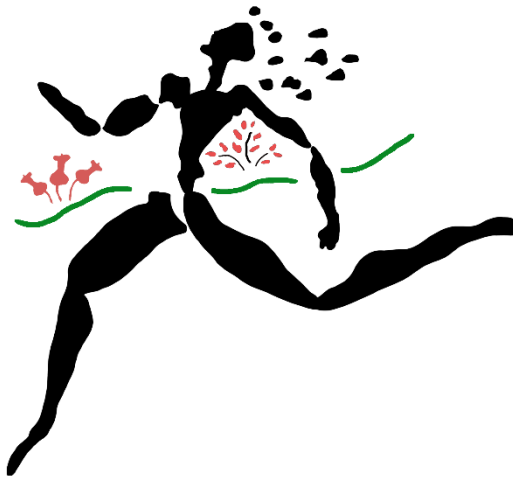


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## **No (e)scape?**

### **Towards a Relational Archaeology of Man, Nature, and Thing in the Aegean Bronze Age**



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# (E)SCAPING ARGUMENTS: *GEMMAE DUBITANDAE* AND THEIR POSITION IN EXPLORING AEGEAN BRONZE AGE ARCHAEOLOGY

## INTRODUCTION

Any form of interplay between a bygone era and (any) today depends on the historian's daily work. As archaeologists, who are both historical as well as cultural scientists, we mediate between the past and the present and propose ways of understanding how people dealt with existential matters in the ancient world. This we put into the context of how we manage life now, in our own time. To establish this connection, we as archaeologists focus on artifacts as our primary sources. Dedicating a conference and its contributions in written form to the topic of relational archaeology illustrates the aspiration in our community – the young researchers of Aegean Archaeology – to evaluate independently the knowledge and methodology gained so far over the course of our academic training. By means of not only scrutinizing the sheer material evidence, the backbone of the archaeological discipline, with new questions and innovative methods, but also by considering the diversity of opinions within the scholarly community as a phenomenon in itself, we examine our field of research with a relational approach.

Being a (preliminary) result of socially and historically determined dynamics, archaeological science and our perspectives to evaluate historical problems cannot be considered a static or even linearly developing expertise that is shaped objectively by the material evidence itself: the archaeologists and their publications, with the intention to make artifacts 'speak', are themselves the predominant factors. This immediately puts the 'objective' quality of material evidence into perspective and necessitates us to factor in the scholar and her/his individual position in a scientific as well as non-scientific community. The relation between a scholar and things/items, and further between scholars and colleagues (even opponents) sheds light on the ways of thought that are representative of this scientific discipline and its daily routine. With the relational approach, we are able to juxtapose the scholars as interpreters of processes inherent to past times and their sources, the artifacts evaluated by them as well as by us.

Why *gemmae dubitandae*?<sup>1</sup> How do they correspond to the matters of relational archaeology? As a phenomenon of material studies focusing on sealstones and signet rings supposedly originating from the Aegean Bronze Age, *gemmae dubitandae* illustrate the versatility of archaeological research in several ways.

First, the expression itself shows a compromise. By using it, one attempts to include artifacts of unknown provenance and date of production into the scientific discussion while at the same time stressing the doubtful character of their alleged Aegean Bronze Age origin. In practice, this is a demand which can hardly be met. *Gemma dubitanda* is a makeshift phrase intended to fill the gap between assessments conventionally called 'mandatory', such as the concepts of *authentic* and *fake* archaeological evidence. Secondly, as a technical term in scholarly literature, the exact semantic content of *gemma dubitanda* may vary with the purpose of its implementation. Therefore, one must always consider the intention behind its practical application. Thirdly, *gemmae dubitandae* and how they are addressed in the scholarly debate provide the opportunity to study the roots, progress, and modifications of a discussion dedicated to one of the most fundamental problems of material-based historical studies, namely the acquiring of solid information about the artifacts we study, above all their provenance. All three of these observations necessitate a relational approach towards scholarly debates for we must take into account the peculiar qualities they entail as socio-historical phenomena. This might be exemplified in a case-study motivated by *gemmae dubitandae*. They provide an opportunity to explore Aegean Bronze Age Archaeology as a living and breathing community by confronting the archaeologists' with the artifacts' biographies.

## EXPLORING THE SCHOLARLY ENVIRONMENT OF *GEMMAE DUBITANDAE*

An archaeologist's or historian's first inclination to apprehend events in scholarly history might be to follow her or his training which will include a fondness for periodization and classification, an intrinsic tendency observed and pointed out just recently through humorous exaggeration by Peter Warren.<sup>2</sup> So, naturally, one precondition for choosing the historical approach towards the scholarly

debate about *gemmae dubitandae*, or about the issue of fake material being included into research in general, is being mindful of the development of scientific working methods and hypotheses. At first, in order to identify trends in explanatory models as well as further historically specified impacts, we do this macroscopically.

