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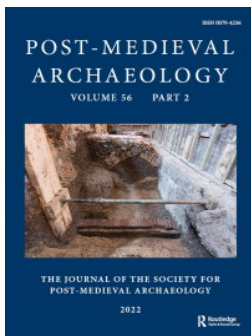
# 'Around the hut': an archaeological ethnography around the experimental construction of a shepherd's hut in Konitsa, north-west Greece

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# 'Around the hut': an archaeological ethnography around the experimental construction of a shepherd's hut in Konitsa, north-west Greece

*By* FAIDON MOUDOPOULOS-ATHANASIOU , TRAIANOS BOKAS, ANTONIJA MIKULIĆ, PETYA DIMITROVA, KRISTIYAN KARAIVANOV, ANICA TUBANOVIĆ, İREM SAYILGAN, KONSTANTINA PAPADOPOULOU *and* ANA BANU

SUMMARY: *This article reflects on the experimental building of a Vlach hut that took place in the 14th Summer School of the Balkan Border Crossings Network. The approach took the form of an archaeological ethnography and addressed a variety of subjects from ethnographic and experimental fieldworkto videography and critical heritage, all emerging from the same point: thebuilding of a shepherd's roundhut in the plain of Konitsa. From interdisciplinary methodological encounters to reflections on pastoral identities, legislation and its effects on this built pastoral heritage, as well as fieldwork reflections, while experiencing and experimenting, this article reveals potential avenues for interdisciplinary engagement in contexts such as Summer Schools.*

## INTRODUCTION: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY ACADEMIC EXPERIMENT

The Border Crossings Konitsa Summer School in Anthropology, Ethnography and Comparative Folklore of the Balkans (hereafter KSS) is an annual intensive international field-school operating in Konitsa, north-west Greece. Living up to its title, it has succeeded in bringing together academics from across the wider Balkans. Research conducted at the KSS is addressing regional issues of the south-west Balkans, dealing with border identities and liminality[1] and has succeeded in maintaining folklore studies in the forefront of the Greek academic discourse.[2] KSS accepts participants across the social sciences and the humanities, while students from all levels of higher education are welcome (see for example the diverse backgrounds of the present authors). In the course of the summer school, students follow lectures on the theory and practice of ethnographic fieldwork and conduct small-scale research, subsequently presented at an informal conference on the final day of the program.

This article presents the results of our short-term experimental fieldwork that took place at the 14th KSS (21 July - 3 August 2019). Our team generated a project around the building of a wooden shepherd's round-hut, while also investigating the heritage and identities surrounding such structures in the south-west Balkans. The experimental building of this structure occurred in the context of an academic environment and safe space, and our team focused not just on the construction of the hut, but also on the educational and experiential value of this process as a learning outcome. Our interest also included ethnographic investigations around such structures. The process was completed with the assistance of an elder Albanian-Vlach mason and his two Albanian

assistants living in Konitsa, who were invited and compensated by the KSS for their contribution. Miho, the 80-year-old elder mason had *dwelled*[3] in the former transhumant pastoral communities which utilised such constructions. Hence, our three assistants also became our interlocutors.

The aforementioned parameters created different dynamics affecting our positionality in the field. We must recognise the hierarchical agreement between the institution (KSS) and the three masons, as a superstructural layer that defined our practice. However, this agreement in itself was more than a mercantile transaction to secure the 'performance' of the three masons. Prof. Vassilis Nitsiakos, who invited the builders, is native to the region of Konitsa and of Vlach origin. He knew the masons beforehand and their agreement in assisting our team in the project came in good faith. The masons were aware of our experimental/experiential work and the subsequent videography embedded in the project. Our team, consisting of nine students from BA to PhD levels speaking five different languages and coming from many different fields of research, played no part in this 'formal' deal and that likely contributed to less hierarchical and singular relationships with the masons, as will be shown below. Consequently, even from the specific details for the arrangements of this project, we realise this endeavour goes beyond the context of a positivist experiment, as working with people from the local communities, with subaltern, transborder, identities, involves an effort to root the past in the present, following Nilsen's observations from doing experimental archaeology in a north Norwegian, multi-ethnic context.[4]

The three groups of people engaged with our project reveal three different layers of knowledge, around which this article is organised. Miho represents (within this experimental fieldwork and our theorisation of it) a 'premodern' context of transhumance in which such huts were used as flimsy dwellings in the summer and winter camps of pastoralists. This mode of life faded gradually after the imposed nation-state borders in the south-west Balkans,[5] and internal arrangements within the nation-states.[6] The second layer is that of our 'modern' practice: constructing, recording, and interpreting a wooden round-hut, in the plain of the town of Konitsa, that is otherwise used solely for cultivation, within the context of sedentary, modern development.[7] The third layer emerges from our academic positionality within the context of the fieldwork exercise. Our project was situated at a threshold where ethnography, experimental archaeology, vernacular architecture, and visual anthropology join and communicate with each other. The international character of our team and our various academic backgrounds urged the team to examine our fieldwork through a variety of angles, not necessarily overlapping–but emerging from the same point: the in situ building of

a shepherd's hut and the reflections upon our practice and its educational value. Visual anthropology focussing on the senses emerged as a tool to rethink our university (taught) background in an environment of tacit learning and knowledge articulation,[8] thus staging a self-reflexive aspect and adding a third layer to our interpretation: the 'meta-narrative' contemplation of a shepherd's hut.

The three lenses of analysis (premodern, modern, and meta-narrative) emerge as an epistemological experiment within the safe space of an academic summer school. To address all of them in relation to our work, we have divided this article into subsequent sections. The first outlines the methodology of our archaeological ethnography,[9] but we do not avoid stressing the potential limitations of our short-ranged, but intensive fieldwork conditions, which emerge as fundamental aspects of focused ethnography.[10] The second part provides a background on the history of the main ethnic groups that used to construct round huts in the region, followed by the documentation of the building process, including sketches and audio-visuals as demonstrative material. The third part consists of a self-reflexive archaeological ethnography based on our fieldwork observations while reflecting upon our positionality. We question whether the building of such traditional pastoral structures, vital aspects of the regional heritage, is facilitated by current forest legislation, and we address such issues the way we encountered them during fieldwork. Furthermore, we reflect on the sensorial aspects of our practice.

