

‘Κούπια με λίρες’

Unexpected circumstances revealed in investigating a Bronze Age tumulus at Klopas, Marathon

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the prehistoric tumulus discovered in 2001 at Klopas, Marathon, by the late Maria Oikonomakou. Despite the difficulties caused by the prior discovery and then exploration of the monument, part of which was destroyed by modern seekers after treasure, the available evidence yet allows us to reconstruct something of its history of development, demonstrating its use from the end of Early to the beginning of Middle Helladic. A brief overview of the contemporaneous tumuli in northeastern Attica, namely at the nearby sites of Aphidna and Vranas (Tumulus I), reveals interesting affinities with mounds in other areas of mainland Greece and further away. This kinship is a result of the strategic location of the region in question, which enabled the local communities to participate in a wider exchange network that was maintained even after the abrupt end of the Early Helladic II culture. The mound is additionally examined within its regional context, especially in conjunction with the nearby settlement of Plasi. It is proposed that the close spatial relationship observed between an Early Helladic II large building and the later Middle Helladic megaron there might indicate strategies for the deliberate assimilation of the past, which can be also detected in the development of the tumulus.

INTRODUCTION

The tumulus at Klopas was unexpectedly discovered in 2001, during digging works in a private plot on the Marathon plain (northeast Attica). It was only partially investigated by the late M. Oikonomakou and then reburied, without leaving open any opportunity for further research and a closer study of the monument *per se*. All that was available was the archive kept by the excavator and the finds collected and stored at the Museum of Marathon. However, before the archaeological exploration could be conducted properly, there occurred an unfortunate event – an attempt was made to loot the tumulus, that ruined part of the tomb, unearthed and destroyed significant evidence. A few years later it also proved impossible to relocate important ceramic groups excavated that could potentially have allowed a safer dating of the tumulus. However, despite these difficulties, the tumulus certainly repays a closer look. One must bear in mind here one important fact: its unexpected discovery at a considerable depth under alluvium. This may well reflect the fate of other prehistoric remains on the Marathon plain, which most probably still remain buried.

The purpose of this paper is (a) to present systematically the available evidence and argue for the early use of the tumulus, dating it possibly from late Early to the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age, and (b) to place

and discuss the significance of the tumulus within its regional context. Along with the tumuli at Vranas and another one excavated over a century ago in Aphidna (see below), the tumulus at Klopas offers a glimpse into some interesting influences arriving in northeast Attica from the west towards the end of the Early Helladic (hereafter EH) period.

HISTORY OF RESEARCH

The tumulus at Klopas, located in the Marathon plain, lies ca. 550 m northwest of the prehistoric settlement at Plasi (Fig. 1). It was fortuitously discovered in 2001, during deep excavation works at the A. Zagari plot (κτήμα ιδιοκτησίας Α. Ζαγάρη) at a depth of 4.50 m from modern surface level. The discovery of large cobbles in a deliberate arrangement made the archaeological investigation paramount. However, and despite the clear instructions given by the local Ephorate of Antiquities for the immediate cessation of any further digging without archaeological supervision, the owner of the plot along with the bulldozer operator ignored the directive and further work continued before the archaeologists arrived at the place. The late M. Oikonomakou, authorized to conduct the excavation of the newly discovered feature, describes the incident and notes the presence of a hole in the earth, masked with freshly excavated soil, sand and mulberry branches. Oikonomakou was convinced that this was an attempt to locate and plunder valuable finds, ‘κούπια με λίρες’, as it was stated in the excavation logbook, retaining the original writing, instead of the word ‘κιούπια’ –perhaps a misspelling or a personal idiom.

“Προχώρησαν δε σε βάθος μεγαλύτερο από αυτό που τους είχαμε πει – τους είχαμε πει να σταματήσουν τις εκσκαφές 0.50 μ. πάνω από τις αρχαιότητες. Σε ένα σημείο δε παρατηρήσαμε ότι το χώμα είχε σκαφτεί σε μεγάλο βάθος και είχε καλυφθεί από σκαμμένο χώμα, άμμο οικοδομής και μικρά κλαδιά μουριάς. Μάλλον κάποιοι πίστεψαν ότι θα βρουν ‘κούπια με λίρες.’”

Unfortunately, the damage was already done and significant details of this construction, which proved to be a prehistoric burial tumulus, are now forever lost. Only a small part of the tumulus’ circumference was hurriedly investigated in a medium-sized trench (10.1 x 6.7 m) as the opportunity for excavation was rather short and the monument had to be reburied. Therefore, the study of the stratigraphy and architecture here is strictly based on a few excavation photos and a couple of drawings. Oikonomakou dated the tumulus to the Middle Helladic (hereafter MH) period and a short and preliminary presentation of it was made in the international conference held in 2006 at Athens for the promotion of study of the Middle Bronze Age culture of mainland Greece (Oikonomakou 2010).

Since 2014, interest in the prehistoric monuments in the wider region of Marathon has been resumed. A new research programme for the detailed study and final publication of the Vranas tumuli, under the auspices of the Archaeological Society at Athens (Pantelidou-Gofa et al. 2020), was initiated, while since 2015 systematic excavations have started at the settlement of Plasi by the Department of History and Archaeology of the National and Kapodistrian University at Athens (Polychronakou-Sgouritsa et al. 2016, 306–7). Given the proximity of the tumulus at Klopas with the settlement remains at Plasi, in 2017 the two directors of the Plasi excavations, Prof. Naya Polychronakou- Sgouritsa and Assoc. Prof. Yiannis Papadatos asked permission to re-examine the collected data for the tumulus at Klopas, to investigate its relationship to the nearby settlement. To establish its date, the author joined the team, and a one-day expedition to the Museum of Marathon was organized, to study the finds. The main aim, however, was only partly fulfilled, since very few diagnostic sherds were recognized, while some others hastily photographed by Oikonomakou have never been located, misplaced apparently during the reorganization of Museum storerooms. Despite the aforementioned difficulties, some prospect for further research still remains, especially as regards to the hitherto unquestioned assignment of the tumulus to the MH period.

