

Remembering and Forgetting: The Relationship Between Memory and the Abandonment of Graves in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Greek Cemeteries

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Abstract This paper examines the concept of commemoration as an expression of social memory and its relationship to time and space as manifested through the mortuary evidence from Modern Greek cemeteries. Of particular interest is the act of commemoration itself: who remembers whom and the length of time that this type of memory endures. Based on evidence collected from a number of different cemeteries in northern Kythera and the eastern Corinthia, I argue that memory at the nuclear family level determines the length of time a grave is remembered as a physical location. Once this memory ceases to exist, the grave gradually enters a process of neglect, which ultimately leads to its abandonment. Some abandoned graves are recycled for use by other families who, in the absence of any recollection or memory of the grave, remove and destroy the old monuments (if they exist) and the remains of the previous occupants. Particular burial spaces are, thus, reclaimed by new groups.

Keywords Cemeteries · Memory · Kythera · Corinthia

In any case, cemeteries mark no significant event in most people's lives; we seldom die in them, but are simply put there for memorial convenience. Cemeteries matter less as repositories for the dead than as fields of remembrance for the living; the unmarked grave goes unseen (Lowenthal 1979, p. 123).

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Introduction

In the above passage, historian David Lowenthal eloquently describes the cemetery as a representation of collective memorialization within which the deceased individuals are at first commemorated, only to be forgotten as time goes by. The process of forgetting is romantically portrayed with the cemetery acquiring a historical and antiquarian dimension, becoming a “relic in its own right,” which adequately compensates for its neglect, disuse, and subsequent abandonment.

As landscape features, cemeteries are assemblages of personal memorials. Often the collective quality of memorialization stands out: in military cemeteries, the massed and uniform crosses, the anonymity of the graves, evoke not individual soldiers but the Great War in which they died. Disused and abandoned cemeteries all seem more and more collective, because those interred there matter less and less to the living. Tombstones and headstones refer increasingly to a common past rather than to the specific persons whose names appear on them. Meanwhile the cemetery takes on secondary historical characteristics. The memorials acquire an antiquarian look and a patina of age; their form and decor, the nature and calligraphy of their engraved messages, evoke past epochs. This antiquarian effect is seldom intended, either by those who designed the cemetery or by those who buried their dead there. But it ultimately conjoins the landscape of commemoration with the landscape of the past. No longer just a set of monuments to the departed, the cemetery becomes a relic in its own right (Lowenthal 1979, p. 123).

This idyllic scenario presented by Lowenthal for old and abandoned cemeteries in the West is far from the reality observed on the ground in functioning Modern Greek cemeteries. Here, the juxtaposition of different phenomena and processes, including maintenance and care versus neglect and abandonment, is often present alongside expressions of simplicity and excess, indifference, and concern.

For the archaeologist, the modern cemetery provides a unique opportunity to examine issues such as commemoration, abandonment, and the ongoing processes involved in generating their material manifestations, which are more difficult to ascertain in a pre-modern archaeological context. Such concepts are examined here by utilizing the archaeological evidence collected from modern cemeteries in two distinct regions of Greece, the eastern Corinthia (on the mainland of the Peloponnese) and the northern part of the island of Kythera. The evidence includes nineteenth- and twentieth-century graves, monuments, above-ground features, surviving inscriptions, and observations recorded during fieldwork regarding their present-day condition and maintenance. The focus of the paper is on commemoration and its manifestation at the community level involving the whole cemetery as a place of collective memorialization, at the family level concentrating on the family grave, and at the individual represented through the inscriptions on each grave. I argue that commemoration at the family level is the most significant factor affecting the cemetery as a whole, its maintenance, preservation, and overall appearance. Such commemoration is exemplified through regular visitation, cleaning, washing of monuments, and general maintenance of the gravesite as part of a system of familial and reciprocal obligations. Neglect and abandonment of individual graves are consequences of the cessation of commemorative practices, which ultimately lead to their seizure by others, the discard of remains found in them, and their reuse and occupation.

Remembering Through Commemoration, Forgetting Through Abandonment

Remembering is regarded in a positive way and tends to attract most attention in research on memory. Forgetting, on the other hand, is regarded with suspicion as something negative, in constant struggle and opposition to remembering. While remembering is celebrated as the triumph of memory and the past, forgetting is associated with loss, emptiness, and failure. However, few scholars have attempted to explore the dialectic of remembering and forgetting as social processes in any meaningful way (Brockmeier 2002; Gross 2000). As Jens Brockmeier (2002, p. 21) has pointed out, when considering the cultural and historical dimension of memory, the dichotomy between remembering and forgetting becomes less apparent; instead, a more complex interplay between these two actions exists whereby they are conceived as “two sides of one process, a process in which we give shape to our experience, thought and imagination in terms of past, present and future.” This is precisely my own position in this paper, which examines remembering and forgetting as a single process within the broader discourse of commemoration.

