



IRISH INSTITUTE OF HELLENIC STUDIES AT ATHENS

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Ιρλανδικό Ινστιτούτο Ελληνικών Σπουδών στην Αθήνα

The Minoan scramble for the past

Colonial, national and indigenous archaeologies of Crete at the turn of the 20th century

Dr. Vassilis Varouhakis
(Independent researcher)

The intermingled threads of colonial politics, nationalism and archaeology can hardly be disentangled when it comes to discussing the case of the Cretan State (1898 – 1913), a semi-autonomous regime, established on the island of Crete by the “Great Powers” (Great Britain, France, Russia and Italy). This polity ended 250 years of direct Ottoman rule, on a region inhabited by both Christians – the majority – and Muslims. Some of the most significant archaeological projects began during that period, mainly directed by Western archaeological missions. Amidst this setting, a local elite of intermediaries supported Greek irredentism and demanded a nationally “pure” present, heir to an equally “pure” past. At the same time, an obedient stance towards the occupying forces and their archaeological demands secured their individual and collective interests. Both attitudes led them to clash with Western archaeologists, their Greek colleagues, and especially the local peasantry, whose behaviour towards antiquities they considered ignorant and non-patriotic.

Varouhakis’ research deals with the ways that archaeological practice affected local elites, the rest of the population, the occupiers, and the relationships amongst all the above. It is an archaeological ethnography based on data resources of an archival nature, some of them never published before. They come from personal collections, memoirs, correspondence between key figures, press articles and administrative records. In this lecture, he will focus on how the Cretan population of the countryside “consumed” the new narratives on the material past by persevering with embedded practices that questioned their validity.



Wednesday June 1st 2016

Lecture begins at 19.30

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