatly mixed state due to the numerous reuses and looting activity, in addition to the collapse of the vault and the subsequent filling of the chamber with soil. A recent re-examination of the excavation data and the materials kept in the Stratigraphical Museum have definitely clarified what had already been proposed by many scholars previously, namely that the construction date was not LM IA, as Hutchinson said, but LM II, with an important reuse in LM IIIC²⁵. The confusion was due to the huge quantity of earth mixed with numerous Neopalatial ceramic fragments found inside the chamber, probably coming from a nearby domestic area.

Because of its underground and continental character, the tomb was linked from the beginning with the three categories defined by Wace for the Mycenae tholoi²⁶. As a result, the relationships and the similarity between the Kephala and the older mainland tholos have been frequently pointed out, especially with the Panagia and Kato Phournos tholoi at Mycenae. The similarities are numerous and appear much more meaningful than the differences²⁷. If Kephala is a continental tholos transplanted into Crete, the possibility remains that the huge quantity of soil found inside the chamber could be from the tumulus superimposed at the construction, fallen in with the vault collapse.

This matter of an earth covering could be a very important feature in clearly distinguishing the Minoan tholoi of the Messarà from the mainland ones. These last are considered by some scholars as an evolution from the typically continental MH tumuli with their burial pits inside, precisely because of the existence of the superimposed tumulus. The use of grave pits inside the chamber further associates them²⁸. The Kephala example is the only tholos in Crete up to now to present this mainland feature.

We must stress that the tumulus is not only a structural element, but a feature deeply involved in the funerary practices²⁹.

CONSTRUCTION PROCESSES, FUNCTIONS AND PERFORMANCES

We now go through the construction processes of an epigeic tholos and of a hypogeic tholos.

To build an epigeic tholos of the type common in the Messarà it is essential to have at one's disposal a flat surface. In the recent literature, in fact, mention has been made of clear traces of the ground's preparation³⁰. On the flat surface the builders put the masonry on the ground surface and without foundation. Sometimes a short section of the wall leans against a low slope³¹. The wall thickness is important and can reach up to 2 meters. Concerning the roofing, it is plausible as proposed by Hood, Pelon and Branigan that the stone vault was only feasible for the tombs of small diameter, under the 6 meters; it is possible that the larger tholoi had a

24 Hutchinson 1956, 76-77. Preston 2005, 77.

25 Pelon 1976, 421. Preston 2005.

26 Hutchinson 1956, 76. Pelon 1976, 421-422. Preston 2005, 65-67.

27 Pelon 1976, 419-423.

28 Korres 1984. See also Müller-Celka 1989, 27-33. According to the supporters of the continental origin of the Mycenaean tholos the presence of the grave pits on the floor chamber could be a continental evolution of the shaft graves seen inside the tumuli.

29 Pelon 1976, 421.

30 Pelon 1976, 40-41. Vasilakis and Branigan 2010.

31 Alexiou and Warren 2004. Vasilakis and Branigan 2010.

lighter perishable covering, with a wooden framework covered with clay (fig. 5). But also here there is not agreement³².

To build a hypogeic tholos tomb of the continental type, we must rather find a hill, in order to take advantage of the slope in which to excavate the dromos. The digging of the chamber takes place from the top downwards, by first excavating a sort of vertical and circular pit inside the hill, and then gradually covering the sides in a circular stone wall – relatively thin at some 0.50 m deep. This method is adopted also when the tomb is excavated into a more or less flat ground. This type of construction is functional to hold up the structure and to support the vault, making the tholos more solid and durable. Later on a dry stone wall is built to demarcate the tumulus, so preventing its quick destruction by natural agents. The substantial differences between the two types are well illustrated in the outline proposed by Hood (fig. 6).

The appearance of the two structures is utterly different from the outside. Although the entrance of the Minoan tholoi is often partly hidden by the quadrangular rooms used as ossuaries – sometimes built later, sometimes built structurally with the tomb, the tombs were visible and recognisable because built on top of the ground. The Mycenaean tholoi in contrast are somewhat “disguised”. Though the top of the mound and the slot of the dromos give them away to some degree, yet the tomb chamber itself is set inside a hill or a slope, and so the whole may blend into the natural landscape.

