



The Archaeology of Forced Migration in Greece: A Layered Pedagogy

Kostis Kourelis

How does the academic teaching of archaeology in the United States respond to the urgent questions surrounding this migration to Europe? The ad hoc urbanism of Greece's migrant camps offers a rich entry point for the study of contemporary migration and its relationship to historical landscapes. Since its foundation in 1830, modern Greece has experienced continuous episodes of forced migration, emigration, internal displacement, war, economic collapse, destruction, abandonment, and ruination. Its countryside is layered with migrant sites, artifacts, and memories. Starting in the seventeenth century, European intellectuals valorized the Greek landscape as an idyllic Arcadia that was central to Western civilization's relationship to nature. Representing universal values, Greece's antiquities stand as foils to the mutability and degeneration of modernity and form the subject of archaeology as a discipline.

How can Greek archaeology, a science devoted to giving physical testimony to an idealized West, be redeployed toward the study of modern migration? Classical archaeology was born as a modern discipline to legitimize colonialist, nationalist, and racial projects that continue to tarnish its

K. Kourelis (✉)

Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, PA, USA

© The Author(s) 2023

B. Murray et al. (eds.), *Migration, Displacement, and Higher Education*, Political Pedagogies,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-12350-4_12

reputation in the twenty-first century (Dyson 2006). In response, New Archaeology or Processual Archaeology recalibrated the discipline toward the study of nonelite populations, social forces, ecology, and less prestigious historical periods. Modern migration came into focus as processual archaeologists partnered with ethnographers to study the recent past (Sutton 1988). By the early 2000s, a mature subfield on the archaeology of the contemporary had fully emerged, with a self-conscious focus on contemporary conflict, forensics, and human rights advocacy (González Ruibal 2018).

In spite of these innovations in a diachronic and multifaceted Greek archaeology, the primacy of the classical dominates how American students encounter the modern country. Classical studies, ancient history, philosophy, philology, and art continue to be the academic gateways through which students discover Greece and pursue study-abroad opportunities. Approximately 5000 American students travel to Greece every year, making it the 14th most popular country for foreign travel (U.S. Embassy 2019). In recent calls to decolonize the syllabus, the Greek curriculum faces an additional motivation to accept migration studies. Neglecting to incorporate the material culture of migration into archaeology's concerns risks turning the study of Greece into an antiquated warehouse for racial supremacists and reactionary agendas. During the twentieth century, Greece was central to Europe's geopolitical struggles over the Eastern Question that contributed to the two Balkan Wars, the two World Wars, the Greek Civil War, the Cold War, the collapse of the Eastern bloc, and the ensuing civil wars in Yugoslavia. State funding and support from private foundations allowed archaeology to generate the social, linguistic, and geographic expertise that Western powers could use in the production of cultural capital (Davis and Vogeikoff-Brogan 2013). Spies and archaeologists came through the same circles, training, and curriculum (Heuck 2011). The U.S. government's active participation in warfare in Greece after World War II (from the experimental use of napalm during the 1946–49 civil war, to supporting the country's 1967–74 military junta) entangled academics. Understandably, American archaeologists have steered away from excavating modern sites that would highlight such complicity. The archaeology of ancient democracy safely distances Americans from recent entanglements, while promoting an ahistorical self-identification of modern America with ancient Athens.

American students have been excavating in Greece since 1881; their continued engagement in the field today raises new questions of ethics, responsibilities, and global citizenship. Archaeological engagement with contemporary migration can contextualize the politics of the twentieth century and, more importantly, introduce conflicts between present-day local and global international relations. In 2015, massive forced displacement revealed an important tension between inclusive and exclusive archaeological practices. Students who traveled to Greece to experience an idealized classical landscape encountered 60,000 refugees desperately occupying the real contemporary landscape. Carrying out fieldwork on a deserted village in the mountains of central Greece, my students at Franklin & Marshall College watched a humanitarian crisis unfold in real time. As one of the central news items of the decade, the European migration crisis had percolated to the top of the students' worldview and demanded a fundamental reconsideration of Greece's role in the American curriculum (Brenningmeyer et al. 2021).

