

Mycenaean Messenia in the Making: The Evidence from the Tholos Tombs

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Abstract: The analysis of Middle and Late Bronze Age tombs provides important insights into the emergence of the Mycenaean society and its later developments. The southwestern Peloponnese (Messenia and Triphylia) in particular, with its rich mortuary landscape, is suitable for studying the changes which occurred not only at the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age but also during the Mycenaean period. The purpose of this paper is to highlight these changes through the architecture of the tholos tombs as well as the burial gifts.

Keywords: Messenia, Triphylia, tholos tombs, MH, early Mycenaean period, funerary archaeology

Introduction

Since Heinrich Schliemann's excavations at Mycenae in 1876, Greek Bronze Age tombs have attracted the attention of archaeologists and of historians. With the rising awareness that graves are an important source for understanding changes and developments in ancient societies, interest has extended from burial sites of the so-called elites also to more modest tombs. Especially in cultures where written records are absent or allow only a limited reconstruction of social hierarchies, the analysis of different aspects concerning burials and burial places allows us to make major contributions to this topic.

The southwestern Peloponnese with its rich late MH and LH mortuary landscape is particularly suitable for studying the socio-political changes which occurred not only at the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age but also during the Mycenaean period proper.² Whereas it is difficult to trace social hierarchies during the earlier MH period due to the small number of excavated tombs, the emergence of the early Mycenaean elite burials can be observed very well. At this point, I would like to stress that this paper does not deal only with modern Messenia: in accordance with the research of John Bennet, Yannis Galanakis and Birgitta Eder I also include Triphylia south of the Alpheios in my considerations (Fig. 1).³

The Southwestern Peloponnese in the MH Period: An Overview

After the collapse which brought the EH II material culture to an end, the Peloponnese seems to have been partially deserted.⁴ In many regions, an increase in population is only visible in the later Middle Bronze Age.⁵ It seems that this was also the case in Triphylia, where a substantial

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² Of course, it has to be kept in mind that developments were not identical in the different regions of the Peloponnese, not to mention mainland Greece.

³ Bennet – Galanakis 2005, 147; Eder 2011.

⁴ Perhaps some groups of the population in EH III were used to a nomadic lifestyle: Rutter 2017 (with further references).

⁵ Zavadil 2010; Zavadil 2016.