We see thus two different and opposite *modus operandi*: one is constructed above the ground level, as was the case for virtually every domestic building, and its *visibility* is ensured from its location, dimensions and position above ground; the other is set inside the ground, with a *reduced visibility* by being located inside a hill and inside an artificial feature as the tumulus, built to look similar to a natural feature of the landscape. It was not, of course, totally invisible: the dromos and at times the earth covering would give it some sort of profile³³.

Adopting now a phenomenological approach, we will traverse the valley, reconstructing the potential activities of the participants in a funeral.

Leaving the settlement and crossing the ravine, we approach the ascent of the hill of Gypsades – source of the gypsum used so liberally in the houses and Palace. The tomb is rapidly visible to us. The way up is perhaps tiring, certainly sorrowful, but one that immediately lifts the gaze upwards and towards many horizons: Jouktas, the Palace and town, the cemeteries on Aelias hill, even the sea. All the aspects of the deceased's daily environment are open to us. Arriving at the tomb, the body is set within its shelter: an event that involves entering but not descending. Without a dromos, when the stone door is removed, light immediately flows into the chamber.

If we now make our way to the Kephala tholos, we progress through the lower section of the valley, by the principal road going from the Palace north, towards the harbour-town. No vistas are before us that embrace matters or places of importance in the Minoan culture. Arriving at the dromos, we enter into a sort of narrow funnel, covered also on the top; descending and proceeding towards the chamber, the dromos becomes ever darker. The entire tomb's structure and the probable existence of the tumulus over it emphasises the suggestion that we are entering in and under the earth. We are dealing then with a structure orientated downwards, away from the light³⁴.

32 Hood 1960, 171-172. Branigan 1970, 28-55. Pelon 1976, 55-63. Kanta 1997.

33 Alberti 2015.

34 This movement downwards recalls the descent of Orpheus when searching for Eurydice and the following failed ascent towards life and light. Many are the occasions in myth and epic literature of the first millennium, in which the Afterworld is located underground. These features need to be evaluated as elements of a feeling common in Greek classical world.

In this reading the absence of the dromos in the Minoan tholoi and its presence in the Mycenaean ones is very significant. In the Minoan tholoi the entrance is hidden by the ossuaries, rendering difficult access to and from and concealing the entrance from the gaze of the living. The antechamber or paved area sometimes available lead one to speculate on feasting and other performances there conducted. In the Gypsades tholos, the space in front of the entrance, even if altered by the later added ossuaries, apparently was not covered or constricted by other structural elements: the entrance probably had an open space in front, overlooking the valley. Light was always available.

The dromos, on the other hand, with its rectilinear structure and its shrinking in size toward the stomion is linear: its descent is without hesitation. It delimits a space that conducts one inside the tomb, progressively becoming darker and narrower. At Kephala, we are moving in the gloom from early on, one that becomes progressively heavier going towards the chamber, where the darkness must be almost absolute. The importance of the introduction of the dromos in the continental funerary typologies, its gradual increasing monumentality and its symbolic, ritual and social significance have been recently underlined³⁵.

Of course, though going in is towards the dark, the act of leaving is the opposite. Here the dromos could have had an essential function in the ritual helping separate the living from the dead, making easier the way back to life. Just as the participants in the funeral moved away from the inside of the chamber and returned to the light and everyday life.

The way of structuring space is related to the society as a whole, especially when we are involved with types of structures repeatedly employed over the years, as tholoi are. These tombs were modified during the centuries not only for practical needs, but also for ideological reasons. A society, as a combination of institutions, groups and individuals, expresses its particular ideology through a series of actions and practical activities – one such is how it uses space. At the same time constructed spaces influence the movement of the groups that erected them, confining them to a series of physical actions that are repeated with every usage: and so help form the historical memory and ideology of that group³⁶.

