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Livari Skiadi. A Minoan cemetery in
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The early 21st century is an exciting period for Minoan funerary studies. Over the last 15 years, a series

of tombs and cemeteries that had been unearthed decades earlier have been extensively published,¹ old excavated assemblages have been (re)studied,² and new burial sites have been discovered.³ This profusion of fresh data has triggered a renewed interest in Minoan, and especially Prepalatial, mortuary practices. Fed by the theoretical, methodological, and scientific developments that took place in the archaeology of death from the 1980s onwards, recent studies offer novel perspectives on this enriched dataset.⁴ In this way, tomb types and grave goods are no longer seen as passive reflections of the status of the deceased; quite the contrary, it is now well acknowledged that funerary practices played an active role in the negotiation of social identities and relationships among the living. Themes such as landscape, memory, feasting, and performance have also gained importance in the literature on Minoan burial practices.⁵ Even more important, field methods have evolved, and recent projects testify to a growing investment in the study of long-neglected human skeletal remains, thus providing unprecedented information on the deceased (e.g., sex, age, and health status) and the different steps involved in their funerary treatment.⁶

Livari Skiadi is one of these recently and meticulously excavated cemeteries for which the archaeological community has been longing. The small coastal plain of Livari is located in southeastern Crete, ca. 5 kilometers to the east of Goudouras, opposite the islet of Kouphonisi. The cemetery was established on a low rocky promontory, only 50 meters from the shore. The existence of a burial site organized around a tholos tomb of the type well known in Prepalatial south-central Crete was first noted by N. Schlager, who also recorded three prehistoric settlements on the hills surrounding the plain of Livari.⁷ The cemetery suffered from erosion but it had as yet escaped the attention of looters. After suspicious visitors were spotted at the site and the owner of the land made unauthorized constructions, the 24th Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities decided to carry out rescue excavations (p. 4). The task was performed under the direction of Chrysa Sofianou with the collaboration of Yiannis Papadatos. Between 2008 and 2010, three excavation campaigns revealed a circular tomb and a burial rock shelter, both Prepalatial in date, a Neopalatial house tomb,

¹ Panagiotopoulos 2002; Alexiou and Warren 2004; Papadatos 2005; Vasilakis and Branigan 2010; Betancourt 2014.

² Caloi 2011; Flouda 2011; Girella 2011.

³ Schoep *et al.* 2011; Schoep *et al.* 2012; Tsipopoulou 2012; Papadatos and Sofianou 2013.

⁴ Vavouranakis 2007; Murphy 2011; Legarra Herrero 2014.

⁵ Hamilakis 1998; Vavouranakis 2007; Déderix 2015.

⁶ Triantaphyllou 2009; Triantaphyllou 2012; Crevecoeur *et al.* 2015.

⁷ Schlager *et al.* 2001.

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as well as deposits in open areas around the tombs. *Livari Skiadi. A Minoan cemetery in southeast Crete. Volume I. Excavation and finds* is the first of a two-volume final report on the excavation of the site. It presents the stratigraphy, architecture, and artefacts, while organic materials and final conclusions will be the subject of the second volume.