Commemoration and related concepts, including memory and remembrance, have been a subject of interest to historians, social theorists, psychologists, anthropologists, and scholars of the humanities over the years. Although most scholars acknowledge that these concepts or processes are almost synonymous, some prefer to define them separately. For example, “commemoration” is usually referred to as the ritualistic enactment of honoring the memory of an individual, a group of people, or an event or object as a sign of respect. This act is perceived to be a thoroughly communal act, requiring the involvement of more than one’s own self in remembering at a certain place and time (Casey 2000, p. 221; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003, pp. 5–6). “Remembrance”, on the other hand, is given a broader definition as the act of remembering, a memory, or a thing kept or given as a reminder of or in commemoration of someone or something, realized either by an individual, or by a group of people as a communal act (Casey 2000, p. 216). Such communal acts are inherently associated with “collective memory”, which is defined as a socially constructed concept dependant on the support of a group of individuals delimited in space and time (Durkheim 1947, p. 10; Halbwachs 1950, p. 84), and “social memory”, as an expression of collective experience, which identifies a group of people through its sense of a common past and future aspiration (Fentress and Wickham 1992, p. 25).

Sociologists have tried to make a distinction between “historical,” “inscribed,” “embodied,” and “autobiographical” memory to account for the differences in the way we remember (Coser 1992, pp. 23–24). “Historical memory” or “inscribed memory” refers to the act of remembering through documentary evidence (written records, photography) or tangible objects (like monuments) and kept alive through commemorations, ritual, and other bodily activities. “Autobiographical memory,” on the other hand, is remembering through personal experience of the past. This type of memory tends to fade with time and may eventually be lost altogether, especially when contact with persons and things associated with that memory becomes limited or ceases to exist (Coser 1992, p. 24). “Embodied memory” involves bodily activities in ritual re-enactments and behavior (Connerton 1989).

The present research is concerned with the social aspect of memory, especially collective/social memory, and in this paper, “commemoration” and “remembrance”

are used interchangeably, although “commemoration” is the preferred term for remembering both at the individual and communal levels. Elsewhere, I have provided a more detailed description of the general scholarship on commemoration, memory, and all associated complexities, focusing on such issues as space, temporality, historical continuity, and associated social constructs such as religion and politics (Tzortzopoulou-Gregory 2008a, pp. 29–38). Particularly important is the work of historians (Darian-Smith and Hamilton 1994; Gross 2000; Hutton 1993; Huysen 2000; Le Goff 1996; Lowenthal 1985; Schwartz 1982), and, in more recent years, the work of archaeologists (Alcock 2002; Barrett 1994; Bradley and Williams 1998; Rowlands 1993; Tarlow 1997, 1999; and the contributors in Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). My research in Greek cemeteries examines the relationship between commemoration and familial obligations and the length of time this relationship endures; it acknowledges cemeteries and grave monuments as the material manifestations of memory that are “naturally loaded with social interpretations, emotions, and expressions of social relationships” (Tzortzopoulou-Gregory 2008a, p. 32). Commemoration, neglect, and abandonment are all inter-related themes discussed in detail below.

“May Their Memory Be Eternal” (*Aionia e mneme*): The Short Duration of Commemoration in Contradicting Eternal Memory

Four full-scale field seasons conducted between 2001 and 2004, resulted in the recording of a total of thirteen cemeteries in northern Kythera and twelve cemeteries in the eastern Corinthia with a total of 2,295 graves in the two regions (Fig. 1). The physical recording of the cemeteries and individual graves involved photography (print, slide, and digital), mapping of the cemetery grounds and the position of graves, and the recording of each burial, along with selected features from individual monuments and inscriptions. Limited historical and archival sources were utilized alongside the archaeological evidence, as was oral narratives obtained from local informants. All data collected were entered in an electronic database and related to a GIS platform, containing digitized spatial information, the location of the cemetery, and the location of each grave within the cemetery (Tzortzopoulou-Gregory 2008a, b).

Almost all functioning cemeteries in rural Greece, including those in my study sample, are new foundations from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They are comprised mainly of family plots measuring approximately 1×2 m (single plot), or 2×2 m (double plot). The basic unit of burial within the cemetery is the family plot. Although the extended family is sometimes represented, it is the nuclear family (in most instances the husband and wife only) that defines the family plot. Based on a system of “reciprocal obligations,” family members (in most cases the adult children) must perform the appropriate death rituals for their deceased relatives in return for the house and property they inherit from them (Danforth 1982; Kenna 1976, 1991). These rituals take on the appearance of public performances to be carefully evaluated by the community at large in order to determine whether these obligations have been properly fulfilled. The construction of what are perceived by the community to be appropriate monuments is part fulfillment of such obligations (Tzortzopoulou-Gregory 2008a, pp. 6, 63).

