

Archaeology of
THE BONE OBJECTS

in the eastern Mediterranean, Near East,
the Black Sea area and the Balkans
during the Hellenistic, Roman
and Early Byzantine periods

in honour of Hector Williams



May 14, 2025 / Izmir, Turkey

Meeting venue

Join us on Zoom.us or physically in Izmir

E-mail

paphlagonia@deu.edu.tr

Deadline for the abstracts' submission

March 1, 2024

First circular – Call for papers

Last update: 7 December 2024.
Number of words: 2,748.



Dear Colleagues,

We are glad to inform you that an international e-conference on bone objects in the Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine periods in the eastern Mediterranean, Near East, Black Sea area and Balkans will take place on May 14, 2025 on Zoom.us. Ancient bone objects were found in relatively large quantities in the entire Mediterranean, from Spain to Syria and Egypt to France, where they were manufactured between the Neolithic and Medieval periods. The art of carving animal bones involves especially antler and horn. However, the spectrum of the worked bone objects recovered from Anatolia, rest of the eastern Mediterranean, Near East, the Black Sea area and Balkans is very varied, and reflects different characteristics of Graeco-Roman and Early Byzantine daily life. In these areas they were also utilised as grave goods secondarily. They were exported or imported over the entire ancient Graeco-Roman and Early Byzantine worlds.

In this conference papers dealing with ancient artefacts or objects manufactured by worked bone, antler, ivory, animal teeth, mother of pearl and cockleshell will be included. Main material groups made by bones are as follows: items connected to personal grooming, weaponry, artifacts used for spinning or in pottery decoration, artifacts related to cosmetics, jewellery, combs, pins for clothing and women's hair, items related to dressmaking and textile (particularly sewing needles, weaving implements or buttons), parts of soldiers' equipment, items used for leather working, amulets and other magical items, knife handles, musical instruments, playing stones (e.g., lopsided dices), frames of various kinds (e.g., of mirrors), furniture (including fittings, wood sidings and inlaid decoration), boxes, plaques, writing items (for example, *καλαμοί, calami* in Lat.), liturgical and religious items (e.g., crosses and reliquaries), half-finished products and *miscellanea*. Just in the rest of the Roman world, hairpins are the most numerous artifacts made of bone or antler in the Eastern part of the Empire. Gaming pieces represent the other widespread and customary *instrumentum* category of the worked bones. Several other material groups also used during the processing of bone artefacts, for example, some objects may have been filled with coloured wax to make them to stand out.

So far the study of this material group has been overlooked, whereas there is still a huge amount of unpublished material from excavations, field surveys and museums in the entire Mediterranean and rest of the ancient world. There is a regular conference series of the *Worked Bone Research Group* (WBRG; cf. <<https://www.wbrg.net/>>) which include almost all periods and areas. In our e-meeting in 2025 we only focus on bone objects between the fourth century B.C. and the sixth century A.D., and attempt to set out a comprehensive model for the study of bone objects, including their definition, typology, chronology, contexts, function, regional characteristics, production and distribution patterns in the whole eastern Mediterranean geographies, including the Near East, Black Sea area and Balkans. The increasing number of recent finds in the concerned areas over the last thirty years, thanks to the development of preventive archaeology, has tended to challenge our previous observations and assumptions on Graeco-Roman and Byzantine worked bone objects.

It is also our intention to create a complete bibliography of previous publications on bone objects for several areas and chronologies.

We warmly invite contributions by scholars and graduate students from a variety of disciplines related to this material group. Intended to bring together scholars of Greek, Roman and Early Byzantine *instrumenta* / artefacts' archaeology to discuss a range of issues concerning this material group characteristics, this video conference should be an excellent opportunity to increase our knowledge about ancient worked bones. The following theme groups are the main questions of the conference which are prescriptive:

- Bone objects from archaeological field projects, museums and private collections,
- Graeco-Roman bone objects in comparison with the bone objects of the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic periods, Bronze and Iron Ages,
- Graeco-Roman bone objects in comparison with the Minoan and Mycenaean bone objects,
- Etymology of bone objects in ancient Near Eastern, eastern Mediterranean and Aegean languages,
- Ancient Greek, Latin and Byzantine textual sources on bone objects,
- Typological evolution and design of bone objects,
- Selection criteria for some certain animal genres for bone-working,
- Decoration of bone objects, as detailed chronologies should be established for both the produced forms and their decoration,
- Chronologies of these objects that can highlight the social spread of these products,
- Manufacturing technics, manufacturing tools, major production centres and workshops of bone objects in the Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine periods, their organisation and interactions.
- Distribution of bone objects, economic and social aspects: in what type of socio-economic context are they found?,
- Typological and functional features of bone objects during the Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine periods: what might the utilitarian, social and/or symbolic functions or practices of these objects have been?
- Identification of the economic factors that contributed to the standardization in the bone-working,
- What ancient Greeks, Romans and Byzantines thought about afterlife? Bone objects in the eastern Mediterranean funerary contexts,
- The role of monastic or religious economy in Early Byzantine bone-working,

- Commodities and their trade through bone objects,
- Relations of bone objects to metal, terracotta, glass, wooden or stone objects: how did this material group fit in with objects made from different materials, particularly metal, glass, or wood? Can any stylistic links be found between them?
- Roman bone objects in the eastern and western Mediterranean and Europe, and their differences,
- Hellenistic and Roman gravestones and other iconographic media depicting bone objects,
- Conservation of worked bone objects, especially excavated finds: current strategies and future approaches,
- Archaeometric analyses of these objects,
- *Miscellanea*.

On these themes and questions, all approaches and methods susceptible to bring some progress to our current knowledge are of course welcome: archaeology, physical anthropology, archaeozoology, osteoarchaeology, bioarchaeology, palaeohistology, ancient history, history of art, cultural anthropology etc.

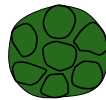
A special focus of the workshop is the identification of workshops from different regions, cities and areas, in particular capital cities (such as Byzantium, Ephesus, Pergamum, Antioch-on-the-Orontes, Alexandria, Athens, Rome etc.) with main workshops. A regional approach will enable us to understand the influences and contacts between workshops. Were these exclusively urban activities, or also rural? What motivated their establishment? Political powers, raw materials, the development of urban centres and the urban elite (merchants, craftsmen, religious orders, etc.) or economic outlets? And, are there any imitations or copies in certain localities suggesting competition between workshops?

Another important topic is the manufacturing techniques which were varied and depended on the composition and morphology of each raw material type as much as on the artefact to be produced. Regardless of the raw material, the manufacturing process of an ancient bone object was usually multi-stage:

1. Selection and acquisition of the raw material;
2. Preparation of the raw material, including cleaning, drying and cutting into pieces;
3. The appropriate working processes using instruments like knives, chisels, files, lathes and bow-drills;
4. Finishing the worked objects by grinding, polishing and colouring.

The previous finds reflect that mostly manufacturing techniques were related to an organized production where the different manufacturing stages were standardized and predefined, which can be identified as a *chaîne opératoire*. Particular attention should be paid to these technical aspects, which are the integral parts of the uniqueness of most of the ancient worked bone objects.

We also need to look at the distribution of these objects on a local, regional, and even supra-regional scale, and trade networks. Some have crossed the overseas, such as Anatolian products unearthed in England. How can these exchanges be explained?



Our conference is primarily virtual, and will take place on Zoom; but if any of the participants will wish to appear in Izmir physically, she/he is welcome to present her/his paper in our conference room to the audience which will also be livestreamed and broadcasted simultaneously on Zoom.

All the readings and discussions in our e-conference will be in English, and recorded for later viewing as a podcast on YouTube. The proceedings of the conference will be published in the forthcoming issues of the *Archaeology of western Anatolia* (AWA) in 2026. The conference is free of charge.

We would be delighted, if you could consider contributing to our conference and contact us with the registration form below until March 1, 2024. Our e-mail address is paphlagonia@deu.edu.tr

For all your queries concerning the conference our phone and WhatsApp number is +90.544.540 78 34. The organizers seek to widen participation at this conference, and would like to encourage colleagues from all parts of the world to attend. We kindly request that you alert any interested researches, colleagues and students within your research community who would be interested in participating at this e-conference, either by forwarding our first circular and poster through your Academia, Researchgate, Instagram, X, YouTube, Facebook accounts, or other similar social media, or by printing them and displaying in your institutions. Please share them also on your ListSers. We hope that you will be able to join us on Zoom, and look forward to seeing you!