Applying this way of looking at funerary architecture to the two tholoi-types of Knossos and trying to comprehend the ideological aspects underlying the physical movements – the progressing through the funerary landscape to and from the tombs, we have a chance to reconstruct, even if but vaguely, communal memory-patterns.

In the case of the Minoan tholos, the concepts of repetition and commemoration of a substantial group seem well evidenced in the archaeological record: feasting rituals have been presumed for the open air paved areas, transference of bones into the ossuaries is evident, and the need for an enormous quantity of conical cups. The tholos appears as a unitary and common space for the dead, in which they have a secure arrangement, known to everybody but closed to the living. The circular space, without corners as differences and ruptures, may imply a sort of pseudo-equality and a sense of community in death. Later on there will be larnakes, pithoi and recesses in the Minoan tholoi: they may accentuate the individual more. And beyond this, the cemeteries composed of multiple-chambered tombs announce yet further social differentiation and the individual's establishment.

Undoubtedly too in the Mycenaean tholoi there were commemorations and rituals for the reopening of the tomb. But at Kephala the participants involved will have been fewer than at Gypsades. There are no ossuaries here to receive the numerous dead. Further a marked individuality can be read into the very architecture, namely the grave pits in the floor and the niches

35 Papadimitriou 2009. Alberti 2015. See also Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 117-118.

36 Connerton 1989, cited in Wright 2006.

in the dromos. The dromos is as an added feature, not required in the Minoan tradition: narrow and often rather long, it restricts involvement, allowing the active participation of but a limited number. In progressing from the settlement to the Kephala tomb, moreover, the opportunity of re-visiting places memorable in Minoan daily life is completely missing: there is no view of the Palace, nor of other cemeteries, only a bit of Jouktas is visible, the sea not at all. However, a new element of display is introduced by the proximity of the principal road leading to the harbour.

To summarize: for the mainland tholoi, the impact of the individual is more prevailing than for the Minoan tholoi. Likewise, the participation of the living in the process appears restricted in number, and in that sense more intimate for the mainland version: the narrow dromos necessitates this limited access. Moreover, the Minoan tholoi are a visible component of the landscape they inhabit, as *built features*, as a real *house* of the dead. Whilst the mainland tholoi covered with their tumuli are more likely to vanish into their surroundings, becoming *part of the natural landscape*, a sort of *artificial hill*.

These aspects only concern the physical and so external part of the funerary experience, but they are both created by and also influence the intangible spheres of what is sacred, of concepts about the afterlife and religion. The complexities of social dynamics are in play. To me, and from a psychological/ritual/religious viewpoint, descending below the earth's surface is an act ideologically quite in contrast to remaining above ground level.

A RETURN TICKET

The present analysis attempts to emphasise how in the Knossos valley two dissimilar ways of managing death, one following the other, that find physical expression in two types of tombs only apparently similar in form. Gypsades appears as a classic example of working at a community level, with some traces later of individuality in the sporadic usage of the larnax. Here the collective aspect is confirmed by the symbolic value and the practical use of the ossuaries. The grieving parties process towards a burial place that is fully embedded in the Minoan landscape of memory: what is seen from this physical (and certainly also psychological) path are the places of reverence and power, in the full light of day.

The Kephala manages death differently: a more restricted group is involved, in which the individual ranks higher, as is testified by the use of smaller pits and niches that receive the dead in ones and twos. But the absence of lateral rooms used as ossuaries to accommodate a high number of depositions is the most noteworthy observation. The itinerary is down, into the bowels of the earth and the darkness; a journey also bereft of reminders of the surrounding culture. A burial is an event for a limited number of people, sufficiently brave to go through the dark of the dromos.

Considering our two sets of tholoi, then, is it possible to speak of a continuity of practice in Crete?

The two Knossos tholoi, the MM III-LM IA tholos of Gypsades and the LM II one of Kephala, are only apparently close in respect of where they are and when they were used, but they are very distant, not only in the construction technologies, but especially in the ideology that underlies their construction.

