Andonis Vasilakis, Tomas Alusik, Petros Charamis, Matous Semerad, Ladislav Smejda, Eirini Kritikopoulou, Pavla Alusikova Dostalikova

The Porti-Miamou project 2015-2016: 2015 Season Preliminary Report

Abstract

The Porti-Miamou Project is an official archaeological project of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Heraklion. It focuses on the small-scale surface survey and documentation of the immediate vicinity of Porti and Miamou, two prehistoric sites in the Mesara area, south central Crete. This paper presents the preliminary results of the 2015 season, which was focused on the site of Porti, located on the low hillock of Tou Bairami to Papouri between Vasilika Anogia and Kandila. The first aim of the season was to create new up-to-date plans of the Porti tholos tomb (excavated in 1906) and the adjoining area based on the actual state of all architectural remains. The main aim of the season was to carry out an intensive surface survey in the area of 800 x 800 m, centred on the Papouri hillock, for the better understanding of the site, its local context and chronology**.** The most important finds made during the survey are a small prehistoric burial cave and a small ancient (?) local limestone quarry. Altogether about 12,400 artefacts were recorded, nearly a quarter of them from the Papouri area.

Keywords: Porti, Minoan, tholos tomb, cave, quarry, photogrammetry, heritage conservation, geochemistry

The aims of the project

The Porti-Miamou Project is an official project of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Heraklion, co-directed by Andonis Vasilakis and Tomas Alusik. The Project focuses on the surface documentation and small-scale surface survey of the immediate vicinity of Porti and Miamou, two prehistoric sites in the municipality of Gortyna in the Mesara area, south central Crete (Fig. 1). At both sites there are important remains of human habitation occurring in the Prepalatial and early Protopalatial periods. This evidence is mainly found in the foundations of the large circular tombs at both sites (of the Mesara tholos type), which were used for the burials of all members of the community over the course of several centuries. Less evidence is clear from the adjacent settlements, located in the vicinity of each of the tombs.

The 2015 season (August 10th-September 5th) was focused on the site of Porti (Fig. 2)**,** which is located on the low hillock of *Tou Bairami to Papouri* between the villages of Vasilika Anogia and Kandila. This site was excavated in 1906 by Stephanos Xanthoudides, who uncovered a Mesara-type tholos tomb (labelled “Tholos Π”, dated to the EM I/II-MM II period), and also

Fig. 1. Map of Crete with the location of Porti.*

Fig. 2. General view of the hillock 'Tou Bairami to Papouri'.

reported scant traces of a settlement on the terrace above the tomb (Fig. 3) (Xanthoudides 1924, 54-69, pl. LXII). The first aim of the season was to do an architectural survey and to create new up-to-date plans of the tholos site and the adjoining area based on the actual state of all architectural remains: the tholos tomb, the retaining wall(s) and the traces of the settlement. Modern digitization methods were used to create an orthographic view and a photogrammetric model of the tomb (Fig. 4).

The main aim of the Project was to carry out an intensive surface survey on the Papouri hillock and its immediate vicinity – in the area of 800 x 800 m, i.e. c. 300-400 m from the edges of the hillock to the main cardinal points – for the better understanding of the site, its local context and chronology. However, the preservation of the remains of masonry, illegal excavations and agricultural activity have also been dealt with and solutions proposed.

The most important finds made during the surface survey are a specific group of pottery, a small ancient local limestone quarry and a small prehistoric burial cave known as Tou Kouphou o Spilios.

* The photographs were taken by T. Alusik and A. Vasilakis, unless otherwise stated.

Fig. 3. General aerial view on the site of Porti – the hillock of Tou Bairami to Papouri. Photo Michalis Spyridakis.

This research project relates and follows three projects, focused on the excavation and study of (the finds from) the Mesara-type tholos tombs, carried out in recent years: study and publication of the Moni Odigitria excavation and survey (Vasilakis and Branigan 2010); the Apesokari Tholos Tomb B Study Project, directed by G. Vavouranakis (see e.g. Vavouranakis 2012; Flouda et al. 2012); and the Heidelberg Koumasa Project, directed by D. Panagiotopoulos (see e.g. Ergon 2012, 85-90; Ergon 2013, 55-58; Ergon 2014, 45-50; Ergon 2015, 45-48).

Fig. 4. Porti – topdown orthographic view of the tholos tomb Π. Created by Petros Charamis.