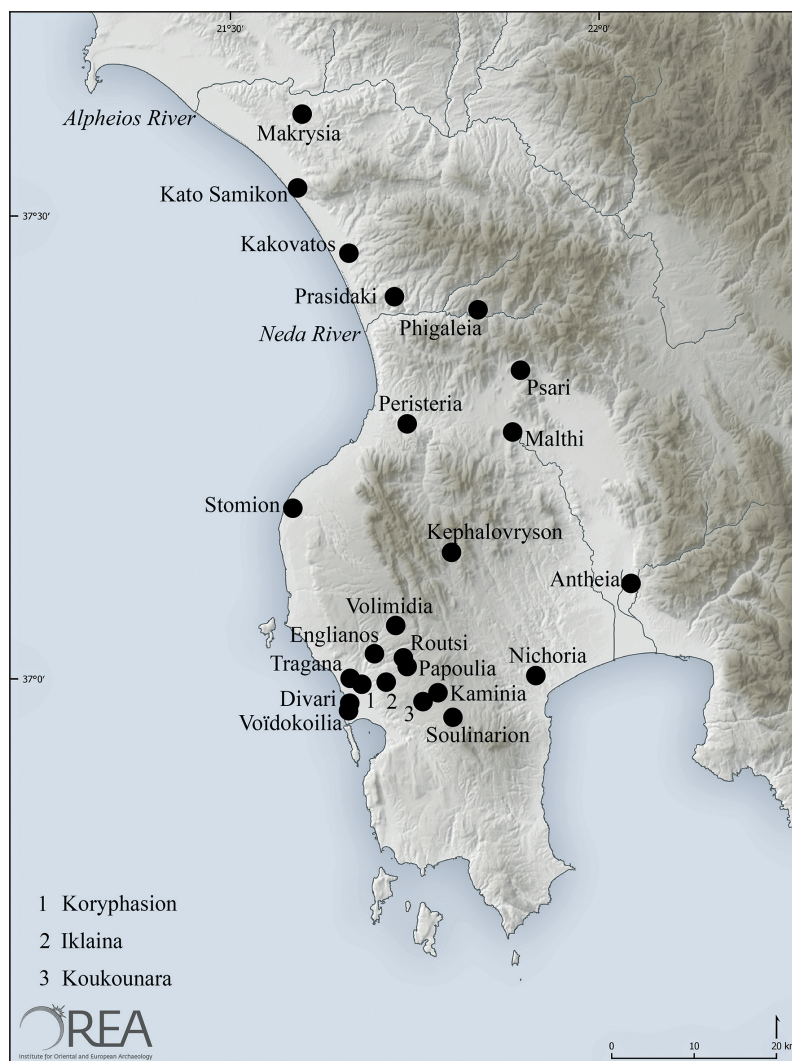


Fig. 1: Map of the southwestern Peloponnese with sites mentioned in the text
(M. Zavadil, M. Börner)

number of settlements were founded only in the second half of the Middle Bronze Age or close to its end. Only a few sites, e.g. Phigaleia-Kourdoumbouli and Prasadaki, were inhabited in MH I and MH II.⁶ Accordingly, tombs from the first half of the MH period are lacking. South of the Neda River, the pattern changes: on the Epano Englianos ridge, in the vicinity of the later Palace of Nestor, evidence for habitation exists from the late EH III and the early MH periods.⁷ The settlements at Malthi, Nichoria, Stomion near Philiatra and possibly also at Iklaina-Traganes were possibly founded in the first half of the Middle Bronze Age as well.⁸ Of the many tumuli known in modern Messenia, only nine have been excavated.⁹ Apart from two burial mounds of unknown date (Divari and Myrsinochori-Routsis, Tumulus I [Giorgiopoulos]), all were built in the first half of the MH period.¹⁰ Although these tumuli constitute a fascinating phenomenon in Messenia, the

⁶ Rambach 2010, 114.

⁷ Deriziotis Aloni: Stocker 2003; Stocker 2004. Petropoulos Trenches: Davis – Stocker 2010.

⁸ Zavadil 2010, 158–159; Cosmopoulos – Shelmerdine 2016, 203. For the foundation of Malthi probably in MH II see now Worsham et al. 2018, 15, 23.

⁹ This number does not include the so-called complex tumuli (for the term see Voutsaki 1998, 43).

¹⁰ Pelon 1976, 75–77; Boyd 2002, 119–123, 126–130, 137–138, 153–159, 167–175; Rambach 2010, 113; Korres 2012, 430–432; Zavadil 2013, 288–291, 364, 499–500, 530–531, 540–546, 587–592, 601. To avoid lengthy foot-

present paper will not focus on them.¹¹ However, I would like to emphasise a few observations: Nikolas Papadimitriou has pointed out recently that at the very few sites in the Peloponnese where both extramural tumuli and settlements were excavated intramural burials were also common.¹² This coexistence may hint at some kind of social stratification already in the first half of the MH period.¹³ Not only the amount of labour and organisation required for constructing a tumulus has to be taken into account; a tumulus also enabled a larger number of mourners to attend the funeral as would have been the case at a grave within the settlement. Furthermore, a mound is visible from a distance and thus attracts attention. Moreover, albeit we have to consider a possible division of Messenia into several regions,¹⁴ the tumuli (and thus the people who were buried there) shared one common feature: at least some of the ceramic vessels used as burial gifts are thought to be imports from Aigina, the Argolid and from Crete.¹⁵ Thus, their owners might not only have been of higher social standing, but were also part of a wider network, which already existed in the first half of the Middle Bronze Age.¹⁶

The number of tombs dated to the second half and the end of the Middle Bronze Age does not match with the number of settlements known from this period: there are some cist graves or small built chamber tombs (and perhaps also pithos burials) in the tumuli at Kato Samikon-Kleidi,¹⁷ the tholos tomb at Koryphasion,¹⁸ and Tomb 1 at Chora-Volimidia/Kephalovryson.¹⁹ Possibly the intramural burials in Myron-Peristeria and Iklaina also date to the end of the MH period.²⁰ The tombs at Kato Samikon follow Middle Bronze Age traditions in terms of construction as well as of furniture, and, according to their excavator, Eleni Papakonstantinou, at least, in the way it was built one of the mounds resembled the much earlier tumulus at Papoulia-Ayios Ioannis with its radially inserted burial pithoi.²¹ By contrast, Tomb 1 at Chora-Volimidia/Kephalovryson and the tholos at Koryphasion show new features. Although Tomb 1 at Kephalovryson also belongs to the category of MH cist graves, the fact that it was cut into a natural cavity, its unusual size and the large number of grave goods set it apart from earlier burials. The tholos has no precursors on the mainland; whether its ‘invention’, which presumably took place in Messenia, can be attributed to Minoan influences or whether it was a genuinely mainland creation I do not wish to discuss.²²

notes, general references to burial sites will be limited to the main publications, which also provide the relevant bibliography (Pelon 1976; Boyd 2002; Zavadil 2013). – For a plan of Tumulus I (Giorgiopoulos) at Myrsinochori-Routsi, see now Marinatos 2014, 105, fig. 23.

