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Antiquities in exile: Ottoman Greek refugees' trauma and Ionian antiquities

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Abstract

This article contributes to our understanding of the links between forced exile, refugee trauma, and antiquities. It zooms in to the case of the Ottoman Greek refugees who fled to Greece in the wake of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the defeat of the Greek army by the Turkish National Movement forces in 1922. It critically discusses memories of ordinary people from Lithri (ancient Erythrai, modern-day Ildırı), Nymphaio (near ancient Sardeis, modern-day Kemalpaşa), and Ayasolouk (ancient Ephesus, modern-day Selçuk). It also looks at aspects of the literary world of Smyrna-born poet and Nobel Laureate George Seferis. It is argued that, for these refugees, antiquities served as conduits, symbols, metaphors, and allegories for expressing the trauma linked to their state of uprootedness and forced exile. The refugees in question employed reverse “rescue archaeologies,” where it was for antiquities to salvage refugees rather than the other way round. The main primary material consulted consists of refugee testimonies from the Oral Tradition Archive of the Centre for Asia Minor Studies and Seferis’s diary. The approach is interdisciplinary and, besides Ottoman Greek history, draws on cultural geography, anthropology, archaeology as well as broader discussions in memory studies and critical heritage studies.

Keywords: Ottoman Greeks; antiquities; George Seferis; Asia Minor Catastrophe; refugees

Introduction

A cataclysmic event in its own right, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century affected the various Ottoman communities in particular, yet equally cataclysmic ways. Following nearly 100 years of socio-economic advancement, the Ottoman Greeks came increasingly under pressure with the rise to power of the Young Turks (1908). From 1914 onwards, discrimination against them is noticeable in the economy. In that year, “a campaign of threats and intimidation” organized by the Committee of Union and Progress, a major political organization of the Young Turks, forced at least 130,000 Ottoman Greeks from the western provinces of Anatolia to flee to neighbouring Greece (Zürcher 2007 [1993] [1994] [1997] [1998] [2001] [2004] [2005], 93–132, 126 for the quote). This latter episode is known in Greek as “the First Persecution” (*o Prótos Diogmós*). In May 1919, Greek forces landed in Smyrna (Izmir) and, with the Treaty of Sèvres, in August 1920, the administration of

the city and its environs was officially ceded to Greece in anticipation of a referendum that would decide on their final status.¹ This sequence of events led to the outbreak of a Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922). The collapse of the Greek front in September 1922 resulted in a largely disordered retreat of the Greek army and left a great number of Ottoman Greek civilians unprotected (Kayalı 2008; Zürcher 2007 [1993] [1994] [1997] [1998] [2001] [2004] [2005], 147–156). Inscribed in Greek discourse as the Asia Minor Catastrophe (*Mikrasiatikí Katastrophí*), the events that ensued the defeat of the Greek army drove approximately 1.2 million among them to seek refuge in Greece (Hirschon 2005, 377), where they set out to rebuild their lives as refugees.

This article provides a critical analysis of the role played by antiquities in/from their Anatolian homeland in the exilic lives of refugees from three locations in historical Ionia: Lithri, the ancient Erythrai (known in Turkish as Lytri or Ildırı); Nymphaio, which also goes by the name Nyphio, close to Sardeis (known in Turkish as Nif or Kemalpaşa); and Ayasolouk, the ancient Ephesus (known in Turkish as Ayasoluk or Selçuk).² It traces, in particular, on one hand, the links between ancient ruins and finds, and, on the other, the trauma of uprootedness and exile. In doing so, it draws on testimonies of refugees that were collected in the context of the Oral Tradition Archive by the Centre for Asia Minor Studies (CAMS), and the diary of George Seferis (2020 [2016]), Greek poet and Nobel Laureate born in late Ottoman Smyrna. Both sources date from the post-1922 period. Overall, I argue that, for these refugees, antiquities became loci of enactment of the deeply felt pain linked to their state of exile, as well as conduits and symbols for verbalizing this. In acts of what I call reverse “rescue archaeology,” it may have been for the antiquities to salvage the refugees rather than the other way round.

Reverse “rescue archaeologies” by ordinary refugees

Antiquities from Ionia made for regular points of reference for late Ottoman Greeks who lived in that area. As the following testimony by Theodoros Andreadakēs on an inscription discovered in his native Lithri highlights, vestiges of the past found in their villages formed an integral part of local culture and identity:

At that time, there lived in [Lithri] a teacher from Athens. His name was Gryparēs. Brother of the poet. I don’t how such a man could end up in our lands. So, he considered it good to inform the Turkish [sic] authorities in Tsesmes [Çeşme] and they sent [men] and took not just this inscription, but all other finds that we had put in the yard of the Konaki [Turkish: *konak*, mansion usually related to a public authority]. There they were safe. And they were at home. Who knows to whom they sold them. We don’t owe to do good.³

¹ Archive of the League of Nations, *Traité de Paix entre les Puissances Alliées et Associées et la Turquie signé le 10 août 1920 à Sèvres (texte Français, Anglais et Italien)*, section IV on Smyrna (arts 65–83), especially arts 69 and 83 (reference code: R1226/17/6809/4715; created: 11.9.1920). Available at <https://archives.unige.ch/eng/treaty-of-peace-with-turkey-sevres-1920> (accessed 22 August 2023).

² CAMS (2012), Oral Tradition Archive, Lithri, 26; Nymphaio, 21; Ayasolouk, 21.

³ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Lithri, 146 (24.3.1961), section titled “Information on Ruins: Inscriptions.”

Given that Andreadakēs recounted this incident as a refugee in Greece, the question arises as to the role that this ancient find from Lithri played in his Athenian forced exile. More than that, Andreadakēs' narration invites us to critically consider the place of antiquities found in the now lost Ottoman homeland in the lives of the refugees of the Asia Minor Catastrophe in Greece more broadly.