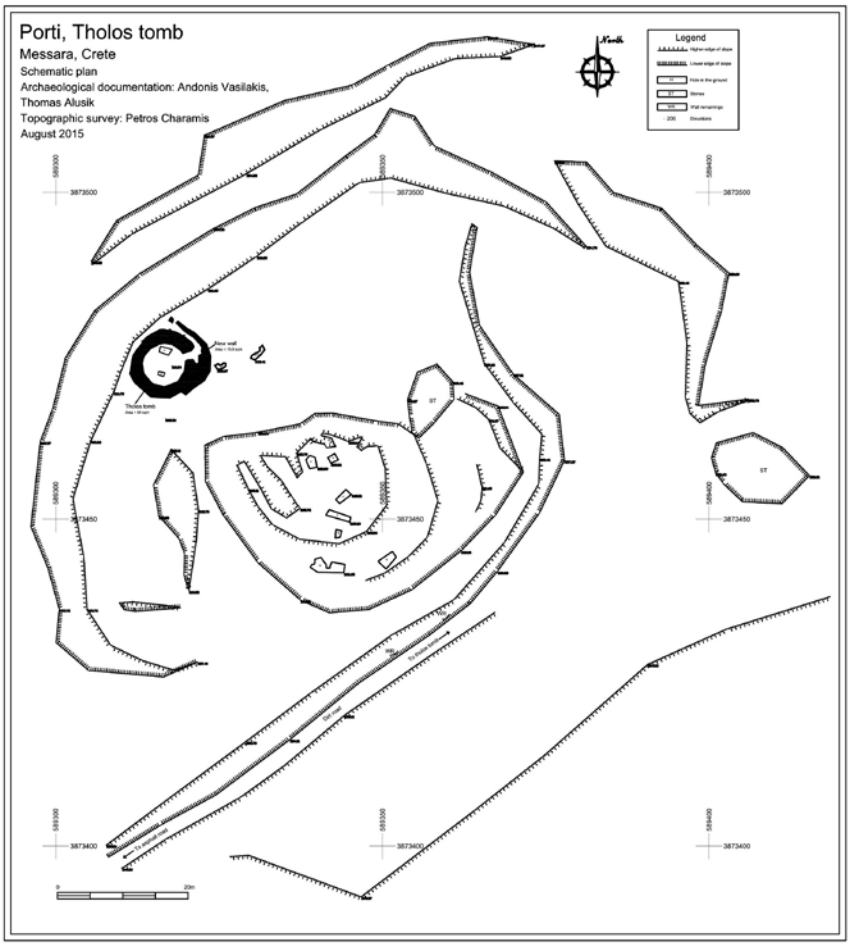

Fig. 5. A schematic plan of the site of Porti. Created by Petros Charamis.

The site, the tholos tomb and the settlement

The *site* of Porti, on which the main survey work concentrated in the 2015 season, is located on the hillock Tou Bairami to Papouri (square E4 of the survey grid). This hillock is only slightly elevated above the level of the surrounding Mesara Plain, just to a maximum of 20 m. In the north and west the hillock mass creates a vast terrace (with the tholos remains) over which the top itself rises, elevated by only a few meters. A modern dirt road (chomatodromos), running southwest-northeast, enables access to these places and is cut into a cultural layer in its central part. A geodetic survey of the whole hillock was carried out and its schematic plan worked out (Fig. 5).

The *tholos* tomb is located on the terrace in the north-western part of the hillock (Fig. 6). Xanthoudides referred to the main circular tomb chamber, in front of which the remains of three other tomb chambers were found (annexes α-Γ; two oblong and one with apsidal ending – see Xanthoudides 1924, pl. LXII). But at the beginning of the Project, only the main circular chamber of the tomb was visible. Only later, during the initial basic cleaning of the area to the north and east in front of the tomb, were groups or lines of stones reminiscent of masonry uncovered in three places. As they are oriented approximately in one line, running more or less

Fig. 6. General aerial view on the Porti tholos tomb (2016). Photo Michalis Spyridakis.

in the same direction as an entrance into the main tomb chamber, these are, most probably, the remains of the masonry of the tomb annexes. Although the tholos was cleared of vegetation, only the whole course of the inner façade is known. The exterior tomb façade was revealed on the northern and eastern sides (Fig. 7).