The final part presents a comparative case. It draws upon our ethnographic-oriented visit to Gyftokampos (Zagori), an open-air site of memory and meeting point of the Zagori Sarakatsans, an ethnic group of pastoralists,[11] the 'Sarakatsaniki Stani' (Sarakatsan Pen). We analyse the origins and the spatial dimensions of the Stani together with its contemporary uses, drawing comparisons with our initial hut-building fieldwork. This comparison offers insights into different temporalities and provides a fertile ground to elaborate on the differences between Nora's (1989) conceptualisations of *milieu* and *lieu de memoire*.[12] The structure of this article highlights the nature of this experimental, but also educational and experiential project.

We believe that using the hut as an analytical category while changing focal points from the structure to its surroundings, might provide insights into some questions addressed by multiple disciplines: when and how is the tacit knowledge associated with these structures lost, or becomes institutionalised, and therefore altered, divided between representation and practice? We reflect upon the potential avenues of engagement and interpretation that such an educational project entail.

## METHODOLOGY

All projects conducted in the KSS are products of short-term field visits and intensive data processing. These two aspects define the method of focused ethnography, a method complementary to conventional ethnography.[13] In the case of our project, the experimental building of a wooden shepherd's round-hut, theory and practice were intertwined. In that sense, the large number of participants and their different backgrounds became advantages as we were able to divide into sub-teams and focus on different parameters within the project, and we managed to collect a large amount of data. Intensive collection of audiovisual technologies is at the core of the methodological considerations of focused ethnography,[14] and material of the sort complemented our practice.

The main differences between conventional and focused ethnography, besides time limitations, are those apropos the positionality in the field. While in conventional ethnography, aspects of participant roles are highlighted, in focused ethnography the researcher obtains a role of quasi-field-observer.[15] Furthermore, focused ethnography requires deep background knowledge, to compensate for the lack of insider's knowledge, which is built through long data-collection processes. We were aware of these limitations and we took precautions to address them. During the four days of the hut-building process, we held daily meetings to reflect upon our positionality in the field. Although our need to finish the construction on time meant that the two experienced elder masons would have to work at a faster pace, reducing thus our involvement with the construction, we rejected the notion of the 19th-century anthropological gaze, and found ways to be involved in the process, as demonstrated below. Likewise, although we conducted background research on the Vlachs and Sarakatsani, we strived to communicate with the masons. Despite the language barriers, we conducted a semi-structured interview in Vlach, with Miho the head-mason.

During the building of the hut, we explored and recorded the sensorial aspects of our practice–acoustic environment, smells, temperature. The tools used by the builders were not just tools we looked at and created images of. We used them and connected to their rhythm as they advanced the building of the hut. The soundscapes they created is now a collective memory the group can access[16] – sounds of nature: birds during July in Konitsa, dogs guarding an agriculturally productive landscape, wind, leaves crackling under footsteps and human-generated sounds: cars passing by, axes cutting the wood.

> "Sound is always present, and our ears are always switched on. We share an acoustic environment with anyone who occupies the same indoor or outdoor space that we do".[17]

In addition to sound, we had the smellscape of freshly cut fern, a couple of days later dried out, the dust, the stuffy hot air. The smell of chemicals in the anti-mosquito sprays were constant reminders of the caveat of anachronism that our contemporary approach to a premodern technology might bring forward.

The visual aids attached to this article[18] reveal that communication with the masons, leading eventually to active participation in the hut-building process was achieved gradually. Quite a few video segments, especially at the beginning, show participants in the shade, while masons engage with the construction. However, as the hours passed by, participants joined in gradually, revealing that collaborations of this sort require time to break the barriers between gazing and acting. These methodological considerations place our project within the context of archaeological ethnography, because of its focus on ethnographic fieldwork and ethnohistory as tools to reflect on broader issues than the case-specific ethnoarchaeology of the 70s.[19] We intended to investigate the changing identities surrounding the huts in different temporalities. Instead of an ethnoarchaeological approach that would strictly document the tangible structures to understand the past, we were conscious that our interlocutors, and their trajectories in space through modernity, are not relics of a distant past, but agents of the present. Consequently, our archaeological ethnography emerges from the present and requires awareness of our positionality within the field, to explore different temporalities and modes of otherness[20] to avoid flat ethnoarchaeological observations, critically evaluated by Halstead,[21] while researching the Pindos mountains.

Our team consisted of nine people with different cultural backgrounds and academic formations expanding beyond Ingold's 'four As' (architecture, archaeology, anthropology, art),[22] also including three masons, as mentioned above. Since archaeological ethnography is a trans-disciplinary and trans-cultural 'space for engagement, dialogue, and critique, cantered upon the material traces of various times and involving researchers as well as various other participants',[23] our endeavour could be described as a test of whether such an enquiry could work in a compressed and experimental timescale, defined by the needs of focused ethnography.

Although we participated in a singular experimental event, our perception of identity differed, as well as our positionalities, having many different nationalities and backgrounds, striving to communicate with each other, as well as the masons. In the field, one could hear Greek, Albanian, Vlach, English, Bulgarian, Romanian, and Croatian. At first, the language barriers seemed to reinforce the formal narratives and boundaries–'us' versus 'the other'–but as the process unfolded, the engagement and the non-verbal communication alleviated the tension

produced by the language barrier. The fading of language, as the dominant modern means of transferring knowledge, alerted our other senses, bringing the team closer to a non-institutionalised learning environment focussing on practical and embodied knowledge, key aspects of experimental archaeology.[24] This way we established a relationship with the masons that allowed an insightful engagement with participatory observation, thus facilitating the transfer of tacit knowledge.

As previously stated, our group was interested in the end-product as well as the process. This approach questions the idea of a clear boundary between experimental archaeology as research (scientific empiricism) and education (experiential).[25] In other words, the construction of a shepherd's hut in such a modern and decontextualised locus does not take away the validity of the experiment. Several people from our nine-member team noted that the builders invited everyone to engage in the process by pointing towards tools–they shared with us simple tasks like holding the wood, cutting, hammering, and smiled in approval when we managed to it correctly. And it is through non-verbal communication such as smiles and ostension, the way the body manifests intention, that we communicate and engage with our environment as well as other people, ultimately working towards transcending borders. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge a hierarchical relationship concerning the learning process, as Miho and Pandeli were invited by the KSS to join our effort and take the lead on the construction (see above). Hence, we do recognise that in the premodern context of learning it is likely that instead of smiles, learners would have encountered different techniques in very different kinship-based modes of action.[26] Still, these differences are subject to different temporalities and forms of dwelling.