To do so, I turned my attention to the CAMS, and those refugees who shared their stories on their Ionian homelands in Ottoman Anatolia with the interviewers of the Centre. Already in the 1930s and up to 1975, and with a view to rescuing the memory of life in Ottoman Anatolia and Eastern Thrace before 1922, the CAMS, from its headquarters in Athens, designed and carried out an early example of an oral history project. Over 100 researchers, paid and volunteer ones, scoured the refugee settlements in the capital and beyond in search of the treasures of memory. Approximately 5,000 refugees, men and women, from all over Asia Minor and Eastern Thrace gave their testimonies. Over 300,000 handwritten pages bring their voices to us today. In this work, the Centre followed a geographical division of Ottoman Turkey into twenty provinces and 120 districts or regions. They made use of the Roman division of Asia Minor, and of its ancient Greek names, for example Aeolis, Ionia, Caria, Lycia, and Pamphylia. At its core, this oral history project was ethnographic. Among other things, these interviews provide glimpses of the language, geography, economy, religious life, education, antiquities, and local history in the refugees' birthplaces (CAMS 2012, Oral Tradition Archive; Kéntro Mikrasiatikón Spoudón 2012, Arkhío Prophorikís Parádosis).

The Centre was able to interview a total of fifteen refugees from Lithri, Nymphaio, and Ayasolouk; five from each location. Out of these fifteen refugees, three were women; two from Nymphaio and one from Lithri. Biographical information from the archive files on those among these fifteen narrators whose testimonies on antiquities are used here affords us a partial reconstruction of their lives. For all its fragmentary and incomplete nature, it is expected that such information will provide a useful backdrop for better understanding the place of antiquities in their coping with forced dispossession and forced exile.

Andreas Drimbetēs was born in Lithri around 1896. He was a farmer in Anatolia, and in Athens he ran a shop for construction materials. Anastassia Andreadakē was born in Lithri at some point before 1886 and received only very basic education. Her husband, Theodoros Andreadakēs, was also born in Lithri before 1886, and was a shoemaker. Ioannēs Kanakarēs was born in Lithri around 1911 and fled to Greece as a small child in 1914. He returned with his family "... in 1919, when the place was liberated [by the Greek army], as they would say ...". He was a carpenter. Eustathios Katirtzēs was born in Ayasolouk in 1900 and worked for a company. Georgios Babourakēs (official surname: Mimēkopoulos) was born in 1889 in Nymphaio, finished primary school, and seems to have also attended the first years of junior high school. He left his birthplace in 1911, and in 1919 joined the Greek army in Asia Minor as a volunteer. Titika Dēmopoulou was born in 1896 in Nymphaio and finished primary school there. She fled Anatolia in 1922. Her brother, Nestoras Dēmopoulos, was born in 1889 in Nymphaio, and was a graduate of the famous Evangelikē Scholē (Evangelical School) in Smyrna. In 1919, he enrolled in the Medical School in Athens. In the Greco-Turkish War, he fought with the Greek army. Together with the reports of their

interviewers, the transcripts of the stories shared by refugees from Lythri, Nymphaio, and Ayasolouk run over 400 handwritten pages.⁴

What most of these narrators have in common is a non-elite view of antiquities in their birthplaces. In the long nineteenth century (c. 1750–1914) (Burke 2000), the state and societal elites both in the West and in the Empire became increasingly interested in the material remains of the past. Next to an antiquarian tradition that aimed at establishing role models from the past whose acts could serve as examples to contemporaries, an approach known as *magistra vitae topos*, there developed the professional study of history. Significantly, now history was viewed as a process of incremental progress (Eriksen 2016 [2014], 84–85, 98–99; Kalpaxís 1990, 47; Papatheodorou 2017, 51–88). While reproducing ancient constructions in books or stand-alone photographs could be noticed on occasion, practice gradually shifted towards actual conservation and restoration. Besides university departments, including of archaeology, the institutionalization of the professional study of the past saw its pinnacle in the modern museum (Eriksen 2016 [2014], 151, 236–237; Papatheodorou 2017, 89–192, 320–322). A reflection of its time, this was a project of national identity aimed at inculcating its visitors with the right set of emotions, revolving around empathy and a feeling of belonging linked to the ancient cultures on display (Çelik 2016, 13–133; Díaz-Andreu 2007; Eriksen 2016 [2014], 87, 248, 297–299; Shaw 2003, especially 172–184).

Such intellectual and ideological formulations of states and elites on archaeology were of little consequence to ordinary Ottoman Greek refugees. Their relation to antiquities was more affective than cognitive, more embodied than political. Their archaeologies can be conceptualized as “indigenous archaeologies.” The term “indigenous archaeologies” initially only referred to practices that systematically take into account Native voices and Native perspectives on archaeology. It has its roots in the criticism of conventional archaeology aired by Indigenous people throughout the world in the 1960s, and gradually led to the development of new sets of ethics among archaeologists *vis-à-vis* surviving Indigenous groups of peoples, on whose lands and whose archaeological remains they investigate (Atalay 2006; Murray 2011; Watkins 2005). Hamilakis’s reformulation of this concept turns it into a most useful analytical tool for the study of the reception of antiquities in past settings, especially by ordinary Ottomans. In his paper on “Indigenous archaeologies in Ottoman Greece” (Hamilakis 2011, 49), he defines “indigenous archaeologies” as “local, vernacular discourses and practices involving things from another time.” He argues that such vernacular approaches can only help us broaden our understanding of archeology, and moves on to provide an example that can accordingly help us expand our views. Drawing on antiquarian Edward Clarke’s travelogue, Hamilakis is able to reconstruct the “indigenous archaeology” of the inhabitants of Eleusis in 1801. He zooms in to a particular find, known as the Ceres of Eleusis, which in reality, rather than a representation of the goddess, was the upper torso of a caryatid made of marble. The locals made a particular use of it that, for Hamilakis, amounts to a vivid illustration of “their own archaeology” (Hamilakis 2011, 52). Clarke recounted this use in his travelogue in the following words:

⁴ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Lithri; Nymphaio; Ayasolouk (various dates for all locations).