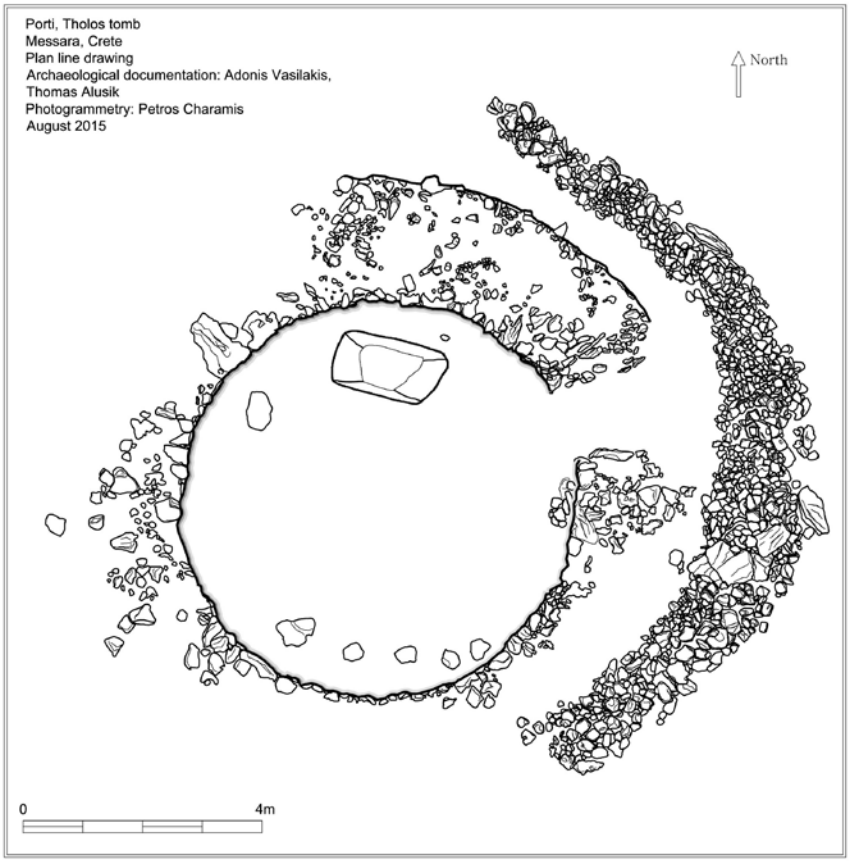

Fig. 7. New ground plan of the Porti tholos (2015). Created by Petros Charamis.

Fig. 8. The burial cave Tou Kouphou o Spilios.

The tholos tomb masonry consists of very small to large rough stones. The individual layers of the masonry were not laid horizontally, but were gradually tilted towards the centre, which would correspond with corbelled vault roofing. On the northern and north-western sides there are longer narrow stone blocks protruding out of the outer face in three places, thus providing staticity for climbing up to the roof, as documented in other Mesara-type tholos tombs (e.g. in Apesokari Tholos B). The dimensions of the tomb based on the new measurements are as follows: diameter 6.65 m; wall width 1.95-2.18 m; the area of the preserved external wall is 84 m2. The finds from the tomb and its surroundings show evidence of use in the Prepalatial period until MM II.

The *settlement*, according to Xanthoudides, was located on the upper part of the Papouri hillock, especially on its top plateau (measuring c. 24 × 18.5 m), labelled the 'acropolis'. He also mentioned that the only preserved part of the settlement was a lower stretch of a huge wall (interpreted as a fortification), leading around the perimeter of the 'acropolis' (Xanthoudides 1924, 54). Unfortunately, only a few stones have been preserved in the western corner and on the north-western side.

The only clearly identified remains of ancient masonry are situated in the cut-off profile of the slope closely above the modern dirt road, south-east of the top and the tholos tomb. Within our survey, 9 pit objects have been documented on the top plateau of Papouri. Some of these are probably original excavation trenches, while the others were rather the result of erosion. The most important is the smallest pit object situated at the northeast edge of the plateau, measuring approximately 1.8 (l) × 1.4 (w) × 0.8 m (d). A larger amount of pottery was found on its surface. Most likely, this is a damaged Minoan domestic context.

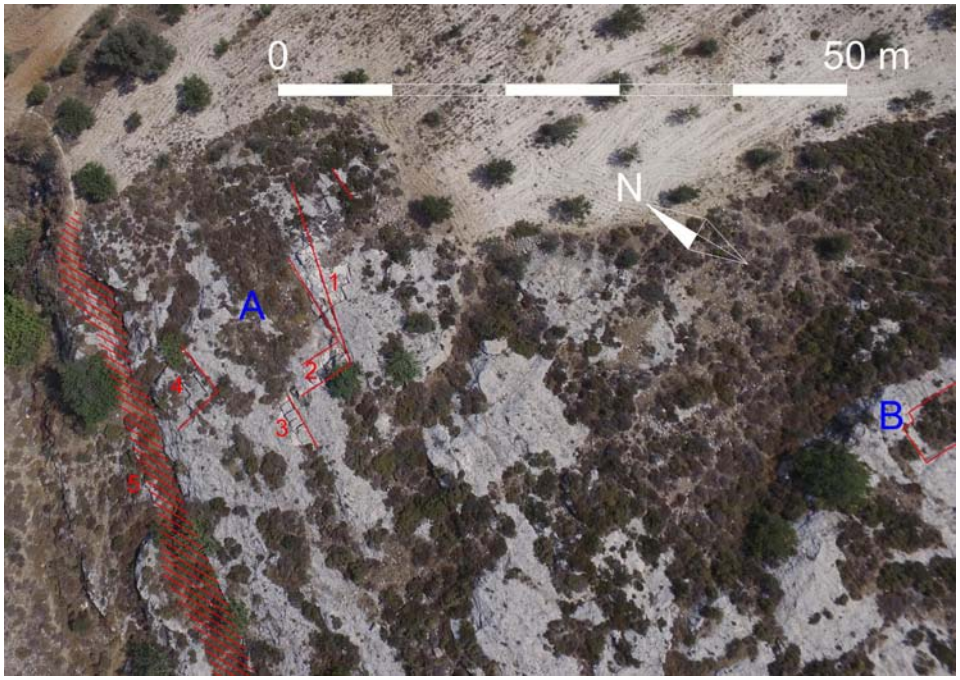

Fig. 9. Porti – ancient quarry, plan on the basis of the orthophoto. A – main quarry; B – small quarry;
1, 2, 3 – not extracted stone blocks flanking the south-west and south-east side of the quarry;
4 – not extracted stone blocks on the edge of the rock terrace (path);
5 – edge of the main rock terrace of the quarry.
Photo Michalis Spyridakis, created by Matous Semerad.