Teachers and scholars involved with study-abroad programs in Greece responded in a variety of ways to the humanitarian crisis. Under the direction of comparative literature professor Karen Emmerich (2020), students at Princeton volunteered at the Katsikas refugee camp through European NGO Lighthouse Relief. Brown University students working with Yannis Hamilakis et al. (2020) curated material culture produced by the refugees of Moria, Lesbos, in the exhibition *Transient Matter*. Rachel Kiddey (2020) worked on illegal squats in Athens as part of the Architectures of Displacement program at Oxford University. Jan Sanders (2018), program director of Arcadia University in Greece collaborated with director of the Athens Poetry Center A. E. Stallings (2018), Bucknell University classics professor Stephanie Larson (Lavelle 2016), and many others to provide material support for the 300–500 refugees occupying an abandoned high school in Athens. When the Greek police evacuated the premises of the Fifth School Squat in September 2019, the team continued to support the migrant group in their relocation to a military base in Corinth. All curricular responses were situational by necessity. Since the Greek Army oversaw the management of refugees, no formal institutional relationship was permitted with any foreign institution. This included Greek academics and their students, as well as the Department of Social Anthropology of the University of the Aegean, whose campus was located on the Island of Lesbos. Albeit unofficial, Franklin & Marshall's response was guided by an informal network of Greek and American educators who were pushing the limits of their institutions to carry out this work.

REMOTE SENSING

In the summer of 2015, an unprecedented flight of refugees in the Mediterranean quickly became a humanitarian disaster. Some 60,000 migrants who had crossed the Aegean Sea with the hope of traveling on to Western European countries were stuck in Greece, as the Balkan states closed their borders. The Greek government then created detainment camps scattered through the Greek countryside. In the summer of 2017, the UNHCR reported the location of seventy-five such camps (fifty-six on the Greek mainland and nineteen on Aegean Islands), conveying public information that the Greek state had provided. Although heavily controlled by the Greek Army and Police, the detainment camps were visible on national and local news, social media, and satellite images. A student could triangulate spatial clues from online photographs with Google Earth's cartographic images and make visible an architectural reality that authorities on the ground were trying to hide. Undergraduate students at Franklin & Marshall's campus in Lancaster, PA, 5000 miles from Greece, could engage in a form of humanitarian watch while learning technical skills of digital mapping. In the 2000s, a "spatial turn" in pedagogy had changed the teaching of history with exemplary projects like the Holocaust Geographies Collaborative (co-founded at Middlebury College) that mapped the piecemeal development of Auschwitz (Knowles et al. 2014).

In 2015, American academics had three alternatives: to ignore it and continue with business as usual, to address it through civic engagement (fundraising, volunteering, etc.), or to redirect specific disciplinary tools toward studying the crisis. The third approach was embraced by Franklin & Marshall. The study-abroad strategies developed by the college involved two summer research programs in Greece (2016 and 2018, funded by the Hackman Summer Scholars program) and two new Art History courses: *Migration Architecture: Introduction to Spatial Analysis* (ART 175, Fall 2017) and *Syria: Spaces of Resistance* (ART 375, Spring 2018). They were accompanied by a campus-wide conversation over the curriculum of forced migration. Participating faculty developed a co-taught Forced Migration Seminar directed by Giovanna Faleschini-Lerner in International Studies (IST 200, Spring 2019). Franklin & Marshall's interdisciplinary and collaborative approach benefited from the wisdom of Maria Höhn and conversations with the Consortium on Forced Migration, Displacement, and Education at Vassar College.