The inhabitants of the small village which is now situated among the Ruins of Eleusis still regarded this Statue with a high degree of superstitious veneration. They attribute to its presence the fertility of their land; and it was for this reason that they heaped around it the manure intended for their fields. They believed that the loss of it would be followed by no less than the failure of their annual harvests; and they pointed to the ears of bearded wheat among the sculptured ornaments upon the head of the figure, as a never-failing indication of the produce of the soil (Clarke 1814, 772–773, as quoted in Hamilakis 2011, 51).

Hamilakis (2011, 52) describes such archaeology of the locals as both a discourse and a practice, which relied on singling out and exhibiting the statue, and building a discourse relating the statue to their own lives (e.g. harvests and agriculture-related ornamentation on the statue) that led to its veneration.

In his analysis, Hamilakis (2011, 49) notes that “indigenous archaeologies” can be traced in travel writings, as in the case of Edward Clarke seen above, folktales, and practices of reworking past remains, as in spoliation. I argue that the testimonies of refugees from the Empire constitute a new and unique vantage point into “vernacular” receptions of antiquities, and provide access to a direct discourse on ancient finds and ruins that is not to be found in spoliation and is somewhat unlikely in folktales. Compared to travelogues, these testimonies offer insight that remains unmediated by the gaze of the Western traveler. In them, the voice of the “indigenous archaeologist” is direct and personal. In these testimonies, information on remains of past civilizations is found either in special sections titled according to an archaeology-related vocabulary (such as ruins, Acropolis, etc.), or is dispersed in sections that bear titles irrelevant to the vestiges of the past. While, in the former case, the narrators were specifically asked for information on antiquities, in the latter they were the ones who took the initiative to share memories of these.

Even if the gaze of the Western traveler left the CAMS testimonies largely unaffected, there is, however, another source of mediation or filtering – this time, internal – that shaped the ways in which refugees of the Asia Minor Catastrophe spoke about ancient finds in their home villages. The source is trauma. Far from being composed of contemporary testimonies, i.e. ones collected *in situ* in late Ottoman times, the archive of the Centre was formed on the basis of recollections nurtured by the trauma of uprootedness, in a post-Ottoman exile with no return.

Trauma finds its expression in dislocated time and form. As Rosanne Kennedy (2020, 47) argues, “[m]emories of events that threaten our bodily and mental integrity resist being assimilated into a coherent life story and are repressed; they return, sometimes years later, as intrusive flashbacks, nightmares and fragments.” Traumatic memories are not always vocalized. Some people put them into words; for others, trauma numbs their tongues. On occasion, building a narrative out of such flashbacks, nightmares, and fragments is of help with coming to terms with or sustaining life with a traumatic memory (Lothe 2020, 107). Memories of antiquities back home were likewise fragmented, and articulated as part of a broader copying mechanism for trauma, which I call reverse “rescue archaeology.”

Memories are subjective and individual, and so are traumatic memories. Yet, trauma is always culturally mediated, and catastrophic events tend to produce

“cultural traumas,” a situation in which an entire community may be forced to rediscover itself (Davis and Meretoja 2020, 13–14). Cultural trauma characterized the lives of the refugees of the Asia Minor Catastrophe and entailed for them immense pressure to shift overnight to a new identity. I would like to argue that this was a post-Ottoman identity, in which memories from Ottoman times played a decisive role. Others, too, have made the case for a strong link between memories of the Ottoman homeland and identity in exile. Renée Hirschon (2005) argues that the experience of uprootedness created new connective tissue for the refugees; in this identity formation, memories of the homeland played an important role. Tziovas (cited in Argenti 2019, 10), in turn, has shown that for the refugees, exilic life was a liminal space where memories were again centre stage. Walter Benjamin postulation in favor of a dialectical thinking of historical time provides further theoretical credence to such approaches. Benjamin contends that the present is no more than a past future, that is, the future of a past present, as well as a future past, that is, the past of an anticipated future. He argues against treating such futures in a deterministic, teleological fashion, while acknowledging that each present era works towards fashioning its future in certain, desired ways (Walton 2019, 355–357). As a past future, the exilic present of the Asia Minor refugees carried with it their Ottoman identity. As a future past, this same exilic present entailed that the refugees were in a process of re-fashioning their identity. A liminal chronotope between an Ottoman self and the new self they were to become, the exilic present of the refugees could be interpreted as post-Ottoman. The modern Greeks have almost invariably been post-Ottoman. As the Greek state was incrementally created out of Ottoman lands and populations, post-Ottoman liminalities have carried their effect to this day, with post-Ottoman identity being variegated and polysemic. For example, Emily Neumeier (2019, 407) has shown how the National Historical Museum in Athens negotiates in its displays the Ottoman past as a time of occupation whereas the Museum of Ali Pasha and the Period of Revolution in Ioannina practically claims this Ottoman dignitary “as the unlikely father of the modern Greek nation-state.” In a similar fashion, Séverine Rey (2019) discusses how refugees from Asia Minor on Lesbos island renegotiated their trauma of uprootedness and promoted a narrative of (re-)rooting on that island through a creative conflation of narratives and memories related to the Empire from disparate times.

Besides trauma, one more factor framed and shaped the testimonies of the refugees. This factor is power. In describing Foucault’s take on archives, Hirsch (2012, 227) maintains that the archive is “the set of hegemonic rules that determine how a culture selects, orders, and preserves the past.” Linked to this, the documentation of traumatic memory may serve various purposes, including justice, human rights, and even oblivion (Baronian 2014; Kennedy 2014; Rigney 2014).