This first volume on the cemetery of Livari Skiadi is comprised of four parts that are subdivided into 14 chapters, two appendices, and two concordance tables. The text is complemented and illustrated by 63 tables, 55 figures, and 43 plates. Part I offers a general introduction to the site (Chapter 1, Sofianou), before moving on to describe its excavation and stratigraphy (Chapter 2, Sofianou and Papadatos), as well as the architecture of the two built tombs (Chapter 3, Papadatos). Part II examines the ceramic assemblage. Chapters 4 to 6 are concerned with the typology (Papadatos), petrographic characteristics (Nodarou), and interpretation (Papadatos) of the Prepalatial assemblage, which constitutes the bulk of the pottery from Livari Skiadi. Two brief chapters then describe the few Neopalatial (Chapter 7, Papadatos) and Late Hellenistic/Early Roman sherds and vases that were discovered at the site (Chapter 8, Sofianou). Small finds are then examined in Part III—i.e., metalwork (Chapter 9, Papadatos), stone vases (Chapter 10, Papadatos), jewelry (Chapter 11, Papadatos), seals (Chapter 12, Papadatos), miscellaneous artifacts (Chapter 13, Papadatos), and chipped stone (Chapter 14, Carter). In Part IV, two appendices discuss scanning electron microscopy analysis of Prepalatial pottery (Appendix A, Nodarou and Roggenbucke) and analyses of metal and faience artifacts using portable X-ray fluorescence spectrometry (Appendix B, Hall). All authors are thorough in their presentation of the evidence, which they aim at being as exhaustive as possible. As stressed by Papadatos, the erosion of the site and the relatively modest size of its assemblage are compensated for on several levels: 1) unlike most burial sites, Livari Skiadi was not disturbed by looters, hence allowing for the identification of spatial patterns within the cemetery and the tombs; 2) the excavation was not limited to the tombs themselves but extended to the surrounding open areas; and 3) all diagnostic sherds were cataloged, studied, and included in the publication (pp. 27–28).

Among the unexpected finds from Livari Skiadi are 255 pieces of chipped stone (mostly chert) dated to the Mesolithic. The assemblage, which is believed by Carter to ‘relate to a temporary hunter-gatherer occupation located in front of the rock shelter’ (p. 114), offers an interesting parallel to the recent discoveries of Plakias.⁸ It is only briefly mentioned

in the volume and will be published elsewhere. Evidence for human activity in the area prior to the foundation of the Prepalatial cemetery also includes a handful of eroded Final Neolithic sherds. They were found mixed with Early Minoan (EM) I-IIA material in a layer of soft soil that was laid out in the tholos tomb, probably to fill in the irregularities of the bedrock before the first burials were made (pp. 11, 77).

The tholos tomb was built in EM IB, when the rock shelter also started to be used for funerary purposes. With its inner diameter of 4.4m, it is among the smallest Prepalatial tholos tombs known to date. The circuit wall is preserved on a single course of stones, except to the north where it had eroded away together with part of the burial deposit. According to Papadatos, there is evidence that the tholos tomb was covered by a full stone vault (p. 23). The rock shelter, on the other hand, is a natural formation comprised of three interconnected chambers. The first chamber could not be excavated as it was sealed off by the owner of the land, and the third only contained loose soil deposited by natural processes. Chamber 2, in contrast, produced a thick archaeological layer. The main period of use of the tholos tomb and the rock shelter was EM IB, but burial activity continued through EM II without major interruption. The tholos tomb was abandoned at the end of EM IIB or soon after, whereas the rock shelter remained in use in EM III, albeit less intensively (p. 81). The tholos tomb and the rock shelter both contained a single burial stratum consisting of scattered human bones mixed with pottery sherds, chipped stone tools, and other objects (pp. 8, 12). Two differences are, however, worth mentioning. First, the tholos tomb was poorer in grave goods than the rock shelter which yielded three times as many obsidian blades, most of the metal objects, and all of the EM seals found in the cemetery. Second, and most importantly, a significant portion of the content of the tholos tomb was burned to various degrees (p. 10), which was not the case in the rock shelter. The osteological assemblage will be published in the second volume on Livari Skiadi, but Triantaphyllou argued in a preliminary report that the bones had been intentionally cremated in the course of a lengthy and systematic process before being deposited in the tholos tomb.⁹ Such a practice is unparalleled in Prepalatial Crete, even though human bones were sometimes briefly exposed to fire and smoke in the context of episodes of fumigation in the tombs. Together with more ambiguous data from Mochlos and Sissi,¹⁰ the assemblage from Livari Skiadi seems to force us to consider the possibility that cremation rites exceptionally occurred in Crete during the Prepalatial and Protopalatial periods.

⁹ Triantaphyllou 2009.

¹⁰ Soles and Davaras 1992: 420–421; Schoep *et al.* 2011: 61.