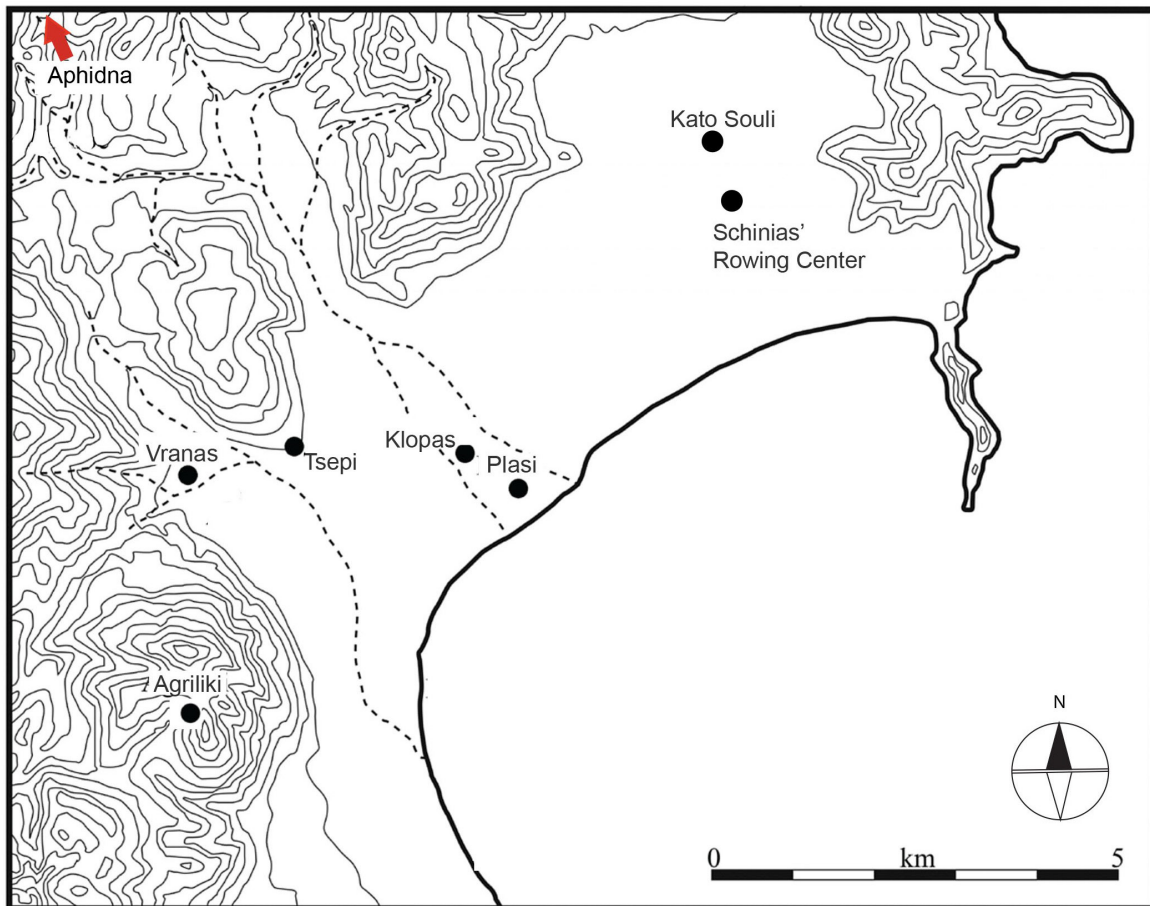


Fig. 1. Marathon plain with sites discussed in text (after Polychronakou-Sgouritsa et al. 2016, 305, fig. 19.1; reformulated by A. Balitsari).

THE TUMULUS AT KLOPAS

Stratigraphy and architecture

A trial trench opened at what was the exterior of the outer peribolos to the tumulus (see below) indicated that the structure was founded on top of alluvium, which was created, according to the excavator, by the nearby streams. The same process of deposition might have also covered the monument gradually over the following centuries, since there are no archaeological finds recorded from the superimposed strata, apparently due to the lack of any anthropogenic activities. Based on the limited photographic record it becomes also evident that the tumulus was more likely a low cairn, possibly given a soil covering, since no stones appear in the vertical sections of the trench (Fig. 2).

The enceinte(s)

According to Oikonomakou, the tumulus consisted of three roughly concentric stone rings called ‘periboloi’ (Oikonomakou 2010, 236), which enclose the only excavated tomb (Fig. 3). The innermost peribolos A (max. preserved length: 6.4 m) appears more ovoid, and impinges on the northwest corner of the grave. The intermediate peribolos B (max. preserved length: 8.25 m) and the outer one C (max. preserved length: 4.65 m) mark the course of two more evenly concentric circles. All three of them were built with medium to large-sized cobble stones (average dimensions: 0.50 x 0.32 m). The outer peribolos consisted only of two courses of stones (Fig. 4),



Fig. 2. The tumulus at Klopas (view from southwest; photo by M. Oikonomakou).

