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Hellenic Foundation for
Research & Innovation

Description of the funded research project
1st Call for H.F.R.I. Research Projects to Support Faculty
Members & Researchers and Procure High-Value
Research Equipment

Title of the research project:

Tracking Re-cycling: Archaeological and Anthropological Survey in the Habitat of Xanthi Region-Thrace

Principal Investigator: Eurydice Kefalidou, Assistant Professor of Classical Archaeology

Reader-friendly title: TRAASH

Scientific Area: Humanities and Arts

Institution and Country: National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

Host Institution: National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Collaborating Institution: Ephorate of Antiquities of Xanthi

Project webpage: <http://en.arch.uoa.gr/research-congresses/programmes/tracking-re-cycling-archaeological-and-anthropological-survey-in-the-habitat-of-xanthi-region-thrace-k-e-16337/projects-title.html>



TRAASH



Budget: 200.000€

Duration: 36 months

Research Project Synopsis

In the last decades we have a continuous encouragement to “Think Green” and to recycle, upcycle, reuse, reduce waste and repurpose a variety of objects, which could be called a ‘secondary use’ of materials. The Research Programme TRAASH is based on the view that this secondary use, their disposal and taking them out of circulation emphasizes the biography of the objects and their makers.

The region of Xanthi as a case study allows the diachronic analysis, from Prehistory until modern times, of how all these practices were and are used by various cultural groups, such as the Greeks colonists and the indigenous Thracians in Antiquity or, later, the modern rural communities. However, all these practices are not restricted to material culture but they are applicable to landscapes and concepts, while they have a deeper impact in human societies and cultures, both modern and ancient. The changing patterns of landscape (natural and human-induced) exploitation and of the locally available natural resources can provide a footprint of how distinct cultural groups acted through time.

The diachronic analysis of all these parameters (material culture, landscape, natural resources) in the area of Xanthi will allow the understanding of broader social and cultural interchanges within an often neglected geographical area. It will also highlight the ways which people diachronically used in order to extend (or reduce) the lifetime of objects, landscapes and ideas, which were bearers of various meanings and reflect the mentality, the individual and group identity, memory, and cult. Within the framework of the current research programme experienced specialists and young researchers will actively participate in order to collect archaeological, historical, ethnoarchaeological and other types of data that will formulate a paradigm of environmental and material sustainability for immediate or future application in modern societies.

Project originality

The study of ancient 'garbage' is a rather novel trend in Archaeology. The idea that garbage is a useful source of cultural information about the past and may serve as a paradigm for the present, becomes more and more of a power; after all, in many sites of archeological digs we can discern areas of rubbish heaps or pits in fact many of the pottery fragments, flint scraps etc. that we look at in museums are really just very old garbage! Recent studies of 'object biography' suggest that it is important to consider not only the original purpose for which an artefact may have been made, but also the different ways that it may have been used through its lifetime (secondary uses). These different 'lives of objects' include the restorations, welds, modifications, adaptations, and sometimes even the concealment or the 'curation' (the retention of an artefact well beyond its production date) or the purposeful 'destructions' of objects. All these actions aim to a new use and a new life of material culture, incorporate different meanings and entail certain changes in its cultural perception and use.

The final deposition of objects is what we come across in our archaeological work. Traditional methods use the history of art as well as the ancient texts and inscriptions to interpret them. However, these tools are in many cases insufficient, especially when looking at objects from prehistoric periods, or objects related to geographical areas or with aspects of everyday life for which written sources are absent. Recent studies on ancient materiality emphatically emphasize the need for detailed and in-depth ethnographic and ethnoarchaeological research of the issue of secondary uses, to clarify aspects of the use and life of objects.

In TRAASH these hermeneutic tools will be applied on the communities living in the (modern) region of Xanthi from the prehistoric to modern times. Moreover, the recent developments in the fields of Landscape Archaeology and Geographic Information Systems provide a new methodological and theoretical tool that can help us understand the different forms of landscape exploitation. Finally, another interesting approach to garbage will be offered by contemporary art (trash art, found art or arte povera) which focuses on the creative use of trash and found objects. Through the use of banal, ordinary, everyday materials (sometimes even real garbage) artists produce thought-provoking work which increases awareness of our decisions to consume and dispose of things.

Expected results & Research Project Impact

TRAASH research results will be presented in a collective volume, collective presentations in Greek and international scientific conferences, and publications in international scientific journals. They will also be presented in a scientific meeting at the Archaeological Museum of Abdera in Xanthi region. A doctoral dissertation is also among the deliverables.

Research results will be made available to the wider public via the web site, with brochures, educational activities and modern art exhibition (Trash Art) that will be carried out in collaboration with the Ephorate of Antiquities of Xanthi at the Archaeological Museum of Abdera on the subject: 'We are what we (do not) throw away'.

The wider public is expected to become aware, think, reflect, and generally approach the issue of 'rubbish' and rejection in general with regard to wider issues concerning the natural and cultural environment, individual and collective identities, the past, the present and the future.

The importance of this funding

We are optimistic that the results of our research funded by the H.F.R.I will inspire and urge other people (not just in Xanthi region) in the direction of developing, managing and supporting innovative activities related to re-use and recycle, thus adding a small stone in to the international effort to make the world an eco-friendlier place.



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