

## FROM 'TRADITION' TO 'CULTURAL MEMORY'. TOWARDS A PARADIGM SHIFT IN AEGEAN ARCHAEOLOGY

"The first task memory performs is actually not to preserve ... but to select ...".<sup>1</sup>

### Prolegomena

Can archaeological theory really help us to understand the way(s) Aegean societies came to terms with their past? This is the crucial question the present paper seeks to address by examining the validity of some recent theoretical models pertinent to memory in the field of Aegean Archaeology.<sup>2</sup> In the last decades, cultural studies experienced a 'memory boom'<sup>3</sup> which has had a strong and still lasting impact on archaeological disciplines.<sup>4</sup> In the heart of this influential line of thought lie the overlapping terms 'social memory', 'collective memory', and 'cultural memory', which refer to the recollection of the past by a collective as a deliberate, socially embedded action. The basic idea that nourishes these new hermeneutical approaches is that groups fabricate their own narratives of collective remembrance and build upon them a collective identity. They mostly do so by participating in public activities through which they articulated a collective shared knowledge of the past, on which a group's sense of unity and singularity is based. This idea has marked a strong shift of the scholarly interest from the static concept of the 'past', as a former reality with normative strength, to the dynamic notion of 'memory' as a conscious act shaped by collective agency. The title of the present paper refers to exactly this turn from a rather static to a more dynamic approach to Bronze Age Aegean *mneme* and not to how the – partially overlapping – terms 'tradition' and 'memory' have been used in recent research.<sup>5</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> E. ESPOSITO, "Social Forgetting: A Systems-Theory Approach," in A. ERLI and A. NÜNNING (eds), *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (2008) 184.
- <sup>2</sup> This paper advances some thoughts which were first presented in D. PANAGIOTOPOULOS, "In the Grip of their Past. Tracing Mycenaean *Memoria*," in S. SHERRATT (ed.), *Archaeology and Homeric Epic* (2017) 74-100.
- <sup>3</sup> See the seminal works by F. YATES, *The Art of Memory* (1966); P. CONNERTON, *How Societies Remember* (1989); J. ASSMANN, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (1992) [english translation: J. ASSMANN, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization. Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination* (2011)]. The real pioneer in this field was Maurice Halbwachs, whose path-breaking studies remained for several decades without followers, see M. HALBWACHS, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925), *La mémoire collective* (1950). For further crucial monographs, collective volumes or articles among a vast and still growing body of literature see D. LOWENTHAL, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (1985); for a revisited edition see D. LOWENTHAL, *The Past is a Foreign Country – Revisited* (2015) (not available to the author); J. THOMAS, *Time, Culture and Identity* (2002); S. KÜCHLER, "The Place of Memory," in A. FORTY and S. KÜCHLER (eds), *The Art of Forgetting* (1999) 53-71; ERLI and NÜNNING (*supra* n. 1).
- <sup>4</sup> See M. ROWLANDS, "The Role of Memory in the Transmission of Culture," *World Archaeology* 25 (2) (1993) 141-151; S.E. ALCOCK, *Archaeologies of the Greek Past. Landscape, Monuments, and Memories* (2002); R. BRADLEY, *The Past in Prehistoric Societies* (2002); H. WILLIAMS (ed.), *Archaeologies of Remembrance. Death and Memory in Past Societies* (2003); R.M. VAN DYKE and S.E. ALCOCK (eds), *Archaeologies of Memory* (2003); A. JONES, *Memory and Material Culture* (2007); Y. HAMILAKIS, *Memory and the Senses. Human Experience, Memory and Affect* (2013); M. BOMMAS (ed.), *Cultural Memory and Identity in Ancient Societies* (2011).
- <sup>5</sup> The term 'tradition' is employed in various meanings ranging from a rather unconscious transmission of old practices from generation to generation to a conscious instrumentalization of the past for present concerns; for the latter see E. Hobsbawm's concept of the 'invented tradition', E. HOBSBAWM, "Inventing Traditions," in E. HOBSBAWM and T. RANGER (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (1992) 1-4. He distinguishes between 'tradition' on the one hand and 'custom', 'convention' and 'routine' on the other; see also J. MARAN, in this volume.

