

# Linking the Archaeological Past and Agricultural Present: Tourism, Heritage, and Olive Production in the Zakros Valley, Crete

Dr. Rebecca M. Seifried (IMS–FORTH)  
rmseifried@ims.forth.gr, rmseifried@gmail.com

Dr. Ioanna Antoniadou

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[Slide 1] This talk presents the results of ethnographic research carried out in July 2018 in Zakros, a village in eastern Crete. The research is part of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie project “European Frontiers: Rural Spaces and Expanding States” (EUROFRONT). The research this summer would not have been possible without Dr. Ioanna Antoniadou’s ethnographic expertise.

# Introduction

- **Research question:** how do large-scale political and economic changes (globalization, capitalism) affect rural landscapes?
- **Case study:** Zakros valley, eastern Crete
- **Method:** ethnographic interviews

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[Slide 2] The overarching goal of the EUROFRONT project is to understand how large-scale political and economic changes (such as globalization and capitalism) affect rural landscapes. The project is focusing on two case studies: one in southern Croatia, and another in the valley around Zakros. We are conducting interviews with local residents to find out more about their experience of living in places far removed from urban centers.

# Introduction

## Location of Zakros



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[Slide 3] Zakros is a village with about 600 residents, located on the far eastern edge of Crete. The nearest city is Sitia, about an hour's drive away.



[Slide 4] This is an aerial view of the valley around Zakros. The area is best known for the archaeological site of Kato Zakros, a Minoan palace site that was discovered in the early 20th century. Since the 1960s, many of the people who used to live in villages around the area (marked with black-and-white dots) have either emigrated or moved to Zakros.

# Introduction

## Initial goal...

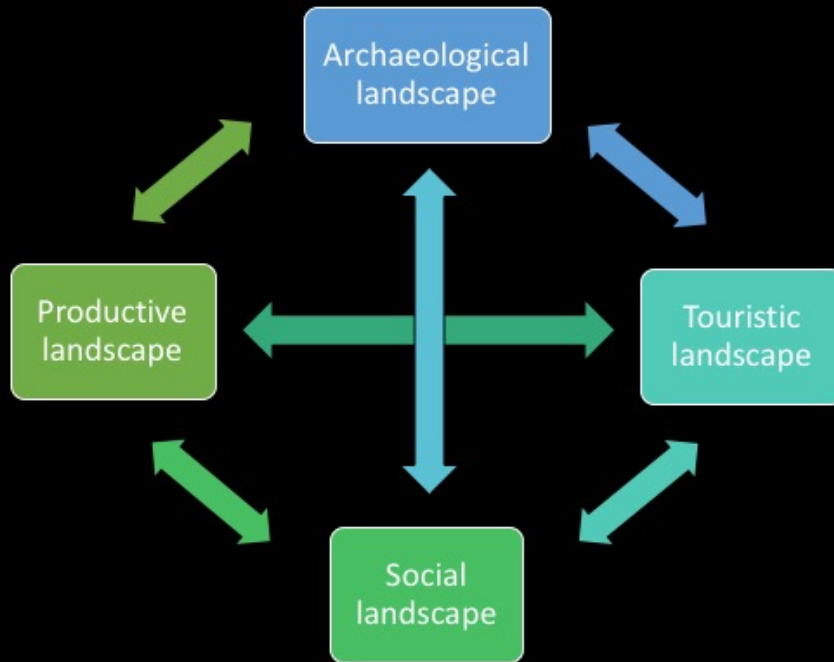


- To learn about:
  - traditional agricultural practices
  - local ecological knowledge
  - perceptions of landscape

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[Slide 5] The goal of our interviews with local Zakrites was to learn about traditional agricultural practices (which would have contributed to the formation of the most recent archaeological remains in the area, like threshing floors and terraces), local ecological knowledge, and their perceptions of the landscape and the features within it.

# Landscape(s)



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[Slide 6] Over a two-week period in July 2018, we conducted over a dozen interviews. While sorting through my notes from the interviews, a few major themes started to become clear. One is the intertwining nature of the different aspects of the landscape. As someone who uses geographic information systems (GIS) frequently, I found it helpful to think of these as topographical layers, each one interacting with the others in interesting ways.



Kato Zakros

Archaeological  
landscape



Footpaths



Abandoned settlements

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[Slide 7] The layer of the “archaeological landscape” contains the physical remains of past human activity, from the Minoan site at Kato Zakros through to the more recent evidence of traditional lifeways, like abandoned settlements and stone-built footpaths used for foot and animal traffic.



Footpaths



Olive cultivation

Productive  
landscape



Other crops



Remains of agricultural and  
pastoralist activities

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[Slide 8] The “productive landscape” is made up of features and artifacts related to cultivation and food processing. The footpaths fall into this category, too.



