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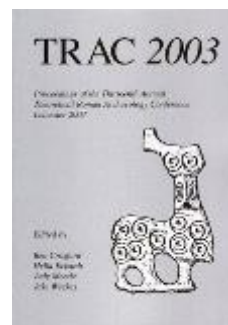
Memory in Roman Knossos

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Tomb robbing and the transformation of social memory in Roman Knossos

Dimitris Grigoropoulos

Introduction

For many archaeologists working on burial sites across the Mediterranean, the discovery of disturbed burials and/or graves emptied of all or most of their contents is a frequent phenomenon. Apart from cases that seem to have been prompted by treasure-hunting in recent or contemporary times, a host of other burials are thought to have been disturbed or systematically plundered in Classical antiquity. Such evidence is frequently cited in preliminary reports and news sections of archaeological journals, yet only in a few cases have the circumstances and meanings of the practice been made the subject of focused enquiry. The reasons for this apparent reluctance are multiple and to a certain extent understandable. In many cases, it proves extremely difficult in the first place to identify and date with certainty such secondary activity on excavated burial sites. The grounds for such identification are furthermore not always stated explicitly (but see Taylor 1999), and concomitant interpretations run the risk of confusing tomb robbing with other mortuary practices, such as the exhumation of human remains, which may leave a similar signature on the archaeological record (Huntington and Metcalf 1991). To these should be added the general lack of comprehensive publication of mortuary data in the Mediterranean that could place this type of evidence in its wider context and enable the deduction of meaningful patterns (Small 2001: 36).

Apart from the methodological problems surrounding any such investigation, there also seems to be a tacit assumption among archaeologists that tomb robbing represents nothing more than a typical repetitive disturbance of the archaeological record, an invisible formation process, which may only help to interpret empirically observed anomalies in the latter. There are good reasons to believe that this is only partly the case, and this paper will consider the interpretive potential of this type of evidence for our understanding of the past society that produced it. Given the social significance and emotional value with which cemeteries and individual tombs were invested in the Classical world, in what circumstances and for what purposes did people consider it appropriate to resort to robbing graves? At the same time, the fact that cemeteries and tombs were frequently the material foci of temporally sustained or intermittent commemorative practices (Alcock 1991; Antonaccio 1995) raises interesting questions about the meaning of tomb robbing in the context of social memory and identity. All this appears to call for a more focused appraisal of tomb robbing within the historical, social and cultural contexts in which this practice is known to have occurred. Moreover, an archaeological examination of tomb robbing cannot be divorced from other related issues about the 're-use of ancient monuments' in the past (Bradley and Williams 1998), which are now being addressed in a serious way by Classical archaeologists.

