

The Koutroulou Magoula Archaeology and Archaeological Ethnography Project: An interdisciplinary field project in central Greece

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Background and significance of the project

Koutroulou Magoula is a multi-period archaeological site (a tell - artificial mound) in central Greece, which is becoming increasingly known internationally due to its astonishing preservation and its diverse and unusual material record, including its spatial organisation, as well as the pioneering archaeological and ethnographic methodologies adopted in its exploration. The main period of use of the site is the Middle Neolithic (c. 6000-5800 BCE) when it was a habitation settlement; in the Late Bronze Age (c. 1500 BCE) the site was used for burials, and an elaborate tholos (bee-hived) tomb was constructed at the top of the mound, next to the Neolithic buildings. In the 12th c. CE the site was used again for burials, and an inhumation burial of a young woman was excavated by our team.

Since 2009 the site is being explored as part of the Koutroulou Magoula Archaeology and Archaeological Ethnography interdisciplinary project, under my co-direction. The project relies on the participation of a large number of scholars and other specialists, including anthropologists, geoarchaeologists, archaeobotanists, archaeozoologists, organic residue specialists, ceramic petrographers, bioarchaeologists and physical anthropologists, soil micro-morphologists, computing application specialists, even performance artists and theatre specialists (more on this below).

Through this detailed interdisciplinary work, we have unearthed a very elaborate settlement with extremely well preserved, stone and mud brick buildings, occupied by a community which was engaged in large scale communal projects, including terracing and the construction of large, perimeter ditches around the settlement. This community also produced and used impressive material culture, including clay figurines, 450 of each have already been unearthed and studied, one of the largest such collections from the Neolithic of South Eastern Europe. They are extremely diverse in terms of technology, form, and decoration, and they often depict hybrid human-animal beings or entirely fantastic entities.

The project has the potential to rewrite the archaeology of the Balkan Neolithic, given its unique features, preservation, and interdisciplinary nature of our work.

The project's interdisciplinary approach

Archaeology today is by definition inter-disciplinary. As explained above, we rely on the expertise of scholars from a wide range of disciplines for both the excavation process and recording, as well as the analysis, presentation and publication of the material and of the site as a whole. Our specialists rely on

geology, geochemistry, soil science, botany, zoology and comparative anatomy, computing science, and physical and cultural anthropology, amongst others. Student participants will be working with all these specialists on site, and they will be learning from them as they help them carry out recording, sampling, and field study of the material, and as they carry out their own independent research projects.

Another key inter-disciplinary aspect of the project has been the ethnographic research, coordinated by a social anthropologist. The main research aim is the understanding of local perceptions and attitudes towards the past, and the exploration of alternative conceptions of materiality and temporality. In addition, our community and public archaeology practices entail the collaboration of a scholar of performing arts who has designed and executed a theatre/archaeology project. As part of this, a play inspired by the field process is written every year, and then performed (with the active participation of students) on site, next to the trenches, for the benefit of the whole team and of the various local communities.

The necessity of a larger research cohort for the project's success

Excavation and field archaeological projects in general are labour intensive endeavours. They rely on large teams of specialists and trainees, working long days over a period of a few weeks at a time. In our case, we will be working for four weeks in June 2018, carrying out excavation and recording during the day, and data-imputing and finds processing and analysis (together with seminars) during the evening. It is the presence of a large, interdisciplinary team on site, working closely and collaboratively over an intense four-week period, which can guarantee the success of the project.

The mentoring strategies and philosophy of the faculty involved

As the lead faculty member, I will be in charge of the mentoring process prior to the field season in Greece, during the excavation and field study, and in months following our return to campus. I will be meeting students regularly over the spring months to advise them on their individual projects, and brief them on our research goals and methodology. While on site, we will hold regular group seminars as well as individual supervision session with each student. It has been also my strategy to rotate all students during the field season, so that everyone could get the opportunity to experience all different processes of excavation and field research, and gain a sense of the range of skills involved. Finally, as stated above, in the field, students will be taught not just by myself but by all researchers present: all supervisors and field archaeologists, as well as the different specialists/scholars from a wide range of disciplines.

I have trained students in the field since 1996, and I welcome Brown undergraduate and graduate students to this project in 2016 for the first time. Two of the undergraduate students were funded by UTRAS. One of them, Jiaju Ma, was inspired by his participation to carry out a pioneering art project, the results of which can be currently seen as part of an exhibition at the Granoff Center.

The nature of the research environment where the research will be conducted

As part of this project, students will experience first hand an inter-disciplinary research environment, and participate actively in the generation of new data and knowledge. More specifically, through the participation in this project they will be able to:

- a) Understand the interdisciplinary nature of the archaeological process.
- b) Work in a real research environment, as opposed to a field training camp or school.
- c) Become familiar with and gain a good grounding on the various processes, methods, and skills involved in field archaeology, and archaeology in general.
- d) Benefit from the continuous and intense interaction with faculty, scholars of different disciplines, and analytical specialists, on site as well as in the field lab. The site itself, its stratigraphy, excavation and recording problems, and the samples and materials taken from it will become the primary foci of teaching and learning.
- e) Benefit from their peers, both from Brown and other universities, and learn the importance of teamwork, which is fundamental to all field archaeological projects.
- f) Understand the ethical and political problems encountered when working amongst various local communities, and reflect on the various processes of ethnographic understanding, and community and public participation.
- g) Gain an invaluable experience in studying and researching in another country and in a rural environment, which they will explore further through ethnographic research.