The CAMS curated the topics for its Oral Tradition Archive. The list that guided the work of the interviewers in the field included some topics of interest while excluding others. The reader of the testimonies should thus be alert as much to their content as to their omissions and lacunae.

Such selection and ordering on the side of the Centre manifests the purposes that this archive was set to serve from the beginning. First, the CAMS reflected the efforts of its founder, Melpo Logothetēs-Merlier, to safeguard ethnographic information on life in Ottoman lands lost for the Greeks in 1922. An ethnomusicologist trained in

Austria, Switzerland, Germany, and France, Logothetēs-Merlier established in 1929 the Folk Songs Association (Σίλλος Dimotikón Tragoudión) in order to record Greek folk songs. The following year, she established the Ethnographic Music Archive (Mousikó Laographikó Arkhío). This aimed at collecting folk songs sang mostly by the refugees from Eastern Thrace and Asia Minor but, faced with a scarcity of background ethnographic information that could help the researchers contextualize the songs, the researchers coupled their music recordings with a rudiment of ethnographic research. Such information gave birth in 1933 to the Archive of Asia Minor Ethnography (Arkhío tis Mikrasiatikís Laographías) as a branch to the Ethnographic Music Archive. In 1949, the Archive of Asia Minor Ethnography was renamed the Centre for Asia Minor Studies (A. E. 1977, 323–324; Petropoulou 2002, 4).

“Is that first level enough for understanding the Oral Tradition Archive and its purposes,” one may ask? In other words, should we treat the ethnography of the Centre merely as an expression of scholarly curiosity, and ensuing intellectual power, one brought by knowledge? Echoing Michael Hertzfeld, Nicolas Argenti (2019, 5) suggests that nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century experts on folklore studies in Greece actively perpetuated the myth of the renewal of a classical Greek identity in modern times in the aftermath of five centuries of Ottoman domination. Resonating with this proposition, Penelope Papailias argues that the refugees in particular were viewed in Greece as cultural heritage. Hellenic but deprived of their native land, they were to be preserved for the sake of the nation (İğsız 2018, 179). If we are to think along these lines, then the Oral Tradition Archive did precisely this: it preserved for future generations the Hellenic heritage of Anatolian and Thracian Greeks. This is further supported by evidence that links Melpo Logothetēs-Merlier to the key proponents of Greek irredentism, Eleutherios Venizelos himself and his entourage, who had supported her research initiatives early on (Petropoulou 2002; Rízou-Kouroupoú 2002).

I contend, however, that the Centre was not alone in exerting power over the Oral Tradition Archive. So did the narrators. Huyssen (2003, 3, as quoted in Kennedy 2020, 46) maintains that “the act of remembering is always in and of the present,” a present that, as seen, in the case of the refugees of the Asia Minor Catastrophe, was post-Ottoman. Drawing on de Cesari (2016) who has made an argument about the potential of heritage projects to serve even antithetical purposes, I suggest that in this process of heritagizing the refugees, the latter were far from voices of a fossilized past. These perceived “relics” – or “ruins” – of a Hellenic past in Anatolia and Eastern Thrace were already post-Ottoman, and posited themselves *vis-à-vis* the interviewers of the Centre as such. This means that their responses to the questions of the Centre were as much about the(ir) past as about the(ir) present – and in this way also about the(ir) future.

Another argument in support of the power that the refugees had in their hands to influence the Oral Tradition Archive relates to the nature of this repository. This ethnographic archive was a precursor to oral history, a methodology and branch of historical inquiry that took off in earnest after the end of World War II (Starr 1996 [1984]). Oral history is widely celebrated for affording the narrator agency in the documentation of their life story (Thompson 2000 [1978] [1988]). In a similar vein, the refugees who gave their testimonies to the CAMS enjoyed this kind of agency. Like a modern historian, the Centre set specific topics for investigation, but the narrators

could choose how to respond: whole-heartedly; by evading some topics; by adding elements that may speak of an agenda of their own; or by omitting information.

Moreover, the Oral History Archive was put together not by an omnipotent state, but by a private scholarly oriented organization with limited resources. Against such a background, the narrators must have had more leeway than one assumes. First, some of Melpo Logothetēs-Merlier's assistants were themselves refugees who saw in this initiative a way to deal with their forced dispossession and forced dislocation (Rízou-Kouroupoú 2002, 9). By working in the Archive, they did not only open up channels of communication with refugees for the Centre. They were arguably able to also convey refugee opinions to the Centre and, at least to an extent, shape its work according to refugee wishes. More importantly, identifying narrators was far from a straightforward enterprise. Not all refugees were willing to talk. As already explained, traumatic memories may prompt verbalization, but they may also block it. Most narrators seem to have been located by word of mouth against a setting that was barely propitious: phones were lacking, buses did not always connect with remote refugee settlements, refugee neighborhoods were notorious for their dirt roads that became muddy with rain, refugee houses – neat and welcoming as they would be – could also be very cold in winter, and refugees willing to share their stories may have had to do so while tending to a customer in their little shop or workshop.⁵ Such challenges to locate and engage a narrator turned the ones found, especially those who were apt at sharing information, into much valued interlocutors.

By limiting our understanding of the Oral Tradition Archive to that of a heritagization project, we also run the risk of missing the importance of this collection of testimonies in resisting the identification of the refugees with a monosemantic, Greek state-sponsored Hellenic identity. Argenti (2019, 11) points to the formulation in modern times of a disemic Greek past: a Western, Hellenic past generally privileged over an Eastern, Romeic (Byzantine and later Ottoman) one. If the Oral Tradition Archive were merely a national project of heritagizing the refugees along Hellenic lines, then it would not have afforded them so much space to convey memories of an Eastern, Romeic nature. Significantly, the affirmation of such an identity in the context of the Archive went hand in hand with a broader dynamics of polyvocality: “memory,” writes Argenti (2019, 13), “can reintroduce the lost polyvocality muted by the production of a homogeneous national subjectivity.”

