

Formation Processes and the Evidence of Looting in the San Giuliano Etruscan Chamber Tombs

During the 2017 and 2018 field seasons, the San Giuliano Archaeological Research Project (SGARP) team fully excavated three Etruscan rock-cut tombs ranging in date from the late seventh to the mid-sixth century BCE. This paper will describe the interior and exterior structure and decoration of the tombs, putting them into context with comparative examples from the Etruscan cemeteries of Cerveteri and Tarquinia and suggesting some theories of use and possible class and gender distinction that are suggested by the attention paid to the decoration of certain areas of each tomb.

We will then address one of the challenges inherent in studying Etruscan mortuary remains, which is that the wealth of the burials - especially the presence of bronze objects and the fine local bucchero ware, as well as imported Greek painted vases - has resulted in the looting of the majority of the tombs. Although there is still much knowledge to be gained from excavation of the disturbed tombs, analysis is complicated by the damage caused by tomb robbers, often beginning in the Roman period and continuing periodically up to the present. The authors will discuss the evidence in and near the tombs for these looting events, focusing on the methodologies used by our team to determine the archaeological and natural formation processes that have resulted in complex and varied stratigraphy.

In particular, in Tomb G13-001 it was possible to determine the location point of forced entry, and artifacts recovered during excavation suggest two distinct phases of modern looting. We will argue that such evidence is significant in understanding the life of the site beyond its ancient origins, and that careful attention to depositional processes can allow archaeologists to greatly expand the explanatory potential of disturbed contexts. Further, we will suggest some

ways in which an understanding of the looting history may be used proactively to educate the local public about the ongoing threat to their history, and the ways in which researchers may partner with them to preserve the rich cultural heritage of the San Giuliano site.