

ERASMUS+ PECUS


CASE STUDY SHEET

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| CS code | GR-02 | CS Title | LIMNAKARO MITATO |
| GENERAL INFORMATION | | | |
| Type of case study | <input type="checkbox"/> National or regional level policy/plan/strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Local level policy/plan/strategy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Study/research <input type="checkbox"/> Project <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Article in a Scientific Magazine) | | |
| Responsible body/Promoter | Harriet Blitzer, NKUA | | |
| Location (region, locality) | Mt. Dikti, Limnakaro upland valley, Lasithi, Crete, Greece | | |
| Geographical area covered | Limnakaro plateau is a karstic depression covering an area of c. 90 hectares. It is located at an altitude of 1120 m amsl. It lies right south of the Lasithi plateau (the largest upland valley in Crete at 850 m amsl) and right under the highest peak of the Dikti Mt., Spathi (2148 m amsl). | | |
| Year | 1990 | | |
| Summary description | <p>In 1990 Dr. Harriet Blitzer, professor of Art History at the State University of New York, published a paper about the pastoral families of Ag. Georgios, their productive practices in the Limnakaro plateau and the core structure of these economic strategies, the so-called 'mitato', a complex building of seasonal use. The paper was based on evidence collected on site at the time and was meant to be used as an ethnographic parallel for ancient pastoral activity.</p> <p>In the article, after a brief description of the locality and topography, there is a description of the 'mitato', the main building used by the shepherds that includes the dwelling area, a corral and specialized working spaces for milking, shearing, cheese production etc.</p> <p>The article deals also with the seasonality of activities of these shepherding families, with the practice of transhumance, and with the end products that the shepherds marketed, such as wool, hides and dairy products. An extended part is devoted to the cheese making practices as well as milking.</p> <p>The study discussed here, apart from being important for ethnography and the documentation of traditional practices, is highly valuable for archaeology as well. The practices presented are a group of activities that live minimum to no archaeologically detectable traces. However, it is quite certain that such activities took place as indicated by indirect evidence. Thus the documentation and detailed description of recent parallels can be revealing for archaeologist and they usually contain hints directing our attention and making us understand what we need to look for.</p> | | |
| Link with laws/regulations and with other policies/plans/strategies(if any) | <p>Despite their deep history and their importance as tangible evidence for long lasting traditions of pastoralism and transhumance, the 'mitata' of Dikti have not been declared as monuments of Cultural Heritage and are not protected by the Greek Law. Thus, they have been left to decay and oblivion. This is rather surprising, because "Transhumant Livestock Farming" has been included to the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Greece since 2017.</p> | | |
| PROBLEMS AND NEEDS TARGETED | | | |
| Problems | <p>The main problem is that the economic strategies and productive activities described in the article have become so rare to the point of extinction. Very few people still follow these activities, they are usually very old and they only continue to perform certain tasks and not the whole process. Therefore, the transhumant way of life and economic model disappears rather rapidly in Crete and will soon become subject of archaeology instead of ethnography.</p> <p>Furthermore, the article discusses transhumance, but not with much detail, and certain aspects of this phenomenon remain elusive, such as the demographic composition of the transhumant groups, the distance covered with the flocks or different strategies of husbandry in the summer and the winter pasture lands.</p> | | |