As a second step, these cursory observations can be analyzed in greater detail by deconstructing them down to the personal level. Now, each archaeologist can be marked out individually; their individual character and their position amongst their environment, whether historical, scholarly, or extra-professional, constitutes a new point of reference.<sup>3</sup>

Having been characterized as the most influential period of scholarship so far, the earliest years of Aegean Bronze Age Archaeology attract an especially high level of attention. They have been regarded as a product of the pioneers in this field, among them – and usually standing out – Arthur Evans and his work in Knossos. In 2002, Yiannis Hamilakis categorized the first century of Aegean Bronze Age studies, and its conceptional framework in particular, as barely innovative because, in hindsight, he considered it unmodified and unchallenged. For decades it persisted and continued to be determined by the terminological corset and chronological benchmarks specified by Arthur Evans and other pioneers of Cretan archaeology.<sup>4</sup> Anthony Snodgrass had already commented on this in 1985, retrospectively outlining a paradigm shift from the ‘Classical’ Aegean Archaeology to the ‘New Archaeology’ as follows:

*The place which in Classical Archaeology is occupied by the ancient sources, and in Near Eastern archaeology by the cuneiform and hieroglyphic texts and the Bible, is taken in the Aegean Bronze Age by the early excavators’ interpretations of their own discoveries [...] By this I mean, not that these men’s every word is believed until it is proved false, which today especially would be manifestly untrue, but that their vision of Aegean prehistory has been perpetuated as a framework within which everyone has worked – until, that is, the advent of a new approach in the last fifteen years or so.<sup>5</sup>*

The paradigm of cultural evolutionism, the matrix of Arthur Evans’s concept of a tripartite chronological model based on cultural growth, maturity, and decay, had hardly been altered since he had first proposed it. Although from the 1970s onwards the school of New Archaeology introduced and established anthropological methods as an alternative explanatory scale, its concepts regarding Aegean Bronze Age civilizations still were based on evolutionism. Yiannis Hamilakis therefore classified this as ‘cultural neo-evolutionism’ and thus, in a way, as a further traditional approach to cultural sciences.<sup>6</sup>

The rediscovery of Aegean Bronze Age civilization through its artifacts and sites radiated glamour that was experienced globally.<sup>7</sup> Being pioneers in this new scientific landscape, the early excavators certainly had the opportunity to establish their profile quickly as they proposed their concepts and interpretations: there lay their opportunity and privilege to explore and comment on this culture for the first time as specifically proclaimed experts. Therefore, their influence on the perception of the Mycenaean and Minoan Age was naturally high. In other words: they ‘scaped’ the scientific field of Bronze Age Archaeology, thereby creating a specific research environment.

Minoan and Mycenaean forgeries more and more developed to be a substantial problem to Aegean Archaeology in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> From this point on, one can observe a growing demand for Aegean Bronze Age artifacts, sealstones and signet rings represented prominently amongst other classes of evidence. This stimulated, as a crucial by-product, the production of fake artifacts. Modern artists specialized in fashioning sought-after objects by trying to meet the expectations their targeted group of buyers might hold. Accordingly, relational archaeology today needs to consider the correlation between scholarly interpretations and the adaptiveness of production of fakes: producers (forgers) and consumers (archaeologists, collectors, etc.) of artifacts should be observed as interdependent actors in a unique, symbiotic setting. Furthermore, some conditional connectivity on a personal level is to be expected as well: being contemporaries living in and exemplifying in their actions similar historical preconditions, this hypothesis qualifies to be pursued further.

## SOME THOUGHTS ON THE PHRASE *GEMMA DUBITANDA* AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION IN EARLY AEGEAN SEAL-STUDIES

In this paper, *gemma dubitanda* is regarded a technical term that, in its plural form, specifies a group of sealstones and signet rings of alleged historical origin and significance supposedly dating back to the Aegean Bronze Age. I use the adverb *supposedly* to emphasize that the objects under study contain certain features that lead us to believe they might have actually *not* been made in Minoan or Mycenaean times. Since none of them originate from professional, well-documented archaeological excavations, doubts about their affiliation with Bronze Age material are appropriate or even imperative. The objects' historical significance therefore can only be determined as soon as presently absent information about their provenance is gained or their controversial nature is clarified by other means. Nonetheless, to this day we do not possess any decisive reference of their provenance, which is why they indefinitely must be considered as both, as fake *and* as authentic archaeological evidence. Taking into account this dual quality, we might paraphrase them as a 'Schrodinger's cat' of Aegean Archaeology, genuine *and* fake at the same time.

The expression *gemma dubitanda* has also been accused of being an artificial, unjustified category to benefit those too convenient<sup>9</sup> or undecided to take a stand for *genuine* or *fake* in their evaluation of objects lacking a traceable place of origin. However, in my opinion, not only does its concise terminology facilitate grouping these objects, but, as for today, the phrase is indispensable for putting the following crucial dilemma into words: how should we discuss sealstones and signet rings that *could* be fakes as Bronze Age evidence, while at the same time we want to express our doubts about their historical significance as ancient artifacts?