An important point of reference for the archaeological fieldwork was Jason de León (2015), who witnessed a similar crossing of contemporary migrants through his Mesoamerican excavation in Mexico during his PhD research. He responded with the Undocumented Migration Project, an archaeological survey of the U.S.-Mexico border through the Sonoran Desert. We decided to develop a digital archaeology that expanded its scope to include the Cold War campus of the Voice of America, villages destroyed by Nazi atrocities, and refugee camps (Brenningmeyer et al. 2020; Kourelis 2018a). The chosen tool was “counter-forensics,” a notion informed by photographer Allan Sekula and elaborated by Thomas Keenan, director of the Human Rights Program at Bard College (Keenan 2014). Our intentional reversal of power turned the totalistic view of Google Earth and other surveillance structures into critical tools. The strategy applied by students to Greek refugee camps has been inspired by the heftier digital toolkit of Forensic Architecture, the initiative created by Eyal Weizman (2017) at Goldsmith’s, University of London, that investigates crimes against humanity through spatial modeling. In contrast to the nuanced technical applications of Forensic Architecture, the data on Greek refugee camps were free, as was all the software students used. Our much simpler Forensic Architecture taught lessons on the politics of spatial data, democracy, activism, witnessing, and media transparency.

The use of satellite images to prospect sites is a standard investigative tool in the landscape archaeology of ancient periods. The University of Pennsylvania, for example, established the Cultural Heritage and Armed Conflict Data Resources, a geo-referenced database of cultural heritage destruction between 1989 and 2016. Building on the university’s long history of archaeological fieldwork in Mesopotamia, the Penn Cultural Heritage Center focused on the wars in Iraq and Syria and used multiple strategies for research, including the exhibition that paired contemporary and ancient objects, featured sponsored preservation projects in war zones, and commissioned Syrian artist Issam Kourbaj to create sculptural installations (Kourelis 2018b). While on display over the spring, summer, and fall 2018 semesters, field trips to *Cultures in the Crossfire* at Penn enriched the classroom experience for the students at Franklin & Marshall. The public art and history studio project Monument Lab had also just assembled a robust program of public arts interventions. It included Michael Rakowitz’s *Radio Silence*, which partnered Philadelphia’s Iraqi community with its returning veterans from the war in Iraq (Farber and Lum 2019). Both released in 2018, the Penn Cultural Heritage Center and Monument Lab

showed students the interdisciplinary and creative fringes of digital practices. In the classroom, students carried out a narrower analytical exercise of data from a country they had never visited, but whose refugee coverage was filling their media space.

Remote sensing is a technical field of archaeological research that assumes spatial distance. In the study of refugees and asylum seekers, there is an additional remoteness of observational access. Under national and international laws, the migrant population of Greece can only be studied remotely. The police tightly prohibit photographing, recording, interviewing, or socializing with migrants whose legal status is in limbo. Although the chain-link fences around Greek refugee camps are porous, lawful interaction is limited. American students can access the detained populations only as volunteers in one of the many (and predominantly European) NGOs granted access to specific camps, but that comes with a minimum six-week commitment typically required by volunteering contracts. The mapping of camp installations does not directly confront individuals or capture data of a private nature. Rather, it studies the institutional infrastructure constructed by the state to house stateless populations who are not involved in constructing those installations. The mapping of such sites includes recording elements that preceded arrival of the camp, such as the natural environment (flora, fauna, streams, topography) and earlier human settlement (farm ruins, abandoned military buildings, road infrastructure, water and electrical utilities, fencing, debris, signs, legal ownership, etc.).

Within architectural studies, there is a strong tradition of collaborative documentation and cartography; it is best seen in the architectural curriculum of Manuel Herz at ETH in Zurich, which mapped the social spaces of Western Sahara's camps (Herz 2013). Such studies, however, focus on long-term camps that have become permanent, including Dadaab in Kenya, which opened in 1992 and houses over 200,000 residents (Rawlence 2016), or more recently Za'atari in Jordan, which opened in 2012 to host Syrian refugees temporarily and now houses 80,000 people. At Za'atari, the Rochester Institute of Technology, moreover, developed a special GIS that empowered residents to map their own facilities. The RefuGIS project was funded by the UNHCR and highlights the greatest potential in collaborative research (Tomaszewski 2018; and see the following chapter in this book).

