

The antiquities on the Papoura hill in Crete

ICOMOS Hellenic expresses its deep concern for the fate of the unique and highly significant circular monument discovered on Papoura Hill, during the archaeological research, necessary within the framework of the project, New Heraklion International Airport.

The monument on Papoura Hill is located at the top of the hill, overlooking the entire plain of Kastelli and, beyond it, the characteristic mountain formations of Crete. Excavation data indicate use from 3200 to 1800 BC, with reuse in the 7th century BC. The circular structure is shaped as a labyrinth, with high constructional precision in the tracing of the rings and in their shaping at different levels. The existence, on the slopes of the hill, of a Minoan palace complex, a cult cave and a shaped path, shows that it was the common work of a group of local communities, with ritual and religious use. This particular construction is unique and opens up new fields in the study and knowledge of Minoan culture. In order to fully interpret the findings so far, archaeological research should continue and extend to the whole area, as it is almost certain that new data will emerge.

When the archaeological research is completed, the site will be a great archaeological unit that should be given back to science and the public, with the creation of an archaeological park.

The decision of the Central Archaeological Council approves very large-scale interventions on Papoura Hill proposed for the installation of air navigation systems for the needs of the new Heraklion International Airport. The heavy construction activities, using explosives, put at risk the ancient sites that have been uncovered and those that have not yet been uncovered. The construction of large-scale buildings for the installation of radar, tens of metres high, control towers and other auxiliary buildings with extensive landscaping and lowering of the hill, will irreparably damage the monument and the surrounding area, cancelling the completion of research in the area and the formation of a visitable archaeological park.

Once again, the political leadership of the Ministry of Culture, with the Central Archaeological Council as a smoke-screen of “legitimacy”, is blatantly violating the Archaeological Law 4858-2021 and Article 24 of the Constitution, damaging archaeological monuments and evidence and destroying the authenticity of the archaeological landscape.

The Greek ICOMOS expresses its absolute opposition to the arbitrary policies of the Ministry of Culture and the lack of transparency and care for antiquities in accordance with national legislation and international conventions.

In particular, for the proper management of the antiquities on Papoura Hill, it considers that new studies must be carried out for the placement of the air navigation systems of the new Heraklion International Airport. The new studies should provide for the positioning of the air navigation systems in locations that will allow unhindered archaeological research in the area in the future, for the future promotion and study of the antiquities, and for the organisation of an archaeological park open to visitors.

The antiquities on Papoura Hill constitute a major archaeological find of key importance for the study and understanding of the Minoan civilisation and the early civilisations of the Mediterranean basin. It should be preserved intact for the sake not only of science but also of humanity.