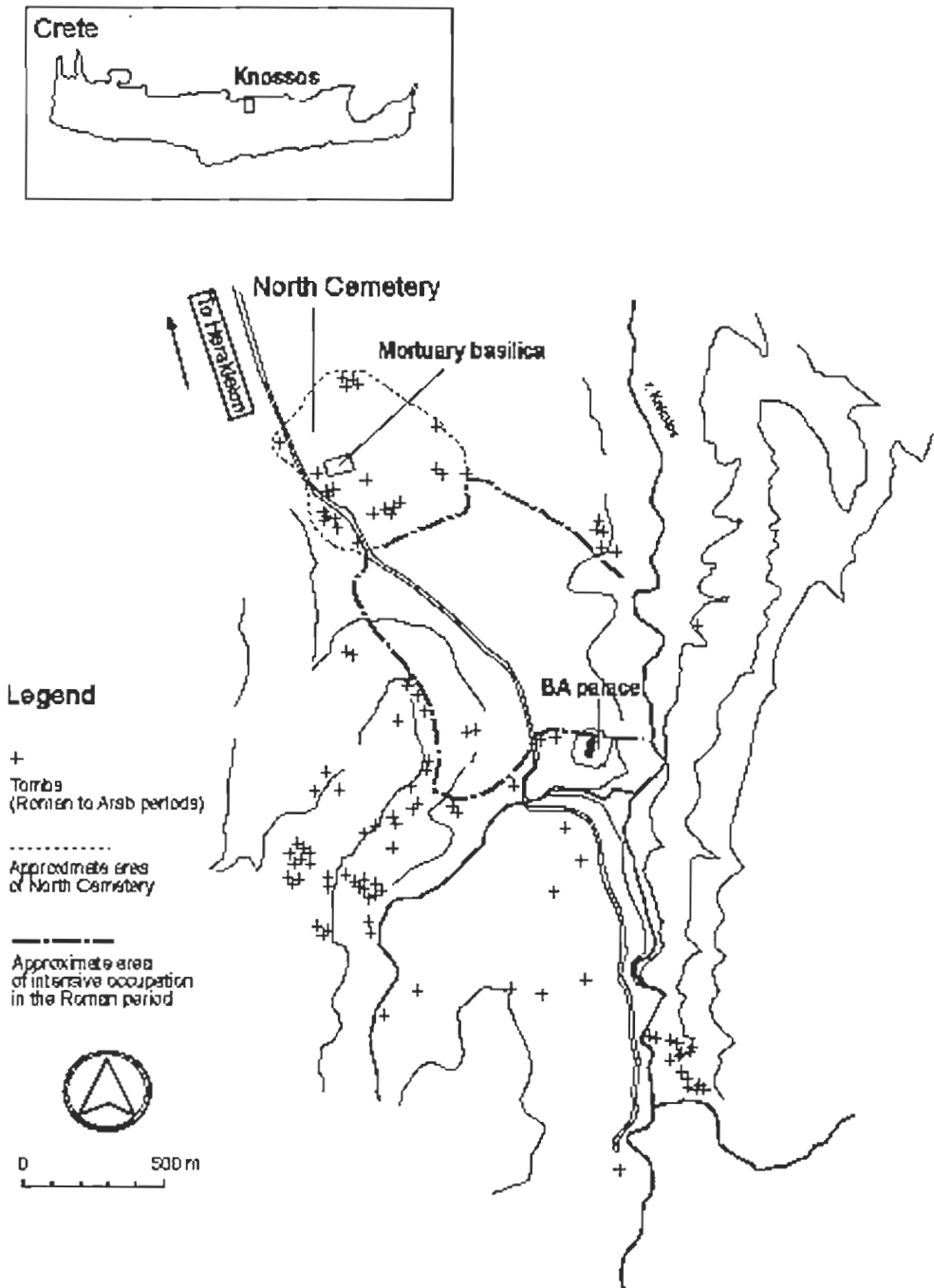


Figure 1: Map of Knossos area showing sites and features mentioned in the text (after Hood and Smyth 1981. Reproduced with permission of the British School at Athens)

This paper provides an initial, partly speculative attempt to examine some of these issues and to stimulate thought about tomb robbing and its multiple impacts on society in the Roman period. Drawing upon the concept of the cultural biography of objects (Marshall and Gosden 1999), the discussion concentrates on the evidence for the afterlife of a number of Early Greek tombs in the Hellenistic and Roman periods at the North Cemetery of Knossos in Crete. The North Cemetery lies about one km N – NW of the famous remains of the Bronze Age palatial complex, on the east side of the road leading from the modern village of Knossos to Herakleion (Fig. 1). It comprises a number of neighbouring sites excavated in advance of building construction at various times in the last century by the Greek Archaeological Service and the British School at Athens. The evidence dated to the Hellenistic and Roman periods is awaiting publication and it is known exclusively from preliminary reports and brief notes. The full publication of the Early Greek material, however, allows provisional observations to be made about the treatment of the Sub-Minoan and Early Iron Age tombs, which included episodes of intentional re-use, avoidance and plundering by the later generations that used the cemetery.

The Early Greek tombs in the Hellenistic and Roman periods

The North Cemetery represents the earliest burial ground used by the population of Knossos in the post-Minoan period. The earliest burials, dated to the Sub-Minoan period (ca. 1150 – 1050 BC), were a number of chamber tombs and pits dug into the natural rock. In the succeeding Protogeometric, Geometric and Orientalizing periods (ca. 1050 – 600 BC), further burials were inserted, some of them displacing the remains of existing burials and/or re-using the chambers or entranceways (*δρόμοι*) of the older chamber tombs. The cemetery appears to have been abandoned for most of the Archaic and Classical periods. In the Hellenistic period, however, it started to receive new interments on a scale paralleled only by the initial use of the site in the Early Iron Age (Catling 1979). The cemetery continued in use in the Roman period, although on a significantly smaller scale, while in the Late Roman period, probably in the fifth century AD a large mortuary basilica was built on the eastern part, resulting in the destruction of many pre-existing tombs.

In many ways, the Early Greek tombs were instrumental in structuring later activity in the cemetery. In the Hellenistic period, contemporary graves were placed in close association with them, probably deliberately, judging from the spatial configuration in which they were found during excavation (Fig. 2). Hellenistic graves appear to have formed distinct burial plots, some of which clustered on areas that were already occupied by the earlier graves. Particular early tombs seem furthermore to have been sought after and ‘honeycombed’ by Hellenistic burials (e.g. Tomb 193). In other cases, graves were inserted near or on the entranceways of chamber tombs (e.g. Tombs 268 – 270), over the chamber (e.g. Tombs 49, 220, 296) or between a pair of early tombs (e.g. Tombs 73 and 84 inserted between Tombs 138 and 60). Although several of these late graves appear to have cut into the earlier ones, the excavators note that specific care was taken to disturb them as little as possible or at least not to obliterate their presence (e.g. Tombs 75, 285).