Infrastructure



Hotels and  
restaurants



Geopark Sitia

Touristic  
landscape

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[Slide 9] A big part of the Zakros experience is the “touristic landscape,” which started to form in earnest since the 1960s. This includes hotels and restaurants, plus the infrastructure related to the relatively new UNESCO Geopark Sitia – including the E4 trail, a trans-European hiking trail that starts in Portugal and ends in Zakros.



Community spaces



Gendered practices

Social  
landscape

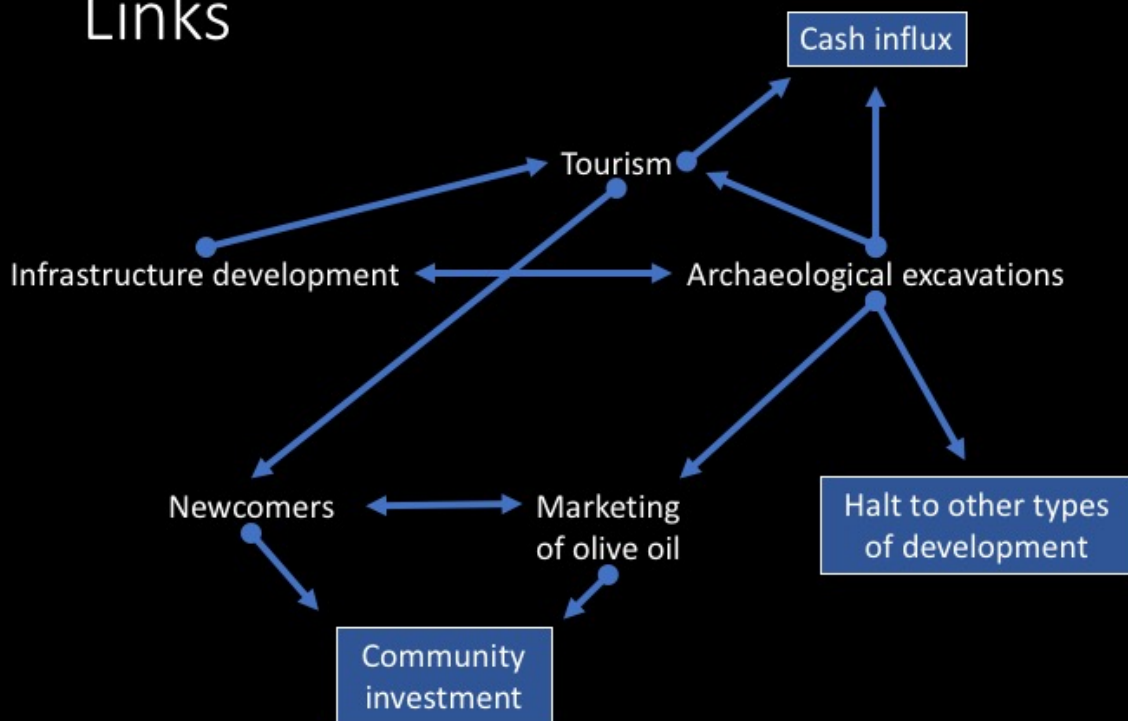


Cooperatives and  
private companies

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[Slide 10] Finally, there is the “social landscape,” the realm familiar to ethnography and cultural anthropology. This layer reaches from the gendered practices that define how people engage with the world to the way people organize themselves socially (like the cooperatives and private companies that market products from the region).

# Links



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[Slide 11] When we return to the big picture and try to think about how all these “landscape” layers interact, the ways of imagining these interconnections are limitless. This diagram is just one possible interpretation, showing how I envision the historical excavations, tourism, and olive production to connect.

Agricultural Cooperative of Zakros - Crete - Greece

# ZAKROS

*extra virgin olive oil*

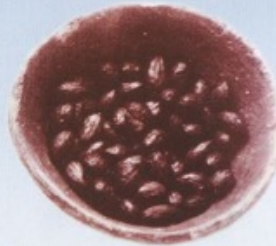
A 4000 years old tradition of olive cultivation  
around the Minoan Palace of Zakros



*Olive, gift from God. As old as man.  
As precious as life*

The roads of olive oil have been engraved by the Minoans, they have crossed Greece, ended up on the coast of the Mediterranean and gave us the value of olive.

Zakros, which is the eastern end of Crete, brought to prominence one of the most important commercial and cultural centers of the Minoan civilization where man and olive groves have been co-habiting for over 3500 years. The very important ancient findings have confirmed the speculations and enriched our region.



When the archaeologist Nicolas Platon discovered the Minoan Palace of Kato Zakros he drew out of the well of the palace edible olives conserved in a pot as a contribution to the Gods.



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[Slide 12] One of the main connections is the link between the excavations at Kato Zakros and the marketing of olive oil produced in the region today. These are flyers from the Agricultural Cooperative of Zakros, which processes and sells almost all the olive oil produced in the region. According to the flyers, the farmers harvesting olives in Zakros today represent “A 4,000 years old tradition of olive cultivation around the Minoan Palace of Zakros.” The link is driven home with a photograph of a millennia-old bowl of olives found at the palace.