The library of past images (cataloged in Google Earth) creates a diachronic view of a landscape that can be visually studied for any change. Although many of the Greek camps were placed on military property, the

reused bases had been abandoned (demilitarized after the Cold War) and were therefore not classified as sensitive. Scrolling through the time signatures of multiple images, the researcher can reconstruct the architectural evolution of all the sites. A researcher can also trust that events occurring in the present will be posted in a subsequent satellite image three to twelve months in the future. The high degree of resolution and the frequency of updated coverage provide a nuanced record of a refugee camp, as it horizontally occupies a clear and visible territory. Modeling the evolution of a contemporary refugee camp almost in real time (with a six-month lag) not only brought those contemporary events to life for the twelve students in the class, but also created a critical framework to consider how online cartographic data are collected and used in daily life. Counter-forensics takes the data that we passively consume as users while navigating in our cars or planning a holiday and turns it into activism. The digital tools were admittedly limited by how much could be learned by nonspecialized undergraduates in one semester. Those lessons could not compare with the procedures developed by grant-funded graduate programs, but provided a sufficiently critical framework and participated in the production of scholarship.

HUMANIZING THE DIGITAL

In Greece, remote sensing provided topographical clarity of camps from the sky, but elements needed to be verified through observation or what remote-sensing archaeologists call “ground truthing.” Recording a camp during its use as shelter for refugees was impossible due to the Greek government’s vigilant policing, but we discovered that the makeshift preparations created a displacement among many sites, leaving them open to investigation before, after, or in-between occupation. We tracked the forced movement of one refugee group in Thessaly and discovered that, within one year, there were four involuntary dislocations. Summer travel and fieldwork was limited by the short window of opportunity, June and July, when students could be in Greece. During our fieldwork, some sites became unoccupied, and we could inspect them in person (Kourelis 2020). Back in the classroom, the intersection of terrestrial visual data gathered in the field with aerial visual data extracted from Google Earth enabled us to test the limits of technology while producing a factual record.

The methodology of remote sensing and digital mapping lacks a fundamental engagement with the human beings who live in those spaces. We side-stepped the limitations of access by working with migrant and refugee

populations who had left the camps and moved to apartments in Athens. We collaborated with Melissa Network, a solidarity organization for migrant and refugee women, founded in 2014 to provide a voluntary communal hub. Melissa Network is housed in a townhouse near Victoria Square, in the heart of Athens' immigrant community. Incidentally, this beautiful house had been built by Russian refugees in the 1920s. Here, migrant women from multiple countries of origin support each other, take Greek and English language lessons, use psychological services, receive child care and communal meals, and attend seminars. Franklin & Marshall student Nancy Le, who had participated in the remote sensing class back in Lancaster, organized a two-day workshop on the meaning of home. With the assistance of Melissa Network's co-founder, the anthropologist Nadina Christodoulou, we invited participants to reflect on housing experiences during their long journeys. Workshop participants were born in Afghanistan, had grown up as refugees in Iran, and had travelled through Turkey, crossed the Aegean at Lesvos to be asylum-seekers in Greece. Le and I shared our personal experiences—as children of Vietnamese refugees in Los Angeles and Greek immigrants in Philadelphia, respectively—and brainstormed on the past and future of “home.” The workshop was a conversation of mutual learning that articulated in human terms what it was like to live in the refugee camps studied remotely by those who had temporarily inhabited them. The following summer, Le joined another Franklin & Marshall professor, Eric Hirsch, to study climate refugees in Peru. Hirsch also established the Environmental Migration Lab on campus, which collected narratives of migration from the substantial community of migrants in Lancaster (a city that the BBC called the refugee capital of the United States in 2017). The Environmental Migration Lab built on the ethnography of Lancaster photographer Kristin Rehder, (2017) whose project was exhibited at both Franklin & Marshall and Vassar Colleges. Finally, the conversation between European and American migration was sharpened through an artist residency program funded by the Richard C. von Hess Foundation. Franklin & Marshall hosted students, artists, and archaeologists of the Undocumented Migration Project were in residence for a week and installed *Hostile Terrain*, a multimedia exhibition at our college's Phillips Museum of Art (Cahill et al. 2019).

