

A NEW THOLOS TOMB AT KAMILARI, CRETE

by KEITH BRANIGAN

The tholos tomb described here was first discovered by the writer in 1966, and a brief mention was made of it in my list of circular built chamber tombs of Mesara type, published in 1970.¹ The site was revisited early in September 1971 however, in the company of Mr M. Fisher, and it was found that further remains belonging to the tomb had been uncovered and looted during the intermediate period. Since the tomb is now seen to belong to a small and interesting group of tholoi, which have a rectangular building attached to them, and since the stone of the tomb is seemingly being carried away for use elsewhere, it seems that a brief description and discussion of the tomb would be of value.

Situation.

This tomb is the third found at Kamilari, two others having been found and excavated by Levi.² These two lie about two kilometres, almost due south, from the two tholoi and the settlement at Agia Triadha. The third tholos is situated about a hundred and fifty metres to the east-south-east of the large tholos excavated by Levi. It is built into the steep, but low side of a rather flat plateau, separated from the hill on which the large tholos stands by a narrow valley. Sherds are strewn over the plateau, and it is thought that the contemporary settlement may have been situated here.

¹ K. Branigan *The Tombs of Mesara* (London 1970) 6, 170.

² D. Levi "La Tomba a Tholos di Kamilari Presso a Festòs" *Annuario* 339-40 (1962).

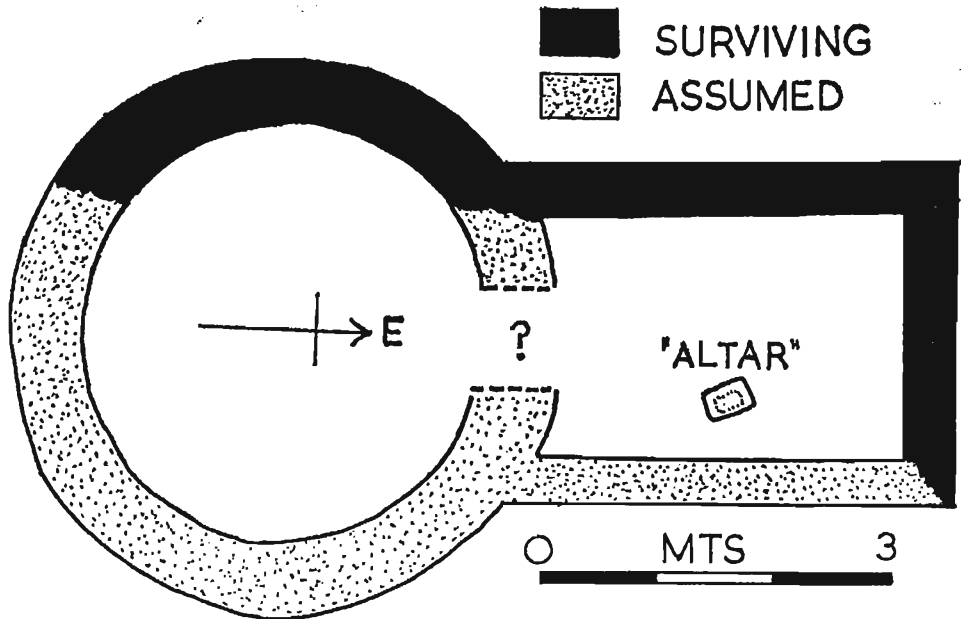


Fig. 1. Plan of Kamilari III, as it survived in September 1971.

Structural Features.

The surviving remains of the tomb are shown in fig. 1, and in pl. 1. The tomb has an interior diameter of about 3.7 mts, and a wall approximately 1.0 mt wide. On its eastern side is a rectangular room which measures 3.5 mts x 2 mts. The walls of both tomb and room stand to a maximum of 1.1 mts in height, and the wall of the tomb shows some inward inclination.

The walls are built of roughly squared limestone blocks, of quite regular size and shape, laid in courses, a maximum of four of which survived. No more than a quarter of the tomb's wall survives, and the southern wall of the rectangular chamber has been completely destroyed. For this reason, the exact position and dimensions of the doorway are uncertain, but it must clearly have been situated on the east side of the tomb chamber, so that it could be entered from the chamber outside. This is the traditional and customary orientation of the entrance to the tomb in these Mesara tholoi.³ There were no traces of large stone slabs such as are usually associated with trilithon doorways, and it seems likely that this tomb had a built doorway like its larger neighbour.⁴ Within the outer chamber there were no visible traces of

³ Branigan *op. cit.* n. 1, 162-3.

⁴ Branigan *op. cit.* n. 1, pl. 5.



The tholos from the south.

PLATE II



The 'altar' stone (the penknife is 9.5 cms long).

cross-walls suggestive of its subdivision, although on analogy with other tombs of this type one might have expected them.

Finds.

The robbing and looting of the tomb and the chamber appeared to have been thorough, and in several places the limestone floor of both could be seen. There was no suggestion of a paved, pebble or other variety of laid floor; the white limestone seems to have sufficed. Finds were very few indeed. There were a few scrappy, indeterminate sherds in the vicinity but none which clearly pointed to the date of the tomb. In 1966 however, I found several sherds of black-washed Middle Minoan pottery around the tomb chamber, and these, and several features of the tombs architecture suggest that it was built and used in MM.I-II. Apart from the sherds mentioned above, only one other find was made. This was a large block of stone, one side of which was quite flat and had been worked to produce a shallow, oblong "trough" (pl. 2). It was found inside the outer room at the point shown in fig. 1.

Discussion.