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Organisation of the meeting

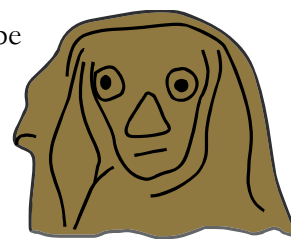
Our conference is primarily virtual, and will take place on Zoom; but if any of participant will wish to appear in Izmir physically, she/he is welcome to present her/his paper in our conference room to the audience which will also be livestreamed and broadcasted on Zoom.

As this is an international conference, papers will **only** be presented in English. They should last 20 minutes and will be followed by a 10-minute joint discussion at the end of each session.

Papers presented at this conference will be published in the forthcoming issues of the *Archaeology of western Anatolia* (AwA) in 2026, cf. <<https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/awa>>.

The conference dinner is scheduled for the evening of Wednesday, 14th of May at the 50th floor of the tower block A of Ege Perla with a seascope of the Golf of Izmir (<http://egeperlakonut.com/>). Visits to three archaeological museums in the town center of Izmir for their bone collections are also planned for Thursday, 15th of May.

As Monday, 19th of May, 2025 is a national holiday in Turkey, a post-conference tour to Chios, Greece may be organized between the 17th and 19th of May, 2025, if there will be enough number of participants wishing to do so.



How to contribute

Application with paper proposals or as an observer should be sent to the following address paphlagonia@deu.edu.tr until **1st of March 2024**. They must include the registration form below and an abstract.

Registration for the participation to the e-conference

Type of your participation (virtual lecturer, virtual observer or physical participation with or without a paper presentation):

Name:

Academic title:

Institution:

E-mail address:

Complete professional address:

Cell-phone number:

Academia or Researchgate account:

Orcid ID:

Would you participate to the conference dinner on 14th of May ?:

Would you participate to the post-conference museums' tour on 15th of May ?:

Would you participate to the joint post-conference holiday to Chios-Greece on 17th–19th of May ?:

Would you agree with the recording of your virtual lecture and to be displayed as a podcast in our YouTube channel

(<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCU4How2qUqAuGBEm27pKLZw>) later?:

Any special requests:

Title of your lecture:

Your abstract:

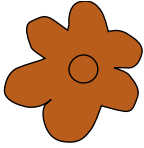
NB: One or two illustrations can be included which should be sent by e-mail to paphlagonia@deu.edu.tr

Scientific committee (in alphabetical order; to be completed)

Organizing and executive committee (in alphabetical order; to be completed)

Dr Fatih Hakan Kaya (Dokuz Eylül University, Izmir),
Ms Zoe Tsiamis (University of Thessaly, Volos).

Website of the e-conference



<https://deu.academia.edu/ErgunLAFLI/Congressus-internationales-Smyrnenses>

List of the previous

Colloquia Anatolica et Aegaea, Congressus internationales Smyrnenses

I- E. Laflı and A. Müller (organ.), “International conference: Terracotta figurines in the Greek and Roman eastern Mediterranean: Production, diffusion, iconography and function”; June 2–6, 2007, Izmir. Website: <web.deu.edu.tr/terraccottas>.

II- E. Laflı and S. Fünfschilling (organ.), “International workshop: Late Roman glass in Anatolia (A.D. 4th to eighth centuries)”; October 26–28, 2009, Izmir.

III- E. Laflı (organ.), “International workshop on Hellenistic ceramics in Anatolia (4th to first cent. B.C.)”; October 12–14, 2010, Izmir.

IV- E. Laflı (organ.), “An international workshop on the pottery finds between fourth century B.C. and eighth century A.D. from northern and central Anatolia”; May 10, 2011, Izmir.

V- E. Laflı (organ.), “XVIIth international congress of ancient bronzes. The archaeology of bronzes in Anatolia and the eastern Mediterranean from Protoegeometric to early Byzantine periods (tenth century B.C. to seventh century A.D.)”; May 21–25, 2011, Izmir.

VI- E. Laflı (organ.), “Second international conference on the archaeology of Ionia – Landscapes of Ionia: Towns in transition”; May 30–June 2, 2011, Izmir.

VII- E. Laflı and G. Labarre (organs.), “Archaeology and history of Lydia from the early Lydian period to late antiquity (eighth century B.C.-sixth century A.D.)”; May 17-18, 2017, Izmir.