As with any working hypothesis, the validity of its implementation depends on how strictly we keep to its parameters. Giving reasons and explaining our arguments remains the most decisive tool to classify a sealstone or signet ring as a *gemma dubitanda*.<sup>10</sup> Since our common interest as archaeologists is to determine an artifact's nature within its primary, that is, ancient context, as many supporting and contradicting arguments as possible have to be taken into account to reasonably express our own point of view in this matter. In most cases, the re-evaluation of a *gemma dubitanda* correlates with the occasion of recently gained archaeological records that shed new light on previous results,<sup>11</sup> but this is not authoritative. Re-testing prior conclusions, the new evidence is introduced to the already complex topic. To discover an ultimate 'key' to a dubious seal's authenticity merely by uncovering and cross-referencing 'fresh' records, should be regarded delusive, wishful thinking. However, achieving unexpected new insights through their meticulous examination is a prolific approach and an appropriate way to approximate the challenges of authenticity studies.

#### GEMMAE DUBITANDAE AND RELATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGY

By incorporating the expressions *scaping* (a neologism derived from the conference title "No (e)scape?") and *escaping* in the title of my paper, I aim at highlighting that *gemmae dubitandae* can be an integral part of relational archaeology and therefore of this conference's subject. The more time I invested in this wordplay – at first barely more than an associative pun –, the more I found it to apply to the actual problem underlying authenticity studies, since they are comprised of two main challenges: the *scaping of* and the *escaping from* arguments brought up for or against a sealstone's or signet ring's Bronze Age origin. Both are basic, essential acts in any scientific discourse. The made-up verb *scaping* (which I derive from associated toponyms such as *landscape*, *mountainscape*, or *seascape* that reflect the process of shaping distinctive topographical appearances) implies the fashioning of a pattern, in this case the result of year-long discussions on one joint research issue. Try visualizing a Zen garden, but instead of meditating monks raking lines in the sand, scholars produce their distinctive streaks in the allegorical scientific 'sandbox'. With every new publication, a new opinion is added and contributes to a debate's direction and success. Step by step, line by line, a scientific landscape takes shape, its appearance modified with every author's point of view. Naturally, the individual patterns may crisscross each other or influence one another's primary direction or appearance, as is to be expected from a topic as controversial as authenticity studies.

Moreover, this paper's title refers to the process of *escaping* from arguments. With this, I address the challenge we are confronted with, whenever we are compelled to decide, which (or whose) arguments we shall willfully neglect in our own judgement. Note that I did not use the verb *ignore*, but *neglect* to stress my point. *To neglect* certain aspects of a debate is a valid approach, once we detect legitimate counter-arguments that, at least in our opinion, necessitate reconsidering a previous point of view. While keeping in mind that our viewpoints on artifacts are always partly determined by their

conventional place in scholarly history – having already been objects of study in the past –, the ability to allow new input is important as well. Still, I believe it to be more of an advantage than a drawback to factor in an artifact’s scholarly ‘biography’ when breaking new ground. Yet most of all, it is important to understand how and why prior arguments developed and to respect the fact that their interdependence can be a significant part of their success or failure. As is the case with *gemmae dubitandae*, we should not neglect the opportunity to take a look into the past, that is, their scholarly background especially since the assessment of a sealstone’s or signet ring’s authenticity often was discussed at cross-purposes. Successes as well as errors both constitute crucial steps in shaping how we experience these objects today. For the remaining part of this paper, let me exemplify this exhaustive theoretical prologue with a case study illustrating this subject.

#### A CASE STUDY: THE ‘RING OF NESTOR’, POLARIZING STUDY OBJECT AND DUBITANDA

Allegedly discovered in a tholos tomb in Kakovatos near Pylos,<sup>12</sup> the gold signet ring commonly known as the ‘Ring of Nestor’ (Fig. 1) made its first appearance in scholarly literature in 1925. By then, Arthur Evans had privately purchased the object and published it in the “Journal of Hellenic Studies,”<sup>13</sup> even though the members of the archaeological board at Athens commissioned with its examination had refused to buy it from its owner beforehand because they considered it a forgery manufactured by a modern artist. The only name that has been determined in the context of the archaeological board so far is Georg Karo’s.<sup>14</sup>