The revitalization of the North Cemetery as a burial ground in the Hellenistic period has already been commented on as a distinct and possibly deliberate phenomenon by the excavators (Coldstream and Catling 1996: 722). Apart from the fact that this took place several centuries after the latest Orientalizing – Archaic burials were inserted in the cemetery,



Figure 2: The Knossos North Cemetery, Medical Faculty Site: Plain numbers refer to tombs mentioned in text, numbers in circles to Early Greek tombs plundered in the Roman period (after Catling 1979. Reproduced with permission of the British School at Athens)

the majority of Hellenistic graves appear to have been deliberately placed in close association with these earlier tombs. An obvious question to ask is how these graves became known after so many centuries of disuse of the cemetery. Although it is difficult to ascertain to what extent the tombs were visible or whether markers of any sort were placed on them, the strong colour contrast between the dark fill of the tombs and the soft light bedrock into which they were dug may still have been perceptible (Coldstream and Catling 1996: plate 3c). Chance discovery and robbing of their contents, as suggested below, might have been equally instrumental in generating an interest for them among the local community.

While the Hellenistic material may appear to suggest an intentional 'return to old ground' (Alcock 2002: 108), the evidence for the use of the North Cemetery in the Roman period as well as the attitudes of its users towards the earlier tombs is more diverse. According to the excavators, 'in the Roman period the North Cemetery ceased to be the main burial ground of Knossos' (Catling 1979: 61). Very few graves of the early Roman period were found in the cemetery, the most characteristic being a number of monumental burial enclosures of the second c. AD (Catling 1979: 57). Even fewer appear to continue the pattern of close association with the Early Greek tombs (e.g. Tomb 227 and burial enclosures 124, 156) from the previous period. Roman graves now tend to occupy distinct, 'fresh', areas and spaces that had not been used for burial in previous periods (e.g. Tombs 6, 33 and 239). The resulting impression is of a consistent avoidance of the Early Greek tombs in the Early Roman period, as opposed to the Hellenistic period when apparently deliberate 'honeycombing' and close associations were made between contemporary and older burials.

The tendency to avoid burial space used in earlier periods can be seen in the wider construction of the mortuary landscape in early Roman Knossos. Cemeteries of the Roman period concentrate in the S – SW and E environs of the city (Fig. 1), namely in areas distinct from those used for burial purposes in both prehistoric and later historic times (Hood and Smyth 1981: 24–26). Similar spatial considerations appear to have been influential in the location of burials in other provincial contexts across the Roman world (Esmonde Cleary 2000; Vermeulen and Bourgeois 2000). This general patterning cannot be accidental but seems to indicate particular, socially significant preferences for the location of burials in Roman Knossos. Both in the Hellenistic and in the Roman periods the presence of old tombs and cemeteries influenced decisions about burial in the Knossos area in a significant way. The ways in which these decisions were materialized in the respective periods, however, reveal contrasting perceptions of the significance accorded to the inherited landscape.

The evidence for tomb robbing

The picture of these emerging attitudes towards the Early Greek tombs in Hellenistic and Roman Knossos cannot be adequately appreciated unless another type of evidence is taken into consideration. The excavation report makes frequent reference to the disturbances caused to the Early Greek tombs through constant re-use (Coldstream and Catling 1996: 56) and the construction of the mortuary basilica in the Late Roman period but also includes information for their plundering in various periods. The excavation report permits us to ascertain that the identification of the robbing rested on evidence quite different from other types of secondary disturbance, which were related to the intensive diachronic use of the cemetery for burial. In most cases, displaced or missing blocking slabs, disturbed or mixed fill, scattered bones and/or

artefacts originally deposited with the dead along with the presence of 'late' pottery or small finds in the chamber fill were taken as clear signs of plundered tombs. In others, robbing activity could be established through the presence of distinctive vertical pits cut into the chamber fill (Coldstream and Catling 1996).

For the purposes of this study it will suffice to concentrate on the chronological spectrum of this evidence, since this will permit an initial appreciation of relative numbers of plundered Early Greek tombs in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. A total of 54 Early Greek graves, most of them belonging to the chamber-tomb type, have produced definite evidence for plundering in some form or another (Table 1). Before discussing the evidence more fully, two observations must be made. First, robbing activity could at best be dated to a broad period/date range, with only a few cases dated more precisely within a particular century. In order to reach some level of homogeneity, it was decided to group these few precisely dated examples into the respective date range/period categories. Secondly, apart from dated or undated instances of tomb robbing, several others, not dated explicitly in the report, are associated with intrusive or 'late' finds from the entranceway (*δρόμος*) or the chamber fill of the Early Greek chamber tombs. Since these finds are also likely to be related to the period when the robbing of the tombs occurred, they have been taken into account in assigning such dates.