During our survey on the whole Papouri hillock and its surroundings, a large concentration of finds was noticed dating back to EM-MM II phases, with some sherds of a Neopalatial date (LM IA). Based on the terrain configuration and the tholos tomb location on the lower terrace edge of the hillock, we may estimate the area of the settlement at up to 200 m (north-south) to 150 m (east-west), with a "core area" (with the highest find density) of approximately 80-100 x 80-100 m.

A cave called *Tou Kouphou o Spilios* (the 'Cave of the Deaf Man') has been discovered in a rock massif elevating from a steep slope, oriented approximately east-west, c. 350 m south-west of the Papouri hillock (squares B1-C1) (Fig. 8). More than 100 pottery sherds and also several fragments of bones were collected from the cave. Approximately another 150 sherds were found on the slope below the cave where they fell as a result of erosion. Their chronological spectrum is quite wide – at least one sherd is of Final Neolithic date, while several others are of EM III date. Most of them – including one larnax fragment, pithos fragments, tripod legs, etc. – originate in the MM-LM periods. Larnax, pithos and bone fragments indicate use of the cave for funeral purposes.

The *quarry* is located c. 150 m south-west of the Papouri hillock (squares B2-B3), in the northern part of a spacious rocky massif, with a narrow valley on its western side (Fig. 9). Clear traces of chipped-off stone are visible in the main area (Area A) measuring about 23 m (north-

Fig. 10. Porti – ancient quarry, general view on the main part A.

south) × 18 m (east-west) (Fig. 10). In the eastern and south-western part of this area three levels of shorter stone steps are clearly visible, mostly further divided by cut vertical narrow "spaces" into separate cuboidal stone blocks. Another small quarrying zone (Area B; c. 7 x 4.2 m) was found c. 50 m further to the east. During the quarrying, first the groove matching the width of the stone row, i.e. the length of the cuboid stone block, was cut, and this newly created stretch was then divided into the individual blocks. Such stretches (and thus also the volumes of the cuboid blocks) mostly followed the contour line. Most of the stone blocks measured 0.73 x 1.32 m - 0.86 x 1.20 m and were c. 0.4 m thick.

The quarry, unfortunately, cannot be dated on the basis of pottery finds, but the technique of chipping off and cutting the stone by means of narrow cut vertical spaces may date (in its (secondary use?) to the Graeco-Roman period.

Grid, digitization and planning

Surface survey and documentation: The aim of this task was to walk an 800 m x 800 m area around the tomb and collect surface finds on a 100 m × 100 m square pattern. The tomb was located on a 1/5000 Greek Army map, on top of which a grid was created with the site (the Papouri hillock) in the center. The survey zone was divided into 64 squares measuring 100 × 100 m, which were marked with Latin letters (A-H) east-west and Arabic numerals north-south (1-8), so A1-H8. Square E4, which contained the tholos tomb, was divided into 16 sub-squares (25 × 25 m; marked as J1-J4 to M1-M4) for denser sampling (5 direct walking lines 5 m apart). The coordinates of the grid points were uploaded on an accurate GPS, which the team used to locate the 102 grid points on the ground (Fig 11).

Fig. 11. Survey grid.

Except for the central square E4 (with the Papouri hillock), which was investigated very carefully, the remaining squares in the area of B1-B7 to H1-H7 were surveyed in 10 north-south lines 10 m apart. The remaining 15 squares on the northern (line A1-H1) and western (line A1-A8) border of the survey area were, due to lack of time, walked only in 5 lines 20 m apart. All the finds, architectural remains and terrain characteristics in all 64 squares were recorded and documented into 5 twenty-metre segments. For the find density see the diagram (Fig. 12).