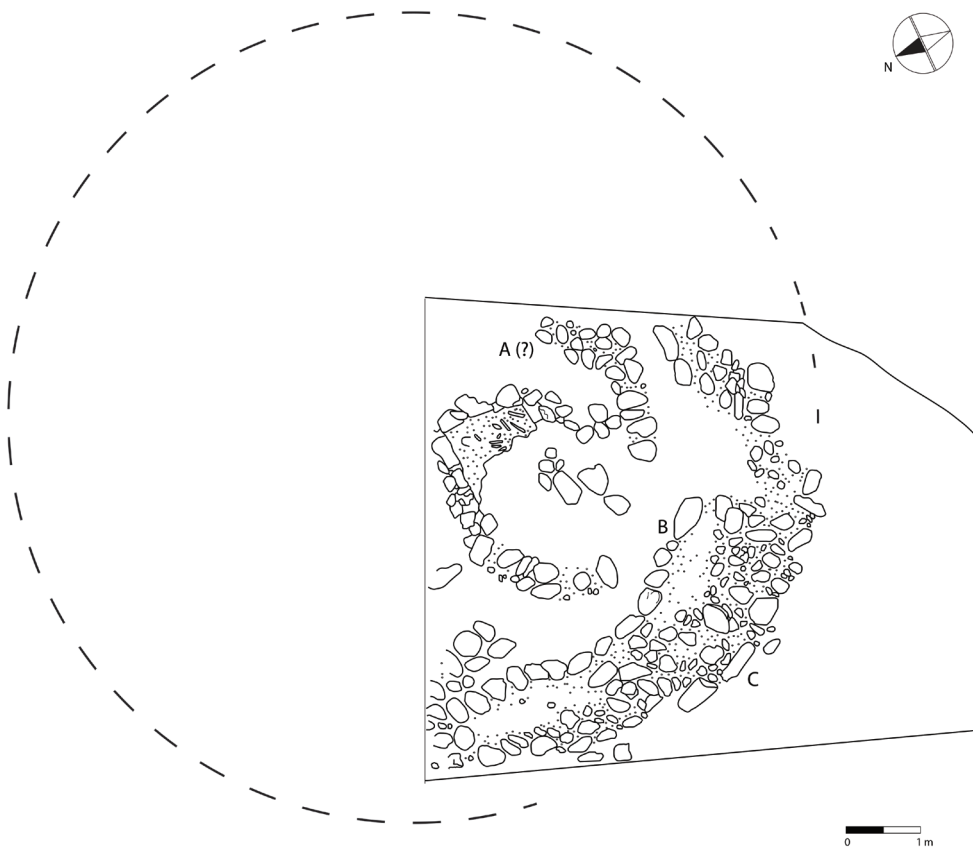


Fig. 3. Plan of the tumulus at Klopas (after Oikonomakou 2010, 241, fig. 4; reformulated by A. Balitsari).



Fig. 4. Exterior face of peribolos C (view from south; photo by M. Oikonomakou).

Fig. 5. Detail of peribolos C with possible entrance to the tumulus, indicated by the large stone perpendicularly placed at the left (view from south; photo by M. Oikonomakou).

but no similar construction detail for the other two periboloi is available. Smaller stones were used to fill the space between peribolos A and the grave, as well as between periboloi B and C. According to the excavator, an oblong stone, vertically placed in the outer peribolos (C), is the remnant of an entrance to the tumulus (Fig. 5), similar to that recovered by S. Marinatos south of Tumulus II at the nearby cemetery of Vranas (Marinatos 1970, 15, fig. 4), with which monument Oikonomakou observed significant construction similarities.

Although Oikonomakou mentions explicitly in the logbook that the naming of the periboloi was not made according to any assumed chronological order, she does not provide any interpretation for them. This recalls Marinatos' inability to provide an explanation for the existence of similar curving rows of stones revealed inside the tumuli I and II at Vranas, although during the recent re-examination of the Vranas tumuli it was not possible to verify the presence of these constructions, especially inside Tumulus II (Pantelidou-Gofa et al. 2015, 35).

“Αμφότεροι δε οι περίβολοι έχουν και άλλα τόξα κύκλων εσωτερικώς, γενομένα δια διαφόρους λόγους, ουχί πάντοτε σαφείς” (Marinatos 1970, 16).

It is, thus, suspected that Oikonomakou might even have had it in mind that the inner peribolos A could have been of later date, as was suggested by Marinatos for the inner peribolos of Tumulus I at Vranas (Marinatos 1970, 11).

Based on the available data, the following observations can be made for the tumulus' architecture and history of development:

(a) Some evidence suggests that the reality of peribolos A can be questioned. Its identification might have been mistakenly influenced by the disturbance of the stone layer caused by the tractor. The indications for this are the fact that peribolos A seems to overlap the built tomb, and, most importantly, the difficulty in following and reconstructing sufficiently well the exact course of peribolos A, the presumed oval shape of which is rather peculiar too.

(b) It is not necessary that periboloi B and C belong to different building phases. On the contrary, they seem to form the inner and outer face of a single construction that demarcated the periphery of the tumulus. Additionally, it is evident that the enceinte (i.e. the space enclosed by periboloi B and C) was large enough (max. diameter ca. 10 m) to accommodate more than one grave. The specific grave explored does not seem to be centrally placed: it may not therefore be one of the original burials to be associated with the mound. Thus, it could be proposed that both the tomb and the enceinte were more or less contemporaneous, a phase of enlargement of the tumulus' periphery to accommodate one or more new graves.

Find Group	Location	Number of sherds	Diagnostic sherds	Weight (gr)
FG 1	Above mound	Not found		
FG 2	Inside of built tomb	5	-	6
FG 3	Between peribolos A and the built tomb	Not found		
FG 4	Between periboloi A and B	3	-	2
FG 5	Between periboloi B and C	113 (ca. 95 joining)	2	284
FG 6	Outside of peribolos C	1	-	4

Table 1. Pottery per Find Group.

As summarized in table 1, the pottery collected during excavation is generally characterized by the small size of the pieces and the rarity of diagnostic sherds, except for a couple of fragments found between periboloi B and C (FG 5); few joining pieces of an EH II dark-painted sauceboat (Wiencke 2000, 586–89, fig. II.92: Type 2) and a fragment of an Aeginetan matt-painted *Bogenrippenamphora* with linear decoration (Siedentopf 1991, pl. 30:137, 32:147–48), a shape mostly date to MH I or MH II early the latest (Pantelidou-Gofa et al. 2016, 34–6) (Fig. 6). Despite the small size of the latter fragment, the identification is mostly based on the bulge observed at the interior, at the junction of shoulder with neck, which was also recognized on a similar vase discovered at Vranas (Pantelidou-Gofa et al. 2016, fig. 4). From author's hands-on experience with similar pottery, the particular feature is missing from other type of closed jars, such as necked jars and especially wide-mouthed jars of the Aeginetan matt-painted ware. Although the diameter at the base of the neck cannot be safely estimated, it seems to exceed 45–50 cm, suggesting a large size compatible with that of a *Bogenrippenamphora*. This, also, provides a terminus ante quem for the establishment of the enceinte. Three more sherds of a seemingly light-colored plain ware (two strap handles and a fragment of a shoulder with a strap handle vertically attached from shoulder to rim) were photographed by Oikonomakou but were not located and examined at the Museum. Any attempt to understand the corresponding shapes and the related date would be pointless, as the photograph is blurred. Their exact findspot remains also unknown.