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| Needs | To face the above problems it is necessary to interview people who still leave on the Mt. Dikti villages, particularly shepherds, and to investigate other ethnographic sources and testimonies from the pre-mechanised/ pre-modern era on the island of Crete. It is likely that the older inhabitants remember the seasonal routes covered by the shepherds with the animals even if no one follows them anymore or if the animals are transferred with trucks. It is important to try and preserve this information before that knowledge is lost together with last people capable of testifying about it. With the information gained from these interviews we will: 1) Carry out an accurate mapping of the recent drover roads 2) Follow the drover roads and try to identify archaeological sites, structures and any kind of tangible evidence, which may indicate a diachronic use of these roads in the recent and remote past 3) Inform the Local Authorities and discuss about the possibility of preserving and restoring such structures, as valuable resources and tangible evidence of a disappearing element of Intangible Culture Heritage. | |
| Quantitative data | Number of villages on Crete at altitudes between 800 m and 1199 m amsl = 31 Number of people in these according to the 1991 census = 4617, 2001 census = 3,366 Current number of shepherding families = ? | |
| FOCUS, OBJECTIVES AND OUTPUTS | | |
| Themes | Does the case study address this theme? (YES/NO) | If yes, how? (max 750 characters for each theme) |
| Spatial planning | NO | |
| Protection of environment (e.g. biodiversity, water, geomorphology, soil, climate...) | NO | |
| Protection/enhancement of tangible cultural heritage (e.g. historical paths, archaeological sites, architecture, terraces and field systems...) | YES | Although “Transhumant Livestock Farming” has been included to the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Greece since 2017, this does not include the protection of structures and other tangible evidence of transhumance. Starting with Blitzer’s article, which will be followed by a systematic survey, mapping and documentation of mountain ‘mitata’ and other structures we hope to increase public awareness and motivate the local inhabitants to protect, preserve and, if possible, restore them. |
| Protection/enhancement of intangible cultural heritage (e.g. historical route networks, scenic views, folklore, food, music...) | YES | Interviews with locals almost 30 years after Blitzer’s article, combined with the survey of the area and the documentation of other structures related to pastoralism will help to increase the local interest for the disappearing practice of transhumance. This will contribute to the protection and enhancement of this element of Intangible Cultural Heritage. |
| Slow mobility (cycling routes, trekking paths, etc.) | YES | The well-known and signed E4 European trekking path is passing right from the middle of the Limnakaro plateau. Therefore, the area is suitable for trekking, and is already included in all major guides about trekking in Greece and Europe. |
| Economic development of mountain & rural | YES | An effort to re-instigate transhumant pastoral practices might be hopeless in a constantly shifting towards intensification of production economic system. However, the material remains of this practices are worthy of preservation as a 'museum' of |

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| areas (e.g. tourism, agro-food production, agriculture, livestock breeding...) | | the recent past. The option of reviving traditional pastoral practices on a small, touristic scale is always open, as long as the know-how is not lost, and might be economically sensible if combined with agro-touristic ventures, that are quite attractive to an alternative audience. |
| INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS | | |
| Actors involved | 1) NKUA: a team from the NKUA will visit the Limnakaro area, record the situation almost 30 years after Blitzer’s article, and survey the area for more structures and any kind of evidence for human pastoral activity in the recent and remote past. Additionally, the team will take interviews from local inhabitants and compare the present picture with the picture described by Blitzer 30 years ago, 2) The shepherds and the inhabitants of the surrounding villages (Avrakontes and Agios Georgios): will host the NKUA team, and will provide valuable information about the area. These communities exploit this mountain area with practices related to animal husbandry. The mobilization and engagement of these communities in the monitoring, protection, and restoration of structures related to pastoralism in the recent past is important for the preservation of these structures and their surrounding landscape. | |
| Involvement procedures | Blitzer’s article includes many information provided by the owners of the 'mitata' in Limnakaro. However, this information is 30 years old, and it would be interesting to contact once more the families of Ag. Georgios and monitor the situation 30 years later. | |
| Problems and challenges | <i>Over time, the old 'mitata' fell out of use and they have started to decay.</i> <i>Younger generations do not travel seasonally with their herds towards the upland valley of Limnakaro and they are not interested in such a practice anymore.</i> <i>Producing activities and transhumant routes of the past may have been forgotten</i> | |
| EXPECTED OR ACHIEVED EFFECTS | | |
| Type of effect | Description <i>(max 750 characters for each type)</i> | |
| Effects on the environment (e.g. restoration of habitats, increased biodiversity, climate change mitigation or adaptation...) | | |
| Effects on immaterial, cultural assets (e.g. cultural landscape, scenic views, folklore...) | Preservation of traditional economic practices of the mountain communities is important both for their own history and survival in a rapidly changing economic system and for ethnographic purposes. The use of parallels from pre-industrial economic systems of the recent past in order to understand human activity of the remote past is of paramount importance and their value increases as they are less and less frequently observed. | |
| Effects on material, cultural assets (e.g. restoration of historic artefacts or buildings, restoration of traditional terraces or cultivation systems...) | It is a happy coincidence that the intangible practices of traditional pastoralism and transhumance are accompanied by material remains, such as the multifunctional 'mitata' buildings in the Limnakaro upland valley. Preserving the knowledge about the practices taking place in these buildings if not trying to re-institute parts of these practices is important for the preservation of the architectural remains themselves and for the preservation of their landscape. | |
| Effects on social and economic | Agro-touristic opportunities are very likely to emerge through an open dialog between the local population and the academic community. Acts for the preservation and enhancement of cultural heritage | |