From the archaeological point of view, we can go back to the statement of Korres, who in 1984 asserted:

“Thus, it becomes clear that there is a sufficient number of elements in support of the proposed gradual development of the Messenian tholos tomb (the first of this kind on the Greek mainland) during the MH period [...]. On this basis it may be generally accepted that MH tomb types comprised the model for the construction and appearance of late MH –

early LHI Messenian tholos tombs. The possibility of influences from Cretan circular tholos tombs cannot be excluded, since the overall form is similar (the circular shape). Apart from this resemblance, however, the differences are enormous" (Korres 1984, 149).

If ideas circulated, and certainly they *were* circulating in a period of such frequent commercial and artisan contacts and movements, we must stress that in Messenia there already existed a collective burial place of circular form before the advent of the tholos with tumulus. The grave pits excavated inside the continental tholoi (not seen in the Messarà tholoi) may recall and be derived from habits expressed in the MH tumuli, that covered groups of shaft graves. It is also plausible, however, that on the Mainland the passage from tumulus to built tholos was influenced by the knowledge of Minoan Messarà tholoi and also probably by the actual involvement of workers well-experienced in the architectural and engineering techniques used in Crete.

The differences between the two tomb types being discussed are not only those of different technologies or tastes, but of quite different mental ideologies, to which the technology is but a means of expression.

Looking at the two types of tholoi present at Knossos in the phase between MM III and LM II, Knossos seems to be locus for two different ways of looking at the death, the travel in the afterlife and the rituals helping the grieving process of the living. Even if we seek the origin of the continental tholos in the Messarà tombs, yet when the underground tholos appears in Crete for the first time at Kephala, this burial custom is already part of a different society: the choice of a new location at Knossos, different too in its landscape, burial space, functions and performances – all testify to a divergent ideological tradition.

We will perhaps never be sure, but if the outbound journey of the circular tomb from Crete to Mainland has been validated, yet on its return the traveller had changed fundamentally³⁷.

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37 We refer here to the long debate on the possibility that persons coming from the Mainland were responsible for the innovations introduced in the Knossian burial customs from LM II onwards (Alberti 2004, 2014 and 2018. Wiener 2015).

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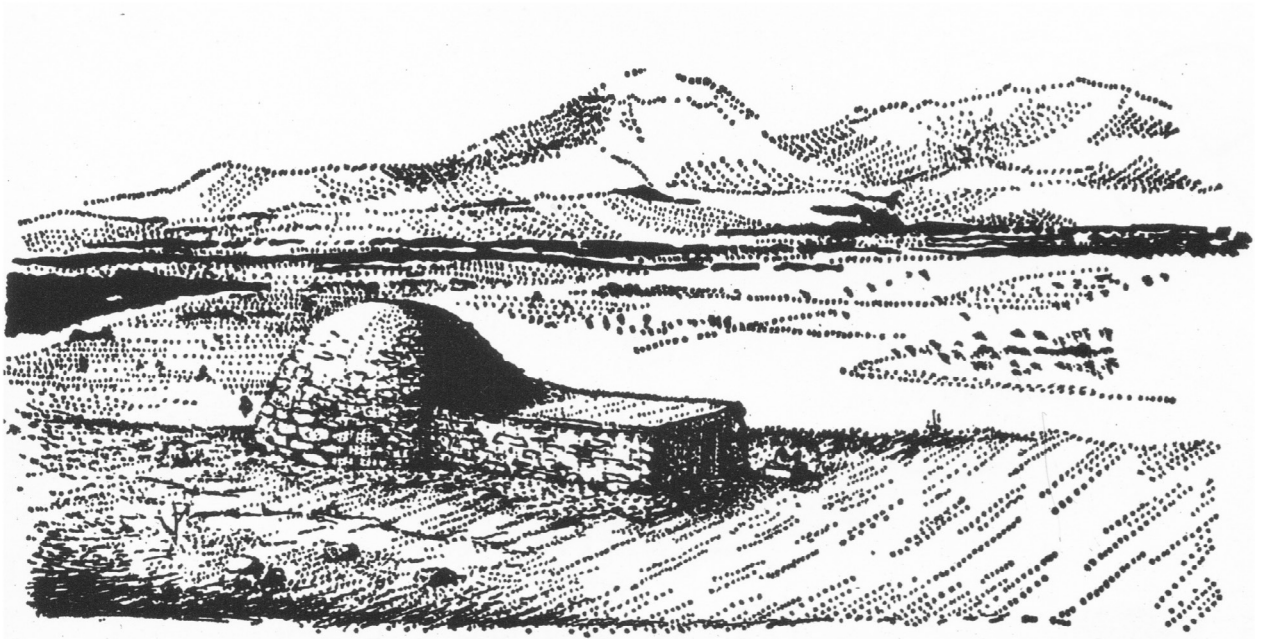