The presence of the EH II material –despite being extremely limited– is interesting, but also hard to explain. In the case of few MH tumuli in Messenia, such as in Ayios Ioannis-Papoulia, Voidokoilia, Routsis (Boyd 2002, 37, with full bibliographical references), and Kastroulia (Rambach 2007, 137–39), EH II pottery has been reported in the fill of the tumuli, because the burial ground was founded on top or close to EH settlement debris. The salvage excavation at Klopas was too short and localized, and a similar conclusion is difficult to be reached. The possibility that the EH II pottery is indicative of an earlier phase of use of the monument cannot be totally excluded, especially if the earlier date proposed for the jar burial (?) is taken into consideration (see below).

The burials

With regard to the graves excavated within the enceinte, Oikonomakou explored a shallow rectangular built grave (inner dimensions: 1.11 x 1.85 m; wall thickness: 0.35 m; depth: 0.65 m) with sides made of unworked large-sized flat stones (Fig. 7). Unfortunately, the western part of the grave had been destroyed by the bull-

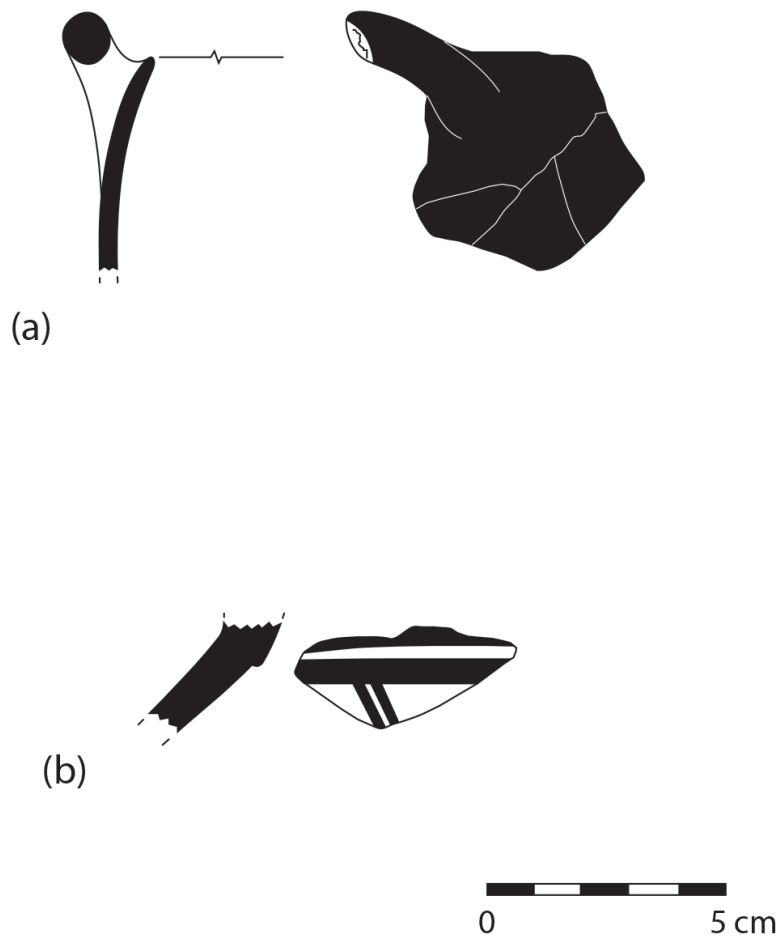


Fig. 6. a: fragment of a sauceboat; b: fragment of a *Bogenrippenamphora* (drawings by A. Balitsari).

dozer. There is also no evidence for its covering, but it is possible that after the inhumation was laid to rest the grave was filled with soil. This particular hypothesis is further strengthened by the fact that the human bones discovered were hard packed in the soil and not easy to extract individually. Although the osteological analysis has not been completed, the excavator recognized an individual in a contracted position placed at the east side of the grave, and a femur of possibly another inhumation at the east. The floor of the grave was made of small gravels (Fig. 8).

The only burial gift consisted of a biconical clay spindle whorl (Fig. 9), recognized during cleaning of the bones at the Museum of Marathon. The spindle whorl –which could also have been used as a bead or a button– belongs to a rather long-lived type in the prehistoric Aegean (Balitsari and Papadopoulos 2019, 132–33, fig. 13), therefore it can provide little help for the establishment of a more specific date. Two pieces of obsidian, a blade fragment and a flake, were also collected from the inside of the tomb, but it is not clear whether they were intentionally deposited there.

Close to the northwest corner of the grave large fragments of a plain jar of reddish coarse fabric were located, destroyed also by the bulldozer (Fig. 10). The jar was most probably used for the burial of another individual of rather young age, whose bones did not survive. This was a common burial practice for tumuli. A date from EH II (Wiencke 2000, 561, 565, 569, fig. II.86: Type 8; however, the specific type is admittedly smaller compare to the jar discussed here) to the transitional EH III–MH I (Maran 1992, 2: pl.32:7, beil.7:18) is based on the slight carination of its body, giving thus some credence to the scenario of the establishment of the mound during the Early Bronze Age.



Fig. 7. The built tomb (view from west; photo by M. Oikonomakou).



Fig. 8. Skeletal remains inside the built tomb (view from west; photo by M. Oikonomakou).