Arthur Evans and his impact on the character of Aegean Bronze Age Archaeology and its evolution as an academic field is a subject on its own. The ‘Nestor Ring’s’ discovery and the debate on its appropriate place in Minoan archaeology emerging soon afterwards (historical testimony or modern imitation?) is the story of a *gemma dubitanda* determined by its many qualities. These are, to a certain extent, also inherent in the ‘Evans-phenomenon’, as has been recently made a subject of discussion by various scholars: one of the latest books by Nanno Marinatos engages with the topic of the impact of Evans’s authority in Aegean Bronze Age Archaeology. In her book “Arthur Evans and Minoan Crete. Creating the Vision of Knossos,” the author paints an extensive image of his many relations with Crete and Cretan archaeology. Among other things, his political, historical, anthropological, and personal viewpoints and experiences are made focal points of discussion.<sup>15</sup> Added all up, these approaches shaped (or, to stay in character, *scaped*) to a large extent what one might associate with Minoan civilization, effective until today. This may be because of the extensive account Evans gives in his “Palace of Minos at Knossos” or because of his role as a museologist, providing information on Minoan Crete in temporary exhibitions and permanent collections, where he would contextualize the island’s Bronze Age past with European modernity.<sup>16</sup> Today, attempts to explore Evans’s work on Crete as visionary, yet re-analyzed as objectively as possible (which necessitates the inclusion of historical conditions as prerequisite, the ‘historical mindset’ as well as biographical aspects) are being discovered as a rewarding field of expertise as are other historicizing approaches to archaeological studies.<sup>17</sup> Still, phrases such as an archaeologist’s *vision*<sup>18</sup> or *legacy*<sup>19</sup> (although used with varying connotations) have left their terminological mark. This terminology affects persistently how scholarly history is experienced within the archaeological work practiced today. Since unbiased science does not exist in a scholarly environment, where we intentionally connect with its historical background, we can take advantage of this and try to detect the many relations between an artifact’s interpretation and the framework of reference that scholars consulted for their purposes. Let me now try to do justice to this by example of the ‘Ring of Nestor’.

Arthur Evans first published the ‘Ring of Nestor’ in an article called “A glimpse into the Minoan After-World” and interpreted the pictorial scenery on its bezel as illustrative of a Minoan Elysian domain.<sup>20</sup> He identified a human couple on its journey to the Beyond and entering the Elysian Fields. For this conclusion, Evans combined indications for similar eschatological models he knew from other ancient civilizations and projected them into the Aegean Bronze Age. By this, he blended the images seen on the gold ring, fashioned in Minoan style, into the semantics observed elsewhere: in his eyes, the dominant, cross-shaped structure resembled the ‘Tree of Life’, known from Oriental and Scandinavian mythology,<sup>21</sup> the butterflies and chrysalises (Fig. 1, upper right) could be explained as symbols of the human soul (imagery he postulated for the Aegean Bronze Age in reference to gold sheets and beads from the shaft-graves in Mycenae),<sup>22</sup> a lion (Fig. 1, upper left) guarded the After-World’s gate as in Egyptian iconography,<sup>23</sup> and the seated griffin, together with a goddess standing

behind him (Fig. 1, lower left), initiated the human couple into the divine sphere. He observed the griffin's special relationship with divinities or religious contexts in detail on Minoan frescoes and seals.<sup>24</sup>

Ever since he proposed this reading of the scenery, many arguments for or against the ring's authenticity that are based on its iconographic features have kept closely to Arthur Evans's hypothesis of an Elysian theme.<sup>25</sup> I therefore propose the idea that support for or condemnation of its Minoan origin always include in some way Evans as a coefficient, his interpretation of as well as his enthusiasm for the artifact.

Accordingly, Nanno Marinatos and Briana Jackson argued against this *dubitanda's* Minoan origin in a paper called "The Pseudo-Minoan Nestor Ring and Its Egyptian Iconography."<sup>26</sup> As regards a plausible forger, their suspicion fell on Emile Gilliéron fils, the famous – or, correspondingly, infamous<sup>27</sup> – skillful Swiss working as Arthur Evans's graphic artist and restorer: he could be the true creator of the 'Ring of Nestor.' Following this hypothesis, Gilliéron fils could have intentionally combined images taken from Egyptian prototypes very familiar to Evans, intending to trick him into believing that this ring confirmed close analogies between the Minoan and Egyptian After-Life belief systems as well as their similar pictorial rendering. As a plausible template, the papyrus of Ani is a possible candidate, since it provides iconographical evidence for the Egyptian Netherworld and its syntax as well as for the arrangement of single motives, which correspond quite illustratively to the lower pictorial zone on the 'Ring of Nestor.'<sup>28</sup> When compared to the papyrus, however, the elements on the ring show some process of 'minoanization': according to this analogy, the enthroned griffin, for example, semiotically corresponds to Osiris as a judge of souls as seen on the papyrus and a Minoan goddess parallels Osiris's wife Isis.<sup>29</sup>

The conclusion Nanno Marinatos and Briana Jackson presented in their paper is more than a noncommittal train of thought: they put a precise hypothesis about the 'Nestor Ring's' provenance up for discussion and, by way of trial, put it forward as a fake fabricated by an expert of Minoan archaeology (namely Emile Gilliéron fils). They proposed a suspect and they traced his templates as well as further details about the circumstances necessary to pave the way for the production of this particular fake object at this particular moment (according to this theory around 1924). They suspect the forger's motive to have been a deliberate humiliation of Arthur Evans and exposure of his willingness to believe in any artifact that supported his 'visions' of Minoan civilization. By this, Marinatos and Jackson proposed an experimental way to treat this signet ring as a modern fake not only hypothetically, but they submitted one specific theoretical model to confront its major challenges. Evans as the intended consumer of this forgery is an important prerequisite.