⁸ Strasser *et al.* 2010.

Two additional Prepalatial deposits (Open Areas 1 and 2) were found in situ in the cemetery, namely to the southeast and the west of the tholos tomb. Both included clay vessels (mostly EM I-IIA in date), shells, and obsidian tools. The absence of bones and the predominance of pouring vases indicate that these deposits are the result of ritual activities rather than burial material cleared out of the tombs (p. 84).

The cemetery went out of use before the beginning of Middle Minoan (MM) I, and the tholos tomb collapsed sometime between EM III and Late Minoan (LM) IA (p. 80). Burial activity then resumed in LM IA with the construction of the house tomb. In its current state, the latter is a small, almost square structure comprised of two rooms, but it probably extended further to the south (p. 15). Room 1, only 2.7 m² in size, contained the burial remains of six individuals. All burials were disarticulated, but the excavators nevertheless recognized five groups of bones and associated finds that provide information on secondary manipulations of the dead (pp. 16–17). For instance, Group I consisted of a skull, a large number of postcranial bones, shells, chipped stone tools, and clay vessels. The postcranial bones belonged to two different individuals and had been collected to be placed between the two halves of a broken jar. Room 2, on the other hand, contained only a few fragmented human bones, indicating that it was either never used for burials, or that all burial remains were thoroughly cleared out (p. 17). A small group of clay vases discovered in the middle of the room points, however, to the practice of libations (p. 88). Outside of the house tomb, remains of Neopalatial activity are limited to two cooking jars found in the destruction layer of the tholos tomb, three cups from Open Area 2, and two fragmentary vases from the rock shelter. Altogether, the evidence suggests that the cemetery of Livari Skiadi was only used to a limited extent in LM IA. It was then deserted, never to be reoccupied with the exception of the rock shelter that was occasionally visited during the Late Hellenic/Early Roman period, as demonstrated by a few vases (p. 90).

It is only with the publication of the second volume on Livari Skiadi that it will become possible to fully assess the extent to which the evidence from the site refines or alters our understanding of Minoan funerary practices. Nevertheless, the LM IA date of the house tomb and the discovery of a Prepalatial tholos tomb in this remote region of southeastern Crete are in themselves of particular significance. Neopalatial funerary data are notoriously scarce.¹¹ Many Prepalatial cemeteries were abandoned before MM II, and built tombs continued to decrease in number during the Protopalatial and the Neopalatial periods. As a rule, funerary rituals also became

less conspicuous. With the striking exception of the chamber tombs of Knossos and Poros, the Neopalatial dataset mostly consists of pithos burials and deposits in older tombs that remained in use or were reused, usually sporadically. The construction of a house tomb at Livari Skiadi in LM IA is quite remarkable in this respect. Yet, its use was restricted to a few individuals who probably held some sort of special position in the community and were buried in the course of no more than one or two generations (p. 88). In this way, Livari Skiadi bears some resemblance to Myrtos Pyrgos, where the Prepalatial house tomb was reopened in MM IIB and LM IA for the burial of six and four male adults, respectively.¹² As elsewhere in Neopalatial Crete, the vast majority of the inhabitants of Livari and Myrtos Pyrgos received no archaeologically visible form of burial. The puzzling question of what happened to their physical remains is still unanswered.

Livari Skiadi also contributes new information on issues of regionalism, identity, and interactions in Prepalatial Crete. The circular tombs of the Mesara and the house tombs of northeastern Crete have long been contrasted to each other and taken as evidence for the coexistence of distinct, geographically bounded cultural groups.¹³ According to this model, immigrants pursuing the burial traditions of their homeland would explain the presence of tombs beyond the boundaries of their cultural zone. The most striking example is the cemetery of Agia Photia, where Cycladic-style tombs and pottery have often been seen as an indication of Cycladic settlers on the north Cretan coast. The foreign origin of the associated community was reaffirmed in the final report on Agia Photia,¹⁴ but several researchers have challenged this assumption by pointing out that, far from being snapshots of the actual society, cemeteries function as arenas for the creation and expression of social status and group identity.¹⁵ As such, non-local goods and ideas can be displayed in the mortuary realm to emphasize the involvement of individuals or groups in interregional networks of interaction and, by this means, establish and legitimize social differences. The evidence from Livari Skiadi is particularly compelling in that it testifies to connections with different areas. The tholos tomb itself points towards south-central Crete, and Papadatos recognized architectural similarities with the tholos tomb of Lebena Gerokampos that may suggest some sort of special relationship between the two sites (p. 22). The EM pottery from Livari Skiadi includes a significant number of vessels that were imported from various sources including south-central Crete