CONCLUSION

Mapping the contemporary refugee camps on the Greek landscape redirects our scholarly attention toward the longer Mediterranean history of forced migration across centuries. Below the walls of the Athenian Acropolis lies a series of caves that once housed enslaved African of the Ottoman period who were eventually able to gain their freedom. Known as Black Rocks, these caves did not enter the archaeological narrative when the nation-state removed any postclassical layers from the Acropolis archaeological site. Since classical archaeology removed the testimonies of African and all other forced migrants in Greek history, it is archaeologists' responsibility to recover them. In the classical period, the silver mines of Laurion produced the coinage that made Athens a global superpower. The silver was mined by enslaved individuals. Forced migration has been an inescapable part of modern Greek history since its foundation as a nation-state. After the Greek War of Independence in 1821, refugee camps were built to accommodate internal displacement; we have literary testimony of twelve such camps, but no architectural evidence. One of the camps was founded by American philhellene Samuel Howe and named Washingtonia. The camp's location has been lost, but Franklin & Marshall and Messiah Colleges have joined forces to rediscover it in future fieldschools. Between 1922 and 1929, the U.S. helped finance 2089 refugee settlements to accommodate the 1.2 million refugees from Asia Minor. World War II followed a similar path, with 18% of the Greek population internally displaced. These examples illustrate the rich, little-known heritage of migration that covers the Greek countryside and requires serious academic attention.

As in the 1820s and the 1920s, the 2020s find Greece accommodating dramatic shifts in global population once again. The mapping of contemporary camps reveals their proximity with sites of earlier histories of dislocation and displacement, long erased and forgotten. The contemporary camps will, in turn, be erased and forgotten unless documented today. The American grand tour of undergraduate students has capitalized on the world monuments of classical tourism (Athens, Delphi, Olympia, Corinth, etc.) whose internationality claims universal ownership and global heritage. Greece's more problematic global heritage should not exclude the extraordinary achievements of Western civilization but must include the ordinary sites of global suffering. Even studied remotely, the reckoning with this migration heritage promises to revitalize the archaeology of Greece as a central discipline in the consideration of contemporary crises.

FURTHER READING

- Weizman, Eyal. *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability*. New York: Zone Books. 2017.
- De León, Jason. *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2015.
- González Ruibal, Alfredo. *An Archaeology of the Contemporary Era*. London: Routledge. 2018.