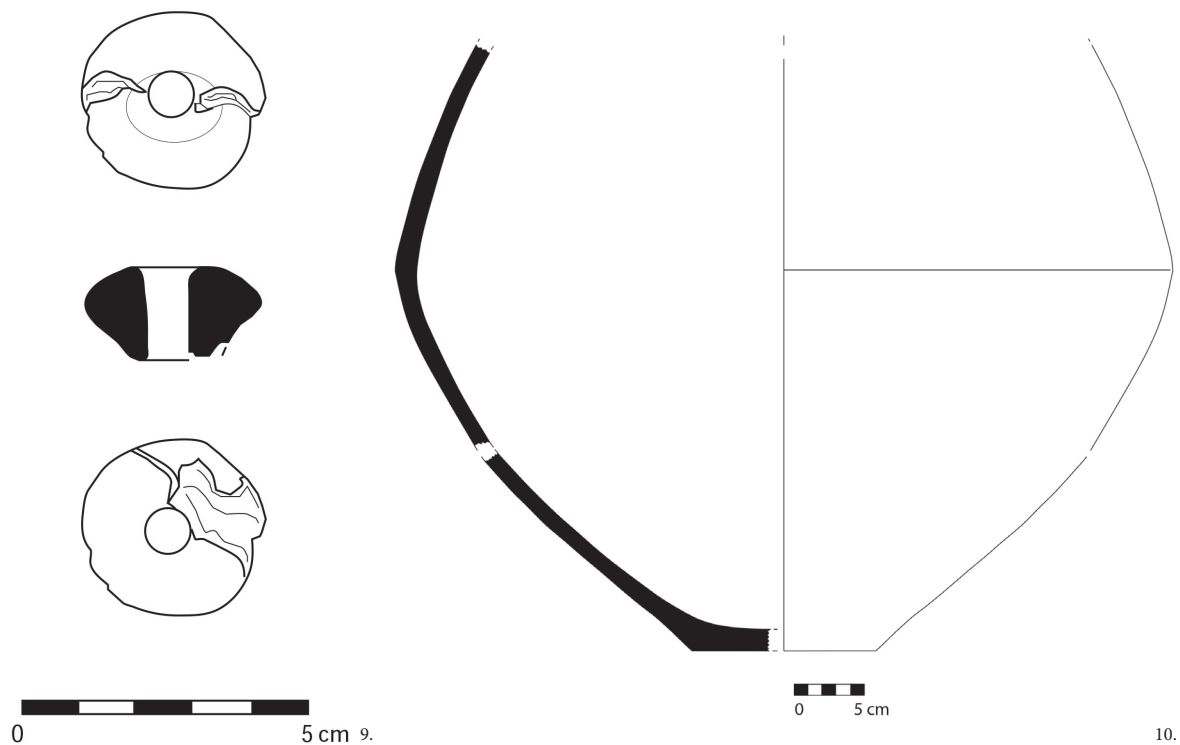


Fig. 9. Clay spindle whorl (drawing by A. Balitsari).

Fig. 10. The jar burial (?) (drawing by A. Balitsari).

Summary

To summarize evidence, the following remarks should be stressed here:

(a) The tumulus at Klopas was possibly initially established during the transitional EH III–MH I, if not as early as the EH II, as indicated first by the date proposed for the jar burial (?), and then by the presence of a sauceboat, which is a type fossil for the EH II. A second phase of use is possibly dated to the MH I–II early, when the enceinte was erected. Whether the mound was used continuously from the Early to Middle Bronze Age cannot be answered.

(b) The date of the built tomb is not easy to establish, because of the lack of diagnostic ceramic finds and burial gifts other than the spindle-whorl. Its chronological relationship to the jar burial is also problematic, because of the poor stratigraphical character of the excavation record, and the disturbance caused by the bulldozer.

(c) In terms of construction and the history of development, the tumulus at Klopas was probably from the beginning a low cairn, since there is no evidence for a heap of soil and stones reaching to any considerable height. Although the peribolos or a stone ring is a constituent part of a tumulus, there is not adequate evidence to reconstruct this particular feature during the first postulated phase of use of the monument. During the MH I–II early, however, a proper enceinte was built. It remains unknown as to whether burials then continued in the interior of the tumulus, including the built tomb excavated, or whether the enceinte was separately formed to reorganize space and make it more prominent.

(d) The exceptionally limited presence of MH pottery and especially the entire lack of Gray Minyan ware –which was found in abundant quantities in the Tumulus I of Vranas within the graves (Pantelidou-Gofa et al. 2014, 47–59) and in adjacent deposits (Pantelidou-Gofa et al. 2016, 30–4)– might together indicate not only the relatively early date of the tumulus but also the limited human activity at the beginning of the MH period after the erection of the enceinte. This contradicts the judgement of Oikonomakou for the MH pottery retrieved from the burials and the mound.

“Στο εσωτερικό του τάφου και ανάμεσα στους λίθους του τύμβου βρέθηκε μεσοελλαδική κεραμική”
(Oikonomakou 2010, 236).

Another indication of the early date of the tumulus at Klopas is the simpler construction consisted of rounded cobbles. A single stone ring has been identified at the contemporaneous tumulus of Aphidna, while Vranas Tumulus I took its final form gradually as a well-constructed large circular platform, the outer circumference of which is made of carefully positioned flat stones (see below).

THE TUMULUS AT KLOPAS IN ITS SPATIO-TEMPORAL CONTEXT

The early tumuli of Attica

Tumuli is a burial practice widely attested along the Dalmatian and Ionian coastline during the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC (Müller 1989; Oikonomidis et al. 2018, 28–30, fig. 1). In mainland Greece, the first tumuli are located on the ‘Amphieion’ hill (EH I/II) and at the Archaeological Museum (EH II) of Thebes in Boeotia (Aravantinos and Psaraki 2012, 402–7, with full bibliographical references), Pellana in Lakonia (EH II) (Alram-Stern 2004, 646, with full bibliographical references), Nidri of Lefkas (EH II–III) (Kilian-Dirlmeier 2005), Kriaritsi-Sykia in Chalkidiki (EH II–III) (Asouhidou 2012), the New Archaeological Museum of Olympia in Elis (EH III) (Yialouris 1964, 174–76, fig. 1; Koumouzelis 1980, 139–40; Merkouri and Kouli 2012, 207), Moschovi Loutrakiou in Aetoloakarnania (EH III) (Kolonas 1995, 141), Atalanti (EH III) (Papakonstantinou 2012, 395, fig. 4a) and Pelasgia-Koumouli (early MH) (Papakonstantinou 2012, 393, figs. 2a–c) in Phthiotis, Argos (Tumulus A) in the Argolid (MH I) (Protonotariou Deilaki 2009, 34–49; for the date, see Balitsari 2017, 246–47), Voidokoilia (Boyd 2002, 126–30, with full bibliographical references) and Kastroulia (Tumulus II) (Rambach 2007) in Messenia (early MH). They all share the general concept of an accumulation of earth over burials enclosed by either a stone ring or a more regularly built circular peribolos. However, there is significant variation in terms of the construction details and the burial practices, especially as far as the type, the number and the arrangement of graves is concerned, as well as the existence of burial rites of special character, such as the use of fire (see below). The tumuli over the House of Tiles at Lerna (Caskey 1968, 314) and the *Rundbau* at Tiryns (Maran 2016) in the Argolid (end of EH II), as well as the mound discovered at Altis-Olympia (EH II) (Weiberg 2007, 155–56, with full bibliographical references) could be also added, although they are usually described as ritual due to the lack of any indication of burial use.