Table 1: Knossos North Cemetery: List of plundered Early Greek tombs by period-group. Notation of tombs as in excavation report (source: Coldstream and Catling 1996)

<i>Hellenistic</i>	<i>Roman</i>	<i>Late Roman</i>	<i>In antiquity</i>	<i>Modern</i>	<i>Undated</i>
T. 31 SE	T. 2 SW	T. 86 SE	T. 13 SE	T. F/67:1	T. 61 SW
T. 82 SE	T. 24 SW	T. 125 W	T. 14 SE	T. F/67:3	T. 168 SW
T. 175 SW	T. 25 SW	T. 132 W	T. 129 SW	T. F/67:4	T. 207 SW
	T. 30 SW	T. 146 SW	T. 222 SE	T. F/67:5	T. 221 SW
	T. 34 SW		T. 283 N	T. F/67:8	T. 282 N
	T. 40 SE-SW		T. N	T. F/67:9	T. 286 N
	T. 48 SW			T. F/67:10	T. 287 N
	T. 56 SW			T. F/67:11	T. 292 N
	T. 57 SW			T. F/67:14	T. 294 N
	T. 60 SW			T. F/67:15	T. 306 N
	T. 149			T. G	T. F
	T. 152				T. H.
	T. 208 SW				T. L
	T. D				T. M
	T. O				
	T. Q				
3	16	4	6	11	14

Figure 3 illustrates the percentage values of Early Greek tombs at the North Cemetery that were plundered from antiquity to the modern age as mentioned in the excavation report. In fourteen (26%) of the reported cases the excavators provide no further information about the dating of the event. Much plundering appears to have taken place in modern or recent times (eleven tombs; 20%), especially in the Fortetsa area, while for six tombs (11%) it was possible to establish a general date for the plundering 'in antiquity'. Among the more closely dated incidents of plundered Early Iron Age tombs, only three (6%) appear to date to the Hellenistic period. In contrast, sixteen (30%) such incidents could be dated to the Roman period and four (7%) to Late Roman times. The latter evidence may be related to the wider disturbances caused to the cemetery when the mortuary basilica was built in the fifth century AD, since almost all of the tombs plundered during this period appear to have been cut by the foundations of the building (Coldstream and Catling 1996: 129ff.). It should be noted in this context that during this period, some of the Early Roman burial enclosures were stripped of their marble fittings and some also plundered (Catling 1979: 57).

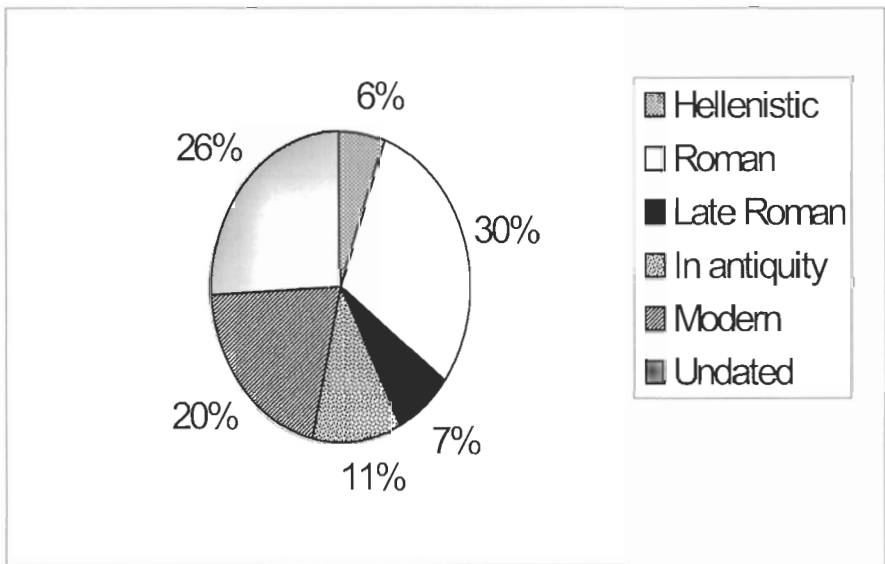


Figure 3: Knossos North Cemetery: The chronological distribution of plundered Early Greek tombs (Total number= 54; source: Coldstream and Catling 1996)

The scarce evidence for tomb robbing activity in the Hellenistic period appears to complement the evidence for extensive re-activation and (generally) non-destructive re-use of old burial ground that is reported from the cemetery. In the Hellenistic period, the re-discovery of the Early Greek tombs appears to have instigated the extensive re-visitation and re-occupation of the cemetery, creating foci for contemporary burial. The three solitary examples of Early Greek tombs robbed in the Hellenistic period were found in areas that were used for contemporary burial and may suggest that, perhaps at an early stage, the re-discovery of the tombs in the course of grave digging may have led to the plundering of their contents. Re-discovery and inspection of the grave goods plundered from the tombs is likely to have led to

speculation about the identity of the deceased within the Knossian community (cf. Williams 1998: 97). Tomb robbing may have thus influenced the appeal that the old cemetery gradually gained as burial ground among the inhabitants of Knossos. At the same time however, the small number of these examples may suggest that tomb robbing did not enjoy a wider acceptance in Hellenistic Knossos.