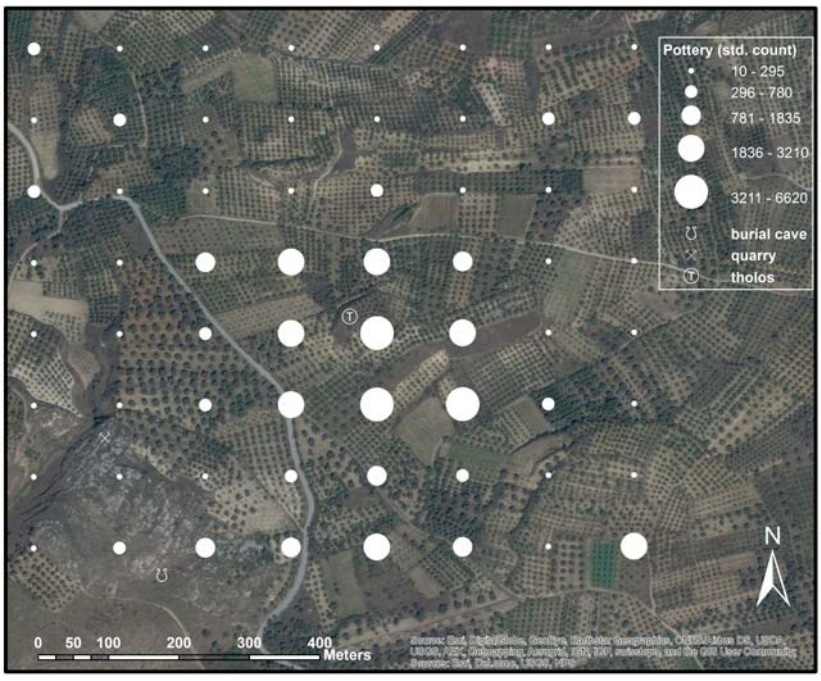

Fig. 12. Finds density on the orthophoto. Created by Ladislav Smejda.

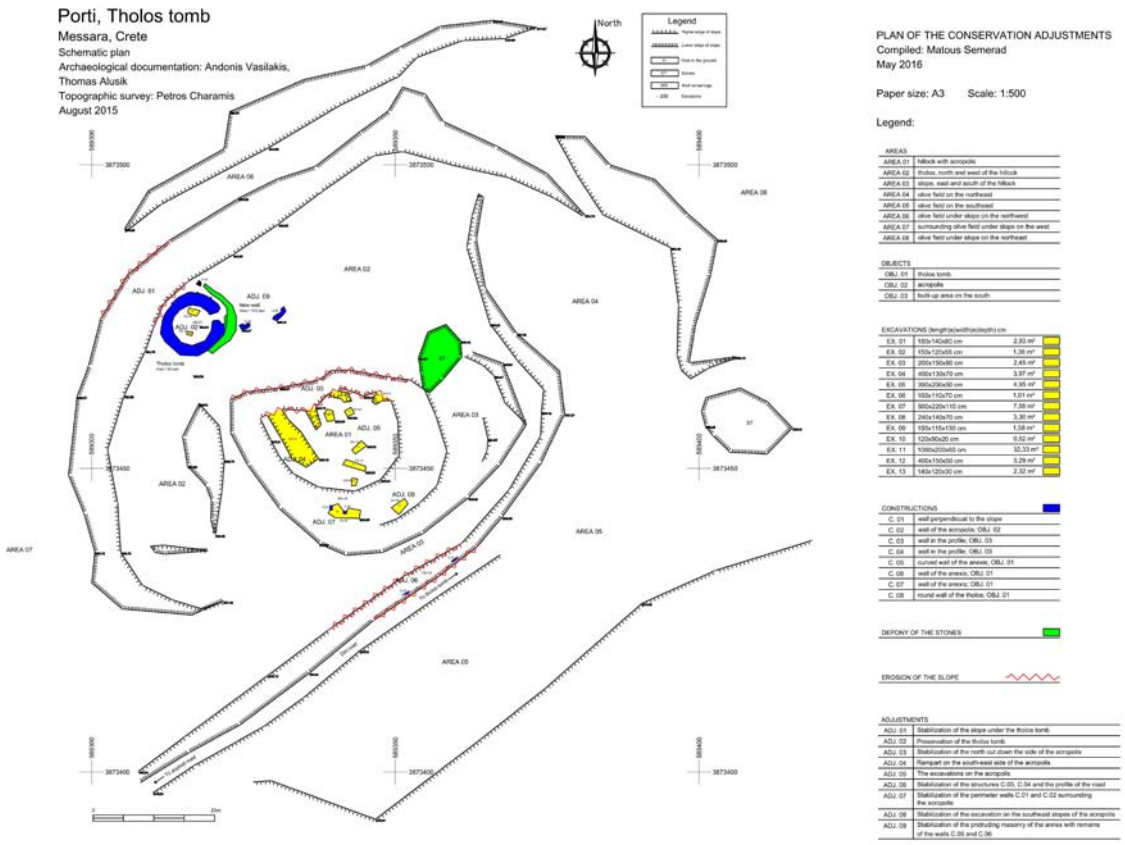

Fig. 13. Plan of the conservation adjustments of the ruins. Created by Matous Semerad.