## THE VLACHS AND THE SARAKATSANI: AN OVERVIEW

We tend to classify pastoralism according to different mobility patterns, varying from nomadism to different forms of transhumance and sedentary agropastoralism.[27] These management systems readjust according to various parameters, such as the shattered resources and available ecological zones. Consequently, seasonal mobility between complementary pastures characterises both and different classifications emerge from the varying ranges of mobility, according to distance or the number of people.[28] Regarding the Pindos mountain range in Epirus, the various forms of nomadic and transhumant pastoralism are more frequently discussed, although household herding is another regional adaptation.[29]

Transhumance operates between fixed summer and winter settlements, while nomadic pastoralism requires greater residential flexibility.[30] Furthermore, the different practices are divided with regards to the presence or absence of the element of agriculture[31] and the extent that these groups are interconnected with the market. Nomadic pastoralism is almost exclusively associated with livestock-breeders who depend on the system of exchange of goods. Seasonal relocation, depending on the availability of resources define their mobility patterns, and the ways they participate in the markets depends on various socio-economic parameters.[32] Contrastingly, transhumant groups mediate between two or more fixed locations facilitating small-scale agriculture.[33] Many Vlach communities in Pindos were examples of such social organisation.[34]

The Vlachs and the Sarakatsani are two distinct ethnic groups associated predominantly with pastoralism. Their lifestyles are very much alike and often get confused even though they differ in cultural and linguistic terms.[35] Therefore, these examples seem to show that the pastoralist culture and the montane landscape exert a greater influence on human behaviour than ethnic origin: the same wooden round-hut, the case study of this article, was historically used in Epirus by both ethnic groups result of adaptations into similar highland and lowland landscapes (see Figure 1).

Although the Vlach communities in Epirus had also, to different extents, an agricultural component,[36] the aspect of transhumant pastoralism attracted the most attention and has defined their identity. The different scales of pastoral mobility, thus, emerge as a phenomenon that followed Vlachs throughout their history and heavily influenced their culture.[37] They were organised in special extended-family cooperatives which were led by the richest member and were the representative in the relations with the Ottoman authorities and the local community members.[38] Sarakatsani were groups of nomadic pastoralists that kept the mobile way of life until the middle of the 20th century. With time, the term vlach started being descriptive for livestock breeding groups and a name given to a professional category. As a result, ethnic groups were subject to further categorisations based on their locality (e.g., Sarakatsani of Zagori).[39] Gradually, the term vlach emerged as a generic, and occasionally derogatory, signifier for pastoral groups regardless of cultural differentiations in the microscale. This led to some confusion regarding identities. For example, the present-day Vlach-speaking sedentary inhabitants of Eastern Zagori call the Sarakatsani nomadic herders that used to rent their summer pastures seasonally 'Vlach', while holding for themselves the ethnolocal identification of the Zagorisian. This is a regional manifestation of a wider phenomenon.[40]

FIG. 1.

Women often appear on the sidelines of discussions regarding mobile pastoral groups. These two pictures suggest otherwise. Left: two Sarakatsani women construct a hut on the winter pastures in Thessaly (©Werner Bischof, 1946). Right: Vlach women from Syrrako in their winter camp near Preveza (©Spyros Meletzis, 1937). The original caption suggests that the women were Sarakatsan (*Sarakatsan-Frauen bei Preveza, Epirus*). However, a recent publication shed light to the Vlach identities of these women (Ziogas 2006), highlighting the evasive identities in visual representations.

The 20th century saw the drastic decline of transhumant pastoralism. The creation of the Balkan nation-states in the 19th century and the solid borders of the 20th century, brought limitations to the former mobility patterns.[41] The reliance of nation-states upon taxes, which are more easily collected from sedentary populations, and the need to minimise the power of the large agricultural estates and the strong *tselingata* (informal cooperative associations with strong internal hierarchies) pushed the mobile groups to adapt to more sedentary patterns towards agriculture and urban life.[42] In the present, the shepherd's hut rests as an identity marker for the descendants of such mobile communities, that do not survive in Greece of the 21st century.

## THE BUILDING PROCESS: *MODERN* AND *PREMODERN* ENCOUNTERS

The above-stated background helps us contextualise our research. The head-mason, Miho, was an 80-year-old Vlach Albanian builder. Born in Përmet (S. Albania), very close to Konitsa on the Albanian side of the border, he had first-hand knowledge of the taskscapes associated with such huts. In his early life, he was part of a transhumant community and wooden huts, such as the one we constructed in KSS, were built both in their summer and winter camps. He was invited from Albania to guide us through the process, as on the

Greek side of the region no one knew how to construct such a structure. Miho built his first hut when he was 12 years old and recollected the learning process as being communal and articulated through practice.

During the preparation process, we gathered the materials needed to build the hut, as instructed by Miho. First, we drove to the forest and collected 125 upright trunks of Fráxo (*Fraxinus ornus*), a tree that, according to our interlocutors, was optimal for such constructions due to its bendable nature (Figure 2). Under the shade of the forest, we cleared the branches and carried them to the field. Next, we drove to an open field and gathered 40 bouquets of fern, a vascular plant that can obtain waterproof qualities when gathered in dense layers to cover the structure (Figure 3). We cut the fern with scythes and tied the plants tightly in bundles to carry them to the field. Then we followed the orders of Miho and purchased the utensils that formed our *modern* toolkit: 1 iron ladder, 2 axes, 1 saw, 2 pliers, 1 tape measure, 1 adze, 1 scythe, 1 hammer, 1 crowbar, rope, 2 kg of iron nails and 2 kg of steel wire.

After assembling the toolkit, the hut was constructed in one day, working from early in the morning until the evening, with only a small lunch break. Miho made a hole in the ground with a metal crowbar, which signified the centre of the hut, placed a wooden pole in the hole and tied it with rope. On the other end of the 1.5 m rope, he placed a large nail and defined the perimeter of the hut (7 m$^2$) (Figure