¹¹ For a discussion of the relations between tumuli and tholoi in the southwestern Peloponnese, see Petrakis, this volume.

¹² Papadimitriou 2016, 338.

¹³ On this topic, see also Spencer 2010; Philippa-Touchais – Touchais 2016, 289.

¹⁴ Wright 2010, 813.

¹⁵ Korres 1993, 235–236; Rambach 2007, 146–147; Rambach 2011, 463–464, 471–472; Korres 2012, 430. For Cretan and/or Kytheran imports to settlements in MH I/II Messenia, see Howell 1992, 73, 76 (Nichoria); Davis – Stocker 2010 (Petropoulos Trenches, Epano Englianos).

¹⁶ See also Rutter – Zerner 1984.

¹⁷ Papakonstantinou 1988; Papakonstantinou 1989a; Papadimitriou 2001, 43–45; Boyd 2002, 186–189; Rambach 2002, 162–163; Nikolentzos 2011, 57–59.

¹⁸ Pelon 1976, 198; Boyd 2002, 125; Zavadil 2013, 451–453.

¹⁹ Boyd 2002, 139, 141–142, 144; Chasiakou 2003, Εισαγωγή: Βολμιδία, Κεφαλόβρυσου, τάφος 1, 59–61; Μέρος Β, I: Κατάλογος: Β, I.10. Τάφος Κεφαλόβρυσου Βολμιδίων, 837–848; Β, II.10. Τάφος Κεφαλόβρυσου Βολμιδίων, 1690–1721; Zavadil 2013, 93–94, 334–337.

²⁰ Myron-Peristeria: Boyd 2002, 35–36, 169, 171–172; Zavadil 2013, 505. Iklaina: Zavadil 2013, 408.

²¹ Papakonstantinou 1988.

²² For summaries of the discussion (with further bibliography), see Pelon 1976, 442–453; Cavanagh – Mee 1998, 44–45; Dickinson 2011.

The Funerary Landscape in MH III/LH I

More tholos tombs are known from the transitional phase between MH III and LH I: they were built in Kato Samikon-Kleidi,²³ Epano Englianos (Tholos V, the so-called Grave Circle),²⁴ and perhaps also in Myron-Peristeria (Tholos 3)²⁵ and Koukounara-Gouvalari (Tholos 2).²⁶ Three of them stand out because of their rich grave goods; the exception is Tholos 1 (the so-called tumulus) at Kato Samikon-Kleidi. The burials in this tomb received pottery, spindle whorls made of stone and clay as well as one knife. Tholos V at Epano Englianos contained, amongst other finds, diadems and at least two vessels made of gold and silver, eight swords, several knives, razors and bronze vessels, seals, beads made of semi-precious stone, amber and glass (one Nuzi bead!), as well as pottery imported from Crete and Cyprus. It has to be stressed that these grave goods do not, however, necessarily belong to the earliest burials. In Myron-Peristeria, Tholos 3, gold and silver vessels, a diadem as well as golden foil ornaments, several beads of semi-precious stone and pottery were found. In Peristeria and Gouvalari large gilded or silver-plated rivets attest to the former presence of swords.

Apart from these tholoi with diameters varying between 5 m and c. 7 m, there is also evidence for smaller, tholos-like tombs, which frequently share a tumulus. They often lack the canonical entrance area consisting of dromos and stomion and just feature short stomion-like dromoi. For this reason, Sofia Voutsaki named them “rudimentary tholoi”.²⁷ We find such tombs at Ano Kremmydia-Kaminia,²⁸ Koukounara-Gouvalari (Tumulus α , Tumulus β , Tumulus 2?),²⁹ Nichoria/Karpophora (Tomb Nikitopoulos 4)³⁰ and at Kephlovryson.³¹ They differ from the larger tholoi neither in the method of construction nor in the quality of the building materials; only their smaller size and the range of grave goods set them apart. No prestige weapons or objects made of precious metals are known from these tombs. The main burial gifts consist of ceramic vessels, clay spindle whorls and stone arrowheads; knives, pins, rings and beads of bronze were only rarely found. Georgios S. Korres’ observation that the rudimentary Tholoi $\alpha 1$ and $\alpha 4$ in Tumulus α at Koukounara-Gouvalari were built at about the same time as Tholos 2 in their immediate vicinity has provided an important indication for the social status of the people buried in these tombs.³² From the difference in size together with the differences in the burial goods we may conclude that the owners of Tholos 2 belonged to a higher social class than the people who commissioned the rudimentary Tholoi $\alpha 1$ and $\alpha 4$.