Put differently, even if the Centre had initially intended for the interviews, especially the antiquities-related sections, to showcase a state-sponsored Hellenic – as opposed to any other – identity of the refugees, this is not the way that this project worked in the end. As already mentioned, the ethnographic-cum-oral-history nature of the interviews meant that the interviewees enjoyed considerable room to freely express themselves. Importantly, the refugees seized such opportunity and spoke of the ancient as well as medieval vestiges in their ancestral villages even when not asked about it during the interview. For example, references to antiquities – whether ancient or medieval – can be found in sections of the interviews dealing with bridges,⁶ islets,⁷

⁵ These descriptions are based on the reports of interviewees.

⁶ CAMS (2012), Oral Tradition Archive, Lithri, 57 (28.2.1961).

⁷ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Lithri, 60 (22.3.1961) and 63 (23.3.1961).

locations in the vicinity of the villages, including nearby Turkish villages,⁸ the village inhabitants,⁹ beaches,¹⁰ relations between Greeks and Turks,¹¹ and chapels.¹² Such cases underscore the fact that the refugees needed no prompt to talk about the material remains of the past; these could be important to them irrespective of their significance for the Centre. Byzantine remains, in particular, were oftentimes experienced in a most direct way as part and parcel of the Orthodox Christian faith shared almost invariably by the refugees. Initiatives taken by the interviewees to talk about surviving medieval materialities confirm that their “indigenous archaeologies” were much more than an attempt to impress their identification with the modern Hellenic nation-state. Arguably the best illustration of this is Eustathios Katirtzēs’s appreciation of “the many beautiful buildings, mosques, baths, and a very nice one that still stands, the mosque of Selim” that the Turks had erected in his native Ayasolouk.¹³ Rare though such an affirmation might be, it reflects a capacity to appreciate archaeological heritage that went not only beyond the Hellenic but also beyond the Christian/Romeic. In all, refugees could appreciate antiquities independent of the understanding of these by the modern Greek nation-state; and in doing so they could refer to both classical and other antiquities related to Hellenic heritage, vestiges of the Byzantine Christian past, and the material remains of a past associated with the “other.”

The analysis that follows shows how, under the influence of trauma and while emboldened by the power that they could exert over the Archive, refugees from Lithri, Nymphaio, and Ayasolouk engaged in their reverse “rescue archaeologies.”

The “rescue archaeologies” of the refugees in question were intensely embodied: artifacts that they touched and looked at, sometimes on a daily basis; landscapes in which they regularly immersed themselves; places where they played as children. More specifically, antiquities had been integrated into the daily lives of the refugees in question, and were characteristically interwoven with the village fabric. Castles towered over their villages, ancient fortifications encircled their neighborhoods, and ancient intaglio rings were unearthed with the simple plowing of one’s land. Georgios Babourakēs remembered that “in the northern side of Nymphaio, on an inaccessible rock, there stood the Acropolis. The village was built around it, in the shape of a horse shoe.”¹⁴ Theodoros Andreadakēs from Lithri, in turn, recollected that “at one point, they wished to extend the church, to add a narthex. That was in [1]900, [18]98, I don’t remember.” He added that “as they were digging, the pickaxe of a certain Georgios Th. Tsikoudēs [name illegible] got tangled up in a marble. He digs more carefully and takes out a statue. It was god Pan. 80 centimeters. He had curly hair and two horns on his head. His legs were sheep-like.”¹⁵ You did not need to dig deep. “Once, in the school yard, the children were digging to plant flowers, and found an inscription that

⁸ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Lithri, 79 (28.2.1961); and *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Nymphaio, 33 (18.2.1962).

⁹ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Ayasolouk, 33 (26.5.1965).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Ayasolouk, 49 (24.5.1965).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Ayasolouk, 92 (20.10.1966).

¹² *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Nymphaio, 74 (6.2.1962) and 76 (6.2.1962).

¹³ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Ayasolouk, 20 (24.5.1965) and 55 (24.5.1965), sections on “Name” and “The roads,” respectively.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Nymphaio, 122 (13.2.1962), section titled “Acropolis.”

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Lithri, 145 (24.3.1961), section titled “Information on Ruins: Statues.”

belonged to the ancient era of Sibylla,” shared Theodoros Andreadakēs.¹⁶ Some of the ancient vestiges remained in use. This was particularly true for aqueducts. In Nymphaio, for example, “some of the fountains were fed by the ancient aqueduct, the Tsaimetzit [Çay Mecit],” Titika Dēmopoulou and her brother, Nestoras Dēmopoulos recounted.¹⁷

Such was the importance and weight of ancient ruins in the village landscape that they were used as landmarks in order to locate entire village neighborhoods and other buildings. Castles, in particular, defined the horizon of villagers. In Nymphaio, many locations were defined in relation to the Acropolis. Georgios Babourakēs related that “the Upper Neighborhood started from the market and reached the foothills of the Acropolis.” Similarly, “. . . the Turkish Neighborhood was north-east of the Acropolis.” The sources of the river Boklou Tsai [Boklu Çay] were “by the byzantine Acropolis.” The little chapel of Hagios Georgios was “by the river, five hundred meters from the village and to the east of the Acropolis” while the little chapel of Hagios Athanassios was “near the Acropolis, to its west.”¹⁸ The Muslim refugees from Serres (Serez), Drama, and Kavala who settled in Ayasolouk in the wake of the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) did so “in front of the fortress, the castle of the village,” as we learn from Eustathios Katirtzēs.¹⁹

Children would even fight for ruins, imposing as these were. Georgios Babourakēs remembered that:

The Acropolis was one kilometer long and 500 [meters] wide. We called it the Castle. Within, it had more walls. The last and the middle ones could not be penetrated except from the gate, because that was its natural shape. On top, in one of the sections, to the west, across from Hagios Athanassios, there was a round rock big as a two-story house and all around there were crenelations. Among the ruins there were pepper trees and some plants that had very nice blossoms. This is where we were going as children to play, this is where we were flying our kites. This castle, we wanted it to ourselves. We wouldn't let the Turkish kids come. We were throwing stones at them and we were pushing them off.²⁰

As these accounts reveal, the narrators experienced the material remains of the past directly and enjoyed a living relationship with them. Their lives were entwined with ancient ruins and other ancient artifacts.