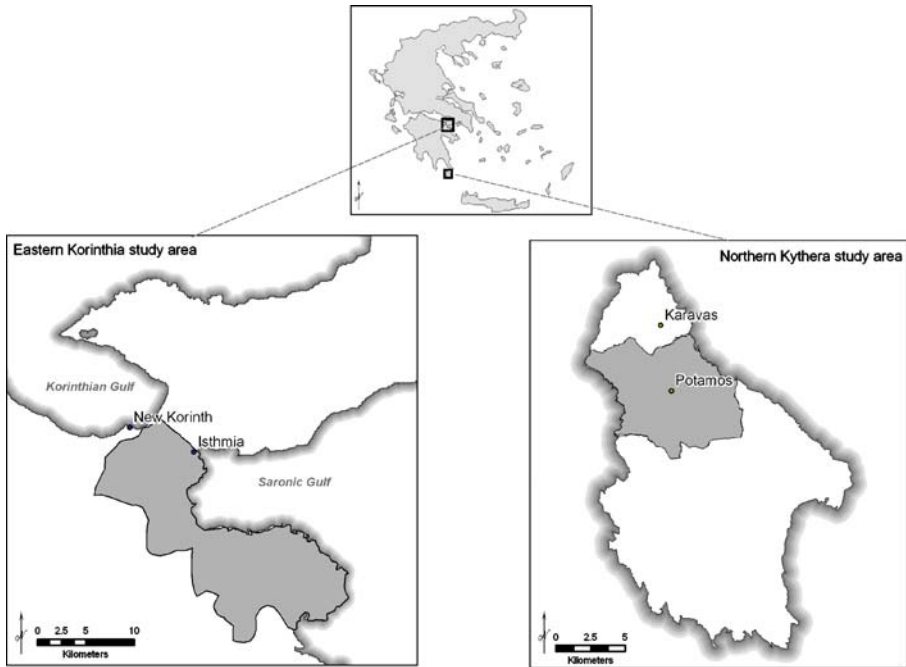


Fig. 1 Map of Greece showing the two study regions of the eastern Korinthia and northern Kythera. (Map provided by Richard Macneill)

As a consequence of such familial obligations, the care and maintenance (or not) of individual family graves, affects enormously the overall appearance and condition of the cemetery at large. In general, one finds well maintained family graves alongside ones that have become neglected over time, overgrown with vegetation, and ultimately abandoned or even destroyed. Intentional vandalism of graves is practically absent from Greek rural cemeteries. More commonly, destruction is caused by carelessness or by the disposal of rubbish from the cleaning of graves nearby, a phenomenon observed in almost all the cemeteries in the study. Sometimes the destruction of previously existing grave monuments and their discard within the cemetery grounds is associated with their replacement by newer, usually more elaborate, and modern constructions. More often, however, destruction results from “recycling”, whereby an abandoned family grave is taken over by a different family.

The lack of responsibility, or even respect, on the part of the community for graves other than those of one’s own family, although not restricted to Greek cemeteries alone, is very noticeable and quite disturbing to an outsider. The discrepancy that exists within Greek cemeteries with regard to the upkeep and long-term preservation of graves can only be explained in terms of the exclusivity of responsibility that lies strictly within the immediate family, without extending to the community at large. Fulfilling familial obligations through the enactment of appropriate commemorations is part of the expectations of the wider community; the community itself bears no responsibility whatsoever regarding the upkeep of family plots or the cemetery in general. The process of abandonment, familiar to all the cemeteries in my study, begins the moment there are no surviving members of a

particular family to take care of the family grave, or for various reasons—including migration and old age—family members are unable to perform the necessary duties of care on a regular basis. Thus, the grave is left unattended for long periods of time, until it is totally abandoned, and ultimately forgotten. Once forgotten, it can then begin its new cycle of re-use, commemoration, neglect, and abandonment (Tzortzopoulou-Gregory 2008a, pp. 80–82, 277).

The pattern is similar for every cemetery in the study sample. An analytic plan of the Examilia cemetery in the eastern Corinthia shows that well-maintained graves can be adjacent to poorly-maintained ones scattered throughout the cemetery regardless of date (Fig. 2). The analysis is based on evidence for regular visitation/maintenance in terms of the overall condition/appearance of the grave/monument arranged chronologically, using the latest inscriptional date (corresponding to the date of death of the last interred individual). The latest inscriptional date recorded for a grave therefore, represents the last commemoration for that grave (Tzortzopoulou-Gregory 2008a, b, pp. 93–97). A well maintained and regularly visited grave would appear clean, with freshly placed perishable offerings (flowers, plants, fruits), renewed plastic flowers, wreaths, and evidence of a regularly burning *kandeli* (oil lantern/lamp). A moderately maintained grave would show signs of irregular visitation, weeds starting to grow on or around the grave, plastic offerings starting to fade, perishable offerings decaying, and evidence of the *kandeli* being lit less frequently. A rarely maintained grave is rarely visited, unkempt, overgrown with weeds, it has very old, faded, and deteriorating offerings, no signs of flowers or plants, and unused *kandeli*. An abandoned grave is totally overgrown, the monument is often weathered and damaged as a result of time and exposure to the elements, it lacks surviving offerings, and any evidence of visitation over many years. A new-unused grave is one that has been constructed recently with the intention to be used sometime in the future; a trend was established in 2000 with the introduction of the Kapodistrias Plan of regional administration, allowing individuals to purchase pre-assigned and grid-planned new-“unused” plots. As one would expect, older graves congregate in a crowded fashion around the church, marking the old section of the cemetery. In contrast, newer graves are arranged more neatly in regular rows along a recent expansion at the northern part of the cemetery. Interestingly enough, a considerable number of newer graves appear in the old section, as well as ones that are clearly new constructions but have not yet been used. The plan shows how the cemetery “renews itself” with completely new graves replacing those that have gone out of use, indicating the re-use of older (abandoned) graves and the construction of new monuments. Sometimes an existing family builds a new monument to replace an older one, but more commonly a new family comes in and replaces the abandoned grave or monument of another family. Older graves tend to be poorly maintained and more often abandoned, as one would expect over time. It is interesting, however, that the newer graves are not necessarily better maintained. In fact, we find a surprisingly large number of graves in the new section of the cemetery that are already in a state of abandonment. Varying states of maintenance have been quantified at the Examilia cemetery (Fig. 3). Only 17.5% of all graves were observed to be well maintained, while 19.8% were abandoned.

