



**HAL**  
open science

**Did you say "antique"? Methodological Approach,  
Practices and Challenges of the Curation of Antiques in  
the Aegean Societies during Late Bronze Age and Early  
Iron Age**

Claire Camberlein

► **To cite this version:**

Claire Camberlein. Did you say "antique"? Methodological Approach, Practices and Challenges of the Curation of Antiques in the Aegean Societies during Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. *Mneme. Past and Memory in the Aegean Bronze Age*, Apr 2018, Venice, Italy. . hal-02550733

**HAL Id: hal-02550733**

**<https://hal.science/hal-02550733>**

Submitted on 22 Apr 2020

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



## DID YOU SAY « ANTIQUE » ? METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH, PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES OF THE CURATION OF ANTIQUES IN THE AEGEAN SOCIETIES DURING LATE BRONZE AGE AND EARLY IRON AGE

### INTRODUCTION

Memory has always been an appreciated subject of social science, which elaborated its methodological foundations. However, it is only until very recently that archaeologists, confronted to these facts by anthropologists and ethnologists, used for themselves these achievements. This “archaeology of memory” (VAN DYKE & ALCOCK 2003) highlights the existence of quite a lot of reminiscences, but the presence of “antiques”, i. e. artefacts found in later contexts to their date of production, has been very little analysed. There has been no holistic study concerning those kinds of objects in the Aegean world during the Final Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, a gap filled by my PhD thesis (CAMBERLEIN 2017). I would like to focus on one of its aspects : the creation of a new methodology allowing their identification as well as their analysis.