FIG. 2.
Collecting Fráxo. Photo by Traianos Bokas



FIG. 3.
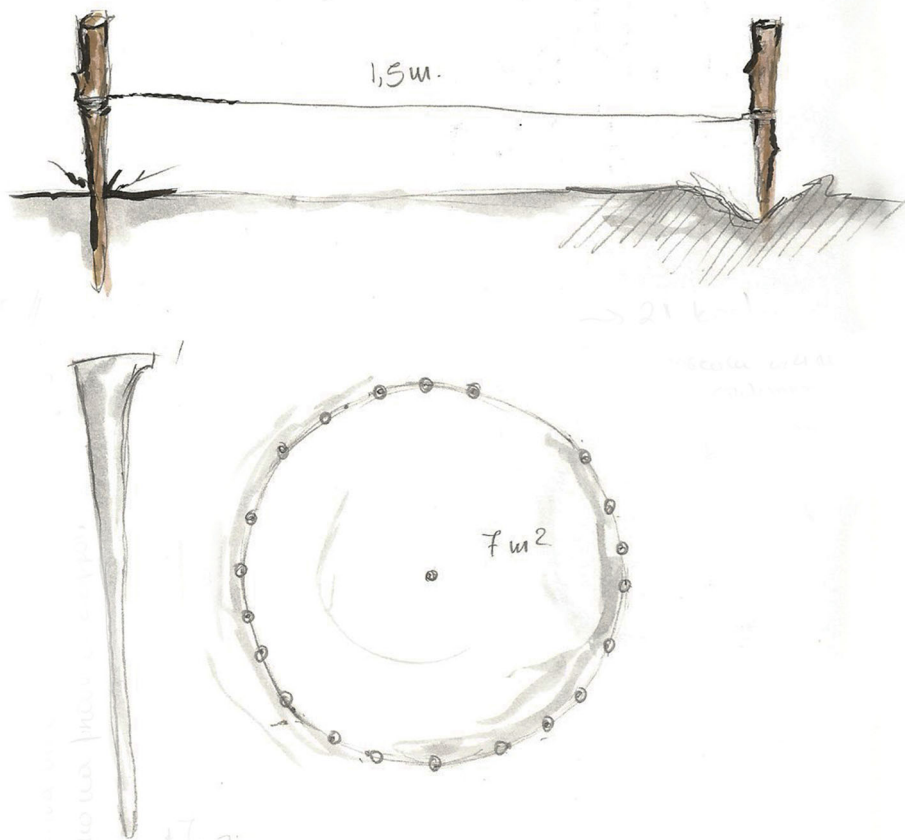Collecting Fern. Photo by Traianos Bokas

FIG. 4.
The first steps of the construction. Drawings by Traianos Bokas

4). After the establishment of this fundamental axis, our team gradually blended with the masons and joined the process. With the guidance of Miho, we placed 22 Fráxo rods around the perimeter, leaving a space for the door. The next stage was to add horizontal layers of Fráxo rods, which we nailed to the vertical ones, wiring them simultaneously to enhance the stability. Moving towards the top, we tightened the perimeter to bend the structure and create a dome. Simultaneously, Miho created a 'crown', a round wooden, crown-like, ring, with thinner Fráxo rods attached, which he placed at the top of the structure: this crown was wired to the upper ends of the horizontal Fráxo branches, securing them and stabilising the dome. By the end of this step, our structure took the shape of a grid. Afterwards, we covered the gaps with fern bundles producing a waterproof cover which we secured with branches tied around the hut. When this process was over, we entered the hut to check if light penetrated the structure and blocked the attested holes with more fern (Figs 5-7). Miho placed a cross on top of the 'crown' for good luck and protection against evil spirits.

It is interesting to compare our observations with a cultural testimony from the Greek side of the border, written in 1972, but reflecting a practice that ended in the 1960s:

"Around a tall wooden branch, they outlined a 'threshing floor' [i.e. perimeter, see above] using rope and a nail. In the periphery of this threshing floor, they placed the rods [λούρες] (…) which they tried to bend in a way to make

FIG. 5.
Further steps of the construction. Drawings by Traianos Bokas

them fit inside a crown that was held from the central wooden branch. Having made this wooden grid, women working both from the inside and outside filled the gaps ( … ) with fern and fir needles."[43]

The hut-building process and its comparison to the culturally significant testimony of Yiannis Lymberopoulos highlighted that many things distanced our practice from the *premodern*, pastoral, and mobile, context of such structures. Besides the apparent structural differentiations, our ethnographic interest turned to the *premodern* toolkit: we were eager to know what sort of apparatuses Miho used, in the context of his early life, within a community that did not possess enough nails, abundant steel wire and other such materials. Therefore, during the building process, we were alert to engage in conversations that could help articulate such differences. As Miho did not talk Greek or English (only Albanian and Vlach, and a few Greek words), the choice to conduct the discussions *in situ* was both driven by practical and methodological issues. On a practical note, it would be easier for Miho to demonstrate *premodern* alternatives. But more importantly, the whole concept of transmission of knowledge relied upon tacit knowledge, practice, and experience.[44] In that sense, the language barrier offered an advantage, as it necessarily moved the team beyond taught education, as formalised within the *modern* framework of institutionalised learning. When we asked Miho how they tied the branches in the 'old days', without wire

and nails, rather than explaining, he walked to a nearby Lipanthiá (*Tilia alba*) and cut a branch. He removed the fresh bark, twisted it, and used it to tie the trunks of Fráxo together. He argued that using this bark, one would not need '*rama*' (i.e. steel wire in Greek) and made a pun that 'we would need no Rama nor Berisha', expressing his views on the current and former Albanian Prime Ministers. With a mixture of gestures and few Greek words, he made it clear that this knot would hold up to six months. This amount of time was the maximum needed, as huts were in operation only for half a year in the context of transhumant/nomadic pastoral mobility cycles. Now that this practice has faded, no-one in the region of Konitsa builds this type of structure any longer-- that is why Miho's commute from the Albanian side of the border was necessary.[45]

## REFLECTIONS ON OUR PRACTICE AND FOREST LEGISLATION

The above-stated juxtapositions between our practice and the *premodern* context of these structures led us to realise that the *modern* industrial tools we used to speed up and facilitate the process were radically different from their premodern counterparts emerging from the woodlands within a framework of dwelling.[46] This shift toward ready-made products, made us rethink our practice within the framework of modern forest legislation. In present-day Greece, the protection of the forests is an obligation of the State and

FIG. 6.
Through the process. Photo by Ana Banu



FIG. 7.
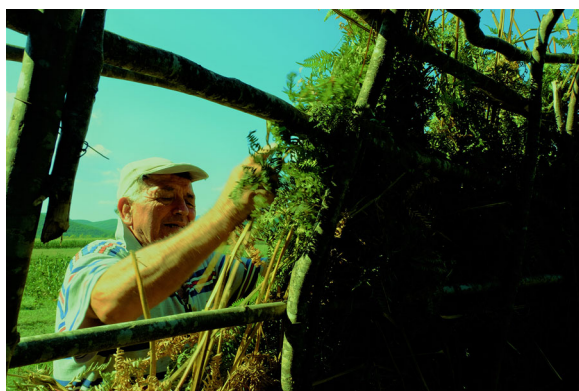Adding the layers of fern. Photo by Traianos Bokas

the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change. According to the legislation, it is illegal to cut down trees and shrubs without permission, authorisation, or demarcation of the limits of the area.[47] When foresters discover illegal activities, they confiscate the tools and the wood that has already been cut, auctioning the products to the highest bidder.