Attempting a first evaluation of this paradigm shift, I would like to start with a – rhetorical – *advocatus diaboli* by putting the question of whether the notion of memory can really offer us new insights into how Aegean societies came to terms with their past, then to move to the theoretical level by discussing the applicability of memory and some related terms in our field and finally to close with a ‘crash test’ of theory, exploring its hermeneutical potential and especially its limits when applied to some intricate archaeological problems.<sup>6</sup> The following thoughts take as their methodological point of departure the idea that cultural memory refers not to a ‘residual’<sup>7</sup> but to a ‘practical past’.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the mere existence of an old monument or tomb in the Minoan or Mycenaean present cannot be an unequivocal proof of a purposeful encounter with a former reality. In other words, the subject of this paper (and this conference) is not the past itself but its instrumentalization by social groups in the Bronze Age Aegean.

### A – rhetorical – *advocatus diaboli*

Can the notion of memory really help us to better understand the manifold encounters of Aegean communities with their past(s)? This question – an imaginative *advocatus diaboli* – is actually not only rhetorical, since several critical voices have already been raised questioning the usefulness and innovativeness of memory as an explanatory concept. Why so? David Lowenthal gives us a first hint stating that: “The past is not dead; it is not even sleeping... it is inherent in all what we do and think ....”<sup>9</sup> And it is exactly this ubiquity of the past that might be a methodological problem for us. This becomes apparent in the funerary sphere. There is hardly anything of what takes place in a cemetery that cannot be regarded as an act of remembrance. Can we really hope to understand the collective conscious of Aegean societies better than previous generations of researchers when we interpret specific Aegean burial practices as acts of remembrance and thus state something that is a universal phenomenon? Do we gain new insights by highlighting the self-evident? Such critical questions are justifiable, yet they do not mean that the concept of memory has no usefulness but actually that we need more elaborated approaches and an emphasis on mnemonic strategies that are preferably less self-evident and thus more indicative in our attempt to comprehend Aegean societies as commemorative cultures.

### The theoretical level

The concept of memory has a decisive asset. Contrary to many theoretical notions, memory resembles no modern theoretical construct, but refers in its strict sense to a capacity of the human brain and in its wider use to a paramount aspect of ancient culture, an existing mental concept that can provide us with lucid insights into social behaviour in pre-modern societies. Even if we cannot hope to find such a word in the Linear B tablets for obvious reasons, we do have ample evidence for several pertinent Akkadian<sup>10</sup> or Egyptian<sup>11</sup> terms.

<sup>6</sup> In the limited space of a conference paper, it is actually impossible to provide a comprehensive analysis of the wide array of theoretical issues pertinent to social/cultural/collective memory. Therefore, I would like to focus here only on those which appear to me relevant to the pertinent archaeological evidence of the Aegean Bronze Age, *i.e.* the modes, agents and temporalities of mnemonic actions.

<sup>7</sup> See LOWENTHAL (*supra* n. 3) 185.

<sup>8</sup> See M. OAKESHOTT, *On History and Other Essays* (1999) 1-48; H. WHITE, “The Practical Past,” *Historiæ* 10 (2011) 10-19; see also D. MANIER and W. HIRST, “A Cognitive Taxonomy of Collective Memories,” in ERLI and NÜNNING (*supra* n. 1) 253: “A collective memory is not simply a memory shared across a community. It must serve a function for the community ... Many Americans know the approximate value of pi, but that does not make it an American collective memory”; further PANAGIOTOPOULOS (*supra* n. 2) 77-78.

<sup>9</sup> See LOWENTHAL (*supra* n. 3) xxv.

<sup>10</sup> E. JONKER, *The Topography of Remembrance. The Dead, Tradition and Collective Identity in Mesopotamia* (1995) 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> A. ERMAN and H. GRAPOW, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache* (1971) 232.12 – 233.26; 233 – 234.17.