Fig. 1. Example of 'Minoan' epigeic tholos tomb (Apesokari) (after Pelon 1976, pl. VII.1).

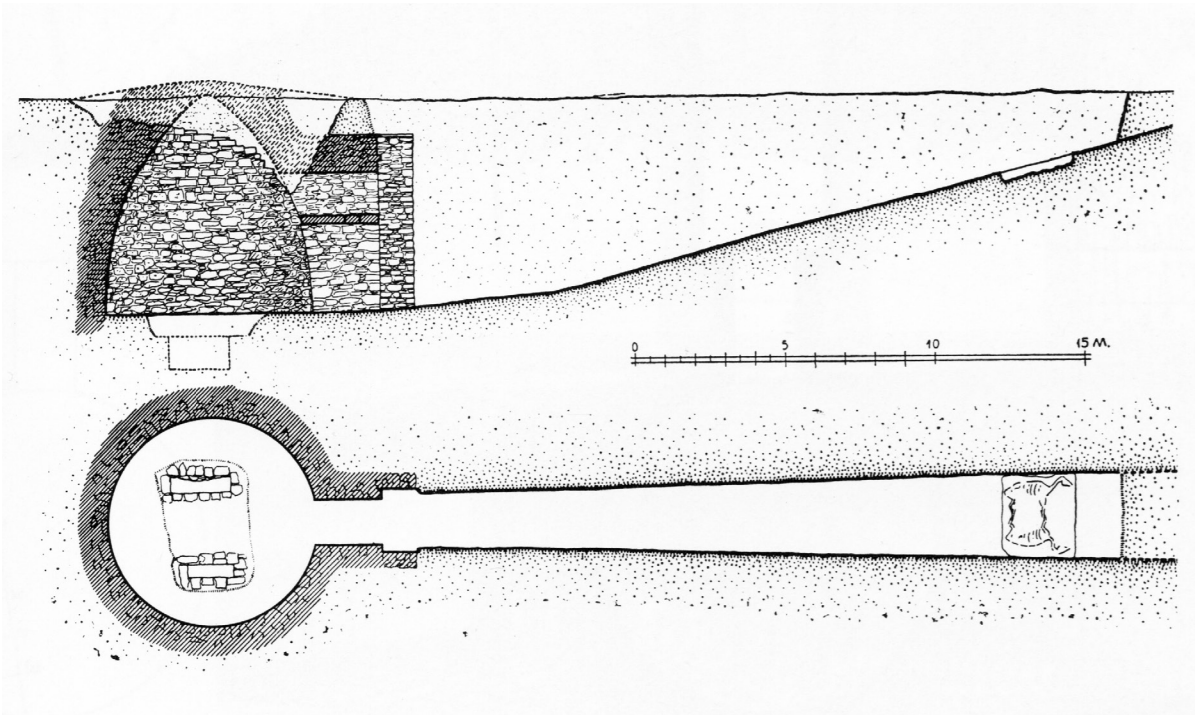


Fig. 2. Example of 'Mycenaean' hypogeic tholos tomb (Marathon) (after Pelon 1976, pl. CVII.2).



Fig. 3. The Gypsades tholos during the excavations. It is possible to see the two floor levels, the stone door and the ossuaries in the background. The circular wall was half removed by stone looters of the Roman period (after Hood 1960, pl. XVIIIb, courtesy of © Antiquity Publications Ltd).