In Attica, the earliest tumuli are located in Aphidna (EH II/III–MH I) (Wide 1896; Hielte-Stavropoulou and Wedde 2002; Forsén 2010) and Vranas (Tumulus I: MH I–II) (Pantelidou-Gofa et al. 2020, with full bibliographical references). Despite the damage caused at the tumulus of Aphidna by modern treasure seekers, Wide’s short excavation rescued significant remains. A stone ring, partly surviving at the northeast, demarcates the periphery of the mound, the max. diameter of which reaches 24 m. Thirteen graves of three different types (shafts/pits with built frames, cist graves and pithoi) were unearthed in the interior (Fig. 11). The construction over shaft grave I (*Grab I*) (Fig. 12) and the division wall of shaft grave XII (*Grab XII*) are unusual features, the closest parallels of which are found in mounds far away from Attica (see below). No particular arrangement of the graves can be observed, although the opening of the pithos burials is usually towards south-southwest. No information is available for the covering of the tumulus. Many graves contained skeletal remains –at least one inhumation per grave based on the crania identified– and grave goods, predominantly clay pots. Of special interest are *Grab I* and pithos burial III, which were richly furnished not only with vessels but also with metal objects, including six gold rings. This was an unusual practice, given the rather poor standards of the EH III–MH I funerary costumes and accessories.

The Tumulus I at Vranas, on the other hand, was found intact (Fig. 13), although some evidence suggests reuse of the monument in Late Roman period. According to the latest study, tomb 1 and the inner peribolos constituted the initial core of the mound, which was later enlarged with the addition of tombs 2–7, and the con-

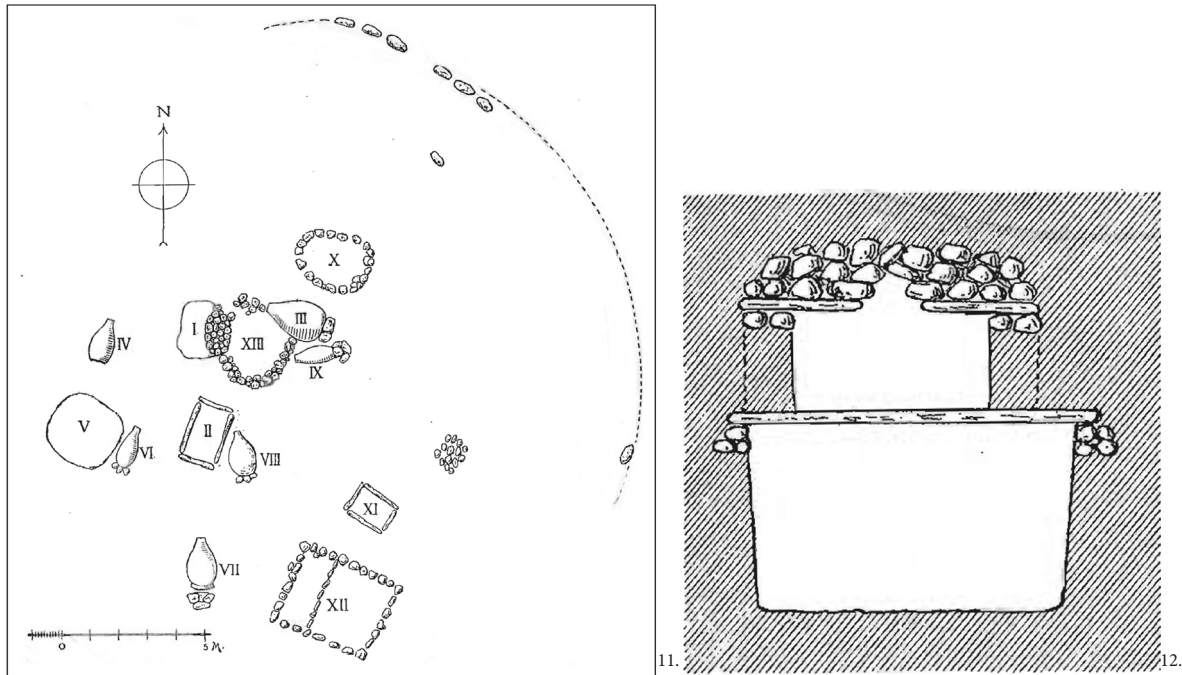


Fig. 11. Plan of the tumulus at Aphidna (after Wide 1896, pl. XIII).

Fig. 12. Section of *Grab I* (after Wide 1896, pl. XIII)..

struction of a new peribolos with an outer face built with flat stones that retains a stone mantle made of large-sized river cobbles. Broadly, the appearance of Tumulus I resembles that of a circular stone-built platform. The tombs at Vranas were much more spacious and elaborate, compared to both tumuli at Klopas and Aphidna, with tombs 2 and 3 being additionally equipped with a side entrance. The re-examination of the skeletal remains, which lie still *in situ*, revealed the presence of both primary and secondary burials. Clay pots are the most common grave goods, and tomb 2 is the richest with 11 vessels.

Finally, another peculiar oblong tumulus of MH date has been reported on the south slope of the Acropolis (Skias 1902). It was only 0.60 m high and 3 m long and had a clay coating. Skeletal remains were recognized in two successive layers with evidence of burning. Eight obsidian arrowheads, a fragmented bone pin and a plain jug were the only finds retrieved. Due to the short character of the publication, it is hard to assess the mound and establish a closer date for it.