Thus, based on tomb architecture, it is possible to identify two or possibly three regions within the area under study, that stood out against the others in the early Mycenaean period: the area around Epano Englianos, where two tholos tombs were built (Tholos V at Epano Englianos, and the tholos at Koryphasion), Myron-Peristeria and perhaps also the Koukounara plateau. These tholos tombs differ from contemporary tholoi in Messenia and Triphylia in terms of size and wealthy burial offerings.³³ It is probably correct to assume that in this phase, the construction of a ‘proper’ tholos was already sufficient to underline the importance of the

²³ Yalouris 1966; Pelon 1976, 77–78; Zavadil 2000; Boyd 2002, 186–188; Nikolentzos 2011, 55–57. For the pottery found in the tholos, see also Rambach 2002, 160–162.

²⁴ Pelon 1976, 194–195; Zavadil 2000; Boyd 2002, 147–152; Zavadil 2013, 374–379. For the tombs at Epano Englianos in general, see Murphy et al. 2020 (with references to earlier bibliography).

²⁵ Pelon 1976, 209–211; Boyd 2002, 167–175; Zavadil 2013, 510–512.

²⁶ Pelon 1976, 203–204; Boyd 2002, 108–113; Zavadil 2013, 461–463. For a sketch of the tholos, see Marinatos 2014, 154, fig. 34.

²⁷ Voutsaki 1998, 43.

²⁸ Boyd 2002, 116–119; Zavadil 2013, 264–273.

²⁹ Boyd 2002, 108–113; Zavadil 2013, 463–480.

³⁰ Boyd 2002, 160–164; Zavadil 2013, 434–436.

³¹ Boyd 2002, 185; Zavadil 2013, 449–450.

³² Korres 1976, 343–344, 349; Korres 1977, 481.

³³ For lists of MH III/LH I tholos tombs in Messenia and Triphylia, see Boyd 2002, 219–220; Zavadil 2013, 247.

person(s) who commissioned it. For this reason, no additional architectural features were necessary to illustrate distinction.

The Funerary Landscape in LH I

In LH I, the number of tholoi that were built becomes greater than in the previous periods. It has to be emphasised that some tombs – I am thinking especially of Tholos IV at Epano Englianos³⁴ – might have been constructed already at the transition from MH III to LH I. One observation is worth mentioning: The diameters of all tombs vary within the range 5 m to 6 m; the exception is Tholos IV at Epano Englianos with a diameter of 9.35 m. It seems to be no coincidence that it is situated at a site where a tholos (Tholos V) had already been constructed earlier. However, this earlier tomb has a significantly smaller diameter of 5.50 m. At Koukounara-Gouvalari the situation appears similar: although Tholoi 1³⁵ and 2 are considerably smaller than the aforementioned large tomb, the observation that the later tomb (Tholos 1, built in LH I, diameter 6.25 m) is larger than the earlier one (Tholos 2, possibly built in MH III/LH I, diameter 4.90–5.00 m) holds true. Thus one may conclude that in LH I the sponsors of the tombs at Epano Englianos and Koukounara-Gouvalari intended to exceed the older tombs in size. What can be said about the grave goods from these tombs? Is there an increase both in the size of the tombs and in the number and quality of the grave goods? There are no clear answers to these questions as the contents of most tombs had been rearranged ... by whomever and whenever. However, as far as we can tell, there was no increase in the lavishness of the burial gifts.