Altogether about 12,400 artefacts were recorded during the surface survey, nearly a quarter of them from the central square E4. Ceramic sherds form the vast majority. Regarding the find density, we can distinguish squares with low (0-20 finds, maximum 2 finds per walking line on average), medium (21-100, maximum 2 finds per segment on average) and high (over 100) number of finds. At least one find was documented in each square. A small number of finds was recorded in 19 squares, a medium number in 24 and a high number in 21 squares.

Topographic survey: The immediate vicinity of the tomb was carefully walked through and visually investigated, to discover all preserved architecture remains. These finds, together with features such as ditches, holes in the ground, modern structures and dirt roads, were measured with the GPS. The tholos tomb was also surveyed using the same instrument. The collected data were processed using CAD software to create the topographic survey drawing, which was referenced to the Greek Grid (GR ’87).

Photogrammetric digitization of the tholos tomb and creation of the plan line drawing: The work started by placing circularly scattered paper targets on the structure. Next, a topographic Total Station was setup in the center of the tholos, measuring the position of the targets with the use of laser technology. These real targets were compared to their corresponding digital

targets of the 3d model. The position of the Total Station setup was measured with the GPS so that the 3d model and its products, the plan orthoimage and the line drawing, would be referenced to the Greek Grid (GR'87). Subsequently, photographic shooting was carried out and a total of 631 high resolution images were recorded. Every piece of the tholos tomb was visible on at least 6 pictures, with a minimum 70% overlap between consecutive images. The photographs were imported into a photogrammetric program which created an initial 3d model of the structure. Textures were also produced that gave the model a realistic appearance**.** Next, the model was imported into 3d graphics software where it was scaled, rotated and positioned to the Greek Grid. After that, the plan orthographic view was generated by projecting the model at a right angle onto the horizontal plane and rendered and saved in jpg format. It was then imported into a CAD program where it was used as a reference in order to graphically extract features, in the form of a final stone-by-stone plan line drawing.

Stabilization of Tou Bairami to Papouri hillock and preservation of remains of the Minoan Structures

The area of the mound and its surroundings is divided into seven sectors for clarity. The top of the hill forms the first, Area 01, slightly raised above the plateau encircling it to the west and north. It passes into the summit in the east, consequently stretching down into the valley. The south side of Papouri, Area 03, is steeply inclined. It is disrupted by the access path on the hillside leading to the water reservoir. The foot of the hill, Area 05, on the south-east side, is accessible by dirt track passing to the higher terraced level of Area 04 in the north-east, connecting it to the plateau, Area 02, bounded by the rock terrace (Fig. 13).

Each of the above-mentioned areas requires a different degree of protection. Areas 01, 02 and 03 are the most valuable in terms of the degree of preservation of the original geomorphology and architectural remnants. These areas should, where possible, be spared new olive tree planting and landscaping. Remains of masonry structures protruding from the surface should be automatically considered untouchable. Illegal excavations turned out to be the most serious problem affecting the most valuable parts of the tholos, the excavation in the middle and digging its outer obverse. The top plateau is equally affected by illegal excavations, especially on its southern slope where a targeted plundering of the stone wall C.02 as well as the destruction of the geological subsoil is evident by the breaking of the stone slabs while searching for potential underground spaces. These interventions are unfortunately among worst recorded at the site. Excavations not only damaged the stone wall but also disrupted the subsoil, leading to its subsidence and subsequent damage. This process is irreversible without costly rescue work and stabilization of the damaged bedrock. Mere backfill of the excavations cannot prevent their subsidence.

General recommendations from the perspective of historic preservation

- *Building structure*: Complementing the existing historic structure using new material is permissible only following detailed documentation.

- *Landscaping*: Not to extend the existing road network and avoid the expansion of cultivated areas, which would cause reduction of the sloping part of the plot.
- *Agricultural activity*: To avoid planting olive trees in areas with demonstrably preserved remains of masonry structures. To stick to the existing state without widely grown olive trees on the 'acropolis'. Agricultural machinery should keep a safe distance from the edge of the tholos. The top plateau of Papouri should remain grassed.
- *Operation*: It would be appropriate to place basic information about the site on the information sign on the main road.

Soil analyses

During the surface survey, special soil analyses with a handheld XRF analyzer spectrometer were also carried out in order to study the potential relationship between ancient settlement pattern and chemical composition of contemporary soil on and around the site. There was a statistically significant correlation of certain chemical elements, probably introduced into the soil as a result of historic or even prehistoric human activities. These elements are especially: phosphorus (P), potassium (K), sulphur (S), zinc (Zn) and copper (Cu). These elements are normal constituents of any living organism. The decomposition of organic waste and deposition of biomass ashes on or near archaeological sites causes the elevated concentrations of these elements in soils, which are detectable by appropriate analytical methods for a very long time after the end of their occupation**.** The correlation of P with the other above-mentioned elements is also detectable in the Porti survey area. Several anomalies of high P concentration can be found especially near the tholos and also towards the South and East. Other places of high P concentration, and very prominent ones, can be found below the opening of the cave and at two other spots along the southern edge of the survey area.