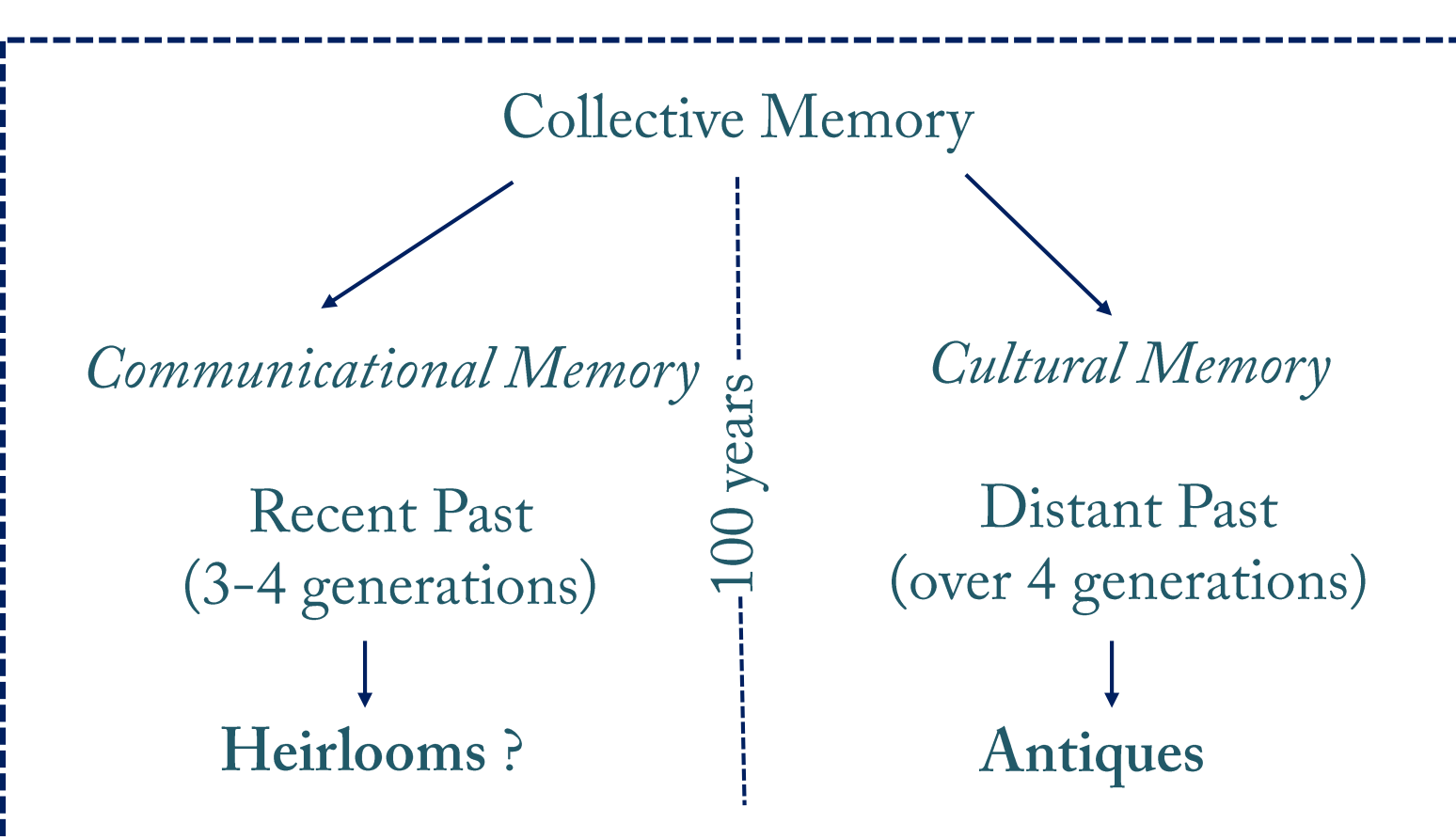
### HISTORY OF RESEARCH

Social science tools can be applied with caution to archaeological data. M. Halbwachs (1925) values that memory is necessarily part of a social frame: it can only exist, maintain itself and get passed on within communication, thus needing a concrete shape (event, *locus* or object) well observable by archaeologists.

Collective memory can be divided into two specific types: *communicational memory* on the one hand, coming from daily exchanges and the gathering of memories created in a near past (3 to 4 generations - between 80 and 100 years); and *cultural memory* on the other hand, which lives on through an institutionalised communication materialised by tangible objects called “socio-transmetteurs”.

### METHODOLOGY

How to identify these artefacts in an archaeological context? For a community to identify an object as having the value of an antique, the past from which this object originates needs to belong to the cultural memory and not to the communicational memory (specific only to the family context).



J. Vansina (1985) believes that this floating gap fluctuates between 30 and 80 years. Such a short period of time is, nevertheless, very difficult to apprehend in an archaeological context. I define a symbolic limit of 100 years that is a time span after which we all have to agree that the given artefact has been curated intentionally, and not by accident.

Stone axes (Xéropolis)  
Source: POPHAM *et al.*  
1980, pl 67.



### TERMINOLOGY

It is important to use a neutral terminology that matches the reality of archaeological research. I chose not to use concepts that are too highly connotated, such as *objects of memory* or *relics*. For some time, I used the Homeric *keimèlia* (CAMBERLEIN 2016), but it describes mainly objects of value integrated in a system of gift exchange, which is very difficult to prove in an archaeological context. The word *heirloom*, used at first in ethnological studies, represents “anything inherited from a line of ancestors, or handed down from generation to generation”. In an archaeological context, however, it is impossible to claim that the passing down of an object occurred within the family context. “Heirloom” should therefore only be used to define certain artefacts found in very specific contexts and curated over a period of 100 years or less. **I will therefore use the word antiques, which is a more generic and neutral term and does not leave out any kind of context of discovery, typology, preservation method, function or how the object was passed down.**



Lapis lazuli seal (Xeropolis)  
Source: PINI 1975, p. 325,  
n°424.