The particularly high number of Early Greek tombs that appear to have been plundered in the Roman period is striking, as it amounts to 1/3 of the total evidence for plundering in all reported period-groups (Fig. 3). This result may however be concealing more subtle chronological differences within the large time span of the Roman period. There is also the possibility that tombs were plundered several times in successive periods (Coldstream and Catling 1996) leaving little tangible evidence for this behind. Some plundering may have taken place concurrently with the use of the cemetery for burial, as in the previous (Hellenistic) period, especially in the much-congested core area to the SW of the Late Roman mortuary basilica, which has produced a few burials of the Roman period. Even allowing for these possibilities, however, the evidence strongly suggests that the Early Greek tombs were plundered on an extensive scale specifically in the Roman period. For the moment, no definitive solutions can be provided for these issues, and more detailed analysis must await the final publication of all the cemetery evidence in order to fully appreciate the sequence in which more recent burials displaced the older ones. At the moment, the outlined trends of Early Greek tombs plundered through time at the North Cemetery allow us to understand robbing activity in a general manner only, however, it is worth exploring this evidence in more detail, taking account of the historical and social contexts in which tomb robbing occurred.

Tomb robbing in historical perspective: The Roman world and beyond

How can we explain the fact that such a large number of Early Greek tombs at the North Cemetery were plundered in the Roman period? The evidence seems admittedly rather odd when seen in the context of the general decrease in burial across the whole cemetery, especially in the Early Roman period, as discussed above (Catling 1979: 56). Although disturbances to pre-existing tombs by grave-digging in later periods were all too frequent in the North Cemetery of Knossos, the activity of tomb robbers in the Roman period appears disconnected from the use of the area as a burial ground. In earlier centuries, tombs were emptied and re-used or, as we saw in the case of the Hellenistic period, they became the spatial epicentres for burial. This was hardly the case in the Early Roman period. Unless the Late Roman activity in the area is concealing the evidence for Early Roman burials, it would appear that when people were 'returning' to the North Cemetery in the Roman period, the main concern was not so much to bury close to the Early Greek tombs but to plunder them.

Although the opening and robbing of tombs is a phenomenon as widespread in space and time as burial itself, ethnohistoric and archaeological studies point to specific circumstances in which this practice has occurred in the recent or more distant past. From modern and contemporary times, the example of southern Tuscany and northern Lazio in Italy is a case in point. Locals have traditionally engaged in robbing Etruscan tombs for antiquities as a means of escaping economic deprivation resulting from changes in land property rights and mounting unemployment in post-unification Italy (Van Velzen 1999). A recent archaeological case study by A. Small (2001; cf. *id.* 2002) places the extensive evidence for tomb robbing at Gravina in

Puglia in the context of social change in the region after the Roman conquest in the third and second centuries BC, which probably involved disruptions in settlement and land tenancy patterns. Economic hardship, conditions of political and social change, through conquest and war, as well as demographic instability appear to present a common backdrop to episodes of extensive disturbances to and plundering of tombs.

The fact that tombs were considered to be repositories of accumulated wealth made them particularly prone to plundering not only in times of extreme hardship but also when the common values, prohibitions and religious sanctions of the community that used the tombs were breached by outsiders in times of crisis. References to tomb robbing in written sources of the imperial period suggest that pre-existing tombs in areas under colonial re-development were particularly targeted by colonists in the course of the building of new cities. Strabo (*Geography* 8.6.23) recounts how in the course of the colonial re-foundation of Corinth, '[...] when (the colonists) were removing the ruins and digging open the graves, they found numbers of terracotta reliefs, and also many bronze vessels: and since they admired the workmanship, they left no grave un-pillaged'. The account is closely mirrored by that of Suetonius for the colony of Capua in Campania (Suetonius *Deified Julius* 81). The association between tomb robbing, destruction and re-foundation of cities might be no more than a literary trope; however it correlates with other known examples in which pre-existing tombs are reported to have become targets of pillage during siege assaults by the Romans (Davies 2000).

The increased evidence for tomb robbing in the Roman period in Knossos seems to correlate with a time of intense transformations of the city's political and administrative status. Knossos is known from epigraphic and literary sources to have been opposed to Roman domination of the island, while during the Roman campaigns in 68/7 BC the city was severely damaged by the Roman troops under Metellus (Harrison 1993: 57). Probably early in the reign of Augustus, Knossos was re-founded as a Roman colony and its territory was re-organised on an extensive scale in order to provide land allotments for the colonist population that came to the area from Capua in Campania (Paton 1994). While it is only possible to follow the impact of these changes in very general terms, there are indications that the transition was neither smooth nor uncomplicated. Conquest and colonial re-foundation were followed by dislocations of the local population from better land, heavy economic burdens and the disappearance of traditional religious institutions that were probably seen as potential sources of civil unrest (Harrison 1993: 61–62). A striking example can be found in the case of the rituals of military training and citizen initiation that were taking place at the sanctuary of the local hero Glaukos, which was abandoned about the time of the conquest (Callaghan 1978).