WORKS CITED

- Brenningmeyer, Todd, Kostis Kourelis, and Miltiadis Katsaros. “Unsettled Settlements: Documenting Site Abandonment and Transformation in Modern Greece.” In *CAA 2017: Digital Archaeologies, Material Worlds (Past and Present). Proceedings of the 45th Annual Conference on Computer Applications and Quantitative Methods in Archaeology*, 324–335. Oxford: Archeopress. 2020.
- Brenningmeyer, Todd, Kostis Kourelis, and Miltiadis Katsaros. “Drones and Stones: Mapping Deserted Villages in Lidoriki Greece.” In *Deserted Villages: Perspectives from the Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Rebeca M. Seifried and Deborah E. Brown Stewart, 347–388. Grand Forks: The Digital Press of the University of North Dakota. 2021.
- Cahill, Lucy, Jason de León, and Michael Wells. *Hostile Terrain*, exhibition catalogue. Lancaster, Pa.: The Phillips Museum of Art. 2019.
- Davis, Jack L. and Natalia Vogeikoff-Brogan eds. *Philhellenism, Philanthropy, or Political Convenience? American Archaeology in Greece*. Princeton, NJ: The American School of Classical Studies at Athens. 2013.
- De León, Jason. *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2015.
- Dyson, Stephen L. *In Pursuit of Ancient Pasts: A History of Classical Archaeology in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2006.
- Emmerich, Karen. “Dwelling in Noncrisis (Im)possibility: Transmigrant Collective Action in Greece, 2016.” In *Languages of Resistance, Transformation, and Futurity in Mediterranean Crisis-Scapes: From Crisis to Critique*, ed. Maria Boletsi, Janna Houwen, and Liesbeth Minnaard, 27–40. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. 2020.
- Farber, Paul M. and Ken Lum eds. *Monument Lab: Creative Speculations for Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 2019.
- González Ruibal, Alfredo. *An Archaeology of the Contemporary Era*. London: Routledge. 2018.
- Hamilakis, Yannis, L. Darcy Hackley, Sherena Razek, and Ayşe Şanlı. *Transient Matter: Assemblages of Migration in the Mediterranean*. Exhibition, Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, Brown University (February 20–March 15, 2020, and online).

- Herz, Manuel. *From Camp to City: Refugee Camps of the Western Sahara*. Basel: Lars Müller. 2013.
- Heuck Allen, Susan. *Classical Spies: American Archaeologists with the OSS in World War II Greece*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press. 2011.
- Keenan, Thomas. "Counter-forensics and Photography." *Grey Room* 55: 2014. 58–77.
- Kiddey, Rachael. "Reluctant Refuge: An Activist Archaeological Approach to Alternative Refugee Shelter in Athens (Greece)." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 33 (3): 2020. 599–621.
- Knowles, Anne Kelly, Tim Cole, and Alberto Giordano. eds. *Geographies of the Holocaust*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2014.
- Kourelis, Kostis. "If Space Remotely Matters: Camped in Greece's Contingent Countryside." *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 3 (2): 2018a. 215–227. Reprinted in *The New Nomadic Age: Archaeology's of Forced and Undocumented Migration*, ed. Yannis Hamilakis, 215–226. London: Equinox. 2018.
- Kourelis, Kostis. Exhibition Review, *Cultures in the Crossfire: Stories from Syria and Iraq*, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia. *Studies in Late Antiquity* 2 (2): 2018b. 132–143.
- Kourelis, Kostis. "Sites of Refuge in a Historically Layered Landscape: Camps in Central Greece." *Change Over Time* 9 (1): 2020. 88–113.
- Lavelle, Moira. "Member Dr. Stephanie Larson Is Working to Help Our Refugee Neighbors," *American School of Classical Studies at Athens, News* (December 21, 2016).
- Rawlence, Ben. *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp*. New York: Picador. 2016.
- Rehder, Kristin V. *Where Hope Finds Home: Recognizing the Refugees of Lancaster, Pennsylvania*. Exhibition, Phillips Museum of Art, Franklin & Marshall College (February 14–April 9, 2017).
- Sanders, Jan. "Refugees and the 5th School Squat." *Arcadia Greece blog*. January 15, 2018.
- Stallings, A. E. *Like: Poems*. New York: Straus and Giroux. 2018.
- Sutton, Susan B. "What is a 'Village' in a Nation of Migrants?" *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 6 (2): 1988. 187–215.
- Tomaszewski, Brian. "I Teach Refugees to Map Their World." *The Conversation*. May 18, 2018.
- U.S. Embassy. "U.S. and Greece Mark Significant Increase in Educational Exchanges." News & Events, *U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Greece*, website. Nov. 19, 2019.
- Weizman, Eyal. *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability*. New York: Zone Books. 2017.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