Moving from the ancient terms to the modern concept, we must raise a point that needs further clarification. The memory in which archaeology is mostly interested is not an individual but a collective one (and the same applies as well to most if not all papers of this volume). This step from individual to collective memory is not unproblematic since there are several scholars thinking that such a collective memory cannot exist – for instance Amos Funkenstein who argues: “Just as a nation cannot eat or dance, neither can it speak or remember. Remembering is a mental act, and therefore it is absolutely and completely personal.”<sup>12</sup> The good thing for us archaeologists is that Funkenstein totally missed the point. Shared remembrance is not a mental act or an accumulation of individual memories, but a cultural product.<sup>13</sup> That means that the employment of ‘collective memory’ by archaeologists takes place on a real and not on a metaphorical level. We focus on the social manifestations or actualizations of collective memory that are tangible. They take place when a group of people comes together to conduct an act of remembrance or moulds mnemonic figures with words, texts, images, monuments, places, rituals and performances for expressing or materializing a shared remembrance. Thus, archaeologists do not target the collective conscious – or unconscious – but collective actions and thus something that really exists. The essence of this crucial argument has been very aptly formulated by Jeffrey K. Olick: “We must remember that memory is a process and not a thing, a faculty rather than a place. Collective memory is something – or rather many things – we do, not something – or many things – we have.”<sup>14</sup>

These general theoretical considerations demonstrate that the concept of collective/cultural memory can provide a reliable analytical tool for our historical context. The next decisive step is the attempt to implement theory for explaining archaeological data. In this, as in every other case, theory has to be applied *a posteriori*, i.e. starting not from the theoretical model but from the archaeological evidence itself and its specific character. Following this methodological premise, we can discern three different modes of encountering the past in the Bronze Age Aegean:

- a. A sustained or passive remembrance of habitual practices, values, words, things or images that may have distant origins. These are preserved either as visible ‘protuberances’ of the past in the dimension of the present (such as old tombs or heirlooms) or are transmitted from generation to generation and are quite often characterized by a lack of intentional bias. The rather unconscious repetition of habitual practices in art, technique and daily life resembles indeed a strong bond with the past and is usually defined as ‘tradition’. In this case, though, there is little that merits the term ‘collective’/‘cultural’ memory (see mode b), a concept that presupposes an intentional act of remembering based on social interaction.
- b. Conscious acts of reviving the past by certain groups who fabricate their own narratives of collective remembrance and build upon them a collective identity. This is the core of what we define here as ‘collective’/‘cultural’ memory.
- c. The production of a mnemonic record for future generations: monuments or structures that were built in a form that is intended to leave a visible mark in the future,<sup>15</sup> such as Minoan filled-in

<sup>12</sup> A. FUNKENSTEIN, “Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness,” *History and Memory* 1, no 1 (1989) 6; see also N. GEDI and Y. ELAM, “Collective Memory – What Is It?,” *History and Memory* 8, no 1 (1996) 34-35.

<sup>13</sup> For this crucial point see J. K. OLLICK, “Collective Memory: The Two Cultures,” *Sociological Theory* 17, no 3 (1999) 333-348; for the decisive difference between ‘collected’ and ‘collective’ memory see W. KANSTEINER, “Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies,” *History and Theory* 41, no 2 (2002) 186: “A collected memory is an aggregate of individual memories which behaves and develops like its individual composites, and which can therefore be studied with the whole inventory of neurological, psychological, and psychoanalytical methods and insights concerning the memories of individuals. Unfortunately, collective memories do not behave according to such rules, but they have their own dynamics for which we have to find appropriate methods of analysis”.

<sup>14</sup> J.K. OLLICK, “From Collective Memory to the Sociology of Mnemonic Practices and Products,” in ERLI and NÜNNING (*supra* n. 1) 159.

<sup>15</sup> See BRADLEY (*supra* n. 4) 34.

benches.<sup>16</sup> Such ‘mnemonic projects’ refer to two different temporal dimensions, as Richard Bradley argues: “Monuments lead double lives. They are built in the present but often they are directed towards the future. For later generations, they come to represent the past.”<sup>17</sup> Here, it becomes apparent that the concept of memory does not refer to a simple encounter between present and past but to something much more complex: We deal with different temporalities that become folded together through acts of remembrance embracing past, present and future.<sup>18</sup>

Following these three different modes of remembering, we can assume that in the Aegean context, collective memory is not only “the compulsion to repeat and the capacity to remember” (our modes a and b) as Paul Connerton has aptly formulated it<sup>19</sup> but also the desire to be remembered (mode c), performing thus an action in which different temporalities merge into each other.