The extent of destruction across the city conveyed by the literary sources remains to be further proven by archaeology; however, the social and political institutions, the material conditions and the human fabric of the Greek city were shaken deeply by the Roman conquest. It is perhaps within this context of conquest, demographic and social change that the activity of tomb robbers in Roman Knossos should also be understood. The examples quoted above reveal that the tension created by the conquest and colonization of areas encompassed multiple domains of social life where established practices and norms were challenged by the novel conditions of conquest and domination. The robbing of tombs may thus represent an aspect of the alienation from the material fabric and norms of city life of the preceding period that people in Knossos were experiencing in the wake of these wider changes that resulted from Roman domination and imperial annexation (Alcock 2001: 327; 2002).

Tomb robbing in social perspective: social change and the domain of memory in Roman Knossos

Situating tomb robbing in Roman Knossos within a context of tension and alienation raises a number of interesting issues related to human agency and social change. Is alienation the result of 'cultural inertia' or the intentional suppression of existing forms of self-perception and identity? And what repercussions did this practice have on society in Roman Knossos as a whole? As we have seen, in many cases tomb robbing had economic motivations but it is also possible that in the Roman world the unintended consequences of the practice were far-reaching. Strabo (*Geography* 8.6.23) goes on to say that the Corinthian 'mortuaries' plundered from the graves in Corinth initiated a short-lived demand in Rome for such curiosities. The plundering of tombs in areas conquered and/or under colonial re-development may thus be understood as another form of the ritualised extraction of booty, some (or all) of which could then be diverted to the market for sale. At the same time, the practice is strikingly similar in conception to the deliberate removal of significant or symbolically charged objects from the domain of the enemy and comparable to the practice of *evocatio* (Beard *et al.* 1998: 61 – 64). The implication of such acts was a transfer of power that denigrates the defeated both morally and physically while conferring prestige to the victor.

It is not necessary that all these considerations were consciously realised in all specific contexts and/or by all of the social agents that engaged in tomb robbing, rather that tomb robbing functioned through such subtexts of power, appropriation and control. Social theorists have emphasized both intentional motivation as well as the unintended consequences of human agency as important factors in initiating change across the wider spectrum of society (Dobres and Robb 2000: 5). The question of 'who robbed the graves' (Palmer 1950) thus may seem less relevant in the context of the evidence from the North Cemetery compared to the effects that these actions had in transforming the lived experience and categorical meaning content of the Early Greek tombs in Roman colonial Knossos. At this point, I wish to discuss some of the ways in which the robbing of the Early Greek tombs had transformative impacts on the constitution of society of Knossos in the Roman period.

Of interest here, initially, is what the Early Greek tombs signified for people in Knossos in the Hellenistic period. Archaeological evidence suggests that during the centuries preceding the conquest by the Romans, Crete experienced a widespread phenomenon of re-activation of old places and monuments, including tombs, sanctuaries and settlements that had been abandoned for centuries. According to Alcock (2002: 118), the evidence suggests 'a widespread investment in the island's past', whereby the memorial potential of old places was realized and actively embraced by local communities. The large-scale re-activation of the North Cemetery in Hellenistic Knossos, the oldest burial ground of the city (Catling 1979), several centuries after the latest burials had taken place, should probably be seen in the same context. People in Hellenistic Knossos were making active attempts to establish links with the past. In this process, the Early Greek tombs had an intrinsic importance as foci of local identity and as physical manifestations of the links between past and present.

'Communities ... have a history – in an important sense are constituted by their past – and for these reason we can speak of a real community as a 'community of memory', one that does not forget its past' (Bellah *et al.* 1985: 153, quoted in Ollick and Robbins 1998). Whilst it is not certain that the robbing of the early Greek tombs in the Roman period reflects a conscious attempt to disconnect from the Hellenistic activity and the possible meanings that this

engendered, the practice resulted in the gradual degradation of the memorial potential of the place and perhaps, by implication, in the waning of the 'memory community' associated with the cemetery and the tombs. What was at stake here is social memory and the sense of place that the Early Greek tombs represented for the community of Knossians before the conquest. Tomb robbing posed a radical threat to the sensory experience of tombs as monuments that enabled the performance of commemorative practices and, ultimately, the reproduction of social memory within the local community. Robbing these tombs deprived those who still wanted to remember and celebrate the past of the very means and the ability to do so.