One recurring coefficient in stating this opinion about the 'Ring of Nestor's' origin story seems to be a reasonable dependency between its maker and Arthur Evans as a chosen victim for whom it was fashioned and customized. Making Evans a subject of discussion as a purchaser of forgeries, maybe naively trusting his associates and dealers,<sup>30</sup> has already been pushed by Kenneth Lapatin and Alexander MacGillivray.<sup>31</sup> Still, this working hypothesis relies on further character witnesses and depends not merely on the evaluation of Evans's role, but also on his position as part of a scholarly environment. Therefore, additional scholars must enter our discussion.

As mentioned earlier, Georg Karo turns out to be the first witness we know by name to have condemned the 'Ring of Nestor' as a modern forgery.<sup>32</sup> As a contemporary to the artifact's appearance in the 1920s, his positioning against the ring's authenticity must be regarded as the beginning of the debate orbiting around its date of origin that has lasted until today. Nanno Marinatos's research in her father's private archive constitutes a further component in her theories, for Spyridon Marinatos was, again, closely connected to Georg Karo: he was his student in Halle, Germany in 1928. Both seem to have established a cautious attitude towards archaeological artifacts turning up all over Crete with increasing frequency but without properly documented provenance.<sup>33</sup> Also, Spyridon Marinatos's efforts to investigate illegally conducted archaeological enterprises and forgers' workshops during his office as ephor of Antiquities of Crete and director of the Archaeological Museum of Iraklio from 1929 to 1937, give a fuller picture to the large extent of said matters at that time.<sup>34</sup> Despite everything, up to this point no decisive comment on the 'Ring of Nestor' was traced back to him, so one may only, if at all, conclude his opinion by factoring in his relationship and correspondence with Georg Karo or Stefanos Xanthoudidis (ephor of Antiquities of Crete and S. Marinatos' superior until his sudden death in 1928).<sup>35</sup> Still, by drawing a close analogy between the case of the 'Ring of Nestor' and the 'Ring of

Minos,'<sup>36</sup> linking their cases seems probable: the latter is a chance find from Crete that was brought to the Archaeological Museum of Iraklio in 1930 and was, again by the responsible archaeological board, judged a forgery. This time, Spyridon Marinatos was part of said board.<sup>37</sup> Yet again, Arthur Evans contrastingly treated the ring as authentic, and based on his repeated behavioral pattern, Nanno Marinatos established an interdependency of the same hypothetical protagonists as for case of the 'Nestor Ring': Arthur Evans as the victim, Emile Gilliéron fils as the forger, and Spyridon Marinatos as a judge in between,<sup>38</sup> Georg Karo being the decisive connective element between the 'Ring of Nestor' and S. Marinatos.

With a brief summary of the following decades discussing the 'Ring of Nestor' and the issue of its authenticity, I intend to illustrate the further *scaping* of its position as a prominent *gemma dubitanda* as well as a reference point of one characteristic scholarly debate. In 1950, Martin Nilsson revoked, in the second edition of his "Minoan-Mycenaean Religion," his initially unwary approach to the object as an authentic Bronze Age artifact and now discussed it, among other examples, as a 'suspect object.'<sup>39</sup> This revision was a necessary step considering the increasing pressure that is perceptible in comments on the book's first edition: many reviews brought up the problem of potential fakes among his objects of study at a time when general awareness for this matter had risen.<sup>40</sup>