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| aspects (e.g. new jobs, new enterprises...) | and tradition might lead to economic development in an already highly touristic island, in which, however, all touristic activity concentrates only on the coastal zone, far from the mountain communities. This could be an opportunity for the mountainous hinterland of Crete to bring forward its unique and neglected characteristics. |
| IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES | |
| Financial resources | The relevant work is funded by NKUA and the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP). |
| Implementation procedures | The monitoring of the status of pastoral structures on the Limnakaro plateau is the first action related to this case study. This will include recording, documenting, surveying and mapping the area. Spatial analyses includes accurate mapping of the recent mountain paths and transhumance routes. Then, these routes will be surveyed for structures and evidence of human activity and presence in the past. These will be mapped in relation to transhumance routes, and natural features such as springs, streambeds and arable land. This will show the diachronic use of these routes transhumance and human and animal movement. Secondly, a dialog is to be opened between the (ex?)shepherding families and the academic community concerning life on the mountains and pastoral economy. |
| SUPPORTING INFORMATION | |
| Images (pictures, graphics, maps, charts, etc.) |  |

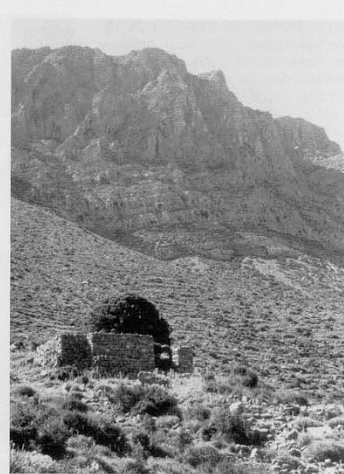
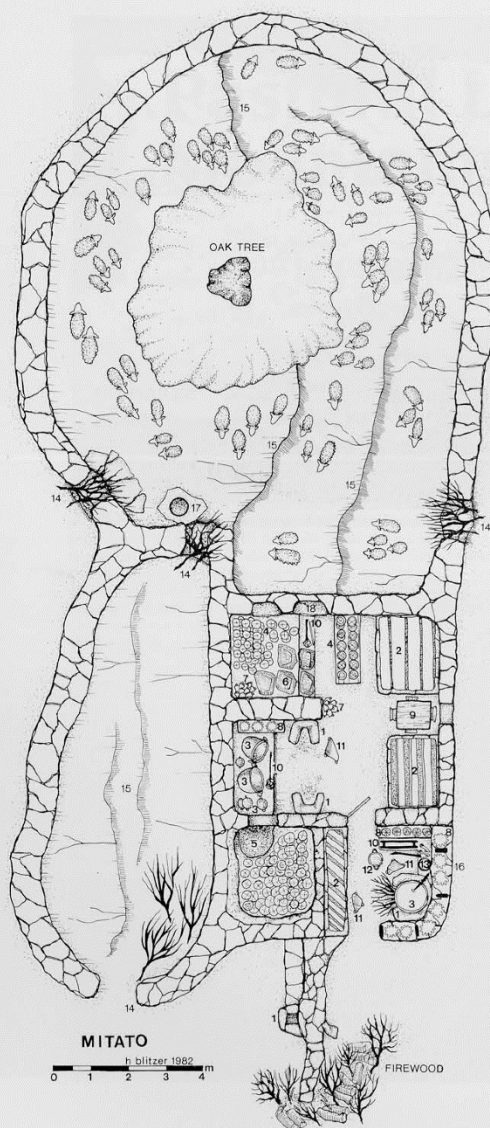


Figure 4. A mitato in Linnarkaro on the slope of Mount Dikte. Above is the crest of Dikte known as Spathi.

Figure 5 (left). Plan of a mitato (numbers 1-18 on plan) built of limestone. The entrance to the building faces north.

1. Hearths built of three upright square stone slabs lined with clay
2. Stone beds and benches covered with thyme-filled mattresses
3. Copper cauldrons for cheese and mizithra preparation
4. Cheese wheels aging on wooden and packed earth shelves
5. Wheels of cheese in the naturally refrigerated storage area
6. Goatskin sacks for the storage of mizithra
7. Sheep bells hanging on the walls
8. Cheese baskets stored on shelves and the tops of walls
9. Table and chairs
10. Wooden stirring tool fashioned like a whisk
11. Wooden tools for cheese processing: wooden frame and T-shaped stirring tool
12. Stools made from tree roots
13. Pan of coarse salt
14. Entrances to corral with movable prickly shrub closures
15. Natural shallow, laminar limestone terraces encircled by the corral walls
16. Enclosed porch area of mitato, with raised roof allowing for air circulation
17. Stone block with carved cylindrical depression for the milking can
18. Shelves built into the walls of the mitato

References (including web links)

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Blitzer, H., 1990. Pastoral Life in the Mountains of Crete. *Expedition* 32, 34-41.
<https://www.penn.museum/sites/expedition/pastoral-life-in-the-mountains-of-crete/>