VIII- E. Laflı (organ.), “*Unguentarium*. A terracotta vessel form and other related vessels in the Hellenistic, Roman and early Byzantine Mediterranean. An international symposium”; May 17-18, 2018, Izmir.

IX- E. Laflı and L. Chrzanovski (organs.), “Ancient terracotta lamps from Anatolia and the eastern Mediterranean to Dacia, the Black Sea and beyond. Comparative lychnological studies in the eastern parts of the Roman Empire and peripheral areas. An international symposium”; May 16-17, 2018, Izmir.

X- E. Laflı (organs.), “Cappadocia and Cappadocians in the Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine periods. An international symposium on the southeastern part of central Anatolia in classical antiquity”; May 14-15, 2020, on Zoom.us

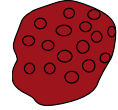
XI- E. Laflı (organs.), “Ancient Greek, Roman and Byzantine engraved gems in the eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea area. An international e-conference on archaeological and archaeogemological approaches”; May 11-12, 2021, on Zoom.us

XII- E. Laflı (organ.), “Ancient Greek, Roman and Byzantine fibulae. An international e-conference in honour of Dr Maurizio Buora”; May 12-13, 2022, on Zoom.us

XIII- E. Laflı and Z. Tsiami (organs.), “Studia bithynica. An e-conference on the archaeology and history of Bithynia in northwestern Anatolia”; May 10, 2023, on Zoom.us

XIV- E. Laflı and Z. Tsiami (organs.), “Pithoi in the archaeology of the eastern Mediterranean. Studies on pithos as a storage and burial vessel in the ancient Classical and Byzantine world”; May 8, 2024, on Zoom.us

**List of the previous *Colloquia Anatolica et Aegaea*,
*Acta congressus communis omnium gentium Smyrnae***



Ia- A. Muller and E. Laflı (eds.), *Figurines de terre cuite en Méditerranée grecque et romaine*, vol. 1: *Production, diffusion, iconographie et fonction*, Ecole française d'Athènes, Bulletin de correspondance hellénique, Supplément 54 (Athens and Paris: De Boccard, 2016).

Ib- A. Muller and E. Laflı (eds.), *Figurines de terre cuite en Méditerranée grecque et romaine*, vol. 2: *Iconographie et contextes*, *Archaologia* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2015).

II- E. Laflı (ed.), *Late Antique/Early Byzantine glass in the eastern Mediterranean*, *Colloquia Anatolica et Aegaea – Acta congressus communis omnium gentium Smyrnae II/Dokuz Eylül University, Faculty of Arts, Department of Archaeology, Division for Medieval Archaeology, Publication series, No. 1* (Izmir: Hürriyet Matbaası, 2009) (ISBN 978-605-61525-0-4).

III- E. Laflı and S. Patacı (eds.), *Recent studies on the archaeology of Anatolia*, *British Archaeological Reports, International Series 2750* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2015).

IV- E. Laflı (ed.), *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine bronzes from Anatolia and neighbouring regions*, *BAR International Series 3038* (Oxford: BAR Publishing, 2021).

V- E. Laflı and G. Labarre (eds.), *Archaeology and history of Lydia from the Early Lydian period to Late Antiquity*, *Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté 1591; Collection de l'Institut des sciences et techniques de l'antiquité* (Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2023) (ISBN: 978-2-84867-953-2).

VI- E. Laflı and G. Kan Şahin (eds.), *Unguentaria and related vessels in the Mediterranean from the Early Hellenistic to the Early Byzantine period*, *BAR International Series 3165* (Oxford: BAR Publishing, 2024) <<https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/r494vn93r>>.

VII- E. M. Günther, S. Günther, E. Laflı and N. Serwint (eds.), *Studia glyptica. Current studies on ancient Greek, Roman and Early Byzantine engraved gems*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament, Veröffentlichungen zur Kultur und Geschichte des Alten Orients und des Alten Testaments 474* (Tecklenburg: Ugarit-Verlag, 2025). Pp. 667. ISBN: 978-3-86835-371-6; ISSN: 0931-4296.



Logo illustration:

A bone plaque depicting Medusa from the Archaeological Museum of Afyonkarahisar, western Turkey, acc. no. 3935 (photo by E. Laflı, 2005).