Cretan curiosities: Experiencing the Knossian past in the Roman period

We should perhaps understand the robbing of the Early Greek tombs at the North Cemetery in the Roman period as a series of small-scale events having a long-term impact on the material conditions that had sustained social memory in Knossos before the conquest. This impact was not only mediated through the re-discovery and re-opening of the old tombs but it could also be followed in the dislocation and re-distribution of their contents. A question that immediately arises is what sort of items could become targets for expropriation and what quantities were involved in the process. As a quick survey of the undisturbed Early Greek tombs at the North Cemetery suggests, the majority of such tombs contained a range of decorated domestic and funerary pottery vessels, other items including personal possessions of the deceased, and objects connected with the mortuary rite (Cavanagh 1996: 668). Richer burials, especially those of the Subminoan/Early Protogeometric and Late Geometric/Orientalizing periods, included imported artefacts and objects of precious metal and stone as well as residual or heirloom items of Bronze Age ('Minoan') date (*ibid.* 651 and 656). It should be emphasized that many tombs had a large time-span of use within the Early Iron Age, resulting in both the depletion and enrichment of their assemblages in the course of this long period. When entering the tombs, robbers in later times would thus have been exposed to an assortment of burials and material culture of different periods. The fact that a number of Early Greek tombs that were plundered in the Roman period still retained a considerable quantity of their accumulated assemblages at the time of their excavation (e.g. Tombs O, Q, 56 SW) may suggest that, either for logistical or other reasons, the plunderers were selective in what they took.

What the tomb robbers were specifically searching for may be difficult to interpret on the basis of the assemblages of undisturbed burials only, however, there is adequate archaeological evidence from elsewhere in Roman Knossos to suggest what types of objects they were commonly finding and how these 'finds' were being used. The most interesting example concerns the miniature 'Minoan' lentoid or prismatic seal stones, typical of the material culture of Bronze Age Crete. These small iridescent or translucent objects were widely re-cycled throughout antiquity and are still used in Crete as prophylactic and curing stones (Coldstream and Catling 1996: 625). Seal stones originally bore a variety of aniconic and figurative decoration but in the Roman period, they were frequently re-carved with new decorative motifs, and they were set in finger rings and/or perforated to be used for pendants (Kenna 1960: 104, no. 114). Excavations in the area of the Greek and Roman city and its environs have produced several such items from Roman domestic contexts (Catling 1977: 4, Fig. 2; Popham *et al.* 1984: 194 ff.), while a find is known from an Early Roman deposit at the

sanctuary of Demeter and Kore, probably representing a personal offering to the deities (Coldstream 1976: 128, no. 17).

These objects could have been easily recovered in an area as rich in vestiges of the past as Knossos but there are indications that some may have been the products of tomb robbing in the vicinity of the Roman city. Harrison (1993: 2) has already drawn attention to the plundering of Minoan graves in the Knossos area but the fact that seal stones were frequently recycled in antiquity may suggest that in the Roman period a considerable number of these objects were retrieved from post-Minoan graves. Although seal stones deriving from Early Iron Age contexts elsewhere in Crete were found almost exclusively in graves, only two such items were found at the Knossos North Cemetery (Coldstream and Catling 1996: 626). The lack of seal stones from the assemblages of the North Cemetery is striking if one thinks that undisturbed Early Greek tombs from elsewhere in Knossos have produced such items. If these objects were as frequently deposited during the Early Iron Age in graves in Knossos as elsewhere in Crete (*ibid.*), then the small number of seal stones found in the North Cemetery may well relate to the fact that many of these tombs were robbed in the Roman period.

Apart from seal stones, other 'unusual' items were also sought and curated by people in Roman Knossos. A deposit found on a floor dating to the Tiberian period from a domestic building in Knossos produced among contemporary items of household use an assemblage of 'survival' pottery and small finds (Table 2).

Table 2: Knossos, 'House of Antiquary', Tiberian deposit B1: Survival pottery and small finds (source: Sackett *et al.* 1992)

Object	Style	Date
Pottery vessel lid	Orientalizing	7th c. BC
Pottery pyxis lid	Corinthian animal-style	7th c. BC
'Pottery' (no further details)	Corinthian animal-style	7th c. BC
Ceramic base sherd (with graffito)	Black-glazed	4th c. BC
Relief bowl	Black-glazed	4th c. BC
Terracotta figurine of ape	–	ca. 330 BC
Bronze medallion	–	4th – 3 rd c. BC
Ceramic bowl (uncertain)	Cypriot Terra Sigillata	Mid 1st c. BC

The eclectic nature of the assemblage, reflecting '[...] a quality of attraction for the curious' (Sackett *et al.* 1992: 190), suggested to the excavators that several were probably personal mementoes or heirlooms of the owner. Among the items represented, Corinthian and Orientalizing pottery, such as the vessel lid in Fig. 4, is likely to have been retrieved from rifled Early Greek/Orientalizing tombs at the North Cemetery. We are here perhaps reminded of the taste for 'antique' Corinthian ceramics from old tombs that is mentioned by Strabo to have been actively pursued by metropolitan Romans.