Despite the fact that tumuli are ostensibly considered as a western innovation, their distribution indicates significant penetration to the east. According to Müller-Celka (2012, 420; Merkouri and Kouli 2012, 204) some remarkable similarities recognized between the contemporaneous tumuli at Nidri on Lefkas, Kriaritsi-Sykia at Chalkidiki and Karataş in southwest Turkey (i.e. joining or intersecting circles, burial pithoi, rich arrays of grave goods) could be explained in terms of the sea-routes possibly related to the diffusion of metallurgy, and developed according to the summer sea currents of the Aegean that run from the southeast coast of Asia Minor to the northeast Aegean (including Chalkidiki), and then to the western Cyclades, the Peloponnese, the Ionian islands and the Adriatic sea. Bearing this in mind, it may not be by chance that Attica is one of the regions where the earliest tumuli appear, including the one most recently found at Klopas. Besides the uncommon peculiar tumulus at Athens, it is important to stress that some of the earliest tumuli appear in northeast Attica, at the entrance of the Euboean gulf, which is the natural maritime passage between the northern and southern sectors of the mainland, connecting the Pagasitic gulf with the western Cyclades to south, and with the Argosaronic and the Corinthian gulf to the southwest. The existence of this route might have enabled a constant flow of related ideas and practices during the late Early and early Middle Bronze Age that could explain some interesting affinities observed between the early tumuli of Attica with others considerably distant in space and time. A few interesting similarities are the following:

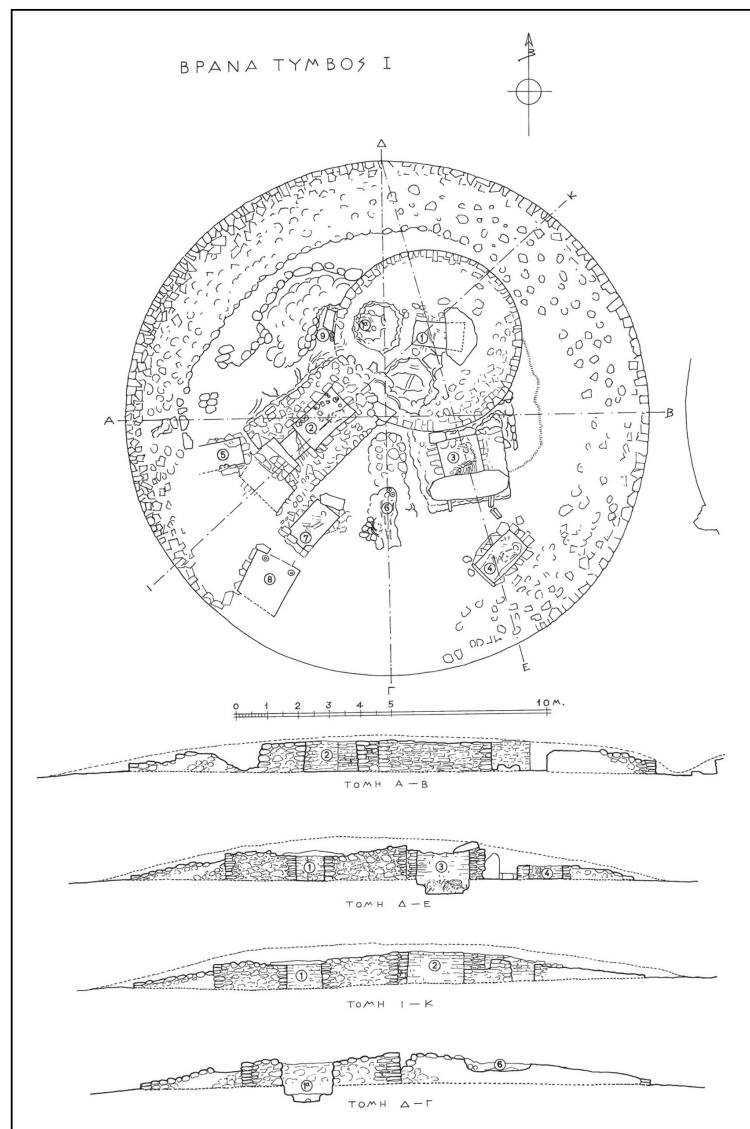


Fig. 13. Plan of Tumulus I at Vranas (after Marinatos 1970, 12, fig. 3).

(a) the low cairn created over the burials, which has been suggested for the tumulus at Klopas and has been observed at the tumuli of the New Archaeological Museum of Olympia, Atalanti and Kriaritsi-Sykia (Asouhidou 2012, 384, fig. 2),

(b) the double-faced enceinte of the tumulus at Klopas, which resembles the peribolos of the tumulus at Pellana (Spyropoulos 1998, 34, fig. 2.19),

(c) the overall platform-like appearance of the tumuli at Vranas and Nidri,

(d) the enclosed construction over *Grab I* of Aphidna tumulus that recalls a similar structure recognized over the central tomb of tumulus 6 at Shtoj in Albania (dated to MH I-II in mainland terms), which obviously served ritual purposes, as evidenced by the discovery of six clay figurines (Oikonomidis et al. 2012, 187, figs. 1c-d; Oikonomidis et al. 2018, 36, 48, fig. 5),

(e) the zoomorphic clay rhyton found at Aphidna (Forsén 2010, 225, fig. 1), which may indicate the performance of ritual acts performed in honor of the dead, similar to those indicated by the clay figurines that came to light in tumulus 6 at Shtoj (see above),

(f) the presence of double shaft or cist-graves with internal wall divisions, recognized both in *Grab XII* of Aphidna (Wide 1896, 396) and Kriaritsi-Sykia (Asouhidou 2012, 385, fig. 3: enclosure VII),

(g) the use of fire for various funerary purposes, evidence for which has been identified in the interior of *Grab XIII* of Aphidna tumulus (Wide 1896, 396), at the tumuli of Nidri, Kriaritsi-Sykia, at the New Archaeological Museum of Olympia (Merkouri and Kouli 2012, 207), as well as in the central horseshoe-shaped construction of Tumulus A at Argos (Protonotariou Deilaki 2009, 36–8).

The aforementioned evidence is not conclusive for the existence of direct relationships between those subregions of the Greek mainland and areas further west. However, they might indicate a network of communication that seems significantly persistent through time, despite the turmoil occurring at the end of EH II and the remarkable cultural hiatus observed especially in Attica between the Early and Middle Bronze Age (see below).