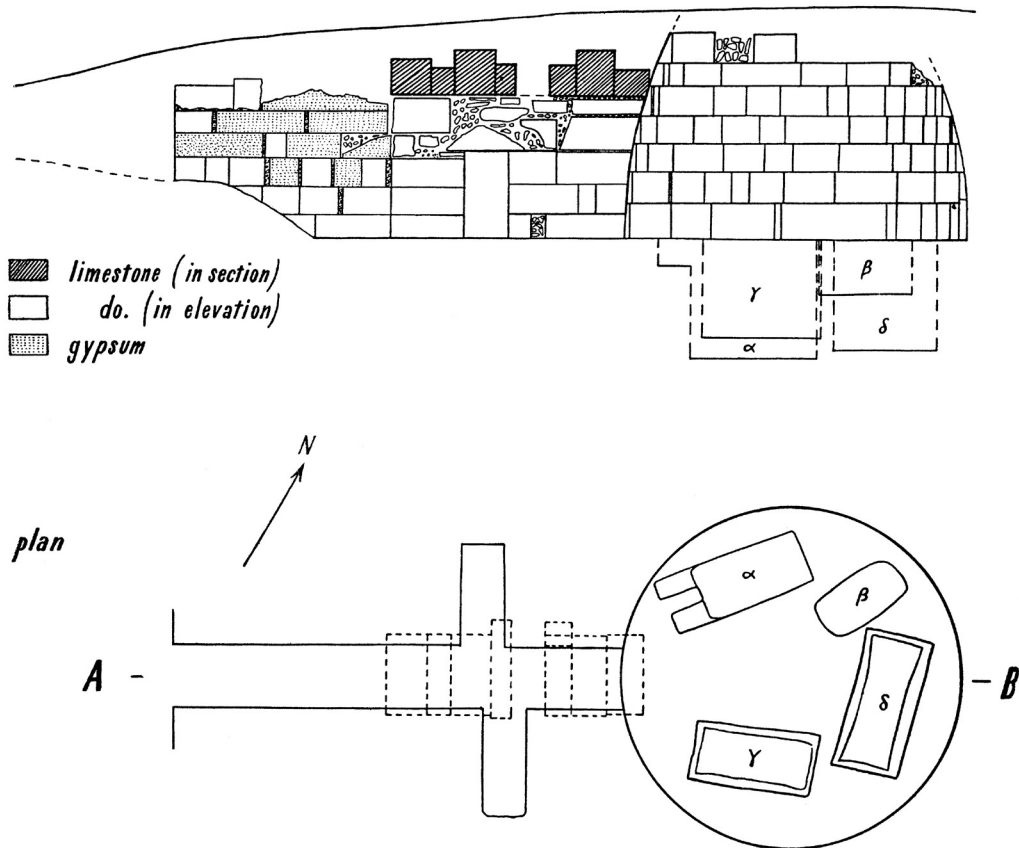


Fig. 4. The Kephala tholos (after Pelon 1976, pl. CXXIX).