With diameters ranging between 5 m and 6 m, most tholoi built in LH I Messenia are considerably smaller than Tholos IV at Epano Englianos. Three of them were undisturbed at the time of their excavation: Tholos 2 at Kato Samikon-Kleidi,³⁶ Tholos 2 at Myrsinochori-Routsis³⁷ and the so-called South Tholos 1 at Myron-Peristeria.³⁸ Based on what we know about all LH I tholoi in the area under study, it has to be stressed again that the size of a tholos alone does not allow any conclusions as to the social status of its owner(s). Not only the grave goods have to be taken into account, but also the neighbouring tombs (if any). The burials in Tholoi 1 and 2 at Myrsinochori-Routsis³⁹ were provided with exceptionally rich grave goods, which are comparable to those found at Epano Englianos and Myron-Peristeria. Tholos 2 at Kato Samikon-Kleidi was less lavishly furnished, but contained, amongst other burial gifts, a boar's tusk helmet, seals and some beads of carnelian. However, the tomb might have been in use until LH IIIA2⁴⁰ and it is as yet unknown to which burials the above-mentioned grave goods belonged. Two tholoi – South Tholos 1 at Myron-Peristeria as well as the tholos at Makryisia-Ayios Ilias⁴¹ – clearly differ from the aforementioned tombs. Although they are similar in size, their grave goods are significantly less rich than in Routsis and even poorer than in Kato Samikon-Kleidi, Tholos 2. At Makryisia-Ayios Ilias they comprised pottery, four knives and two bronze pins, spindle whorls of clay and steatite as well as one stone

³⁴ Pelon 1976, 192–194; Boyd 2002, 147–152; Zavadil 2013, 369–373; Murphy, this volume. Davis – Stocker 2015 argue for a possible construction of Tholos IV already in MH III.

³⁵ Pelon 1976, 203–204; Boyd 2002, 108–113; Zavadil 2013, 460–461. For a plan of the tholos, see now Marinatos 2014, 151, fig. 33.

³⁶ Papakonstantinou 1989b; Boyd 2002, 186–189 (termed “Tholos tomb [mound 5]”); Rambach 2002, 162–163; Nikolentzos 2011, 59–60.

³⁷ Pelon 1976, 198–200; Boyd 2002, 153–159; Zavadil 2013, 526–529.

³⁸ Boyd 2002, 167–175; Zavadil 2013, 514–516. For lists of tholoi built in LH I, see Boyd 2002, 220, and Zavadil 2013, 247–248.

³⁹ For a topographical map of the tholoi, see Marinatos 2014, 106, fig. 24. – The heavily disturbed tholos at Voidokoilia (Pelon 1976, 201; Boyd 2002, 126–130; Zavadil 2013, 592–596; Marinatos 2014, 135, fig. 29) might also be included in this group of smaller, but richly furnished LH I tholos tombs.

⁴⁰ Papakonstantinou 1989b, 110, indicates LH I–III A2 as the period of use for the tomb. For the abandonment of the tholos in LH II, see Nikolentzos 2011, 58.

⁴¹ Pelon 1976, 78; Zavadil 2000; Boyd 2002, 191–192; Nikolentzos 2011, 61.

arrowhead, whereas South Tholos 1 at Myron-Peristeria contained solely pottery. Since this tomb is situated at a considerable distance from the other tholoi at this site, it seems justifiable to assume that the spatial distance and the different choice of burial gifts are both expressions of the class distinctions of their owners. Consequently, these tombs should be seen in the context of the rudimentary tholoi, whose construction continued in LH I. This observation is supported by the fact that neither South Tholos 1 at Myron-Peristeria nor the tholos at Makrysia-Ayios Ilias seem to have featured dromoi, although one has to add that the latter tomb was only very poorly preserved.

Therefore, following their first appearance in Koryphasion in MH III, tholos tombs spread rapidly in the southwestern Peloponnese during LH I. It seems that three social groups commissioned their construction, since differences become apparent in several respects:

1. At four sites tholoi were presumably built in MH III/LH I: Myron-Peristeria (Tholos 3), Epano Englianos (Tholos V) and possibly Koukounara-Gouvalari (Tholos 2). They are similar in terms of their construction as well as the recovered burial gifts.⁴² At two of these sites we notice the construction of a second series of tholoi in LH I. They are larger in size, but contain grave goods of roughly the same quality as before. The exception is Kato Samikon-Kleidi: compared with the aforementioned tombs the dead buried in these two tholoi were poorly furnished.⁴³ Furthermore, both tholos tombs seem to be more or less the same size (Tholos 1: 5.50 m;⁴⁴ Tholos 2: 5.65 m⁴⁵).