Understanding memory as a collective act forces us to shift our attention to the agents who very consciously mould mnemonic figures or participate in mnemonic acts. And here is where the notion of scale comes into action. The bottom and top of a fictive quantitative scale of agency, *i.e.* the individual and ‘culture’ (in our case Minoan, Mycenaean or Cycladic) respectively, can be immediately excluded from our analytical scope. On the one hand, the individual is either not tangible in the archaeological record (the Lady with the Ivory Pyxis at Mochlos might be an exception<sup>20</sup>) or not relevant for our approach, since we are focusing on collective actions. On the other hand, ‘culture’, in its traditional sense, is an extremely problematic term not only generally in the field of humanities<sup>21</sup> but also specifically in the Aegean context. We may be talking about Minoans or Mycenaeans, yet we have no clear evidence of Minoans or Mycenaeans acting consciously as a collective in a mnemonic act.<sup>22</sup> What we obviously have in most cases are the so-called intermediary groups, *i.e.* families, social classes, urban or village communities, religious groups, and – why not – factions, even if it seems to be impossible without any written sources to identify them as such. This insight would help us to make some thoughts about the multivocality of memory in the

<sup>16</sup> I. CALOI, “Preserving Memory in Minoan Crete. Filled-in Bench and Platform Deposits from the First Palace of Phaistos,” *Journal of Greek Archaeology* 2 (2017) 33-52; see also CALOI, in this volume.

<sup>17</sup> BRADLEY (*supra* n. 4) 82; see also *ibidem*, 109.

<sup>18</sup> See G. VAVOURANAKIS, “Time Past and Time Present: the Transformation of the Minoan Palaces as a Transformation of Temporality,” in Z. THEODOROPOULOU-POLYCHRONIADIS and D. EVELY (eds), *Aegis. Essays in Mediterranean Archaeology presented to Matti Egon by the Scholars of the Greek Archaeological committee* (2016) 39: “If we aim to understand past peoples’ ways of life, then the focus should be upon the occasions where different temporalities become bundled or – in Deleuzian terminology – folded together, because such folds may acquire a critical volume regarding the ways in which the future may become virtually anticipated ... Archaeology should then pay attention to the effect of such occasions/time folds, too, upon social processes and structures operating at different temporal scales ...”.

<sup>19</sup> CONNERTON (*supra* n. 3) 25.

<sup>20</sup> See J. SOLES, “The Evidence for Ancestor Worship in Minoan Crete,” in O. KRZYSZKOWSKA (ed.), *Cretan Offerings. Studies in Honour of Peter Warren* (2010) 331-338; J. SOLES, “Hero, Goddess, Priestess: New Evidence for Minoan Religion and Social Organization,” in E. ALRAM-STERN, F. BLAKOLMER, S. DEGER-JALKOTZY, R. LAFFINEUR and J. WEILHARTNER (eds), *METAPHYSIS. Ritual, Myth and Symbolism in the Aegean Bronze Age. Proceedings of the 15<sup>th</sup> International Aegean Conference, Vienna, Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology, Aegean and Anatolia Department, Austrian Academy of Science and Institute of Classical Archaeology, University of Vienna, 22-25 April 2014* (2016) 251.

<sup>21</sup> In the course of the ‘cultural turn’ (see F. JAMESON, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* [1998]), the traditional conception of culture merely referring to territorially fixed and more or less homogenous entities that were often equated with nations or peoples underwent a drastic transformation becoming a denominator for social groups or ‘communities’ with shared ‘webs of significance’; for the latter see Cl. GEERTZ, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in Cl. GEERTZ, *The Interpretation of Culture. Selected Essays* (1973) 3-30.

<sup>22</sup> This is, of course, a general problem, since we also have no unequivocal evidence of a pan-Minoan or pan-Mycenaean centre of power, sanctuary, expedition or ritual. Even the Knossian hegemony in the Neopalatial period is not enough for assuming a distinctive identity of ‘Minoan-ness’ in every single Cretan region, see E. ADAMS, *Cultural Identity in Minoan Crete. Social Dynamics in the Neopalatial Period* (2017).