The construction of the hut required Fráxo branches and fern, materials collected from the forest. Of these materials, Fráxo is a rare and protected species, while its cutting is prohibited in the region (interview with Anonymised Forester).[48] Because of its plastic abilities, people tend to cut it while young, destabilising its reproduction. However, plasticity is the very quality it made it preferable for hut-building throughout history. This antithesis highlighted one of the paradoxes of modernity: following the letter of the law, the hut–a predominant signifier of cultural heritage practices and tacit knowledge endemic to the region–does not have a place in 21st century Konitsa, since the raw materials for its construction are under strict legal protection. This reality is in opposition to the cultural value of these huts–and the heritage of transhumant pastoralists they evoke–that is a vital component of the regional tradition. Such disassociation between *premodern* cultural values and modernity is many times related to law and modernisation-related practices and the shift from communal to state management of resources.[49]

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL ETHNOGRAPHY, MEMORY, AND IDENTITY

Archaeological ethnography covers also a politically loaded space, calling for interventions centred on materiality and temporality.[50] In this context, the observation on forest legislation, as well as the differences in the toolkits presented above, act as signifiers of change changing the hut-building process macroscopically, but also the affecting the practice of individuals, such as Miho. We believe that our practice touches upon the theory of archaeological ethnography, as we revealed that the context of these structures is affected by sociohistorical factors and legislative parameters. Below we present a manifestation of how the materiality of such huts is influenced by sociopolitical factors, and how the construction process acted as a facilitator for the emergence of such discussions.

A central aspect of our fieldwork was the lengthy semi-structured discussion between our colleague Costas Hagitegas and Miho, which took place in the Vlach (i.e. Aromanian) language. The rest of the team members withdrew from the interview scene to respect the privacy of a discussion taking place in the shared subaltern language of the two individuals discussing the fate of the transborder Vlach transhumant and transborder communities of Epirus. When borders between Greece and Albania closed in 1940, many Greek Vlachs who were spending winter on the lowland pastures of Korçë in S. Albania were stuck on the Albanian side of the border. One such person was Thodorakis Gkertsos, from the village Kefalovryso on the Greek side of Pogoni. During Hoxha's communist regime, he was held in prison for many years. His story was known to our discussant Costas, due to narratives of Vlach kinship relationships. Coincidentally, our interlocutor was held prisoner of the regime for some time together with Thodorakis, a reminder that Pogoni was divided in two by the arbitrary border demarcation.[51]

Hoxha's regime expropriated large transhumant flocks and imprisoned many Vlach members of such transhumant communities. On the larger scale, it transformed the Albanian mobile societies into more sedentary lifestyles, a trend followed in Greece through different pathways of modernisation.[52] As mentioned earlier, Miho placed a wooden cross on the top of our hut in Konitsa, for protection against evil spirits. When we asked why he placed the cross, he added that he always puts a cross on top because he is Christian, hence the cross is a visual manifestation of his identity. Emerging from a fugitive background, as Hoxha's regime banned all religions while living now in a predominantly Muslim country, the cross and Orthodoxy are the symbolic remnants of a premodern mobile way of life in the 21st century: 'I am Vlach Albanian and I am not Muslim, I am Orthodox', he stated. His practice could be perceived as an act of counter-memory in the case of Albania. However, in the Greek context, such actions are self-explanatory and have different connotations: a cross hanging within the region of Konitsa, a sea of Orthodoxy with extreme-right political irredentist aspirations for the incorporation of S. Albania into the Greek Nation-State.[53] That is a pristine example of how the historical conditions of the second half of the 20th century altered and fragmented pastoral and ethnic identities, in a previously mobile and fluid landscape.

Despite living a sedentary life nowadays, Miho still builds huts for his animals. His assistants in building the KSS hut were two Albanian masons Pandeli and his son Niko, living permanently in Konitsa, Greece. They knew each other from Albania, but Pandeli and his family emigrated permanently to Greece after 1991. Pandeli had never built such a hut before. Another asset of the hut project: the hut became a multi-referent, due to the many identities that surrounded it: a *point de départ* for all the considerations presented above, a melting pot to test different methodologies and learn through practice around the hut.

## OUR PRACTICE AND VIDEOGRAPHY

Whereas with note-taking, observers may keep their distance, with sensorial recording, one must do the dance between getting closer and staying away. Writing the article, the interaction with the audio and video ethnographic notes made the recounting more vivid. However, these recordings are not simply a more textured and reliable way of taking notes. We would like to suggest that videography, as well as

FIG. 8.
The stable camera, which was constantly recording the process, taken from the inside of the hut. This viewpoint partially challenges the notion of privileged (immovable) camera, as documentation occurred from multiple, different angles. Photo by Ana Banu

photography, are 'material and mnemonic traces of the things, events, instances, and sensorial occasions experienced. They are traces, not in the sense of an imprint but in the sense of a material remnant, of a relic'.[54] Adding this layer of video, we sought to give a sense of being present, *a posteriori*.

That is why we included video-ethnography in our project, aiming, at first, to achieve a slightly more engaging re-telling of the process, assisting also in post-fieldwork research. Reviewing the movements and listening to the sounds a second time, played a vital role in accessing the past and analysing the events using a more reliable form of remembering than our memories. Being present at the site scene with our mechanical eyes, as a filmmaker and theoretician Dziga Vertov called the camera back in the 1920s, we began capturing an extra, and separate, layer of memory, while focusing on other aspects of acting during fieldwork. The agency invested in capturing the building process with all our senses activated a sort of meta-awareness of the situation. The main camera was situated on a tripod, and continuous awareness of its location was needed, so as not to block its vision, as participants moved around the hut site. We used a secondary, compact, camera to capture details of the process, beyond the authoritative gaze of the main camera. Our limited timeframe and resources did not allow for a wider variety of lenses,

which would have been ideal for optimal filming. We also used a microphone to record spontaneous sounds occurring within our site, a difficult task, as we had to move closer to the action, and have the microphone up close.