2. In LH I, tholos tombs were also built in new places: Makrysia-Ayios Ilias, Myrsinochori-Routsi (Tholos 2), Voïdokoilia and perhaps also at Nichoria/Karpophora (Tomb Nikitopoulos 5).⁴⁶ They belonged to different social groups: the people buried in Routsi may be regarded as of similar social standing as the owners of the tombs at Epano Englianos, Myron-Peristeria (and perhaps also Koukounara-Gouvalari), while those who commissioned the other tombs might have belonged to a lower social level.

3. The persons buried e.g. in South Tholos 1 at Myron-Peristeria and in the rudimentary tholoi appear to have belonged to yet another social group.

The Funerary Landscape in LH I/II–LH II

With the transition from LH I to LH II, the heyday of the tholoi in the southwestern Peloponnese began: Tholos 2 and the slightly younger Tholos 1 at Myron-Peristeria,⁴⁷ the tholos at Psari-Metsiki,⁴⁸ and Tholos A at Kakovatos⁴⁹ were constructed late in LH I or at the very beginning of LH IIA. Not only were most tholos tombs built in LH I/II–LH II, it was also in this period when tholoi were commissioned which differ drastically from other contemporary (and earlier) tholos tombs in the area under study. Their architectural elaboration – both the decoration of their façades and the quality of their masonry – as well as their size sets them apart from the majority

⁴² It is uncertain whether the tholoi in Koukounara-Gouvalari should be included in this group, since no diadems, vessels of gold or silver or fragments of gold foil were found. However, the absence of such objects may be due to the bad condition of these tombs.

⁴³ Nevertheless, at least one of the dead buried in the later Tholos 2 was provided with a boar's tusk helmet, which indicates a warrior burial (Papakonstantinou 1989b).

⁴⁴ According to Yalouris 1966, 7, the diameter is 5.50 m; from the plan (Yalouris 1966, fig. 1) a diameter of c. 5.00 m can be determined. If 5.00 m is the correct dimension, it also applies to Kato Samikon-Kleidi that the older tholos is the obviously smaller one.

⁴⁵ Papakonstantinou 1989b, 110.

⁴⁶ Boyd 2002, 160–164; Zavadil 2013, 436.

⁴⁷ Tholos 2: Pelon 1976, 209–211; Boyd 2002, 167–175; Zavadil 2013, 508–510. Tholos 1: Pelon 1976, 207–209; Boyd 2002, 167–175; Zavadil 2013, 502–504.

⁴⁸ Boyd 2002, 180–182; Zavadil 2013, 550–553.

⁴⁹ Pelon 1976, 219–221; Boyd 2002, 189–191; Nikolentzos 2011, 46–49; de Vreé, this volume.

of the tholoi. This applies to Tholos 1 at Myron-Peristeria, Tholos 1 at Tragana-Viglitsa,⁵⁰ the tholos at Antheia-Makria Rachi,⁵¹ and perhaps also Tholos III at Kato Englianos,⁵² although its masonry is of poorer quality compared with the others. In Epano Englianos and Myron-Peristeria these tombs follow a tradition which had begun as early as the transition from MH III to LH I. Furthermore, they continue a trend already noted: later tholoi surpassed their predecessors in size. The latest tombs, however, also surpass the earlier ones in the quality of their masonry. Now also in Tragana-Viglitsa and Antheia-Makria Rachi – sites where no tholoi existed prior to LH II – tholos tombs were built in outstanding masonry. In this context, it seems justified to assume close contacts between Myron-Peristeria and Antheia-Makria Rachi: the construction of the façades of the LH II tholoi is identical,⁵³ as if one and the same architect planned them.

Taking into consideration the wealth of burial gifts found in the tholoi at Kakovatos as well as their size, one is inclined to include them in this group of outstanding tombs. Although we do not have much information about their architectural design because of their pitiful preservation, one can however state that – apart from their impressive size and the paved floor in Tholos B – they do not (any longer?) show any outstanding architectural features. Nevertheless, the finds prove that the persons buried in them belonged to the same social class as the owners of the tholoi at Myron-Peristeria, Antheia-Makria Rachi, Epano Englianos, etc. How to explain this? I think the reason for this could be the very small number of tholoi in the area north of the river Neda: so far, tholos tombs are known only at Makryisia-Ayios Ilias, Kato Samikon-Kleidi and Kakovatos. Perhaps it sufficed to build the Kakovatos tholoi as large as they were to express social standing, and it was not necessary to embellish their architecture beyond that. So it seems that in terms of competitive use of architectural features, the burial monuments in the region of modern Triphylia lagged behind the area south of the Neda River, where we noticed this tendency already in LH I.