Aegean context, in other words the existence of antagonistic memories reflecting the shared remembrance of different groups.

In an attempt to grasp the mnemonic actions of these groups more accurately, we could employ a further theoretical notion, that of communicative memory as opposed cultural memory.<sup>23</sup> Jan Assmann, who coined both terms, defines communicative memory as follows: "Communicative memory is non-institutional; it is not supported by any institutions of learning, transmission, and interpretation; it is not cultivated by specialists and is not summoned or celebrated on special occasions; it is not formalized and stabilized by any forms of material symbolization; it lives in everyday interaction and communication and, for this very reason, has only a limited time depth which normally reaches no farther back than eighty years, the time span of three interacting generations."<sup>24</sup> Opposed to this is, according to Assmann, the notion of cultural memory that resembles something more formal, referring not to the recent but to a remote past as a repertoire and generator of values and traditional 'memory figures' that create identity. The distinction between commemorative and cultural memory was implemented very successfully already in 1995 by Gerdien Jonker in his systematic study of different forms of remembrance in ancient Mesopotamia.<sup>25</sup> Whether a similar approach could be useful in our field is something that needs to be demonstrated. I think that there is some potential in distinguishing between two different *modi memorandi*, a communicative memory that is mostly related to ritual action in Aegean cemeteries and a cultural memory that encompassed the manifestations of so-called memory figures through words, images, ceremonies or performances. Following this distinction, a Minoan or Mycenaean cultural memory – if such has ever existed – can be traced not necessarily in funerary rituals but in the manifestations of written, depicted or performed 'memory figures'.

Finally, this more complex understanding of time can open new forms of encounter with Aegean artefacts that go beyond our traditional approach to their age which has been clearly an exclusively chronological one.<sup>26</sup> We can more or less easily date an Aegean artefact in one specific period of our system of relative chronology, yet we have been less interested in answering questions about the length of an object's biography (or biographies)<sup>27</sup> or whether Aegean societies appreciated the 'patina of age'.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, we still lack a list of reliable criteria for distinguishing between heirlooms and antiques, whereas the latter refers to old objects which had been used, then disappeared, later retrieved and reused.<sup>29</sup> Such questions might help us to go beyond chronology as an essential part of archaeological reasoning and to develop a more elaborated emic perspective based on non-linear timescales.

<sup>23</sup> For this distinction see J. ASSMANN "Communicative and Cultural Memory," in ERLI and NÜNNING (*supra* n. 1) esp. 110-113, 117-118; further D. HART, "The Invention of Cultural Memory", *ibidem*, 86; see also J. WRIGHT, in this volume. This is admittedly only one among several potential distinctions of memory, see for example the concepts of 'episodic', 'semantic', 'procedural', and 'embodied' memory, in MANIER and HIRST (*supra* n. 8) 253-262; further the notions of 'personal', 'cognitive', and 'habit-' memory, see CONNERTON (*supra* n. 3) 21-25. All those different types of memory refer though mostly to individuals rather than groups. Therefore, more interesting in our respect are what Connerton defines as 'inscribed' and 'incorporated' bodily practices, see CONNERTON (*supra* n. 3) esp. 4, 72; see also N. PAPADIMITRIOU, in this volume.

<sup>24</sup> ASSMANN (*supra* n. 23) 111; see also H. WELZER, *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis. Eine Theorie der Erinnerung* (2002).

<sup>25</sup> JONKER (*supra* n. 10).

<sup>26</sup> See G. VAVOURANAKIS, *Funerary Landscapes East of Lasithi, Crete, in the Bronze Age* (2007) 35-36.

<sup>27</sup> An experienced Aegean archaeologist is able to date – more or less effortlessly – vases or other artefacts in terms of relative ceramic chronology, yet he/she would be puzzled by the question of which Aegean artefacts had the longest period of use.

<sup>28</sup> LOWENTHAL (*supra* n. 3) 143.