The other elements show different spatial patterns, which can be shaped either by local geology or unknown human activities. Both sulphur and potassium show increased values in the same area located to the east of the Papouri hillock. Copper shows a different pattern and at present we cannot connect it to the known settlement pattern.

An interesting spatial pattern is connected to lead (Pb) (Fig. 14). Its concentration is very low across the survey area but rises somewhat along its western border, specifically between the stone quarry and the slope below the cave. It is advisable to focus in future research on the possibility of lead contamination of soil caused here by humans, perhaps during the Roman period, which is the situation proven to have existed at a number of sites in the Roman Empire. Pottery finds seem to indicate an activity or settlement from this era in this part of survey area, which could potentially support this preliminary hypothesis**.**

Pottery

This short report focuses primarily on the Minoan pottery recovered from the tholos tomb, the settlement and the burial cave Tou Kouphou o Spilios, but still makes reference to the general occupation of the area through to the present.

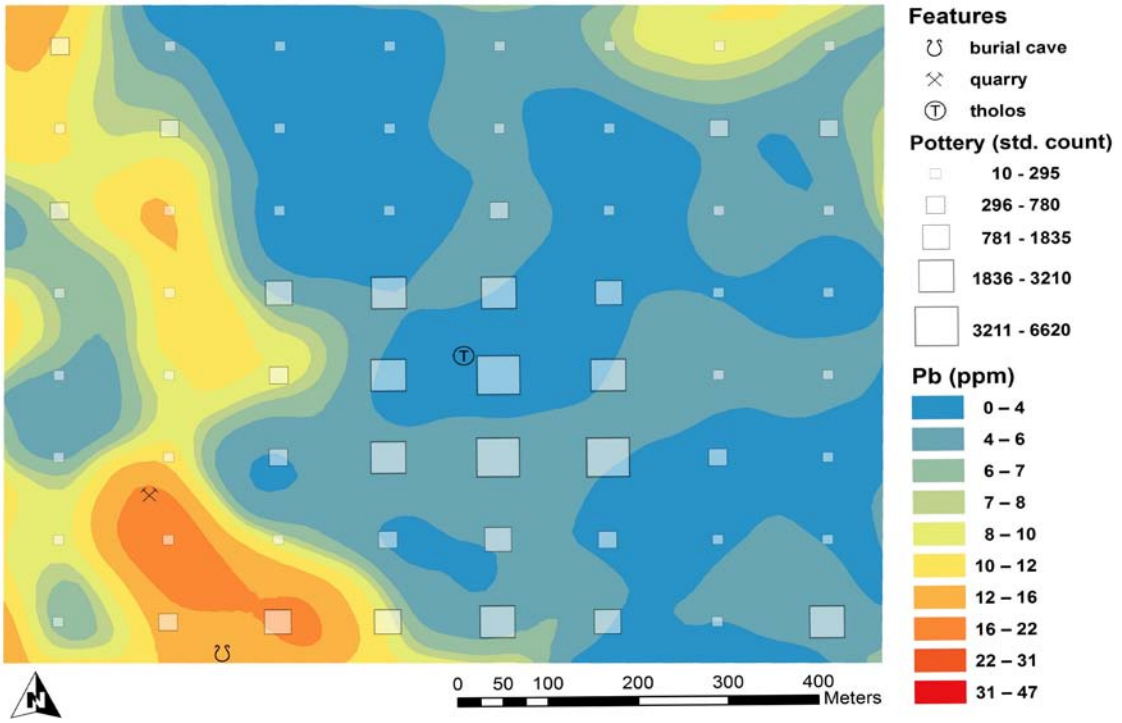

Fig. 14. Soil concentration of Pb, with standardised total counts of pottery.
Created by Ladislav Smejda.

The majority of the pottery from the Porti *tholos* is dated from the Early Minoan to the MM II period. The latest material comes from the Neopalatial period (Fig. 15). The pottery from the tholos area was collected and classified separately in 6 units (labelled Θ1-Θ6).

Fig. 15. Cooking vessels and table wares from the tholos.

Fig. 16. Larnax fragment recovered from the tholos.