In 1954, Hagen Biesantz took a decisive stand against the 'Ring of Nestor's' authenticity primarily based on the observation of stylistic oddities.<sup>41</sup> Agni Xenaki-Sakellariou extensively discussed some of the ring's iconographical details she regarded suspicious in 1994 and critically commented on its typological and technical features.<sup>42</sup> Ingo Pini's article on the 'Ring of Nestor', written in 1998, can be read as a reply to this, for he referred explicitly to Xenaki-Sakellariou's arguments, countering them by naming new insights and evidence in support of the ring's authenticity.<sup>43</sup> He contradicted Xenaki-Sakellariou's former observations by establishing references to the latest data accessed only recently. Thus, he demonstrated how rapidly and strikingly re-investigating prior results may change our reference standards in the archaeological discipline. A line of thought can easily be disrupted on the occasion of new evidence or updates in methodology, both unpredictable and uncertain in advance. These are processes no one can prognosticate, but which, retrospectively speaking, had and have an immense impact on a discussion. Trying to quantify this influence is, of course, a highly difficult matter. Similar conditions apply to the repercussions of a signet ring excavated in 1967 in Archanes Fourni by Yiannis Sakellarakis. He presented this object as authenticating some of the 'Nestor Ring's' pictorial oddities, such as the butterflies and 'chrysalises': he referred to them as crucial iconographic analogies between the two objects, parallels potent enough to rehabilitate the 'Ring of Nestor', and postulated them as *hapax legomena* still effective in 1925 and only now attested on a second object of Minoan date.<sup>44</sup> Addressing typology of motifs as well, Theodore Eliopoulos also argued in favor of the *dubitanda's* genuine Minoan origin in 2013 by proposing a new model to classify and interpret the piece of furniture on which the lion is resting.<sup>45</sup> This proposal can be added as a new point of view on the extensive discussion of this exact pictorial detail, for it had been traditionally put forward against the ring's Minoan origin due to an assumed 'semantic error'.<sup>46</sup>

Put together, these different approaches shed some light on the 'Ring of Nestor's' many challenges as a suspicious object (inherent in its pictorial motifs, its typology, or its technical details). This way, an extensive web of correlating arguments develops around this *gemma dubitanda*, which I try to visualize with the help of a schematic representation (Fig. 2). Certainly, this is by no means a full account of the ring's significance as a *dubitanda*, not even of its distinctive place in scholarly history, but only a brief outline of what I believe can be understood as the *scaping* of talking points in Aegean Archaeology. Having said all that, I want to emphasize the importance of a relational perspective on any single archaeological artifact under discussion, therefore Fig. 2 is supposed to illustrate the interdependency of individual points of views and how we can do justice to their dynamics only by appreciating them as one associated compound.

As for the 'Ring of Nestor' as a *dubitanda*, I don't consider Arthur Evans's accounts an integral part of the debate in the proper sense, even though his thoughts turn out to be eminent points of reference to later scholars. Yet, he did not take part in the discussion of the ring's authenticity, because he never considered it to be a possible fake. Instead, he studied it as an artifact made in Minoan times without having doubts about it. This is why, in the schematic sketch seen in Fig. 2, a line is meant to separate his name (as well as the ring's actual creator, Minoan or modern) from the scientific 'panel' discussing the authenticity issue. Still, Evans was and is an important driving force for subsequent approaches,

especially since he alone proposed an interpretation for the image that included every detail. This is a valid observation supported by Nanno Marinatos's and Briana Jackson's paper, where the authors critically evaluated the credibility of a Minoan eschatology based on Evans's reading of the 'Ring of Nestor'.

Fresh archaeological records, on the other hand, indicate that discussing a *dubitanda* rarely reaches a tiring point: every newly discovered and published artifact opens further perspectives unpredictable in character and impact. Theodore Eliopoulous, Ingo Pini, or Yiannis Sakellarakis already testified to this in their aforementioned papers. Currently, four signet rings and over 50 sealstones found in the 'Grave of the Griffin-Warrior' at Pylos allow raising new questions that will certainly spark new thoughts on the authenticity of some *dubitandae*.<sup>47</sup>

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Any conclusion made about a *gemma dubitanda*'s authenticity today is the result of an elaborate texture of arguments and counterarguments, of remarks that not only comment on the artifacts and their substantial properties, but also on qualities attributed to them by their observers. Regarding the impact the 'pioneers' of Aegean Bronze Age Archaeology might have had on a scholarly discussion that lasts until today, a further coefficient, namely the challenge of how we address archaeological trends typified by object biographies, is a crucial step when we mediate between the present and past/pasts as archaeologists or historians. Interpretative patterns we impute to Arthur Evans, for instance, are merely one approach to explain the influence contemporary history exerts on how ancient history has been and is reflected upon. *Gemmae dubitandae*, such as the 'Ring of Nestor', illustrate that once the objects' archaeological properties actually are – and hopefully will be – determined, they can serve to account either for processes traceable to the Aegean Bronze Age or, alternatively, for something a modern artist believed to be 'Minoan' or 'Mycenaean', according to what an archaeologist at her or his time would have expected. There are no 'worthless' fakes; the value of an object as a historical testimony always hides in its adequate proper historical appreciation. *Scaping* and *escaping* the issue of *gemmae dubitandae*, a topic of high importance for approaching the Aegean Bronze Age by means of its authentic relics, implies challenging archaeology and its dimensions both as a historical as well as a cultural discipline over and over.

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Fig. 1: The 'Ring of Nestor', CMS VI no. 277. Image courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg.