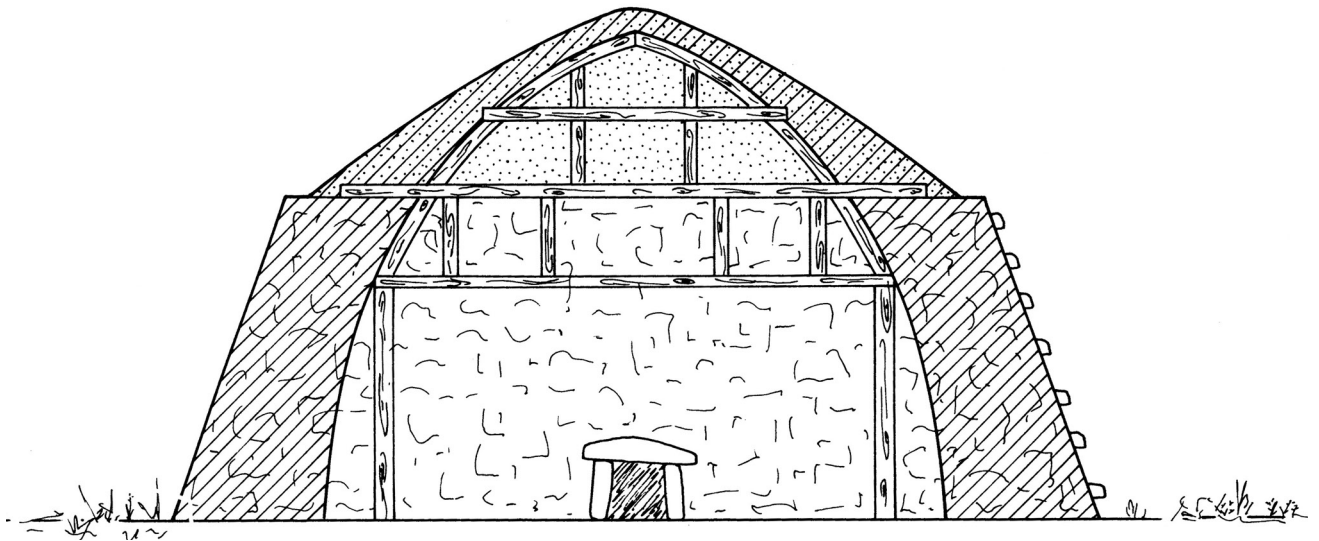


Fig. 5. Hypothetical reconstruction of the roofing of 'Minoan'-type tholos tomb of greater diameter (after Pelon 1976, pl. XV.2).

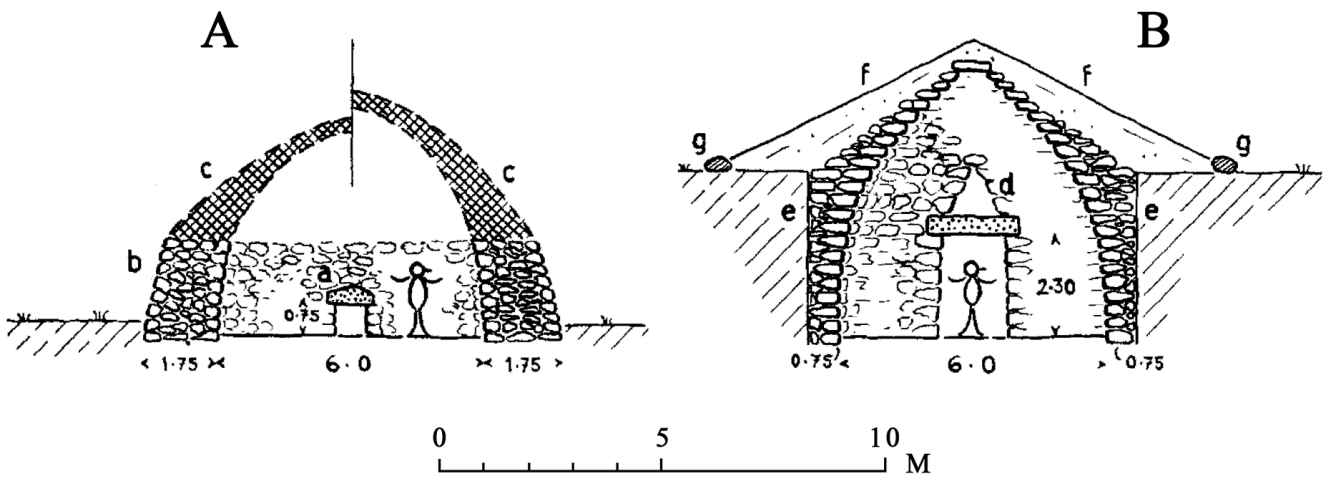


Fig. 6. Comparison between 'Minoan' and 'Mycenaean' tholos tombs: a) Stone lintel; b) Walls; c) Vault of mud or mud-brick; d) Relieving triangle; e) Walls built in cylindrical cutting in the ground; f) Mound of earth covering top of vault; g) Ring of stones round base of mound. The 'man' is 1.68 m tall (after Hood 1960, fig. 2, courtesy of © Antiquity Publications Ltd).