– Θ1 yielded more fine wares than coarse wares, which is unusual for surface collection. The pottery from this unit ranged from MM IA to MM IIB.
– Θ2 was a smaller unit totaling only 14 sherds. As is to be expected, the majority of these were coarse wares. The dates of the pottery range from EM III to MM IIIA.
– Θ3 was quite a large unit consisting of 81 sherds. The ratio of coarse wares to fine wares was more equal than in other units collected from the tholos area (59% coarse wares to 41% fine wares). The chronological span for the material in this unit ranges from EM III to MM IIB, with the majority being in the EM III to MM IIA range.
– Θ4 is a respectably sized unit consisting of 63 sherds in total. The chronological range of this material is from EM III to MM IIA, with the majority coming from the MM IB and MM IIA periods.
– Θ5 is also a decent-sized unit consisting of 53 sherds. As is to be expected for survey material, fine wares recovered were quite minimal, numbering only 7 sherds. The date range for this material was MM IA to MMIIB, with the majority dating from MM IA to MM IIA. This unit was found in close proximity to Θ6, but there were no links whatsoever with that unit.
– Θ6 is a good-sized unit consisting of 50 sherds. Of these, only 9 sherds belonged to fine ware vessels. The diagnostic coarse ware sherds included, for example, a plain larnax rim (Fig. 16) and a body sherd with a lightly burnished interior and exterior. The fine wares demonstrated some interesting finds such as, for example, 2 handles (one in a fine jug/jar fabric, the other possibly from a basket-type vessel) and 3 body sherds with metalicizing all over slip paint decoration. The chronological range for the ceramic material is from EM III through to MM IIB, with the majority between MM IA and MM IIB. The burnished body sherd is possibly from the Final Neolithic, or an EM III holdout style.

A basic overview of the chronological range of the pottery from each sub-square of the central square E4 is presented in the table:

J4 MM IA / Roman	K4 MM IA-MM IIIA	L4 EM IIB-MM IIB	M3 EM-MMIII
J3 EM III-MM IIB	K3 EM III-LM IA	L3 EM II-MM IIB	M3 EM
J2 EM IIB-MM II / Pre-modern	K2 EM IIB-MM IIB	L2 EM II-MM III / FN	M2 EM-LM II
J1 EM III-MM IIA /LM IIIA	K1 EM II-MM II	L1 EM II-MM II	M1 EM-MM II

Fig. 17. Coarse wares recovered from the area of the settlement. Photo Pavla Alusikova Dostalikova.

In general, the area of the *settlement* of Porti also yielded impressive results, but as is to be expected the majority of the material collected was coarse ware from vessels such as jugs, jars, cooking pots, and pithoi (Fig. 17). There were significantly fewer fine wares such as decorated cups or other serving wares, except for the Kamares ware pithos that was found under a tree in a plastic bag (in square F4) (Fig. 18). Probably the result of illegal looting, the vessel is lacking its base and rim. The decoration features spirals and perhaps what could be described as sea urchins, with a central circle in white with radiating lines. There is added plastic band decoration

Fig. 18. A set of fine ware (esp. Kamares style) ceramic sherds, after washing. Created by Pavla Alusikova Dostalikova.

Fig. 19. Cups, bowls, and pithoi fragments recovered from the cave. Photo Pavla Alusikova Dostalikova.

near where the base and the rim would be framing these central panels of decoration. Above the upper plastic band there are wavy white lines painted with no red. Near the base there are handles, and the decoration is quite colourful and complex with red and white on the dark background. Interestingly, the settlement displayed finds of later periods than that of the tholos, implying that the settlement of Porti continued to be occupied even as the tholos tomb fell out of use.

Although there is scant evidence of Neolithic occupation at the cave, the earliest date of its occupation/use is more securely dated to EM II through to MMII (Fig. 19). There is also scarce material dating to LM I and a handful of sherds dating to the Byzantine period. The Bronze Age material recovered exhibits fragments of vessels such as cups, bowls, tripod cooking pots, and pithoi. The decorated fine wares feature polychrome, drip, and all over slip paint decoration. The cave also produced some pithoi sherds of a Byzantine date, probably because it was used for storage in that period. Interestingly, both the Tholos and the cave appear to be in use simultaneously, until the early Neopalatial period.

In the north-west section of the survey area (square B7) a large amount of Late Roman and Byzantine material was recovered, including some glazed wares. This square produced a large amount of Roman tiles. Another high-density area of finds was to the south-east of the survey area (square H1). This area yielded a high amount of Roman architectural features (mostly tiles), while a fragment of a Minoan ceramic wine press with a spout, a few Minoan larnax fragments and a few (Roman?) architectural terracotta fragments were also found.

Important finds

In general, the most important movable finds of this season are the Minoan talismanic seal (Fig. 20), a terracotta animal figurine (both found in the vicinity of the tholos tomb) and the above-mentioned set of Kamares and other fine ware fragments (Fig. 18).

Fig. 20. Minoan talismanic seal from the surface cleaning of the tholos area.

Altogether 67 ground stone implements and 7 chipped stone artefacts, including 3 obsidians, were found. The ground stone tools can be classified into 10 basic types, according to their function. The terminology and basic typology of the ground stone implements have been adopted from Blitzer (1995) and Dierckx (2016). Most were used as pounders-pestles / polishers (16), quernstones (11 pieces; incl. a very well preserved one with a length of 37.15 cm and a weight of 6040 g), whetstones (7) and polishers (7). Thirty-nine of these implements, mostly quernstones or grinders, were made of sandstone (usually fine-grained).

Some human bones were also collected, especially in the area of the tholos tomb and the cave, but the majority are small fragments only a few centimetres long.

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