<https://www.lesamisdezakros.fr/>

## LES AMIS DE ZAKROS

### QUI SOMMES NOUS ?

Une association à but non lucratif qui distribue l'huile d'olive d'origine protégée du village de Zakros. Les excédents de cette distribution financent des projets du village de Zakros à l'extrême est de la Crète.



Amoureux de coins sauvages et authentiques, nous avons eu le coup de foudre pour le village de Zakros et nous voulons vous le faire découvrir autrement en vous faisant partager nos rencontres avec ceux qui font la vie du village, nos balades préférées, la tradition culinaire du village. Nous vous invitons à vous poser et à prendre le temps de saisir le rythme des saisons à Zakros. Parce que ceux qui vont à Zakros y restent.



MAI 2017-LES LAURIERS  
DEPLOIENT LEUR SUBTILE  
VARIATION DE ROSES DANS LA  
VALLEE DES MORTS EN CETTE  
MI MAI 2017.

“A non-profit organization that distributes olive oil of protected designation of origin from the village of Zakros. The proceeds from these sales finance projects in the village of Zakros in the extreme east of Crete...”

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[Slide 13] Another important link is how tourism and olive oil production have come together through Les Amis de Zakros, a Paris-based non-profit organization that distributes Zakros olive oil to its members. In return, the proceeds from the sales are reinvested directly in the community.

# Themes from the interviews

## 1. Many Zakrites are happy with the archaeological work in the area...

- Benefit directly (workmen)
- Benefit indirectly (hotel owners)
- See zoning as protection

... but some are not.

- See zoning as a barrier
- Tourism only benefits a few

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[Slide 14] Thinking about how the different “landscape” layers intersect clarifies several themes that wind through the interviews. First is the differing opinions about how helpful the archaeological work has been to the local community. Some people told us the excavations and resulting archaeological zoning (which prohibits any kind of construction in areas deemed archaeologically significant) are good for Zakros. But others believed that the archaeological research and tourism do not benefit the community as a whole.

# Themes from the interviews

## 2. Olive oil is the lifeblood of Zakros, but it is getting harder to survive.

- 80-90% of Zakrites depend on olive oil
- Precarity from climate change, increased taxes



One interviewee described tourism as a “way out.”

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[Slide 15] A second theme is olive oil. It is difficult to overstate how important olives are to the Zakrites – oil is their main source of income. At the same time, olive production is by no means reliable, depending as it does on unpredictable factors like rainfall. Some Zakrites see tourism as a more dependable way of earning a living.

# Themes from the interviews

## 3. Although Zakros is isolated, it is connected to specific countries...

- Italy = main export destination
- France = largest customer base



... but connection comes with risks.

- Wind turbine construction

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[Slide 16] A third theme is disconnection. Many of the Zakrites we interviewed talked about their sense of isolation from the rest of the world – and even from the rest of Crete! But at the same time, the importance of Italy and France to the local economy came through in almost all our conversations. A few people feared that wind turbines might be built on the mountain ridges around the valley, despite local protestations against them. All of this underscores the fact that Zakros is deeply connected to other areas.

# Themes from the interviews

## 4. For many, the “past” means the region’s Minoan history.

- Some traditional culture is part of the “present”
- Little nostalgia for the traditional past
- Gendered difference in what the “past” means?



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[Slide 17] The last theme I’ll mention is the notion of the “past.” For many of the people we talked to, the “past” meant the Bronze Age – that is, the period when the Minoans lived in the area. When asked about the more recent past, some explicitly defined this as part of the “present.” One idea that we would like to explore further is the possibility of gendered definitions of the “past,” with women more likely to talk about the more recent (traditional) lifeways as part of the “past,” and men more likely to talk about it as exclusively Minoan.

# Conclusions



“The oldest tree in Zakros”

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[Slide 18] On the first day of our research this summer, we were taken to see the “oldest olive tree in Zakros” – a tree that supposedly dates to Minoan times. The tree is an appropriate symbol for how cultural knowledge, archaeological heritage, tourism, and olive oil production are deeply intertwined in Zakros. Talking with the Zakrites showed us that archaeology doesn’t exist in a vacuum – and that archaeological heritage cannot be separated from other aspects of the lived experience.

# Acknowledgements



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- EUROFRONT: <https://eurofront.ims.forth.gr/>
- Agricultural Cooperative of Zakros: <http://zakrosoliveoil.gr/>
- Les Amis de Zakros: <https://www.lesamisdezakros.fr/>
- Geopark Sitia: <http://www.sitia-geopark.gr/>

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[Slide 19] Our research in Zakros is ongoing, but already the interviews with local residents have unveiled the rich possibilities that can come from combining archaeological and ethnographic work. The next step in the EUROFRONT project is to apply this knowledge as we continue researching the historical and archaeological histories of the region.

You can follow the EUROFRONT project at <https://eurofront.ims.forth.gr/>