



H.F.R.I.
Hellenic Foundation for
Research & Innovation

Description of the funded research project
2nd Call for H.F.R.I. Research Projects
to Support Post-Doctoral Researchers

Title of the research project: Byzantine Agricultural Landscape Across the Aegean: Historical Analysis of the Landscapes of Messene in the Peloponnese (GR) and Amorium in Asia Minor (TR)

Principal Investigator: Nikos Tsivikis

Reader-friendly title: BALAA – Byzantine Agricultural Landscape Across the Aegean

Scientific Area: Humanities

Institution and Country: Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum - Leibniz Research Institute for Archaeology, Mainz, Germany

Host Institution: Institute for Mediterranean Studies - Foundation for Research and Technology, Hellas

Collaborating Institution(s): Anadolu University, Eskişehir and Society for Messenian Archaeological Studies

Project webpage
(if applicable): <http://balaa.ims.forth.gr>



Budget: €135.000

Duration: 36 months

Research Project Synopsis

BALAA – Byzantine Agricultural Landscape Across the Aegean

Messene in the Peloponnese and Amorium in Asia Minor represent respectively the inland features of the landscape of the two large geographical zones that historically formed the core of the medieval Byzantine state after the 7th century AD: the Greek and the Asia Minor peninsula. The two settlements follow inverse paths of development in time which, with different characteristics, shed light on common historical processes of Byzantine society. Messene evolved from an important city of Late Antiquity after the crisis of the 7th century into a rural medieval town. Amorium, from a small provincial town of the Early Period, due to the same crisis, transformed after the 7th century into a seat of military and political administration and a regional capital.

Aim of the project is to study through a holistic approach the set of elements that can reconstruct the rural landscape, rural practices and the ways in which the rural landscape and the 'urbs' were linked during the Byzantine period. The tools chosen combine innovative methodologies of historical landscape and environmental history analysis with traditional historical and archaeological approaches. In particular: 1) The rural area immediately surrounding the settlements will be analyzed through Historic Landscape Characterization, Retrospective Landscape Analysis, and Geographic Information Systems. 2) the paleoclimate and its changes in the Peloponnese and central Asia Minor will be studied, 3) the archaeological evidence of rural life from relevant excavations will be examined, and 4) finally, historical sources referring to rural life and production in the period from the 7th to the 12th century will be examined in reference to the two areas of interest.

Through these two case studies, the project aspires to a comprehensive systematic comparative archaeological study of the Byzantine rural landscape and the historical and environmental conditions that contributed to its formation.

Project originality

BALAA – Byzantine Agricultural Landscape Across the Aegean

The analysis of the historical landscape has contributed significantly to the study of medieval settlements and their rural hinterland in recent decades in much of Western and Central Europe. In recent years the use of such tools has also made its appearance in the study of Byzantium, where through specialized studies we have achieved a new understanding of the Byzantine landscape.

BALAA research project aims to understand the relationship between the Byzantines and the rural landscape that surrounded them by applying innovative landscape study tools such as Historical Landscape Analysis, the application of Multiple Geospatial Systems, the analysis of satellite and aerial imagery. But of even greater importance is the holistic approach and the combination of the above with the traditional study of archaeological data from the systematic excavations of Messene and Amorium, as well as with the historical information that will be extracted specifically for the project. The study of the landscape and the finds at BALAA will be carried out in the light of new environmental data which are integrated through specific research.

Finally, BALAA project is based on the comparative study of materials from different countries and geographical zones, combining material from Greece and Turkey. What did it really mean that these two distant regions, the Peloponnese and Central Asia Minor, were under the unified Byzantine state administration of Constantinople? How the people of the land experienced this relationship and how it determined the ways in which they exploited the land and organized their production.

Expected results & Research Project Impact

BALAA – Byzantine Agricultural Landscape Across the Aegean

The BALAA research project contributes substantially and decisively to the understanding of the Byzantine rural landscape as more than an empty agropastoral setting in which people simply inhabit but reformulates it as a decisive and active factor that greatly influences the relationship between man and his environment. In this way, through the project we are developing a holistic methodology for approaching the rural landscape that will guide other similar future research attempts.

Through BALAA a series of scientific studies on the rural landscape and material culture of Amorium and Messene will be produced, focusing on the relationship between the two categories. At the same time, data sets will be created with the analysis of the rural landscape of the two sites, the distribution of fields today and historically, characteristic samples of material culture related to agricultural production in both sites (tools and structures), historical information on rural life in the areas around the sites, and a record of archaeo-environmental data related to the period from the 7th to the 12th century in the areas of interest. These materials will be made available online for use by scholars and the general public through free access platforms.

Perhaps most crucially, however, the BALAA project is attempting for the first time to identify the characteristics of the medieval Byzantine field as something distinct from its Roman and Hellenistic predecessors and to create the tools that will allow its systematic study alongside ever-expanding studies of similar phenomena for the rest of medieval Europe.

The importance of this funding

The importance of HFRI/ELIDEK's funding is great as it allows for the first time in Greece independent research projects led by young scientists in the field to implement innovative and pioneering ideas. The amount of funding is significant as it allows the creation and operation of a research team with a multi-year focus that goes beyond the limitations of individual research. With the HFRI/ELIDEK funding I was able to implement a research proposal in a Greek research institute that in its conception was previously only possible based on foreign funding schemes. I believe that it is a great step for all postdoctoral researchers who are invited to carry out a project of HFRI/ELIDEK on their way to a permanent research or teaching position in Greece or abroad.



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