The graph illustrates the process by which older graves gradually become less maintained, are eventually abandoned, and are taken-over by new ones (Fig. 4). The

Examilia cemetery Degree of maintenance and period of last commemoration

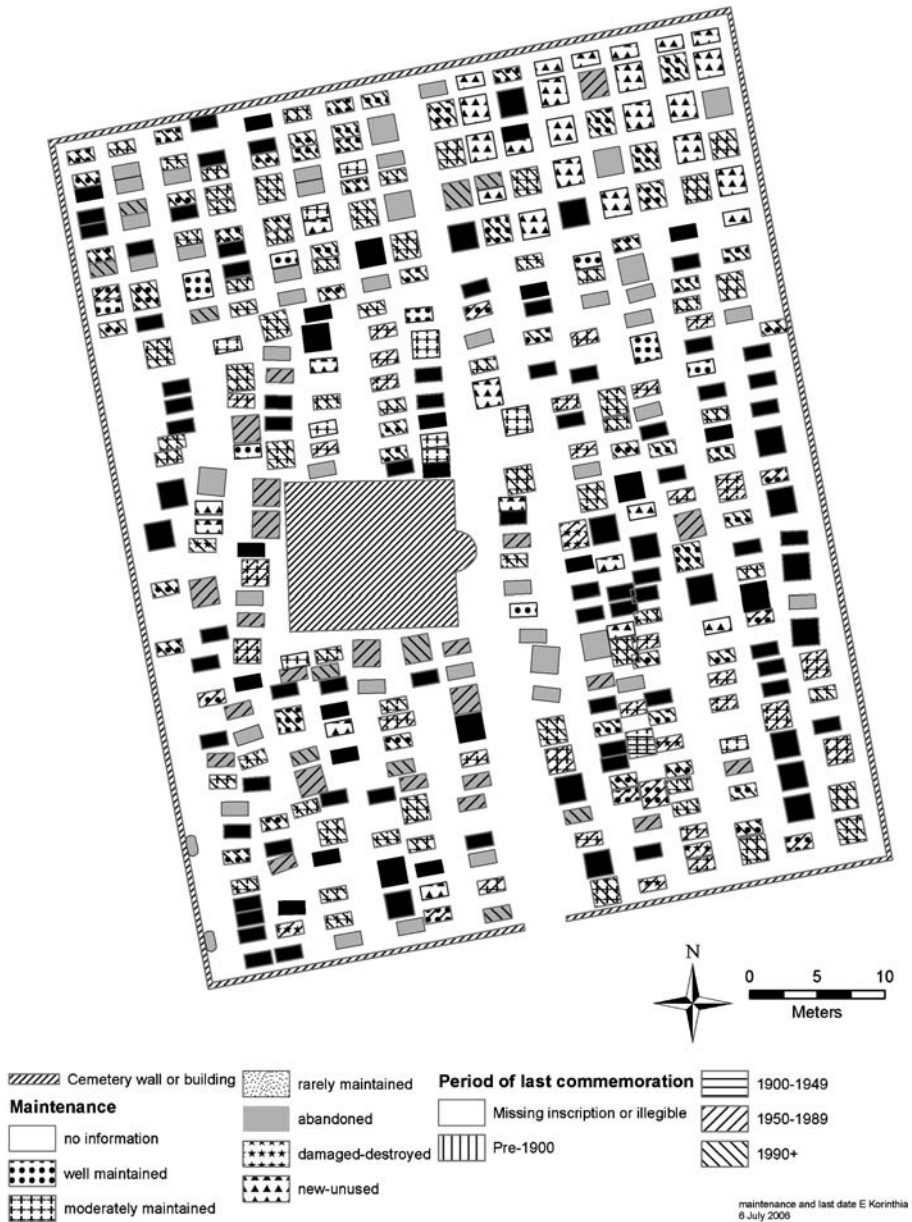


Fig. 2 Chronological distribution of graves based on their rate of maintenance: Examilia. (Map provided by Richard Macneill)

time over which this process takes place is also quantified. Generally, the older graves are in worse condition. At the time of recording in 2004, only a very small number of early graves (five in total) were observed. These surviving graves, with

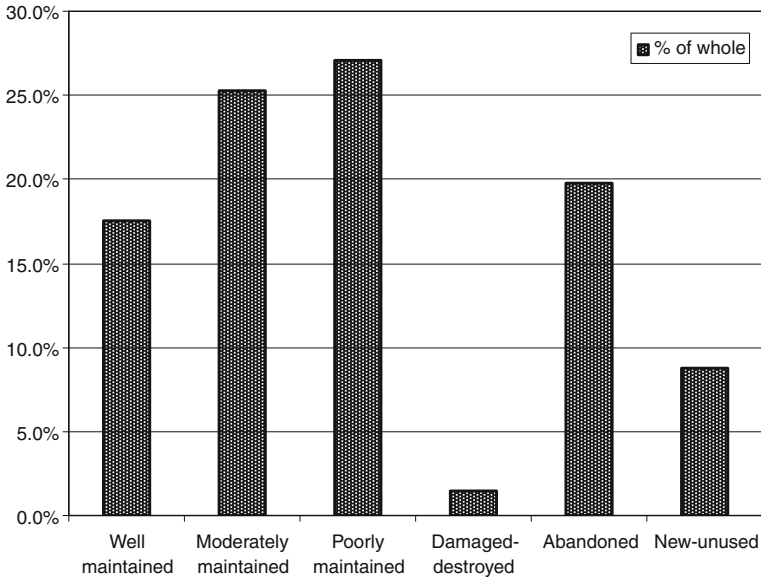


Fig. 3 Examilia: maintenance, percents of graves by categories

last commemoration dating between 1900 and 1949, were on their “way out” with only one moderately maintained and the rest in poor condition. As expected, none of these surviving graves was well maintained. What is surprising, however, is that all the abandoned graves recorded had latest commemoration dates after the 1950s. The absence of abandoned monuments with latest dates before the 1950s suggests that abandonment had already occurred before our documentation began. These abandoned graves have since been “taken-over” and are now being reused with new monuments erected in their place and no visible traces of their earlier existence.