Such embodied experiences of archaeological space and materiality around them bring to mind approaches to landscape developed by cultural geographers, such as John Brinckerhoff Jackson, and those ascribing to “non-representational theory,” as, for example, John Wylie (2007). Jackson, to start with, put emphasis on “the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Lithri, 146 (24.3.1961), section titled “Information on Ruins: Inscriptions.”

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Nymphaio, 60–61 (20.2.1962), section on “Fountains.”

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Nymphaio, 53, 57, 70 and 76 (13.2.1962 and 6.2.1962), sections on “Neighbourhoods,” “Boklou Tsai [Boklu Çay],” “Chapels: Ai-Yorgis,” and “Chapels: Ai-Thanassis,” respectively.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Ayasolouk, 33 (26.5.1965), section on “Inhabitants.”

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Nymphaio, 123–124 (13.2.1962), section titled “Acropolis.”

vernacular landscape.” His studies focused on the indigenous and vernacular aspects of American life, that is, ordinary life in ordinary places. As Wiley (2007, 42–43) comments,

for Jackson . . . , landscape exhibits – is – a straightforward materiality and thereness, it is a palpable reality of objects and patterns that the eye can see and the hand can touch. In turn it demands to be investigated and spoken of via a limpid, clear, direct, descriptive prose.

Or, following the “performative turn” that led to “non-representational theory,” one realizes that the archaeological landscape, as narrated by the refugees in question, is one of “embodied practice” (Wiley 2007, 162). The narrators from Lithri, Ayasolouk, and Nymphaio developed a multisensory, kinesthetic experience of the vestiges of ancient worlds around them; their gaze perused antiquities, their hands touched them, they walked with their feet among ruins, and even their imagination was aroused at their sight, as seen in the claim of the Acropolis at Nymphaio by the children for their games. All these were clearly important enough to be cherished in memory once in Greece. Notably, they were remembered because – as memories created not just based on the cognitive capabilities of the refugees but primarily on embodied experiences that had involved their senses – they provided a strong, multidimensional psychosomatic link to their faraway homeland. And all these unmediated, direct “embodied practices,” they brought them to us in plain, vivid language. In their testimonies, their “vernacular archaeologies” meet “the vernacular landscape” in forming unique accounts of life in their ancestral lands.

It is clear that such a multisensory experience was the primary factor that made antiquities matter to Ottoman Greek refugees. Was there, though, any place for formal knowledge, no matter how limited, to contribute to this? Did these refugees partake in formal knowledge on the antiquities in their birthplaces, and, more importantly, did they pursue (further) formal knowledge on these ancient sites later on in their lives, following their exodus? The answer to this question is revealing of the relationship between the “vernacular landscapes” of antiquities just discussed and trauma.

Ancient ruins in Ottoman Ionia had attracted the interest of world-class archaeologists, while at least Ayasolouk (Ephesus) had already been transformed into a tourist destination in Ottoman times.²¹ Eustathios Katirtzēs’s remark is elucidating on the sources of knowledge about antiquities among Greeks in Ottoman Ionia: “those who had gone to school and would listen to the archaeologists also called it [i.e. Ayasolouk] Old Ephesus because they believed that it was the continuation of the glorious old city.”²² Therefore, one source was school or, more broadly, being able to read books and other publications, such as newspapers, and the other one was listening to archaeological authorities. In any case, the fact that Katirtzēs was aware of the authoritative approach on ancient Ephesus shows that there were – informal, one would imagine – ways for such knowledge to be disseminated also among the less educated like himself.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Ayasolouk, 70 (31.10.1966), section titled “Other buildings.”

²² *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Ayasolouk, 19 (24.5.1965), section titled “The Name.”

Potential differences in historical awareness among narrators aside, it is important to note that the testimonies of these refugees provide no hint as to their acquiring knowledge on the antiquities in their homeland after they had settled in Greece. Therefore, for this first generation of refugees, antiquities remained mostly in a self-sustained realm of memories. No cognitive drive seems to have motivated them to enrich their knowledge of ancient artifacts in their homeland, because, I would argue, antiquities from home were locked in trauma. They did not exist so much as knowledge but more as traumatic memory.

Trauma also underscored the pride that refugees took in the antiquities found in their villages. I argue that such pride was in reality an expression of the pride that they took in their home villages more broadly. Similarly, the pain experienced at the loss of such antiquities by destruction acts as a metaphor for and is accentuated by the pain experienced for the loss of their homeland by war and forced exile. In such instances of “rescue archaeology,” salvaging antiquities and refugees turns out to be equally impossible, with the former lost by actual violence, and the latter lost in trauma accentuated by the symbolic value of such violence. The incident that Ioannēs Kanakarēs from Lithri shared illustrates this point:

We had a plot of land in Alivorno. One day, as our workers were digging, they found a statue [sic] that was 3 m. high and 1 ½ meters wide. It depicted a carriage with 12 girls, over a chariot with curved wheels. It was 50 centimeters deep, looked like a pyramid, like a pediment. It was a one-block piece of marble.

The villagers took it up and placed it on the side, they couldn't take it to the village, it stood by the side of our wall. The village was two hours away.

In the first persecution [1914] that we left and came here to Kalavryta [a place in Greece], we left the statue [sic] ok.

But in 1919 when we returned we found it broken.

The Turks had thought that the statue [sic] could hide something dangerous for them, and thus they broke it to make sure.