From an ethnographic perspective, angles must relate to the person filming at a particular point in time, or else the production of the ethnographic film becomes altered and fictionalised. Hence, we kept asking ourselves about the 'right' distance. Do we join in and influence the builder's rhythm, do we get closer to capture our images? Do we show the camera? Is it peculiar to just sit back and observe the locals work–the anthropological gaze of the 19th century? Although we do not claim to have discovered the right formula, we rejected the idea of a cinematographic 'privileged camera', as outlined below.[55] (Figure 8)

In the two video cuts we attach to this article, 'KSS Hut The Process'[56] and 'KSS Hut The Tools',[57] the acoustic environment is also made of many different layers of sound. The ones that demanded our attention were the human-produced sounds, 'sources of sound-induced by human activities are classified as anthrophonic'.[58] We hear the languages being spoken even though a thorough understanding of what is being said does not happen. We hear human-generated amplified sounds in the form of singing and, of course, we hear the tools at

FIG. 9.
A view of the Sarakatsaniki Stani. Photo by Faidon Moudopoulos-Athanasiou

work, the wind passing through vegetation, dogs barking in the distance. It is interesting to remark that in an urban setting the sounds of tools would merely be a background intrusive noise, whereas in our scenario these sounds are acceptable and sought after. Aside from the technicalities of the process, we are offered a sort of philosophical gaze into a time capsule. If sounds play an emotional role, the moving images, give a sense of the *mise en scène* of the building process. The size of the operation, the number of people involved, the movement of bodies in space. Most of all, they offer clear information about the status of the building process–from a blueprint, a skeleton in the beginning,[59] to a fully cloaked structure ready to offer shelter from the sun.[60]

In observing the sensorially-generated body memories–from the movement around the construction site, to the rhythms of the tools, the language interactions with its monosyllabic flow–our actions became part of a *meta-narrative*, adding a third layer to the discussion of the *premodern* and *modern* context of the shepherd's hut. If the national borders bred rigidity and brought oblivion to a handful of *premodern* pastoral subaltern communities, then performing counter-memory breeds fluidity and lucidity.[61]

Moreover, visual anthropology highlights the importance of moving inside the research environment.[62] Our recordings illustrate that as researchers, we stood static at the beginning of the process. Only gradually we moved and engaged, shifting our positionality from a timid participatory observation to a more confident engagement: these steps are necessary to move beyond taught learning environments, into a context where knowledge is articulated through practice. And as indicated also in the video-timeline, this process of engagement requires time.

## OBSERVING THE OPEN-AIR INSTALLATION OF THE SARAKATSAN PEN (SARAKATSANIKI STANI)

As a comparison to what we have been observing while building our hut, we visited the open-air installation of Sarakatsaniki Stani (the pen of the Sarakatsani, hereafter Stani), at Gyftokampos in the neighbouring region of Zagori. The site acts as an open-air museum revealing aspects of the traditional pastoral life of the Sarakatsani nomads. It contains several wooden round-huts, pens and other livestock

FIG. 10.
A glimpse into the structures of the Stani: cement floor,
iron mesh and metal frames, followed by the necessary
sign of the authoritative museum: 'Do Not Touch'.
Photo by Faidon Moudopoulos-Athanasiou

structures that portray the traditional way of life of the Sarakatsani.

Coincidentally, we visited the site upon preparations for the annual meeting of the Sarakatsani. We met with one of the few people who constructed the site back in 1994. He guided us through the structures and offered us a timeline of the Stani and the concepts behind its creation. We discussed further issues, such as the ownership of the area, the importance of the "museum" for him and the significance of the meeting point. Some reflections are presented in the following paragraphs.

This installation, together with the rest of the structures (a basic café/visitor space, barbeque facilities and a large gathering point) were built simultaneously and funded by the 'Brotherhood of the Sarakatsani' (hereafter Brotherhood), a cultural association celebrating the common roots of the Sarakatsans throughout Epirus–therefore consolidating a regional pastoral identity, that has become sedentary at large. In that sense, the renegotiation of the Sarakatsan identity, in an urbanised world is not an exception to the norm.[63]

The Stani is divided by a small torrent in two parts. The one side belonged to the community of Skamneli, a neighbouring village of Vlach heritage, while the other was public forest land. According to one of our interlocutors in the site, the Brotherhood managed to secure this land through intensive negotiations with Skamneli, the Municipality and the relevant state authorities. Gyftokampos today belongs to the Brotherhood and houses representations of all the fundamental structures evoking the Sarakatsan identity.

To illustrate the life of the Sarakatsani, the installation displays several huts, pens, and other structures, arranged spatially in a dysfunctional array that promotes observation rather than camp functionality and historical accuracy (Figure 9). They do not serve the initial purpose of seasonal flimsy settlements but are designed as museum exhibits, inserting the concept of monumentality, a *lieu de memoire*,[64] transforming the mobile and to a large extent temporally perishable material culture of the Sarakatsani into an authoritative discourse, embedded in the national narrative. Such approaches address the monumental, national, time[65] and in this context, Sarakatsani are descendants of the ancient Dorians, one of the "purest" Greeks.[66]

This material transformation of a culture relying on perishable materials to a site of memory required more enduring materials than the historical constructions, but also than our *modern toolkit*, used in the KKS experiment. For example, the huts at the Stani are covered with reeds instead of fern or other local materials, even though reeds were abundant, and therefore used, in the lowland winter quarters. They also opted for metal frames rather than wooden branches, while securing the interior of the dome with wired mesh to keep the thatching intact. For the additional stability and longevity of the construction, the floors were constructed with concrete (Figure 10). Their interior is decorated with everyday objects such as pottery, wooden furniture, and machines for producing food, static reminders of the items Sarakatsani carried from their winter to the summer pastures. Monumentality in this context is achieved by switching the fundamental concept of the functionality of the huts. It is no longer a valuable tool for survival, but a demonstrative apparatus to manifest the identity of the Sarakatsans in a sedentary, and therefore non-perishable, world.

The large gathering point includes a central fireplace, surrounded by a horseshoe-shaped corridor with many large wooden tables placed next to each other (Figure 11). It is dedicated to the official, yearly commemorated, feasting-oriented gatherings, during the first weekend of August. The wood for the tables and the rest of the construction was donated by the timber-cutting association of Vovousa, a Vlach-speaking village of Zagori with great tradition in forestry-related activities. According to our interlocutor, the Stani attracted far more interest in the 1990s, when the area was built, and individual Sarakatsans invested in the area through donations and voluntary work. Nowadays, they meet only at the annual gathering in August, while the space is open for tourists throughout the year. As a gathering point, it is used to perform the collective identity of the Sarakatsans, through

FIG. 11.
The performance stage in Gyftokampos. Photo by Petya Dimitrova

music, dancing, and communal eating. Each year the Brotherhood invites notable people and members of the local administrative units to attend, giving thus a formal character to the weekend.