It would be interesting to know in this context where to place the tholos near Psari, since with its diameter of 9.10 m it is clearly in the same category as Tholos IV at Epano Englianos and Tholos 2 at Myron-Peristeria. Unfortunately it has been severely disturbed by activities in the post-Mycenaean period, but two rivets with gilded heads are thought by Georgia Hadzi-Spiliopoulou⁵⁴ to derive from a sword or dagger and suggest the former existence of a warrior's burial.

Apart from these exceptional tombs, both 'normal' and 'rudimentary' tholoi continued to be built. They are now found frequently throughout modern Messenia; in Triphylia, however, they remain a rare phenomenon.⁵⁵ Several of them were relatively splendidly furnished with some of their grave goods having parallels in the aforementioned rich tombs.⁵⁶ But it is important to note that none of them yielded swords (or rivets or pommels), and it is also unknown whether they once contained vessels made of precious metals (the only exception is the MME tholos in Nichoria⁵⁷). The absence of these groups of burial gifts may indicate that these tombs belonged to a less high-ranking group of people than the outstanding tholoi built in this phase at Myron-Peristeria, Antheia-Makria Rachi, Tragana-Viglitsa, Epano Englianos and Kakovatos. Their less elaborate architecture suggests this, too.

⁵⁰ Pelon 1976, 195–197; Boyd 2002, 131–132; Zavadil 2013, 559–561. For a plan of the tholos, see now Marinatos 2014, 119, fig. 27.

⁵¹ Boyd 2002, 185; Zavadil 2013, 292–294.

⁵² Pelon 1976, 190–192; Boyd 2002, 147–152; Zavadil 2013, 366–368. The new Tholoi VI and VII, discovered in 2018, were presumably built in LH IIA; see <<http://www.griffinwarrior.org/tholos-tombs/>> and <<https://chronique.efa.gr/?kroute=report&id=8078>> (last access 29 Nov. 2020).

⁵³ Zavadil 2013, 62–63, 294 n. 5, 697, figs. 81–82. See also Nelson 2007, 146–148.

⁵⁴ Hadzi 1989, 79; Hadzi 1990, 105.

⁵⁵ For lists of tholoi built in LH I/II and LH II, see Boyd 2002, 220, and Zavadil 2013, 248.

⁵⁶ E.g. some tombs in the area close to Koukounara (Tholos Akona 2, Tholoi Phyties 1 and Phyties 2: Pelon 1976, 202–205; Boyd 2002, 113–116; Zavadil 2013, 457–459, 481–482) as well as the Veves tholos at Nichoria/Karporphora (Pelon 1976, 188–189; Boyd 2002, 160–165; Zavadil 2013, 428–429).

⁵⁷ Boyd 2002, 213; Zavadil 2013, 418–425. For arguments for a construction of the MME Tholos in LH II or LH IIB/IIIA1, see Zavadil 2013, 76–77, 425; Boyd 2014, 200–201.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the significance of the architectural design of tholos tombs had changed by LH II. In MH III and LH I, when only few tholoi were built, there were hardly any considerable differences in their construction or in the choice of building materials. Social distinctions seem to have been expressed only by means of the size of the tombs and the choice of grave goods. With LH I/II–LH II, when tholoi spread throughout the area under study, differentiation in architectural design was deployed in the regions south of the river Neda: some tombs have exceptionally designed façades or e.g. stomia built of cut or sewn ashlar blocks. The grave goods from these tombs also point to the prominent status of their owners. These tholoi might have been the burial places of the chiefs of small territories, which had probably already begun to rise as early as MH III/LH I. In LH II it seems that competition between the elites of these territories manifested itself both in the architecture of their tombs and in the burial gifts. At sites of perhaps lesser importance tholoi were also built, but these continued, unaltered, the former architectural traditions and may also have been less richly furnished. However, this development cannot be witnessed north of the river Neda: the tholoi of Kakovatos distinguish themselves from the other tholos tombs because of their size and the abundance of grave goods, but most probably not in terms of their architectural features.