¹¹ Devolder 2010.

¹² Cadogan 2011: 111.

¹³ For a recent discussion, see Legarra Herrero 2009.

¹⁴ Davaras and Betancourt 2012.

¹⁵ Day *et al.* 1998; Papadatos 2007; Legarra Herrero 2009.

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but also the Mirabello bay and the north Cretan coast (e.g. p. 75). The seals were probably produced in south-central Crete (p. 109), whereas the jewelries and metalwork have parallels in different region of Crete and the wider Aegean (pp. 95–96, 105–106). It is however the obsidian, beautifully discussed by Carter (pp. 113–126), that best epitomizes the composite nature of the Prepalatial evidence from Livari Skiadi. When they buried obsidian blades with the dead, the Cretans did not blindly borrow a Cycladic tradition; they adapted it. Differences are indeed visible in both the consumption and the production of the blades. In fact, Carter's long involvement with obsidian assemblages all over Crete has enabled him to distinguish among different technological traditions within the island itself and, remarkably enough, the blades from Livari appear to be similar to those produced in Knossos, Archanes, and south-central Crete (p. 125). Altogether, Livari Skiadi adds to a growing body of evidence regarding long-distance networks of interactions in EM I Crete.¹⁶ People, raw materials, finished products, as well as ideas traveled between distant areas, and non-local practices were appropriated and adapted to local needs and circumstances. It is in this context of early interactions that isolated tholos tombs were built in EM I in northeastern and eastern Crete, namely at Livari and Krasi in EM IB and, most strikingly, at Mesorrachi already in EM IA.¹⁷

Livari Skiadi is one of those sites that gives food for thought and sheds new light on old problems. Over the long term, the careful excavation, documentation, and study of the cemetery will no doubt make its publication a lasting reference. As of today, we can only eagerly wait for the second volume to be ready.

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¹⁶ E.g. Day *et al.* 1998; Davaras and Betancourt 2012.

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Corien Wiersma. *Building the Bronze Age: architectural and social change on the Greek mainland during Early Helladic III, Middle Helladic and Late Helladic I*. pp. xxii+561, 125 b/w illustrations, 1 colour illustration, 58 tables, 12 catalogues, 1 addendum. 2014. Oxford: Archaeopress. ISBN 978-1-90573-986-8 paperback £60.00/\$85.00; e-publication £19.

This book, a revised doctoral dissertation undertaken at the University of Groningen, is a welcome study on the neglected topic of domestic architecture in the eras preceding the palatial civilization of the Greek Mainland (in particular the EH III-LH I span). It is structured very much as a dissertation: an introduction setting out the goals, justification and spatiotemporal framework of the study; a survey of prior research on the topic of Mainland domestic architecture (Chapter 1); a theory of domestic architecture, the household and the overall context within which it is nested (community, nearby settlements, regional), and the methodology used for the data underpinning the study (from selection and collection to processing and analysis; Chapter 2); an analytical presentation of architectural remains by region (Thessaly, Phocis and Phthiotis, Boeotia, Euboea, Attica, Corinthia, the Argolid, Laconia, Messenia, Elis, Arcadia and Achaia; Chapter 3); a synthesis of the architectural data by era (EH III, MH I-II, MH III-LH I; Chapter 4); an interpretative discussion of emerging patterns (on the regional, neighboring settlement, local community, individual household levels; Chapter