As a result, Stani in Gyftokampos has produced new meanings and new identities. As Appadurai has argued,[67] locality-producing activities are not only context-driven but also context-generative. We examined the establishment of Stani as both. According to our Sarakatsan interlocutor, and builder of the huts, the area was used until 1985 as the summer habitation of a group of Sarakatsan mobile pastoralists. This primary status evokes the *premodern* practice of nomadic pastoralism. In this context, the Sarakatsani do not own the land and they pay rent to use the summer pastures of the villages of Zagori.[68] The huts and other structures are built of perishable materials, with the assistance of the whole kin, while the knowledge is transmitted transgenerationally. The seasonal habitation degrades during winter and is constructed again the next season.

It could be argued that the present status of the Stani operates in contrast to all the values that permeated the Sarakatsani socioeconomic models in the historical *longue durée*. To perform the contemporary Sarakatsani identity, the Brotherhood owns the land, a fact that was never the case in the pre- and early-

nation-state historical context. Furthermore, to manifest the identity, through the tangible symbol of the hut, they have opted for permanent materials, contrasting again sharply with the perishability of the former Sarakatsani built environment, as analysed above. Finally, the annual gathering and the related festivities have a very different structure than the dominant and competitive kinship networks of the former *tselingato*. The Brotherhood is a society embracing all Sarakatsans without social differentiation.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

*Premodern* practices such as the building of our shepherd's hut in Konitsa no longer serve their initial functional purposes, in an urbanised and sedentised world. However, contemporary experimental, or other, recreations under the framework of an archaeological ethnography facilitates a dialogue with those traditions, the people who practised them, and their reflection in the present, while allowing for the exploration of other-than-institutionalised forms of learning and knowing.

In this project, four generations of people (18 to 80 years old) reenacted the building of an object that used to be at the centre of the transhumant mode of

life, in a modern field in the plain of Konitsa designed to adapt into intensive fruit cultivation. Without the ethnographic setting within the KSS framework, which allowed us to recreate materialities belonging to mobile and to an extent *premodern* context and without 80-year-old Albanian-Vlach, Miho, the experienced hut builder who had emersed in the cultural *milieu* of this way of life, our hut would have been standing as a floating signifier of sorts, in the middle of the (intensively cultivated) Konitsa plain. This testimony, if nothing else, explains the existence of a shepherd's hut in the middle of a sea of present-day agriculturalists.

However, the multi-temporal considerations, the blend of different backgrounds engaged in fieldwork, and the visit to the Stani allow for broader remarks. While for Miho the process implied the performance of his identity, for one of our team members it triggered childhood memories from similar structures in the Croatian countryside.[69] Hence, our practice emerged as an environment where collective and personal identities, as well as notions of alterity, fused, providing different pathways of interpretation within a multicultural, trans-Balkan and decolonial context.

Miho, an individual belonging to the subaltern group of the Orthodox Albanian-Vlachs, commuted daily to Konitsa, on the Greek side of the border, to assist us in the building of our hut. The set of symbols he attached to the hut, like the wooden cross on top of the structure, were articulated in his practice as performances of counter-memory, manifestations of a subaltern identity in the predominantly Muslim, formerly atheist, Albania. In the locality of Konitsa, these manifestations blend with the dominant, Orthodox Greek discourse.

However, within our site, these observations rest at the level of the individual, and the ability of our team to reflect upon the issue of identities in multi-temporal and trans-local contexts. On the contrary, the relevant symbols in the Stani represent the transformation of a former subaltern local identity,[70] to a dominant *lieu de memoire* with regards to the national narrative. In that sense, these two representations of a shepherds' hut, although distant from the "authentic" setting, contrast. The main differences lie in the production of knowledge and the purpose of the construction. We operated in an environment of archaeological ethnography, in the context of an academic summer school, while we aimed to participate in the articulation of knowledge within the field. In that sense, our hut became the tangible marker, around which we sought to understand the liquid nature of identities in different temporal and local dimensions. The Stani, on the other hand, as hinted by the concept of its creation and the materials used, aspired to freeze the Sarakatsani pastoral identity for the future. However, both representations, despite the differences, point to one end, which is always present.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## NOTES

[1] i.e. Dalkavoukis 2019; Manos 2016: 5-6; Nitsiakos 2010.

[2] Herzfeld 2016: 100.

[3] *sensu* Ingold 1993.

[4] Nilsen 2011.

[5] cf. Green 2005.

[6] For the Greek Sarakatsani nomad pastoralists see Campbell 1964, Kavvadias 1979, and Dalkavoukis 2005; for the Greek Vlach transhumant pastoralists see Nitsiakos 1985; for the precarious conditions of Vlachs/Armani communities during the Socialist Republic of Albania, see Kostelancik 1996.

[7] For the quest to modernise the economy of the NW Greek frontier, see Pusceddu 2012.

[8] Ingold 2014: 109 ff.

[9] After Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009.

[10] Knoblauch 2005; Wall 2016; for the context of the KSS, see Dalkavoukis 2019: 80-81)

[11] Campbell 1964, Dalkavoukis 2005; 2011.

[12] Nora 1989.

[13] Knoblauch 2005.

[14] Knoblauch 2005.

[15] Knoblauch 2005.

[16] Banu 2020a; b.

[17] Brown et al. 2016: 3.

[18] Banu 2020a; b.

[19] Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009: 65.

[20] Hamilakis 2016.

[21] Halstead 1990. Of course, Halstead was not doing archaeological ethnography; rather, he exposed the limitations of past ethnoarchaeological interpretations in the Pindos.

[22] Ingold 2013, 10.

[23] Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009, 73.

[24] Foulds 2013, Groat and Lester 2021, Townend 2007.

[25] cf. Paardekooper 2019.

[26] See the folkloric extract from Lymberopoulos 1972 below)

[27] Blench 2001, 11.

[28] Arnold and Greenfield 2006, 7-8

[29] Halstead 1998, Nitsiakos 2015.

[30] Chang 1993, 687.

[31] Arnold and Greenfield 2006, 8.

[32] For the Sarakatsani of Zagori see Campbell 1964 and Dalkavoukis 2005; 2011.

[33] Chang 1993, 709; Arnold and Greenfield 2006, 7.

[34] cf. Nitsiakos 1985.

[35] Ninić 1989, 113.

[36] Dasoulas 2012; 2019.

[37] Ninić 1989, 154.

[38] Gkoltsiou 2011, 31-32.

[39] See Dalkavoukis 2011.

[40] See Clogg 2002, 166-167)

[41] For the case of the neighbouring Pogoni region, see Green 2005.