<sup>29</sup> In the case of heirlooms, it is difficult to speak unconditionally about collective memory in the strict sense of the term, since the social context of this appropriation of the past is not society but kinship. Through such objects, we may assess only a social *habitus* and not a conscious reference to the past as a collective experience, see PANAGIOTOPOULOS (*supra* n. 2) 78. For heirlooms and antiques see also several papers in this volume.

### A (double) crash test of archaeological theory

If we turn now to the empirical evidence we can argue that all these theoretical considerations can open our eyes and help us to formulate new questions that show the complexity of ancient realities. Situated in an archaeological context, the exploration of mnemonic strategies has endeavoured to go beyond the established issues of 'tradition' and tomb or hero cult. Theory can thus really help us to improve our analytical precision by adopting some terms or cognitive categories which help us to elucidate the different motivations, modes, temporalities and impact of mnemonic actions. The aforementioned distinction between communicative and cultural memory, the first related to acts of recollection taking place in Minoan and Mycenaean cemeteries and the latter to images, rituals or artefacts that were sanctified by tradition can provide a first hint for defining different forms of encountering the past. The issue of agency and scale can also enable a more thorough understanding about the groups behind the mnemonic acts and their intentions as well as to explain the multiplicity of memories. And finally, as far as the artefacts are concerned, theory helps us to regard them not as a *fait accompli* focusing on the issues of their chronological/typological classification but, on the contrary, to give an emphasis on their biographies.

Consequently, there can be no doubt that theory can provide an excellent point of departure for designing an effective questionnaire that does justice to the complexity of ancient realities. Yet, when it comes to the decisive point of interpretation, the archaeologist is left alone with the bare evidence, where there is only one way to proceed and this is the traditional one: to collect all relevant data, to study them with patience and persistence and finally to seek any possible meaningful connections between them. This can be easily demonstrated by two examples, a Minoan and a Mycenaean one. The first is the riddle of the missing Neopalatial tombs.<sup>30</sup> This intricate problem is only one side of a coin. The other side entails another problem which has a direct relevance to the topic of this conference. It is not just the enigmatic lack of Neopalatial tombs but actually the no less enigmatic end of Pre- and Protopalatial burial buildings and cemeteries, most of which ceased to be used after MM II. Neopalatial communities in different regions of the island not only stopped using cemeteries that served for centuries as the places of the dead but surprisingly stopped interacting with them. They did respect them in a certain way, because they were not overbuilt, yet they stopped visiting them or conducting any forms of commemorative events for the veneration of their ancestors. This question becomes even more pressing in cases of old cemeteries in the immediate vicinity of Neopalatial settlements which must have been visible and tangible, as in the case of Koumasa which is not the most important example, yet the one I am more acquainted with.<sup>31</sup> The same phenomenon can be observed elsewhere, for example at Sissi,<sup>32</sup> Gournia,<sup>33</sup> Petras<sup>34</sup> and Palaikastro.<sup>35</sup> Most of these tombs/cemeteries were located at strategic positions at the borders of the settlements<sup>36</sup> enjoying high visibility and must have remained thus in a sense 'present' even after their abandonment.

<sup>30</sup> See VAVOURANAKIS (*supra* n. 26) 86-89.

<sup>31</sup> In Koumasa, the Neopalatial settlement about the Prepalatial/Protopalatial cemetery, see Δ. ΠΑΝΑΓΙΩΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, "Ανασκαφή Κουμάσας," *Prakt* 169 (2014) 437.

<sup>32</sup> I. CREVECOEUR, A. SCHMITT and I. SCHOEP, "An Archaeothanatological Approach to the Study of Minoan Funerary Practices: Case-studies from the Early and Middle Minoan Cemetery at Sissi, Crete," *Journal of Field Archaeology* 40, no 3 (2015) 283-299.

<sup>33</sup> For the North Cemetery at Gournia see VAVOURANAKIS (*supra* n. 26) 26-33; G. VAVOURANAKIS, "Burials and the Landscapes of Gournia, Crete, in the Bronze Age," in E.C. ROBERTSON, J.D. SEIBERT, D.C. FERNANDEZ and M.U. ZENDER (eds), *Space and Spatial Analysis in Archaeology* (2006) 233-242; esp. *ibidem*, 236: "The abandonment of the North Cemetery shortly after its monumental refurbishment is also inexplicable. If the elites needed a cemetery in order to sanction their authority, why did they not maintain the North Cemetery?"