We all cried for it, the statue [sic] was our pride. The pride of our village. We were always talking about it at home, about the statue [sic] and I remembered it too though I was little.²³

Even though Kanakarēs was a little child when the breaking of this ancient find happened, he was still able to relate to it as an adult in exile: he was both proud of this artifact and desolate at its destruction. Although there is no indication in Kanakarēs' narration that, as a small child in Asia Minor, he did not partake – at least to some extent – in the feelings regarding this find shared by the older members of his family, I contend that his pride in this and his subsequent sorrow at its destruction are largely metaphors for the pride that he took of his homeland, and for his trauma at its loss, a loss that significantly was to the Turks, that is, the ones who had broken the find.

²³ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Lithri, 141–142 (September 1955), section titled “Ancient Monuments.”

In the memories that the narrators chose to share with the Centre, antiquities also become loci of polyvocality, making room for the Muslim “other” to be seen in a positive light, and for the expression of the occult that seemed to befit the Romeic identity of the refugees more than the Hellenic one projected by the Greek state. In Nymphaio, for example, the locals believed that the hermitage of St Ioannēs Vatatzēs, no other than John III Doukas Vatatzēs Emperor of Nicaea (thirteenth century), was miraculous. This was reported by Titika Dēmopoulou and her brother, Nestoras Dēmopoulos, as well as by Georgios Babourakēs. They all said that Muslim women also shared this belief. For example, Titika Dēmopoulou and Nestoras Dēmopoulos witnessed that “today when we went back we found a vigil oil lamp lit. The Turkish women had it [the hermitage] white-washed. They told us that they don’t take their children to the doctor; they place them there and they get well.”²⁴ By supporting polyvocality, reverse “rescue archaeology” was also a tool in resisting the loss of self that trauma entailed for the refugees.

I find the following story the most eloquent example of the link between trauma and the reverse “rescue archaeologies” of the refugees. “I have an antique, an intaglio ring. It depicts goddess Aphrodite who is having a bath,” said Andreas Drimbetēs from Lithri, now in Athens. “Other compatriots have too,” he continued. “We neither sell them. Nor do we show them to anyone.”²⁵ These ancient intaglio rings were the secret bond of these refugees with the homeland that they had left behind forever. Found in the soil, they reflected – at a symbolic level – a most organic bond with the homeland, and attest to a ritual of mourning linked to its loss. Kept away from others, they were looked at in solitude, forming a mental bridge with what had been left behind in Anatolia. In this way, antiquities that refugees brought with them from Ottoman Ionia to Greece served in these peoples’ rite of passage (Van Gennepe 2016) from their old life as Ottoman subjects in Anatolia to their new one as Greek citizens across the sea. As such, they formed part of their post-Ottoman liminal identity. Related to the interviewer of the CAMS as late as 1961, namely approximately forty years after Drimbetēs’ flight from Anatolia, this story suggests that the refugees experienced their uprootedness as a form of death (Jerzak 2008) followed, once in Greece, by a long process of bereavement. In this transition, or else in this state of exile, acts of lamentation could incorporate the ancient world in material ways too.

The reverse “rescue archaeology” of George Seferis

If the Oral Tradition Archive of the CAMS provides rare material for understanding the reverse “rescue archaeologies” of ordinary Ottoman Greek refugees, literature can help us better grasp the connection between antiquities and the deep sorrow for the lost Ionian homeland as experienced by less ordinary refugees, such as George Seferis, Greek poet and Nobel Laureate, born in Smyrna in 1900 (Panagópoulos 1993).

Trauma theorists have long propounded the idea that “literature could be read as a kind of testimony to unspeakable experience” (Kennedy 2020, 47). Building on this, Sütterlin (2020, 23) argues that literary expression linked to trauma employs

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Nymphaio, 72 and 75 (20.2.1962 and 6.2.1962), sections on “Chapels: Aī-Yannis” and “Chapels: Aī-Yannis the Vatatsēs,” respectively.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Oral Tradition Archive, Lithri, 144 (28.2.1961), section titled “Information on Ruins.”

“figurative language and narrative structures that defy conventional modes of representation.” In turn, I suggest that, in literature, the wor(l)ds relating directly to the traumatic experience that remains impossible to utter could be inflected and take the shape of antiquities. Thus, antiquities from material remains of past civilizations are transformed into unconventional modes of trauma representation that embodies the wound. Out of such embodiment, the writer can carve up a most intensive affective world.

This is the affective world that George Seferis creates in his effort to speak of the trauma linked to his forced exile: embodied in the ruins, visceral, enacted, and performed (Deciu Ritivoi 2020). In his diary (Seferis 2020 [2016]), a text of profound literary qualities, Seferis takes us on a most particular journey to the ruins of Ephesus. There, haunted by death and the ghosts of the past, he will document the deep scar left by the inescapable fact of his uprootedness.

Back to Smyrna – or rather the modern Turkish city of Izmir – in October 1950, and echoing the organic bond shared by the refugees who had safeguarded the ancient intaglio rings, Seferis noted in his diary:

Familiarity kicks-off again; it is your land, it is something even more organic, more primitive; the attraction of your soil – something like the magnet of fire in freezing cold weather, like hunger and like lust. I had never felt like this before, not in this way (Seferis 2020 [2016] – 17 October 1950, 213).²⁶

Seferis also finds inspiration in the historical ports of Asia Minor: “Ships, cargo, ports, crowded cities, persecutions, exiles, refugees, and again, and again – *like the generations of fruits, the lives of mortal men,*” he writes paraphrasing Homer (*Iliad*, Book 6, lines 146–149) (Seferis 2020 [2016] – 18 October). Once in Ephesus, he will desperately search to find the ancient port: “First thing in Ephesus, the city of Lysimachus, I looked for the old port. On the map, it resembles a bottle on its side with a thin and very long neck that gives to Kaystros [Küçük Menderes river] . . .” (Seferis 2020 [2016] – 21 October 1950, 218). Seferis spent the day going around the ruins, but the ancient port continued to dominate his thoughts and feelings:

The drowned port of Ephesus has been haunting me since morning. It didn’t leave me not even in the theater with the raging silversmiths screaming: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians” (Acts 19:23), not even in the secluded charming Odeon. Port sunk in soil, buried mouth of a once-upon-a-time great city and its surrounding valley that stands dead. It has become to me the psychopompos [conveyor of souls to the underworld] of the erased ports of Asia Minor: Ayvali [Ayvalık], Halicarnassus [Bodrum], Skala [İskele], Smyrna. The Smyrna of thirty years ago is much closer to that Ephesus than present-day Izmir. *And even here*, you join the funeral feast of your very own metropolis (Seferis 2020 [2016] – 21 October 1950, 219–220).

