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Citation

Turner, D. R. (2020, June 11). *Grave Reminders : Comparing Mycenaean tomb building with labour and memory*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/96237>

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Issue Date: 2020-06-11

Grave Reminders: Comparing Mycenaean tomb building with labour and memory

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1. From the mid-second millennium BC, multi-use tomb builders in southern Greece created enduring monuments that inspired successors with a replicable tradition of architectural styles at the Achaean cemeteries of Portes and Voudeni. Chamber tombs at Portes conservatively adhered to previous tomb patterns and avoided risking costlier designs, while those at Voudeni experimented with shapes and scales that strongly deviated from the mean.
2. Commissioners of new tombs largely operated in the prosperous fifteenth and fourteenth centuries BC, when performative display secured the position of future generations with durable reminders of powerful ancestors. Claimants to tomb memories who opted for cheaper reuse did so during and after the thirteenth- and twelfth-century upheaval across the eastern Mediterranean, when building anew may have been less tolerable or desirable.
3. Commissioners of large and elaborate tombs leveraged their authenticity and influence over locals with *socially* expensive signals to regional rivals. Unlike Cyclopean fortifications, most tombs were not labour-intensive, taking less than a week to build with teams fewer than 10 workers. Relative to the cost of smaller or standard tombs, however, the largest tombs became costly signals that risked losing cooperative support for individual or family rewards.
4. Low-cost, low-skill labour requirements had an outsized, compounding effect on communal tolerance for lineage extravagance that might be missed by deceptively low ‘total’ labour estimates. A comparative labour index helps to frame tolerance and extravagance as factors of signalling (cohesive, pragmatic, assertive) or scaled investment (undersized, standard, exceptional).
5. Through empirical study of relative energy expenditure and mimetic design, past inspiration from ruins can be measured. Building a catalogue and relative index of investment shows whether an expected standard governed design and may equally offer an interpretive advantage to archaeological studies on standardisation.
6. Manual work dictates remarkably consistent physical and technological limits, such that the manual digging of trenches in the past century is comparable on some level to millennia-old tombs.
7. Comparative labour benefits from simplifying minutiae in the construction process. When comparing multiple earthworks applying rates appropriate to soil type and tools used, energetics surpasses the analytical utility of volumetrics without generating false equivalencies.
8. Lower resolution settings in photogrammetric software help where more detail holds no useful information for earthen fill and roughly shaped stones. Sparse point clouds capture shapes far beyond those conceivable in hand-drawing under the same time restrictions. They also reproduce volumes within 0.1% of the textured models built under the highest settings.
9. New cemetery construction is constrained by settlement density and difficult terrain. Concerns over accessibility partially motivates siting new tombs near established routes.
10. Tomb ‘blueprints’ were internalised through transient experience, being only open and active for short intervals during centuries of reuse. Ironically, this brevity may be more effective at maintaining collective memory than an overlooked monument ever present and visible. Prehistoric events were immersive and remembered *en masse*, while monuments were anonymised and individuals forgotten. Memory studies should focus on the momentary and collective rather than the intransient and individual.

11. Many examples of architectural follies survive from the British Isles and sustain a form of landscape tourism in Georgian, Victorian, and Edwardian gardens. One that has not survived, known as Beckford's Folly, enshrines the commissioner William Thomas Beckford rather than the architect James Wyatt as the guilty party behind a famously short-lived Gothic tower, despite the latter's experiments with 'compo-cement' that ultimately doomed the structure.

12. Wandering into abandoned cemeteries is a common occurrence for archaeological surveys in the rural woodlands of the US Southeast. If not for crumbling stone markers and tell-tale rectilinear depressions visible even in dense leaf litter, the few dozen plots of a forgotten community might go unremarked as living memory decays. However, a collective initiative to restore derelict cemeteries seems to prevail as an inherited cultural habit surviving into the 21st century South.