

ARCHAEOLOGY IN GREECE 2011–2012

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INTRODUCTION

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The reshaping of *Archaeology in Greece* into a review of new discoveries and trends gives greater scope for the BSA Director's introduction to focus on the climate in which the past year's research has been conducted. Indeed, in a year when the domestic and international press has lingered on cuts, redundancies and closures, on the shocking armed raid on the Museum of the History of the Olympic Games and thefts such as that of Pablo Picasso's 'Head of a Woman' (a gift to the Greek people in recognition of their resistance to the Nazi occupation) from the National Gallery of Art, more reflective discussion is vital. In Athens, powerful images of protest in the city centre rightly drew attention to human stories as well as to the significant damage done to the city's historical architecture (a particularly poignant casualty being Schiller's Neo-classical building which housed the Attikon cinema on Stadiou Street). But it is also the case that the archaeology of Athens has never been better understood or better presented to the visiting public at many locations around the city. As Robert Pitt's chapter in this year's *AG* brings home, there is much to draw visitors to Athens and Attica.

A major achievement of the former Ministry of Culture and Tourism (now the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports) has been the online publication of *Από το ανασκαφικό Έργο των Εφορειών Αρχαιοτήτων*, a richly-illustrated review, region by region, of major discoveries made between 2000 and 2010 (www.yppo.gr/0/anaskafes). The wealth of information thus made freely accessible pervades both the print and online editions of *AG*. Regional fascicules of the print *Archaologikon Deltion* continue to appear (the latest covering Thessaly and central Greece) but the costs, and time-lag, involved in their production make it likely that here too, e-publication may soon be the most practical option. Online access is also helping to make many museum collections widely accessible, both via the Ministry's Digital Collections portal (<http://collections.culture.gr/>) and the extension of the *Google Art Project* to the Acropolis Museum (<http://www.googleartproject.com/collection/acropolis-museum/>).

These developments are of course good news for researchers. And without wishing to understate the impact of the financial crisis in terms of redundancies, site closures and limits to opening hours, the battle to sustain and develop cultural tourism is also being fought in many, creative ways. Certain long-awaited developments can be reported, notably the reopening of the site of Akrotiri on Thera, under its impressive new roof. Museums, which (with striking exceptions such as the Acropolis Museum)

have tended to attract fewer visitors than archaeological sites, are experimenting with free Sunday openings, a wider range of cultural events and unified ticketing linking sites, museums and monuments in many parts of the country, developing the highly successful seven-day ticket for central Athenian monuments. Greek culture has been brought to wider audiences worldwide with a series of major loan exhibitions: *Alexander the Great* in the Ashmolean Museum and the Musée du Louvre, *Transition from Byzantium to Christianity – Art in Late Antiquity, Third to Seventh Century AD* in the Onassis Foundation, New York, and *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche* in the Museo Nazionale di Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome. And in Greece, the current exhibition at the National Museum in Athens, *The Antikythera Shipwreck. The Ship, the Hoards – the Mechanism*, which brings together all parts of the Antikythera mechanism (plus several reconstructions) with sections of the ship and its entire cargo, is one of the most memorable (and lauded) for many years. Readers of *AG* may be interested to know that the annual London lecture of the British School, to be held in the British Academy in February 2013, will be delivered on the subject of this exhibition by one of its senior curators, Dr Anastasia Gadolou. This is not an isolated example – notable exhibitions in other institutions have celebrated *Islands off the Beaten Track. An Archaeological Journey to the Greek Islands of Kastellorizo, Symi, Halki, Tilos and Nisyros* (Museum of Cycladic Art); *Abdera – New York – London – Athens* (Numismatic Museum); *Icons from the Thracian Shore of the Black Sea* (Thessaloniki, Museum of Byzantine Culture); *Greeks and Phoenicians, the Crossroads of the Mediterranean* (Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki); and *Classical Athens, Music and Democracy* (Athens, Foundation of Parliament).