The Funerary Landscape in LH III

None of the tholos tombs which were built in the area under study in LH III equalled in size the large tombs built in LH II.⁵⁸ The largest tholoi have diameters between 6 m and 7 m. At least in respect to their size, the difference between tholoi and rudimentary tholoi decreased, since in LH IIIA numerous tholos tombs with diameters ranging between 3 m and 5 m were built. It would be interesting to know more about the burial gifts, but almost all tombs had been badly disturbed in later periods. The finds that we know include mainly pottery, spindle whorls made of clay and stone, bronze knives and razors. What about the larger tholoi? In some,⁵⁹ finds have been recovered which hint at the previous existence of rich grave goods (fragments of sheet gold and gold leaf, gilded rivets, fragments of bronze vessels, etc.). But none of these larger and better furnished tholos tombs displays the outstanding architectural design which qualified the conspicuous series of LH II. It appears a logical conclusion that the steady rise in size and architectural elaboration of the tholoi, discernible from as early as LH I onwards, reflected the competition between elite groups of some centres. When Pylos began to emerge as the dominant centre, it was perhaps no longer necessary (or appropriate?) to use tholos tombs to demonstrate wealth and power.

With the early Palatial period, two further developments attract attention: firstly, chamber tombs became more widespread throughout the area under study;⁶⁰ although in the region between the Neda and the Alpheios they remained a rare phenomenon.⁶¹ Secondly, a series of tholoi was abandoned in LH IIB/IIIA or LH IIIA, i.e. Tholoi IV and V at Epáno Englianos, Tholos 2 at Myrsinochori-Routsí, some of the tholoi in the areas of Koukounara and Nichoria/Karpophora, the tholoi at Myron-Peristeria, Tragana-Viglitsa and Kakovatos, to name just a few. J. Bennet has suggested connecting this phenomenon with the growing dominance of the Palace of Pylos, since the smaller territories, whose leaders (and/or upper class) had been buried in them, had been absorbed into the kingdom of Pylos.⁶² Convincing as this hypothesis may be, it leaves one sub-

⁵⁸ For lists of tholoi built in LH III, see Boyd 2002, 212–213; Zavadil 2013, 248–249.

⁵⁹ E.g. in Tholos II at Malthi (Pelon 1976, 213–217; Boyd 2002, 213; Zavadil 2013, 569–572) and perhaps also the tholos at Soulinarion-Tourliditsa (Pelon 1976, 206–207; Boyd 2002, 133; Zavadil 2013, 555–556).

⁶⁰ In comparison with other regions of the Peloponnese, the number of chamber tombs in Messenia and Triphylia is rather low; see also Bennet – Galanakis 2005, 3–4.

⁶¹ Nikolentzos 2011, 42, 86–89.

⁶² Bennet 1995, 596–601; Bennet 1999, 142–149; Bennet 2007. A summary of Bennet's ideas can be found in Cavanagh – Mee 1998, 77–78.

stantial question unanswered: if the palace had annexed these territories, why did several tholos tombs remain in use in LH IIIB? Tholos 2 at Myrsinochori-Routsi, for example, went out of use after LH IIIA1, but Tholos 1 received burials probably until LH IIIB, and perhaps even until LH IIIC. Had the owners of Tholos 1 come to terms with the new rulers? How can we explain the different life cycles of tombs?

Moreover, it is not the case that the use of tholoi continued exclusively in the immediate vicinity of the palace,⁶³ as might be expected, if the only cause for their abandonment was the new concentration of power at the palace. It is reasonable to suppose that other factors also contributed to the abandonment of these tholoi. One reason for this could be that the owners of these tholoi, which were in use in the Palatial period, were the representatives of the rulers in the palace of Pylos in regional subcentres. Furthermore, the increasing poverty of the population and the growing concentration of wealth in the hands of the palatial elites might also have contributed to the abandonment of a number of tholos tombs.⁶⁴

In the Palatial period wealth (and power) was no longer demonstrated through combining the construction of architecturally impressive tholos tombs with luxurious burial gifts. It sufficed to provide the dead who were buried in those larger tholoi that were still in use or were newly built with a rich range of grave goods. Viewed from the outside, these tholos tombs differed only in their slightly larger diameter from those of less wealthy and/or less high-ranking people. This is in accordance with the observation that with the rise of the palaces, the manifestation of wealth, splendour (and presumably also the claim to power) was no longer associated with tombs but had shifted to the palace and its activities.⁶⁵

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⁶³ See also Mee – Cavanagh 1984, 53.

⁶⁴ Voutsaki 1995.

⁶⁵ Davis et al. 1997, 421.

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Illustration

Fig. 1: Map of the southwestern Peloponnese with sites mentioned in the text (M. Zavadil, M. Börner)