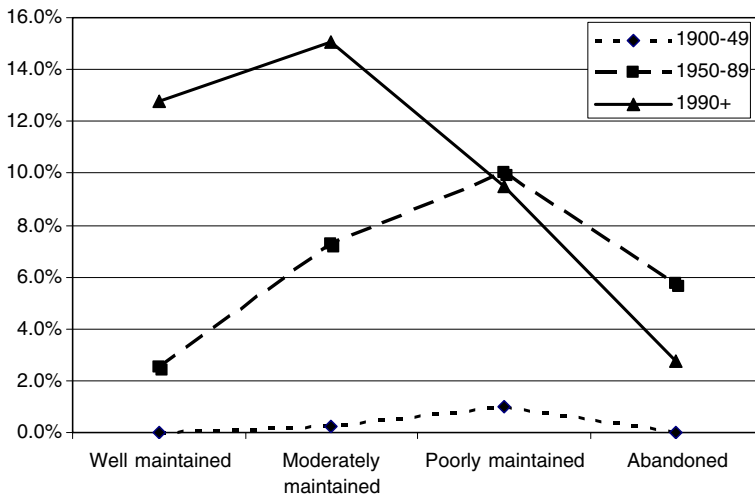


Fig. 4 Examilia: maintenance, percents of graves by periods

A similar pattern is seen with graves bearing commemoration dates of the most recent periods (1950–89 and 1990–2004). Only about 15% of the graves with dates between 1950 and 2004 are well maintained compared to 19.5% that are poorly maintained. At the same time, it is interesting to note the number of abandoned graves observed for the same two periods (8.6%); a process of abandonment had begun already between 1990 and 2004 (only 14 years). Based on this evidence, a pattern emerges that illustrates the process whereby newly constructed graves are maintained for a short period of time, they then enter a state of neglect and subsequent abandonment to be totally replaced and renewed within a fifty year period. From these figures, one could project that the most recently constructed graves/monuments will no longer exist by 2050.

Grave maintenance is compared between the Corinthia and Kythera (Fig. 5; Tables 1, 2).

The data for most categories are higher in the Corinthia than in Kythera, keeping in mind that the figures were adjusted to account for the large difference in total number of graves between the two regions. What clearly stands out is the large number of abandoned graves in Kythera, more than 50% of the total. This may be explained in terms of the large-scale depopulation of the island for most of the twentieth century largely due to systematic migration. The last wave took place between the 1950s and 1980s, especially to Athens and Piraeus. Even with the most recent resurgence in population numbers, with the arrival of retirees (both Greek and foreign) and immigrants (mostly Albanian), Kythera's population is still relatively small (Diacopoulos 2003). Compared to the situation in the Corinthia, where demographic pressures are forcing cemeteries to expand and to re-use and regenerate existing abandoned graves, in Kythera, the existing cemeteries are still able to cope with a small population, requiring little expansion and re-use of existing graves. The abandonment of graves, therefore, is more observable in Kythera than it is in the Corinthia, where the regeneration of abandoned graves is happening at a much faster rate, and the number of newly constructed monuments has increased considerably in the last thirty years. Even so, a relatively high number of abandoned graves is found in the Corinthia, which points to a general trend of abandonment that commences

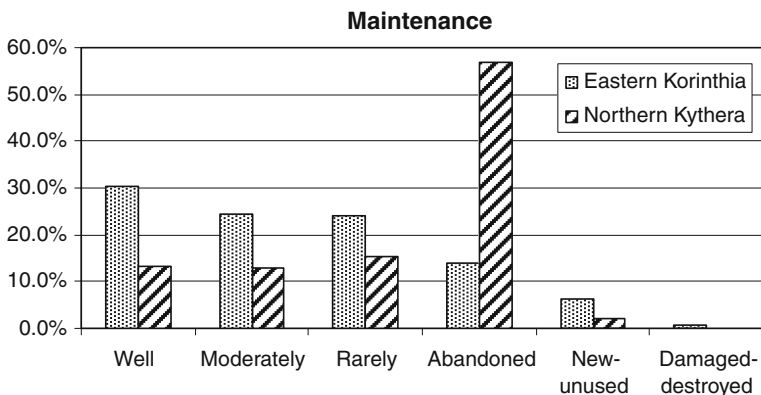


Fig. 5 Maintenance of graves in the Korinthia and Kythera, percentage of all graves by classes of maintenance

Table 1 Maintenance of graves in the Korinthia and Kythera

Maintenance	Eastern Korinthia		Northern Kythera	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Well	483	30.3	93	13.2
Moderately	387	24.3	90	12.8
Rarely	385	24.2	107	15.2
Abandoned	222	13.9	400	56.8
New-unused	102	6.4	14	2.0
Damaged-destroyed	13	0.8	0	0.0
Total	1,592	99.9	704	100.0

much sooner than expected in both regions. Desertion begins before the gravesite is totally taken over and new monuments are erected, destroying any of the earlier remains. This is an important observation in light of the length of commemorative duration (Tzortzopoulou-Gregory 2008a, pp. 263–264).