<sup>34</sup> M. TSIPOPOULOU, "Documenting Sociopolitical Changes in Pre- and Proto-palatial Petras: The house tomb cemetery," in M. TSIPOPOULOU (ed.), *Petras, Siteia. The Pre- and Proto-palatial Cemetery in Context. Acts of a two-day Conference held at the Danish Institute at Athens, 14-15 February 2015* (2017) 57-101.

<sup>35</sup> VAVOURANAKIS (*supra* n. 26) 33-37.

<sup>36</sup> VAVOURANAKIS (*supra* n. 33) 239.

How can we thus explain the fact that Neopalatial communities abruptly excluded the resting places of their ancestors (?) from their symbolic or ritual activities?<sup>37</sup> The common explanation, a shift from the funerary practices to other types of ritual and social representation that followed the establishment of the New Palaces and the consolidation of Knossian dominance,<sup>38</sup> downplays the importance of collective memory. Yet, if this interpretation is close to historical truth, then we have to assume that Knossian hegemony was founded not on remembering but on forgetting, which is definitely an interesting hypothesis.

I leave this question open and turn to the second example, the funerary landscape of Mycenae, which has been the subject of several papers in this AEGAEUM conference. They highlighted the manifold ways of manipulation of the city's past, providing us with valuable insights into the mnemonic strategies of Mycenae's elites. However, there are still a lot of open questions that can trigger further study of the intriguing case of Mycenae as a place of remembrance:<sup>39</sup> How can we interpret the indifference of Mycenae's community towards the less important tombs of the Prehistoric Cemetery which was gradually covered by private houses or other buildings and thus became invisible? These tombs must have belonged to their direct ancestors since there was no cultural break between the time of use of the Prehistoric Cemetery and the time of its erasure from the surface of Mycenae's urban landscape. Why does an impressive process of commemoration appear only in LH IIIB including the refurbishment of Grave Circle A which put an end to a long period of latent remembrance? Why were so many monumental tombs erected within the urban landscape of Mycenae and not in one of the 30 cemeteries surrounding this centre? How can we understand the erection of the built Tomb Rho with its unique design above an earlier shaft grave in Grave Circle B, a couple of generations after the end of its use? Why did this action find no followers? Why did the huge tumulus that was built above the tomb of Clytemnestra also cover the area of Grave Circle B? Was it a coincidence or a conscious attempt to stress the symbolic nexus of both monuments?<sup>40</sup>

In both cases, the Minoan and the Mycenaean one, we have question upon question. It becomes apparent however that the only way to shed light on these complicated issues is not a reference to the ontological dimensions of concepts such as memory, remembrance and past but only a truly contextual approach that will help us to understand culture as a 'web of significance', which man himself has spun, as Clifford Geertz<sup>41</sup> has aptly formulated it. Only the thorough study of what we have or can guess in a specific cultural context, the exploration of all intertwined threads of social action – and in our case memory – is that what forms "the core of our discipline as an interpretive one, one in search of meaning".<sup>42</sup>

Diamantis PANAGIOTOPOULOS

<sup>37</sup> See VAVOURANAKIS (*supra* n. 26) 122: "It should be stressed that the use of the past was not a feature of all Neopalatial burial activity... Although we can plausibly suggest encounters with the pastscape, these encounters do not imply any sign of respect or active engagement with the past." For some possible, yet isolated, exceptions see *ibidem*, 89-90.

<sup>38</sup> See VAVOURANAKIS (*supra* n. 26) 90-91, 97-98, 120-124; further VAVOURANAKIS (*supra* n. 33) 240; G. VAVOURANAKIS, "Funerary Ritual and Social Structure in the Old Palace Period: A multifarious liaison," in TSIPOPOULOU (*supra* n. 34) 387-388.

<sup>39</sup> See PANAGIOTOPOULOS (*supra* n. 2) 85-90.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, 87.

<sup>41</sup> GEERTZ (*supra* n. 21) 5: "The concept of culture I espouse, and whose utility the essays below attempt to demonstrate, is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning."

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*.