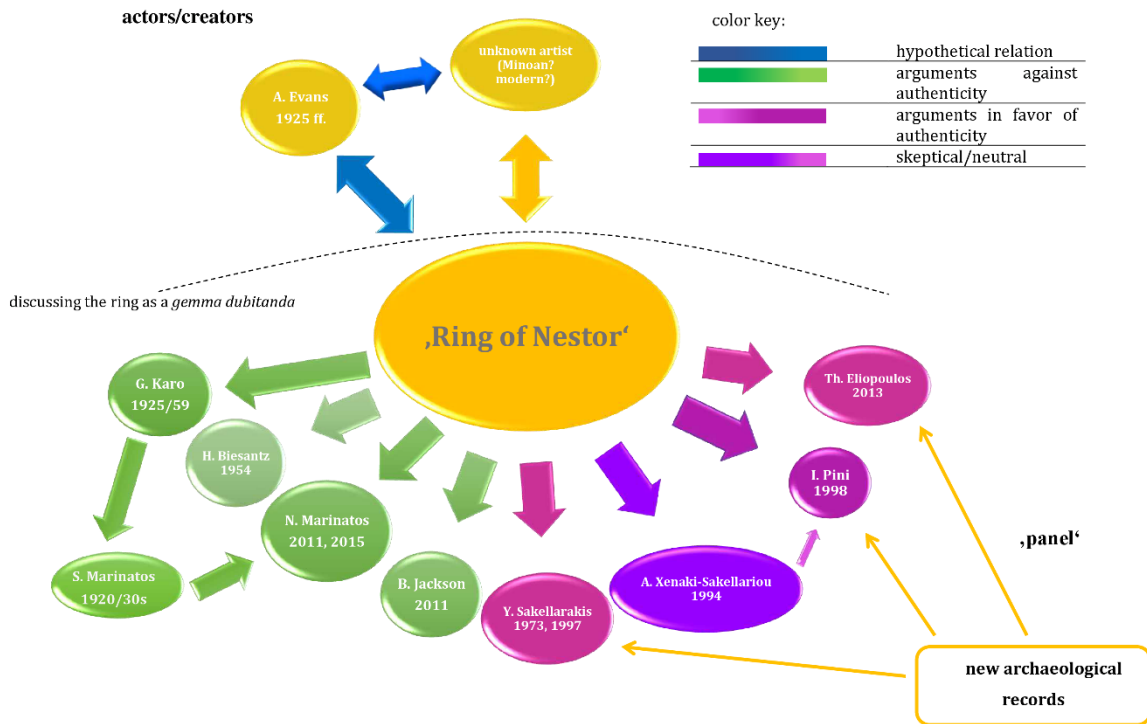


Fig. 2: (Abridged) visualization of the discussion orbiting around the 'Ring of Nestor' as a *gemma dubitanda* with regards to interrelated arguments and viewpoints.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the thoughts I present in this paper are anticipated in observations I touched upon, in less detail, in my Master's Thesis called "Frühägäische Gemmae dubitandae und ihre Vorbilder" (finalized in August 2018), yet the manuscript doesn't correspond with one distinctive chapter. I am grateful to Fritz Blakolmer for his feedback and advice. Furthermore, for improving my English manuscript, I highly appreciate the support I received from Sumner Williams and Mirjam Eisenstädter.

<sup>2</sup> For his humorous account of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries' pioneers of Minoan and Mycenaean Archaeology cf. Warren 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Cadogan (2000) and McEnroe (2002) address the topic of 'pioneers' in Cretan archaeology and include the scholars' biographical, yet primarily occupational data. For gaining additional perspectives on scholarly history by introducing the 'multi-temporal dialogue' between ancient past, past, and present, see Momigliano 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Hamilakis 2002b.

<sup>5</sup> Snodgrass 1985, 35–36.

<sup>6</sup> Hamilakis 2002b, 7–13.

<sup>7</sup> See Blakolmer 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Furtwängler (1899, 1, 36) and Marinatos (1927/28, 34 n. 1) provide some contemporary comments, and so does Lippold (1929, 289). Biesantz (1954, 98–100), on the other hand, postulated the concept of an 'Epochenjahr des Fälschergewerbes' based on significant dates and developments in scholarly history. 1876, the year in which Heinrich Schliemann started excavations in Mycenae, according to his theory would be the only reliable *terminus post quem* for forgeries imitating Aegean Bronze Age artifacts, since prior to this they would not have been popular or prestigious enough to be produced and sold.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Betts 1981, 18 (esp. the phrase "there is no half-way stage for his [the scholar's] convenience").

<sup>10</sup> Therefore, authors discussing *gemmae dubitandae* who withhold information on how their assessments were motivated, have been legitimately criticized. See, for example, Pini (1981, 138–39) and Krzyszkowska (2005, 321) on Kenna's (1960, 154) omissive catalogue of *gemmae dubitandae* in the Ashmolean Museum Oxford. Note also, as an appeasing interjection, Hughes-Brock 2000, 107 (with n. 1).