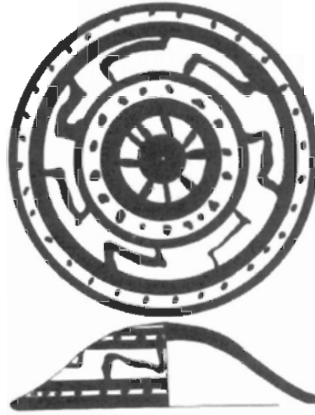


Figure 4: Knossos, 'House of Antiquary': Lid of Orientalizing ceramic vessel found on the floor of a building dating to the Tiberian period. (after Sackett et al. 1992. Reproduced with permission of the British School at Athens)

Commodification of these items, as implied by the literary sources, made them subject to specific rules of exchange (Appadurai 1986) which on the basis of currently available evidence are difficult to re-construct. It is evident from the examples discussed above, however, that the products of tomb robbing were widely circulated and re-used, reaching audiences in various contexts of social life in Roman Knossos. Ancient pottery items were curated as display pieces in personal collections. Minoan seal stones were frequently worn as jewellery by Knossians in their everyday activities or presented as personal offerings to the gods. Tomb robbing thus provided objects with which individuals in Roman Knossos could identify themselves on a personal level and help them make sense of the place and the material conditions they were inhabiting. Such discoveries of old objects in pre-existing tombs around Knossos are likely to have been important in structuring the attitudes of contemporaries towards their surrounding landscape and in influencing their perceptions of the past (Hingley 1996; Williams 1998: 97). The strikingly dissimilar appearance of such items to the material culture that was commonly used in Roman Knossos could, furthermore, have led to speculation about the origin of the objects and may have led to popularising accounts of their use in the past.

The feelings that the plundered objects could have evoked to the people that used them are likely to remain elusive but we can speculate about the possible associations that they might have encouraged. The story of Dictys Cretensis, focusing on the presumed discovery of Phoenician tablets in Knossos in the time of Nero (Forsdyke 1956: 153 ff.), suggests that Knossos was a common backdrop to fictitious or actual antiquarian activities thus revealing a contemporary fascination with the antiquity of the area. Traces of this trend are found throughout literary sources in the Roman imperial period where Knossos in particular becomes emphatically the setting for mythic stories that reflect political and ideological concerns (for examples see Nikolaidis 1985; Harrison 1994). Myths about King Minos, the Labyrinth and the Minotaur were consciously re-told by Roman and Greek writers, reaching various audiences in the Roman world, and it is possible that such stories formed common frameworks of reference for interpreting objects that appeared to be out of the ordinary. While literary

sources might have been an important medium in propagating such fascination across the Roman world (Alcock 2002), the collection and curation of artefacts enabled a more direct appreciation of Knossos' antiquity across a wider spectrum of society in Roman Knossos. The fact that individuals could now consume such items at home or in their everyday or ritual transaction in public places could have contributed to the development of a wider social discourse of the relationship between past and present in Roman Crete.

Conclusion

In a recent review of social memory studies in modern and contemporary sociology, Ollick and Robbins (1998) have highlighted malleability as a dynamic aspect of social memory. Malleability involves the ways in which memory and commemorative practices of societies and groups come to radically alter, partly retain or transfigure their form and/or meaning content. This concept may be heuristically useful in understanding the complex archaeological record from the Knossos North Cemetery and the interpretive issues that this raises in the context of social change in Roman Knossos. It may be difficult to ascertain what people in Hellenistic Knossos were remembering (Alcock 2002), however, the form of remembrance and perhaps the meaning content(s) were clearly undergoing changes after the Roman conquest. These changes were emphatically inscribed on the collective biographies of a number of old tombs dating to the Early Iron Age which in the previous period had sustained shared experiences and perceptions of the Knossian past. The robbing of the Early Greek tombs in the Roman period, in particular, reflects the social, political and demographic tension that was introduced after the conquest and colonial re-organisation of the Greek city by the Romans.

While we can only scratch the surface of what the practice might have signified, tomb robbing 'messed with the minds' (Alcock 2001: 325) of people in Roman Knossos in significant ways. This was by no means a minor side effect, 'external' to the political, economic or other developments but probably carried subtle messages of subordination and colonial appropriation, since the collective biographies and the physical integrity of objects important to the self-determination of the Knossian community before the conquest were challenged and subverted. At the same time, and perhaps ironically, the consumption of the products of tomb robbing was feeding the creation of new associations with the local past of Knossos in novel ways. All this may appear to suggest that people in Roman Knossos, whether colonist or native, were not only living in a different present but they were also beginning to make sense of their inherited surroundings and the past in very different ways than in the previous period.

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