[42] For the Greek case see Campbell 1964; Dalkavoukis 2005; Nitsiakos 1985.

[43] Lymberopoulos 1972, 79.

[44] Ingold, 2013, 109.

[45] For some political differentiations between the two sides of the border, which affected this practice, and explain this 'paradox', see Nitsiakos 2010.

[46] *sensu* Ingold 1993.

[47] Law N.4280

[48] For the needs of our experimental and educational activity, the KSS obtained an exceptional permit from the Konitsa Forestry Agency.

[49] Green 1998; Moudopoulos-Athanasiou 2020a ; Saratsi 2009.

[50] Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009, 67.

[51] cf. Green 2005; Nitsiakos 2010.

[52] cf. Nitsiakos 2010.

[53] For the contemporary irredentist discourse in Konitsa, see Moudopoulos-Athanasiou 2020b.

[54] Carabott, et al. 2015, 5.

[55] McDogall 2014, 1.

[56] Banu 2020a; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWsgbehArq4&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR3flfOjBkoHLoqII6YPFShszE_T51O1F_OebQNRUvD8nDCVfK2roha0jMw

[57] Banu 2020b; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWsgbehArq4&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR3flfOjBkoHLoqII6YPFShszE_T51O1F_OebQNRUvD8nDCVfK2roha0jMw

[58] Brown et al. 2016.

[59] Banu 2020a, 1:00 - 2:50.

[60] Banu 2020a, after 5:00.

[61] McDogall 2014

[62] Pink 2011

[63] For an interesting discussion with emphasis on the mountainous communities, see Potiropoulos 2009.

[64] After Nora 1989.

[65] *sensu* Herzfeld 1991.

[66] See for example Høeg 1925.

[67] Appadurai 1996, 195.

[68] cf. Campbell 1964

[69] This project had the power to breech the language barriers and make people of various Balkan linguistic and national backgrounds communicate and comprehend each other. That is the message we conveyed to the Greek national television, on a live broadcast from the field, on the 30th of July 2019. 2:37:00 ff on the video https://webtv.ert.gr/ert1/kalokerini-enimerosi/30iol2019-kalokairini-enimerosi/?fbclid=IwAR3aJIfM-AgqjcyLiSg80ePDnEMCIe7y5qKIZ-cGQX5CfIXYe0wQlnb8D-4 (Accessed: 11.01.2020).

[70] For the marginal position of the Sarakatsani in Zagori see Dalkavoukis 2005; 2011.

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## SUMMARY IN GERMAN, ITALIAN, SPANISH AND FRENCH

*FRENCH*

**Ethnographie archéologique relative à la construction expérimentale d'une hutte de berger à Konitsa (nord-ouest de la Grèce)**
RESUME: Cet article traite de la construction expérimentale d'une hutte Vlach lors de la 14ème Ecole d'Été du Réseau Frontalier des Balkans (the Balkan Border Crossings Network). L'approche a pris la forme d'une ethnographie archéologique et adresse une série de sujets allant du chantier ethnographique et expérimental à des vidéos et au patrimoine critique, tous émanant d'un même point : la construction d'une hutte ronde de berger dans la plaine de Konitsa. De rencontres méthodologiques interdisciplinaires à des réflexions sur le chantier via l'expérimentation, ainsi qu'à des réflexions sur les identités pastorales, sur la législation et sur ses effets sur le patrimoine pastoral bâti, cet article révèle le champ des possibles d'un engagement interdisciplinaire dans des contextes tels que les Ecoles d'été.

*GERMAN*

**„Rund um die Hütte": Eine ethno-archäologische Untersuchung über den experimentellen Bau einer Schäferhütte in Konitsa (NW-Griechenland)**

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG: Dieser Artikel behandelt den experimentellen Bau einer "Vlach-Hütte", der im Rahmen der 14. Sommerschule des Balkan Border Crossings Network stattfand. Es handelt sich dabei um einen ethno-archäologischen Feldversuch, bei dem eine Vielzahl von Themen genauer untersucht wurde. Im Fokus standen dabei ethnographische und experimentelle Feldforschungen, Videographie und der kritische Umgang mit Kulturerbe. Im Artikel werden außerdem interdisziplinäre, methodische Untersuchungen bis über Ideen über pastorale Identitäten, Gesetze und ihre Auswirkungen auf gebautes, pastorales Kulturerbe bin hin zu Feldforschungsreflexionen dargestellt. Desweiteren werden mögliche Aktivitäten für interdisziplinäres Engagement in Kontexten wie Summer Schools aufgezeigt.

*ITALIAN*

**RIASSUNTO. 'Intorno alla capanna': etnografia archeologica sulla costruzione sperimentale di una capanna da pastori a Konitsa (Grecia nordoccidentale)**
Questo articolo pone una riflessione sulla costruzione sperimentale di una capanna valacca avvenuta durante la XIV Summer School 'Balkan Border Crossings Network'. L'approccio è stato di etnografia archeologica e ha abbracciato una varietà di temi, dal

lavoro sul campo di tipo etnografico e sperimentale, alla documentazione video e al patrimonio cosiddetto critico, il tutto a partire dallo stesso elemento: la costruzione di una capanna rotonda da pastori nella piana di Konitsa. Questo articolo rivela le vaste potenzialità di impegno interdisciplinare in seno alle Summer Schools, a partire da un approccio metodologico interdisciplinare, fino alle considerazioni sulle identità del mondo pastorale, sulla legislazione e i suoi effetti su questa eredità costruttiva, unitamente alla riflessione inerente il lavoro sul campo mentre veniva portata avanti la sperimentazione.

*SPANISH*

**'Alrededor de la cabaña': una etnografía arqueológica en torno a la construcción experimental de una cabaña de pastor en Konitsa (NO de Grecia)**

RESUMEN: Este artículo reflexiona sobre la construcción experimental de una cabaña eregida durante la 14ª Escuela de Verano de la Balkan Border Crossings Network. Se adoptó un estudio desde la etnografía arqueológica y hubo varios temas a considerar, desde el trabajo de campo etnográfico y experimental hasta la videografía y el patrimonio en peligro, todos ellos centrados en la construcción de una cabaña redonda de pastores en la llanura de Konitsa. Este artículo revela las posibles vías disponibles para el estudio interdisciplinario en reuniones tales como las Escuelas de Verano, entre las que hay que destacar los encuentros metodológicos interdisciplinarios, la discusión sobre identidades pastorales, la legislación y sus efectos en este patrimonio pastoral construido, así como las reflexiones sobre el trabajo de campo.

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