<sup>11</sup> See for example Pini (1998, 10–11) on the specifics of hoop-decoration on the 'Ring of Nestor' (CMS VI no. 277) after the discovery of CMS VS1B no. 135 in Anthia. The impact of four gold signet rings discovered in Pylos in 2015 ('Grave of the Griffin-Warrior') with extensive figurative bezel iconographies and their potential as reference pieces in authenticity studies awaits to be discussed in detail. So far, the excavators have commented briefly on some of the details worth examining in this respect (Davis and Stocker 2016, 648, with n. 77). For further comments on said details (tree growing in enclosure/on shrine) cf. Tully 2018, 221–22.

<sup>12</sup> Evans (1925, 46; 1930, 145) passes on some information on the find circumstances that he was told *a posteriori* on occasion of its purchase.

<sup>13</sup> Evans 1925, 43–75.

<sup>14</sup> Marinatos (2015, 77–83) re-evaluates the ring's first bibliographical appearance in Evans (1925; 1930) in detail. Unfortunately, apart from the fact that Georg Karo was part of the archaeological board in this case (cf. Karo 1959, 111), nothing much has been published about it in detail so far.

<sup>15</sup> Marinatos 2015a.

<sup>16</sup> On this topic (with special attention to the museum as a modern institution and instrument to observe, envision and experience history) see Preziosi 2002; on Evans' Minoan exhibitions see Galanakis 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Selected bibliography on this topic: Gere 2009; Fitton 2013; Marinatos 2015a; Schoep 2018; see also various articles in Hamilakis (2002a) and in Momigliano and Farnoux (2017).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Snodgrass 1985, 35–36; Marinatos 2015a.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Relaki and Papadatos 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Evans 1925, 43–75.

<sup>21</sup> Evans 1925, 51; 1930, 146–48.

<sup>22</sup> Evans 1925, 53–64; 1928, 786–89.

<sup>23</sup> Evans 1925, 65–68.

<sup>24</sup> Evans 1925, 68–70.

<sup>25</sup> Cf., most recently, Tully 2018, 47–8. With her referral to Arthur Evans' hypothesis of an Elysian image, the hiatus between this specific iconography of a 'tree' (the vertical and horizontal axis) and the further images of trees on Minoan seals as its reference is touched upon and mentioned as "thought-provoking" (Tully 2018, 48).

<sup>26</sup> Marinatos and Jackson 2011.

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- <sup>27</sup> Besides Marinatos and Jackson (2011) see on this topic, for example, MacGillivray 2000, 289–90; Lapatin 2006, 97.
- <sup>28</sup> Cf. Marinatos and Jackson 2011, 19 fig. 4.
- <sup>29</sup> Marinatos and Jackson 2011, 19–20 (with figs. 3–4).
- <sup>30</sup> For a brief comment cf. Marinatos 2015a, 105–06.
- <sup>31</sup> MacGillivray 2000; Lapatin 2006.
- <sup>32</sup> Karo 1959, 111; cf. as well Karo 1930/33, 301, 304.
- <sup>33</sup> Marinatos 1927/28; for correspondence between S. Marinatos and S. Xanthoudidis on this topic, with reference to G. Karo, cf. Marinatos 2015b, 190.
- <sup>34</sup> Selected bibliography on Spyridon Marinatos as ephor on Crete: Μαντζουράνη and Μαρινάτου 2014; Marinatos 2015b.
- <sup>35</sup> Extracts of the correspondence between Spyridon Marinatos and Stefanos Xanthoudidis are published in Marinatos 2015b.
- <sup>36</sup> For recent comments on the ring and doubts about its alleged authenticity cf. Marinatos 2015b; for an extensive bibliography cf. CMS VI, p. 697.
- <sup>37</sup> Marinatos 2015a, 90–106; Marinatos 2015b.
- <sup>38</sup> Cf. Marinatos 2015b, 194. Nanno Marinatos (2015b, 194 n. 27) therefore also argued as follows: ‘The two rings, however, bear striking similarities in their technique and if one is a forgery the other must be one as well’.
- <sup>39</sup> Nilsson 1927, 549–56, cf. Nilsson 1950, 43–50 (‘Suspect objects’).
- <sup>40</sup> For a review of the first edition see, for example, Schweitzer 1928, 170; for a review of the second edition see Deubner 1953, 146–47; Dow 1954, 155.
- <sup>41</sup> Biesantz 1954, 89–90, 112–14.
- <sup>42</sup> Ξενάκη-Σακελλαρίου 1994.
- <sup>43</sup> Pini 1998.
- <sup>44</sup> Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997, 654–60; Sakellarakis 1973.
- <sup>45</sup> Eliopoulos 2013.
- <sup>46</sup> For a discussion of this detail, from a typological perspective commonly explored as a ‘slaughtering table’ without a proper role in the image’s narrative, cf. Evans 1925, 66; Nilsson 1950, 50; Ξενάκη-Σακελλαρίου 1994, 100.
- <sup>47</sup> Cf. n. 11.