### CASE STUDY : LEFKANDI (EUBOEA)

The site of Lefkandi offers an interesting case study. In the housing area of Xeropolis, a lapis-lazuli seal (LHIIIA) was found in the South House (LHIIIC); a serpentine seal (LHIIIA) was excavated in area IV (LHIIIC); and three Neolithic stone axes were found in an absidial building (GR) (EVELY *et al.* 2006).

In the Toumba cemetery, the two graves located under the protogeometric building are famous for the antiques they contained: a cypriot bronze amphora (LHIIIB/C) used as a cinerary urn for a male cremation and a near-eastern gold pendant (18<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) was inserted into a necklace wherein two beads are in faience and one in rock crystal, dated back to the Mycenaean period. The structure was later covered with a *tumulus*, used as a landscape marker, and an elite cemetery was implemented in direct proximity. The graves there also provide us with antiques: two glass paste seals in grave 12B (PGA-PGM); a near-eastern gold pendant (LB) in grave 63 (PG) that can be compared to the one described earlier; a bronze arrowhead (LHIII) and a north-Syrian haematite cylinder seal (1850-1750 B.C.) in grave 79 (Sub PG II); as well as a bronze dagger (SM) in pyre 13 (SPG I-II). Other memory phenomena can be added to this, like the consciously re-used *tumulus* as well as possible ritual activities honouring the dead, suggested by the ceramics found in the cemetery (POPHAM *et al.* 1980; 1982).



Gold pendant in the feminine  
grave at Toumba  
Source: STAMPOLIDIS *et al.*  
2012, fig. 4.

The analysis of the cemetery organisation has brought to light the presence of several different groups of elite (LEMONS & MITCHELL 2011), still using the same patterns of social recognition through the use of antiques. We observe similar typologies in the antiques discovered in the housing areas and those found in the funerary context, even if their meaning can differ depending on the deposition context. The curation of antiques doesn't affect objects with higher value only, and each and everyone of them plays a role in the social construction of their owners.

### CONCLUSION

The existence of several memory phenomena in Lefkandi points out the importance of memory in social construction. In this case, the curation are mainly performed by elite groups, but it is not possible to determine whether it was done within a segregation strategy, or rather within a process of community integration. One can only assert that remains from the past have a part to play in the construction of identity, helping to integrate the ancestors within the community and to establish oneself within the living. Examining that, we can better understand how new socio-political forms emerge at the end of the Final Bronze Age and at the beginning of the Early Iron Age.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY :

- CAMBERLEIN, C. 2016, « Observations préliminaires sur le rôle des *keimèlia* en Crète du XIV<sup>e</sup> au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle avant J.-C. », dans LEFÈVRE-NOVARO, D. *et al.* (éds.), *Géosciences, Archéologie et histoire en Crète de l'âge du Bronze récent à l'époque archaïque*, Padova, p. 319-332.
- CAMBERLEIN, C., 2017, *Mémoire, identité et paysage dans le monde égéen du XII<sup>e</sup> au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle avant J.-C.*, PhD, Strasbourg.
- EVELY, D., *et al.*, 2006, *Lefkandi IV. The Bronze Age. The Late Helladic IIIC Settlement at Xéropolis*, Athènes.
- HALBWACHS, M., 1925, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Paris.
- LEMONS, I. & MITCHELL, D., 2011, « Elite Burials in Early Iron Age Aegean. Some Preliminary Observations Considering the Spatial Organization of the Toumba Cemetery at Lefkandi », dans MAZARAKIS-AINIAN, A., (éd.), *The Dark Ages Revisited*, Volos, p. 635-644.
- POPHAM, M., *et al.*, 1980, *Lefkandi I. The Iron Age. Text. The Settlement and the Cemeteries*, Oxford.
- POPHAM, M., *et al.*, 1982, « Further Excavations of the Toumba Cemetery at Lefkandi 1981 », *BSA* 77, p. 213-248.
- VAN DYKE, R. & ALCOCK, S., 2003, *Archaeology of Memories*, Oxford.
- VANSINA, J., 1985, *Oral Tradition as History*, London.