Although the erection of monuments and the investment on inscriptions, crosses, sculpture, and other permanent grave markers are intended to preserve the memory of the deceased for time immemorial, the evidence for maintenance of the graves discussed earlier seems to contradict such eternity in commemoration. Furthermore, the examination of the graves points to a short period of grave usage and commemoration.

Table 2 Length of commemoration in years between the first and last inscribed commemoration, Korinthia

Years	Total			Abandoned		
	Frequency	Percentage		Frequency	Percentage	
		Of total	Of valid dates		Of total	Of valid dates
no date	418	26.3		134	60.4	
single date	693	43.6		58	26.1	
1–10	146	9.2	30.4	9	4.1	30.0
11–20	124	7.8	25.8	9	4.1	30.0
21–30	88	5.5	18.3	1	0.5	3.3
31–40	53	3.3	11.0	5	2.3	16.7
41–50	37	2.3	7.7	3	1.4	10.0
51–60	19	1.2	4.0	1	0.5	3.3
61–70	6	0.4	1.3	0	0.0	0.0
71–80	4	0.3	0.8	1	0.5	3.3
81–90	0	0.0	0.0	0	0.0	0.0
91–100	2	0.1	0.4	0	0.0	0.0
161–170	1	0.1	0.2	1	0.5	3.3
Total	1591	100.1	99.9	222	100.4	99.9

The following analysis is based on the number of years between the earliest and the last inscriptional dates found on a grave. It should be stressed here that the inscriptions do not necessarily correspond to the reality in the ground, and it should not be assumed that they do; interred individuals are frequently omitted from the inscriptions, intentionally or unintentionally and for different reasons, while occasionally individuals listed in the inscriptions of a grave are not always buried in that particular grave. We can, nevertheless, assume that a grave or monument bearing inscriptions is in the possession of a single family that commemorates all the individuals listed in the inscriptions from first and last. In this analysis, the graves are organized in categories based on the difference between the first and last date on a grave, which in this context and for technical purposes are referred to as “length of commemoration.” Length of commemoration does not correspond precisely with the length of time any individual is remembered by his/her family, but it is used as a means to measure the length of time a given grave was used. By the same token, it represents an important phenomenon that does, in the end, provide evidence about the duration of actual remembrance (Tzortzopoulou-Gregory 2008a, p. 219).

Length of commemoration is expressed in categories of ten year intervals (1–10, 11–20, 21–30, etc.), while the number of graves in each category is shown both in absolute form and in percentages (first the total number of graves, and then the graves with a calculated length of commemoration) (see Tables 2, 3) In the latter category, graves lacking chronological indications or bearing a single date are excluded. The table shows that, in fact, the majority of graves bear a single date commemorating the interment, usually of one individual. Therefore, 26.3% of the Corinthian graves have no dates, while 43.6% bear a single date. In comparison, 37.4% of the Kytheran graves have no dates, and 32.7% have a single date. The

Table 3 Length of commemoration in years between the first and last inscribed commemoration, Kythera

Years	Total			Abandoned		
	Frequency	Percentage		Frequency	Percentage	
		Of total	Of valid dates		Of total	Of valid dates
no date	263	37.4		195	48.8	
single date	230	32.7		121	30.3	
1 to 10	39	5.5	18.5	15	3.8	17.9
11 to 20	43	6.1	20.4	18	4.5	21.4
21 to 30	36	5.1	17.1	17	4.3	20.2
31 to 40	21	3.0	10.0	7	1.8	8.3
41 to 50	26	3.7	12.3	8	2.0	9.5
51 to 60	23	3.3	10.9	11	2.8	13.1
61 to 70	12	1.7	5.7	6	1.5	7.1
71 to 80	6	0.9	2.8	1	0.3	1.2
81 to 90	1	0.1	0.5	0	0.0	0.0
91 to 100	4	0.6	1.9	1	0.3	1.2
Total	704	100.1	100.1	400	100.4	99.9

general trend in both regions is a steady decrease in the number of graves as the length of commemoration increases. However, the length of commemoration between one to forty years is significantly higher in the Corinthia than in Kythera. The pattern is reversed in the 51–100 years length of commemoration; the evidence in Kythera points to a pattern of longer commemorative duration than in the Corinthia. Naturally, one must bear in mind the small numbers of graves in each of these categories. Nevertheless, the difference between the two regions is large enough to warrant an explanation. For example, the mean length of commemoration observed for all the graves in the Corinthia sample is 27.23 years, with a median of eighteen years. In contrast, the length of commemoration observed for all the graves in the Kythera sample is 30.99 years, with a median of twenty-seven years, a significant difference between the two regions (Figs. 6 and 7). The median scores are presumably more significant as they minimize the effect of outliers on the higher end of the scale (166 years being the longest commemoration recorded in the Corinthia, and 99 years the longest in Kythera).