Marathon and the tumulus at Klopas in late Early and early Middle Bronze Ages

Attica was one of the regions that flourished during the Early Bronze Age (Papadimitriou et al. 2020, xiii, map II) with its role being particularly strengthened by the rich metal ores of silver, lead and copper in the area of Lavrion (Gale et al. 2009; Georgakopoulou 2016, 3; Georgakopoulou et al. 2020; Nazou 2020). As far as the Marathon plain is concerned, evidence of the EH period has been identified at different locations: EH II pottery was recognized at the peak of the Agriliki hill, close to the prehistoric cemetery at Vranas (Hope Simpson and Dickinson 1979, 218); EH settlement remains have been unearthed at Kato Souli (Mastrokostas 1974), and Skorpio Potami close to Tsepi (Andrikou 2020, 10), as well as at Plasi, all dated to EH II (Polychronakou-Sgouritsa et al. 2016, 306–7) and the Schinias Rowing Center, dated to EH I–II, with few ceramics of the EH III phase (Kapetanios 2020); EH I–II graves have been found at Tsepi (Pantelidou 2005), and Kato Souli (Alram-Stern 2004, 553), while at Vranas the two EH tombs found north of Tumulus I are probably of EH II–III date (Kai forthcoming). Except for the formal cemetery at Tsepi, and the forthcoming full publication of the Vranas EH tombs, the other sites have only been preliminarily made available. Consequently, we still lack a consequential reconstruction of the EH occupation at Marathon. The beginning of the MH period is even less sufficiently represented. Besides Tumulus I at Vranas, which was most probably founded during MH I (Pantelidou-Gofa et al. 2020, 442–44), and a MH I–II burial jar found in the same cluster with the aforementioned EH tombs (Kai forthcoming), no other site has produced evidence for the specific phase.

The striking gap in the prehistoric record of habitation in Attica from the end of the EH to the beginning of the MH period might not only correspond to the lack of adequately explored settlements continuously inhabited throughout the Bronze Age and/or detailed publications. It might also reflect a drastic change in the settlement pattern and possibly emerging ceramic developments characterized by a high degree of regionality, which is something hardly noticeable within the predominant ceramic sequences of type-sites, especially Lerna (Balitsari and Papadopoulos 2019, 135–36). It is not fortuitous that the identification of the EH III pots in the Rowing Center of Schinias was based on the close affinities attested with pottery of Lerna IV (Kapetanios 2020, 364–65, fig. 9). This correlation, however, is intriguing for one more reason, as it provides evidence for cultural connections with the northeast Peloponnese during the EH III phase, which period is traditionally described in terms of introversion and lack of interregional contacts. This new observation strengthens the aforementioned argument for northeast Attica's participation in this stream of influences that continuously run from west to east and vice versa.

As far as some corresponding settlement is concerned, given their proximity (ca. half a km away), the tumulus at Klopas should be associated to the settlement at Plasi. The new systematic excavations conducted at the site by the University of Athens were largely focused on the area of the MH megaron (Fig. 14), partly discovered by S. Marinatos (Polychronakou-Sgouritsa et al. 2016, 307–8). It also brought to light remains of a previous EH large building. Although its excavation has not finished yet, the identification of two walls neatly built with well-dressed stones signifies the important character of this (public?) building (for a short and preliminary



Fig. 14. The MH Megaron at Plasi (after Polychronakou-Sgouritsa et al. 2016, 308, fig. 19.3).

presentation, see <https://www.marathonexcavations.arch.uoa.gr/index.php/earl-hel-megaron>). The large quantities of pottery dated to the EH II from the related deposits –based on a preliminary examination by the author– are indicative for its chronology. The MH II–III megaron was erected on top of the destruction layer of the EH II building, following the exact same orientation. Due to its form, size and proximity to two contemporary MH pottery kilns (Kapsali 2019), it has been assumed that the megaron was equally important for the settlement if not the entire region. No intermediate phase dated to EH III–MH I has been recognized. It should be stressed though that only a small portion of the entire prehistoric settlement has been investigated.

Despite the considerable chronological distance and the social transformations that had obviously occurred in the meantime, the facts of the exact same location and the common orientation of both buildings at Plasi underlines the renegotiation of space by new (?) social groups, who were obviously interested in establishing affiliations with the past in order to claim successfully their rights over the specific land. The nearby tumulus at Klopas, which was founded either in the EH II or the transitional EH III–MH I and then enlarged during MH I–II early, seems to represent similar aspirations in the funerary sphere (Bradley 1998; Müller-Celka 2012, 424). This persistence of memory is also remarkable in the case of the tumuli at Vranas, as indicated by the noteworthy technical homogeneity that characterizes Tumuli I and II, the former dated to MH I–II and the latter several centuries later to LH IIIA1–IIIB. It is possible that the fertile plain of Marathon, the significance of which was enhanced by its strategic location on the Euboean gulf, has time and again encouraged the development of such strategies for claiming and retaining control over the land. Besides, tumuli are not only considered monuments of display; they also represent landmarks located on inland and coastal commercial routes (Merkouri and Kouli 2012, 204; Oikonomidis et al. 2018, 35).

CONCLUSIONS

Despite all the difficulties encountered while excavating and studying the tumulus at Klopas, the importance of the monument cannot be overlooked. Unfortunately, its discovery was marked by a treasure seeking that destroyed important evidence. A re-evaluation, however, of both its construction and its date was attempted,

based on the excavation record and the few fragments of pottery that it was possible to relocate at the Museum of Marathon. The unexpected discovery of its early use, dated from the EH II (?)–III to the beginning of the MH, argues against the established and widely circulated belief that the tumulus at Klopas is exclusively MH. On the contrary, it may be one of the earliest tumuli on the Greek mainland that continued to attract attention as a recognized landmark until MH I–II early, when the enceinte was possibly then erected. At the nearby site of Plasi, the establishment of a new MH II–III megaron over the ruins of a pre-existed EH II large building may reflect similar attempts of the new social groups of Marathon to legitimize their aspirations for control over the land.

With regard to the similarities observed between the early tumuli of northeast Attica, namely at Klopas, Aphidna and Vranas (Tumulus I), with other mounds of mainland Greece and even further away, these could be partly explained by the strategic location of the region and the special interest in Attica's metal resources that favored the influx of new elements from west to east, and vice versa. Although the archaeological record of Attica, including Marathon, is extremely poor in evidence for the end of EH and the beginning of MH period, the unexpected discovery of material belonging to the Lerna IV pottery assemblage at the prehistoric settlement of the Schinias Rowing Center is indicative of the interregional contacts that continued to take place, despite the unprecedented cultural break and the phenomenal disruption of trade networks at the end of EH II.

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