

Refugees' trauma and antiquities – an archaeological account of life after 1922

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at the Danish Institute at Athens (DIA)

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This lecture looks at the ways antiquities in/from Ottoman Anatolia affected how refugees of the Asia Minor Catastrophe related to their state of exile and uprootedness, and aims to shed light on the links between trauma and material remains of past civilizations. It focuses on memories of ancient ruins and other ancient finds by ordinary Ottoman Greeks – men and women - from Lithri (ancient Erythrai, modern-day Ildir), Nymphaio (close to ancient Sardeis, modern-day Kemalpaşa) and Ayasolouk (ancient Ephesus, modern-day Selçuk). Besides the place that antiquities retained in refugees' memories, the analysis suggests that certain ancient finds played a profoundly tangible and symbolic role in refugees' transition from a life in Ottoman Anatolia to one in Greece. To discuss such uses of antiquities, the analysis draws largely on refugees' testimonies that were collected by the Centre for Asia Minor Studies between the 1930s and 1970s. Through a critical study of George Seferis' diaries, we are also able to discuss the impact that ancient sites had on this world-acclaimed Smyrniote's own account of exile and uprootedness.