By focusing the analysis on graves already abandoned at the time of recording, the pattern is similar throughout. It should be emphasized that it is impossible to know exactly when the grave was abandoned after the last commemoration, since abandonment was observed as the grave's condition at the time of its recording. However, we can assume that an abandoned grave is no longer maintained by the family to which it belongs. The grave is, therefore, unclaimed and “available” to be taken over and reused. Thus, we assume that the last inscription appearing on an abandoned grave marks the last commemoration, with the last named individual bringing usage of the grave in its present form to its end. Once the grave is taken over and reused (usually in a violent fashion whereby the monuments are destroyed, removed, discarded, and replaced by new ones bearing new inscriptions), it commences a new “life-cycle” in the care of a different family (Tzortzopoulou-Gregory 2008a).

A striking difference between the two regions is the number of abandoned graves; a total of 400 graves (57% of the total number of graves) was recorded in Kythera but only 222 in the Corinthia (14% of the total number of graves). Among the abandoned graves, moreover, a large number lacked dates (60.4% in the Corinthia, 48.8% in Kythera), while a significant number commemorated only a single individual (26.1% in the

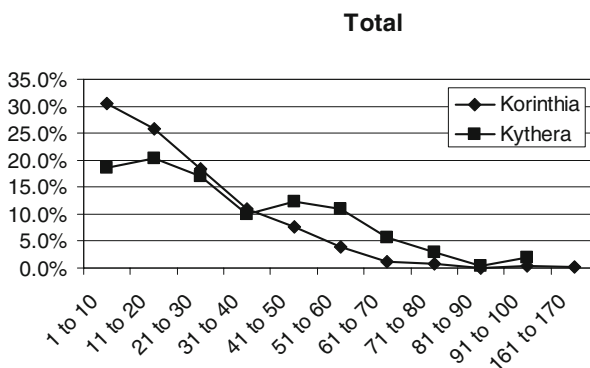


Fig. 6 Percentage of abandoned graves with valid dates (Kythera and Corinthia)

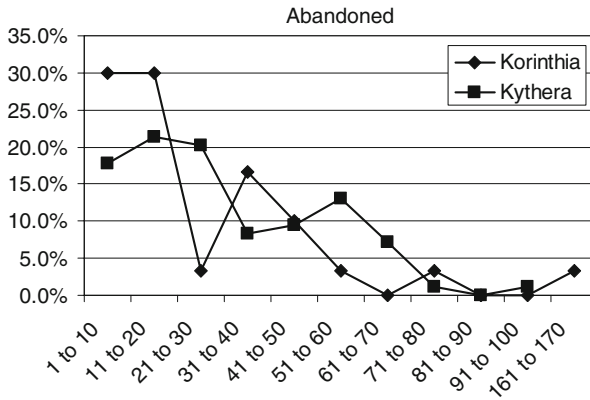


Fig. 7 Length of commemoration in years between the first and last inscribed commemoration based on percentage of total graves with valid dates (Kythera and Korinthia)

Corinthia, 30.3% in Kythera). Once again, it should be emphasized that the analysis is based on a small number of graves for each category of commemoration (see Tables 2 and 3) Nevertheless, the evidence for the one to twenty years duration is of higher percentage in the Corinthia. The same holds for the 31–40, the 71–80, and the 161–170 categories. Similarly, the figures are higher for Kythera in all other categories, and more significantly in the 21–30 and the 51–70 categories. The analysis of abandoned graves hence confirms the general pattern observed in the previous analysis, which shows a steady decrease in the number of graves as the length of commemoration increases. The analysis also emphasizes a more marked difference between the two regions in terms of percentages for certain categories of commemoration, especially the shorter duration categories more dominant in the Corinthia than in Kythera.

The regional differences is quite significant with the Corinthia more dominant in the shorter duration categories (1–10 and 11–20 years) and Kythera more dominant in almost all other categories but especially the 51–70 (see Tables 2 and 3). Nevertheless, the general trend in both regions is similar, with a tendency for a decrease in the absolute number of graves and monuments in the longer duration categories. As mentioned before, this analysis is skewed by the presence of outliers, namely two graves, one in the 161–170 years duration category in the Corinthia, and one in the 91–100 years duration category in Kythera. These two graves are special cases, especially Grave No. 736 from the Sophiko cemetery (eastern Corinthia), which bears an earliest commemoration date of 1821 and a latest date of 1987. The grave was clearly constructed after 1987, and it lists a number of buried individuals, including someone who was killed by the Turks and presumably buried there in 1821. Thus, this date is part of a single phase of inscriptions of which the last date is 1987. This means that the inscriptions were produced sometime after 1987, marking the death of the last commemorated individual. This monument is of particular interest in terms of the length of commemoration, showing how in this case ancestral memory can extend over a period of 166 years. In other words, the person who constructed the monument and inscribed it sometime after 1987 was able to “remember” a number of relatives and their date of death, the oldest dating to 1821 (Tzortzopoulou-Gregory 2008a, b, pp. 152, 247).

One possible explanation for the regional variation in length of commemoration may be the rapid turnover of graves and monuments experienced in the Corinthia due to population pressures and rapid development as opposed to depopulation and slower development in Kythera. The slower rate of grave turnover has, therefore, contributed to the preservation of a considerable number of older and now abandoned graves in Kythera. In contrast, the continuous demand for space in the more crowded cemeteries of the Corinthia has resulted in the immediate takeover and reuse of abandoned graves. Therefore, the abandonment of graves is a much more visible phenomenon in Kythera than in the Corinthia, and it is analogous to the general abandonment observed on the island as a whole. Kythera's continuous depopulation by systematic migration has left a long-lasting mark on unattended and abandoned fields, houses, churches, public buildings, and even whole settlements. In many parts of the island, a sense of gradual deterioration and a noticeable human absence adds a romantic flare to the phenomenon of abandonment. The opposite is true for the Corinthia, where population pressure is very real, and development has a direct impact on the environment, rapidly subsuming the region and changing its appearance with the building of new roads, houses, and industry. There is no sense of abandonment in the Corinthia; like the graves in the cemetery, new buildings replace old ones, agricultural fields are turned into residential or industrial zones, and change precipitates at a very fast rate.