Everything that Seferis sees in Ephesus is morbid. And then comes despair embodied in the despair of the ruins: “The despair of the ruins in Asia Minor is indescribable,” he

²⁶ This and all subsequent translations of Seferis are mine.

writes presaging those theorists discussed above who pronounced the unspeakability of trauma. He continues on the despair of the ruins. “Everything converges to make it even more cruel. The dead, to speak, need blood that is alive; this is what lacks here” (Seferis 2020 [2016] – 22 October 1950, 221).

A grieving Seferis concludes by speaking of the trauma of loss, a trauma that, in his view, cannot be healed. This wound shall remain open for generations to come, an unending process, a circle that cannot be rounded. This is an interesting point. Jean-Michel Ganteau (2020) has shown how literature can be a way to work through trauma. Similarly, Leena Kurvet-Käosaar (2020, 205) argues about the “therapeutic potential of life-writing,” that is, the literary genre employed here by Seferis. She elaborates by explaining that “creative engagements with life-writing ... can alleviate the symptoms of the post-traumatic state and facilitate the reconstruction and recreation of selfhood threatened or shattered by the experience.” Seferis, however, reveals himself not yet ready for resolution. Resistance prevails in his affective world.

The poet will masterfully dramatize this lack of resolution through an allegory that involves ancient theaters of Asia Minor, where the tragedy play ends deprived of its catharsis:

Ah, to save oneself from this convulsion of death that has been haunting me all these days.

Nowadays, it is a common thing to talk of the catastrophes of war. But it is heavier to carry within your guts the sudden annihilation of a vibrant world with its light and its shades, with its ceremonies of joy and sorrow, with its dense net of life. To still hear in your ears the squeak of its hinges at the moment of annihilation. And the bad behavior at that moment. It’s another thing this fate running in your blood, that has met now, as it was unavoidable, with the fate of contemporary ecumenical horror. Theater of Hierapolis, theater of Stratonikeia, theater of Pergamon, theater of Ephesus; you were trying to imagine the eyes spread in those theaters, how they looked. You are thinking of them now, as the sun sets and they look to you like seashells in the hands of children. In this theater, a tragedy was played for you without end, because it was not given the chance to find its catharsis. The sun sets towards the Dyo Aderphia [the mountain peaks of Çatalkaya in Turkish]; the twilight paints the sky and the sea the color of an inexhaustible love. And you are ashamed for wanting to scream that all this is a huge lie. Because you know that the circle has not made a full round; that the Furies that were unleashed in this limited and far-away land for the grand and the humble of this world are not asleep and you won’t see them, neither you nor your children, “in the depths of the world” (Seferis 2020 [2016] – 23 October 1950, 224–225).

The Furies is the personification and embodiment of Seferis’s own fury, his anger at the “bad behavior” at the moment of the Asia Minor Catastrophe and at the loss of his homeland. Able to see the catastrophe that affected him in such a personal way in context, he inscribes it in a continuum of human destruction. His remark to “the catastrophes of war” being an ordinary topic of discussion in 1950 and, above all, the note he takes of the “contemporary ecumenical horror” allude to no other than World

War II (and possibly the Holocaust). And yet, despite this implicit recognition of his anger, and the historical contextualization of the Asia Minor Catastrophe through its connection with the worldwide suffering brought about by World War II, Seferis resists. For what else could his desire “to scream” be, when nature around him becomes soaked in “the color of an inexhaustible love?” Scream, because he wants the Catastrophe to be “a huge lie,” though he knows well that it was a palpable reality. Seferis’s reverse “rescue archaeology” has not yet reached the point of salvation; the Furies in his diary are not ready to return to “the depths of the world” where their abode is. Not just this, the poet foresees that – in what we would nowadays call intergenerational trauma – they will be there to torment the generations to come (“your children”) as well.

Conclusion

In their post-Ottoman liminal chronotopes, Ottoman Greek refugees from Asia Minor employed reverse “rescue archaeologies” in their attempts to deal with trauma. In these salvation practices, it was for antiquities to rescue the refugees rather than the other way round. Antiquities served as ways to resist complete Hellenization, as delineated by the modern Greek state, making instead space for a heritage shared with Muslims and the case for a Romeic identity. The memory of embodied experiences of ancient sites and finds meant that the “vernacular rescue archaeologies” of the refugees met their “vernacular landscapes” of surviving ruins. Seen through the lens of refugee trauma, both the “vernacular archaeological landscapes” and resisting state-induced Hellenization could be interpreted as expressions of the desire to carry the old world intact into exile. Drimbetes (and others) used ancient intaglio rings from home to mourn the lost homeland in prolonged rites of passage that seem fixated in post-Ottoman liminality. Seferis’s reverse “rescue archaeology” served in expressing his unresolved anger at the Asia Minor Catastrophe. The pain that Kanakarēs experienced at the destruction of an ancient find by Turks in his native Lithri works as a metaphor for the pain he felt at the loss of his homeland. In such ways, what I have called reverse “rescue archaeology” comes to accompany refugees in forced exile through their journey of copying with trauma, and gives antiquities an unexpected afterlife.

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