This tomb falls into two groups of tholoi, within the larger, overall Mesara group. Firstly it is typical of the latest of the Mesara tholoi, in having a small diameter, probably a built doorway, and walls of regularly shaped blocks laid in courses.⁵ In size it compares closely with the tombs at Knossos (4.0 mts), Vorou B (4.0 mts) and Siderokamino (3.5 mts).⁶ All of these tombs are safely dated, two by excavation, to the Middle Minoan period. The second group into which it falls is that characterised by the erection of a rectangular building (other than a small, usually rather square, antechamber) outside the entrance to the tomb. Although tombs of both Early and Middle Minoan date are found to have several chambers outside their entrance, it is only a small group, predominantly or exclusively of Middle Minoan date which have a single rectangular building. This is usually divided into two or three smaller rooms inside, as at Apesokari I and II,⁷ Platanos B,⁸ and Agios

⁵ Branigan *op. cit.* n. 1, 151-2.

⁶ M.S.F. Hood "Discoveries during the Latest Knossos Excavations" *Ill London News* 22/2/58, 300-1; S. Marinatos "Duo Proimoi Minoikoi Taphoi ek Vorou Mesaras" *Arch Deltion* 13 (1931); P. Faure "Sur Trois Sortes de Sanctuaires Cretois (suite)". *BCH* 93 (1969), 180.

⁷ F. Matz(ed) *Forschungen auf Kreta* (Berlin 1951); C. Davaras "Arkhaiotetes kai Mnemeia Kretes. Anaskaphai" *Arch Deltion* 19B³ (1964) 441.

⁸ S. Xanthoudides *The Vaulted Tombs of Mesara* (London 1924) pl. LXII.

Kyrillos.⁹ At Gypsades however, the outer chamber was a single room without subdivisions, although it was only built next to, not actually abutting onto, the tomb chamber itself. Other examples of the group, about which we do not have sufficient information to compare them in detail with the Kamilari tomb, are Platanos and probably Viannos.¹⁰

The purpose of these outer chambers has been discussed by me in my book on the Mesara tombs¹¹ and there is no need to repeat the discussion here. I came to the conclusion that the chambers were certainly used for funerary ritual, including the pouring of libations and the deposition of votives, but that it is not possible to say with certainty whether post-funerary ritual was also practised in them. One of the key pieces of evidence for ritual in the outer chambers is the altar found in the room at Apesokari I (fig. 2). It

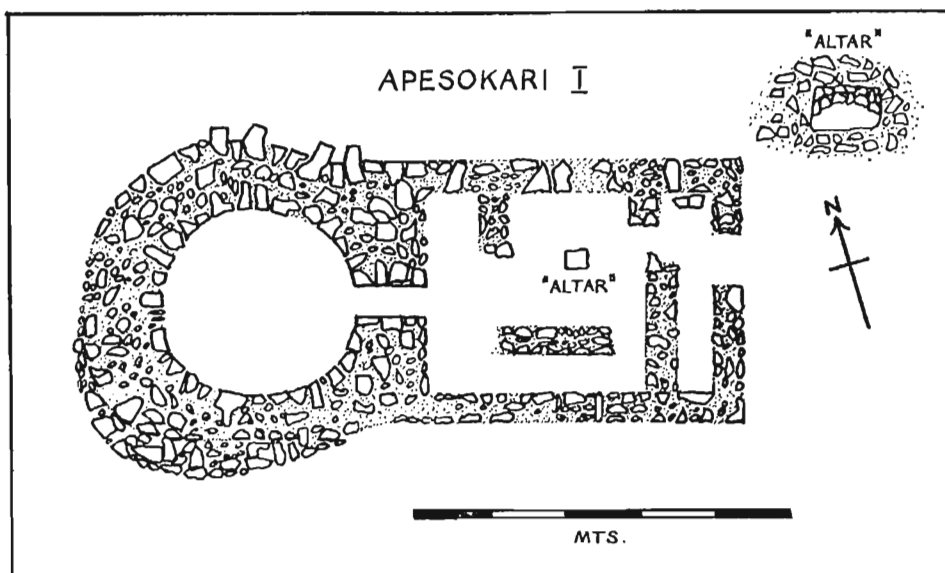


Fig. 2. Plan of Apesokari I.

now looks as if we might be able to add a second example of this feature to the single one known previously. The stone discovered in the outer room of Kamilari III (as I have designated this new tholos tomb) looks as if it had been carved to serve the function of an altar, and its discovery in the chamber

⁹ I. Sakellarakis "A Tholos Tomb at Agios Kyrillos in the Mesara" *Athens Annals Archaeol* I (1968) 51, fig. 1.

¹⁰ Xanthoudides *op. cit.* n. 8, 92; M.S.F. Hood *Archaeol Reports* (1956) 22.

¹¹ Branigan *op. cit.* n. 1, 95-102, 113-4.

suggests that this was so. Earlier (EM.I-MM.I) tholos cemeteries in the Mesara and its environs may have used smaller, portable altars of clay, before the erection of these outer chambers. Five tombs have produced possible examples of libation stones,¹² and from tholos E at Koumasa came the base of a pedestalled altar of clay.¹³ Large fragments of similar altars to this one were recovered from the sites of two Early Minoan tholoi in the Agiopharango behind Kaloi Limenes in 1971.¹⁴

Conclusion.

The small, and much destroyed tholos discovered in 1966 and recorded in 1971 at Kamilari, is a useful addition to our small corpus of Middle Minoan tholoi. It appears to be characteristic of them, both in size and building technique, and may be particularly compared to Apesokari I, less than twenty kilometres to the west of it. The tholos cemetery at Kamilari is now known to contain three tombs, all of Middle Minoan date.

¹² Agia Triadha A(2), Arkhaiokhorapho, Vorou A, Vorou B, and perhaps Platanos B.

¹³ Xanthoudides *op. cit.* n. 8, pl. XXXVIa, 4305.

¹⁴ D. Blackman and K. Branigan *BSA* forthcoming.