Another explanation, however, is associated with the effects of modernity on rural populations in Greece, which until very recently were characterized by a predominantly traditional lifestyle based on local subsistence economies. Modernity is responsible for the vast changes that have taken place in Greece in the last 50 years, including urbanization and the depopulation of the countryside, socioeconomic changes, and what many would argue are cultural changes, in light of Europeanization and globalization. Such changes have affected traditional family relations and communal collaboration practiced in traditional rural communities. In turn, such changes have brought about the "deterioration" of traditional commemoration practices and, eventually, the short duration of commemoration. These changes are happening at a much faster rate in fast-developing regions such as the Corinthia than in more remote areas like Kythera. Traditional commemoration practices based on familial obligations and a strong oral tradition are still being maintained and preserved in Kythera, as opposed to the Corinthia, where they are fast disappearing.

Thus, the inscriptions in Kythera tend to commemorate more individuals for longer periods of time, indicating a longer use of the family plot than in the Corinthia, throughout most of the twentieth century. Women especially, as the traditional performers of commemoration rituals in the family, have been the keepers of knowledge relating to burial and commemoration. Women are responsible for maintaining and passing on such knowledge to future generations through the female line. Unlike the Corinthia, in Kythera today one still finds women (mostly elderly now) who possess such knowledge passed down to them from three or four generations ago. Many of these women know the exact spot of burial of their ancestors in the cemetery and all related information (names of individuals and their ages, date of death, and other death-related circumstances) even in the absence of permanent grave markers or inscriptions (Tzortzopoulou-Gregory 2008a, pp. 266–267, 2008b). When inscriptions are present, they are of little use to those who are illiterate. It is the persistence of the oral tradition

from one generation to the next rather than tangible markers that contributes to the preservation of such memory through appropriate commemoration practices (including memorial services on special calendar dates). Thus, the longevity of the family burial plot in the cemetery is also ensured through persistence of the oral tradition. This long-term memory, along with the lack of demand for space in the cemetery due to depopulation, helps explain the preservation of many abandoned graves, as well as the more continuous use of the grave by the same family in Kythera. However, the evidence shows that the phenomenon of long-term commemoration in Kythera is now disappearing as well; just like their counterparts in other parts of Greece, the new generation of Kytherian women is no longer “burdened” with the same traditional obligations and responsibilities.

Along with the emergence and rise in monumentalization and the commemoration of only immediate family members, women’s role in commemoration, although still important, is more “ephemeral.” Knowledge or memory of deceased relatives and their burial location in the cemetery is now restricted to immediate family members, often lasting only a little over a single generation. An exception to this new trend is the monument at Sophiko, mentioned earlier, constructed sometime after 1987 and commemorating a number of individuals over a period of 166 years. This unique case can be explained as an example of earlier long-term commemorative traditions that have been “monumentalized” in more recent times. The pattern that emerges from the archaeological evidence shows increased monumentalization (both in terms of monuments and inscriptions) and short-term memory leading to a cycle of neglect, abandonment, and eventual re-use.

Conclusion

Cemeteries are not just communal “resting places” for the dead; they are also, by their very nature, grounds for enactments of commemoration and places of remembrance loaded with social meanings for the living. They constantly remind us of our own mortality, evoking an array of sentiments, from loss and sadness, grief and sorrow, to fear and avoidance, or even indifference. At the same time, cemeteries are an integral part of life, reflecting local attitudes and perceptions of both individuals and the community at large.

While the act of remembering in the form of commemoration practices has been a subject for investigation by a number of disciplines including archaeology, little attention has been paid to the relationship between remembering and forgetting within a cemetery context. This is surprising given the dynamics at play between these two acts that are constantly observed at functioning cemeteries in modern Greece. This reality is conceived as a single process whereby both remembering and forgetting enact their parts temporally and spatially. This process involves the selective commemoration of certain deceased individuals in the form of monuments and inscriptions created on their behalf, followed by the monuments’ gradual neglect, forgetting, eventual desertion, and culminating with the plots’ regeneration in the hands of new occupants who initiate another cycle.

My own work, as presented in this paper, has examined this phenomenon of commemoration, neglect, abandonment, and regeneration through an analysis of the

evidence collected from nineteenth- and twentieth-century Greek cemeteries. Through the archaeological investigation of graves and monuments, the roles of individuals, families, groups, and the larger community were clearly identified. Commemoration is a practice of memory exemplified by the erection of monuments. The on-going maintenance and/or neglect of monuments operates at all social levels with particular emphasis on the nuclear family. Women, moreover, predominate in commemorative practices and operate within a system of reciprocal familial obligations. My research also demonstrates how short-lived commemoration can be, often not lasting more than a single generation. Functioning modern cemeteries provide the archaeologist with a unique opportunity to study the processes of remembering and forgetting as historical phenomena acted out contemporaneously and in association through the past, the present, and the future.

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