Plans for new museums also advance. The architectural contest for the development of the former SILO building in Piraeus to house Greece's first Museum of Maritime Archaeology is now in progress, and the Byzantine Museum of the Argolid is due to open in the Capodistrian barracks in Argos early next year (this will be the first museum in the Peloponnese also to cover Venetian, Frankish and Ottoman cultures). The Argos barracks, originally a Venetian hospital built in 1690, became an agora under Ottoman rule, and were intended to house a university after the liberation of Greece, when the new government bought the large area of land later transformed into cavalry barracks by Capodistrias. After a less fortunate recent history, the transformation of this historic building into a museum is a most welcome development, and forms part of a trend also reflected in the plan to transfer the Archaeological Museum of Pylos to the newly restored Ottoman Niokastro (built in 1573). Preservation of the early modern industrial heritage of Greece – buildings, equipment, and physical and oral

records – has for many years been the particular focus of the Piraeus Bank Cultural Foundation (PIOP, <http://www.piop.gr/>). PIOP maintains an expanding network of museums celebrating the local industries of Greece (from brick-manufacture in Volos to mastic production on Chios), educational and publishing programmes, and an exceptional archive documenting rapidly disappearing crafts. The Europa Nostra award made to the Foundation in 2012 is fitting recognition of its outstanding work in an area of early modern archaeology which has received less coverage in *AG* than it deserves.

Restoration and conservation of other monuments also continue. As ever, theatres attract particular attention, with work continuing at Dodona, Kassope, Epidauros (notably the Little Theatre) and Karthaia on Kea, and new studies being prepared for Nikopolis, Delphi, Delos, Eretria and Orchomenos in Arkadia. Other major projects include the Lycaeum in Athens, with work on the Late Classical tower at Agia Marina and the stadium tunnel at Nemea both now complete. The European Union's national support framework (ESPA) has been a lifeline, supporting the conservation and public presentation of sites in many regions. But a key role has also been played by charitable bodies, including the Elliniki Etaireia Perivallontos kai Politismou, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and the John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation (which, in collaboration with Eurobank EFG, publishes freely online a series of lavishly-illustrated publications of Greek museum collections, the most recent of which, on the Pella Museum – <http://www.latsis-foundation.org/default.asp?pid=92&la=2&bid=69&libID=1> – was published in 2011). Work on theatres has been greatly advanced by the energy of the Diazoma organization (<http://www.diazoma.gr/>) which is now engaged with almost 50 theatres in close collaboration with the Archaeological Service. Its work encompasses archaeology but also wider scholarship and outreach, notably in the development of apps for mobile phones and iPads, in collaboration with Apple, which will provide virtual tours of 125 theatres, odeia, amphitheatres, bouleuteria and stadia (the theatres of Messene and Epidauros being the first to appear later this year).

In previous years I have highlighted the problem of illegal excavation and antiquities' trafficking, which is inevitably growing as economic circumstances deteriorate, and frequently forms part of wider criminal activity. The many seizures that have been reported over the past year, while the tip of the iceberg, are a tribute to assiduous policing and growing public awareness. In 2011–2012 the largest ring yet found in Greece was broken with a series of arrests. The ring was active right across central and northern Greece, people from all walks of life were implicated, and some 10,000 objects (from Cycladic marble figurines to Byzantine icons) recovered. In short, there is growing evidence for a major international commercial operation with connections across Europe and beyond. Indeed, evidence uncovered has led to the reopening of a number of past cases. The precise extent of damage done to archaeological sites, and the loss of crucial contextual evidence, can readily be imagined. An indication is given by the discovery in 2011 of a cache of Archaic metalwork

and other finds linked to the activities of the ring, which must come from a minimum of five burials in an as yet unidentified Macedonian cemetery. The collection includes a so far unique pair of solid gold soles and a silver phiale with a gold omphalos identical to one from Sindos (perhaps even from the same mould). Despite similarities with finds from Sindos and Archontiko Giannitson near Pella, no illegal excavation has been reported at these well-documented sites, and the material seized seems therefore to come from a previously undocumented site. Investigation of the ring is ongoing, but the progress made so far is a tribute to patient policing, public engagement and international collaboration. A continuing campaign to educate the wider public about the real cost and consequences of illicit antiquities dealing and illegal excavation included an exhibition – *Αρχαιοκαπηλία τέλος/An End to Antiquities Theft* – in the Archaeological Museum in Thessaloniki, which displayed (mostly for the first time) objects recovered over several decades, and the exhibition in the Byzantine Museum, Ioannina, of a rich collection of icons stolen from churches, mostly in Epirus and western Macedonia, and returned by dealers in London and Amsterdam.

Plainly, complex questions surround the practice of archaeology during an exceptionally difficult period in Greek history. Public policy in the area of culture will continue to be prominently debated. But while change is more likely to be felt in the medium term, it is worth drawing attention to infrastructure programmes which have the potential to affect the way we work. One such is the registry of archaeological sites, monuments and properties being developed alongside the regular land and woodland registries – a huge undertaking, especially when one considers that many small Aegean islands are effectively big sites in their own right (Symi, for example, with only 2,500 inhabitants has 159 declared sites). This is not something that can be achieved quickly, but it will be a major resource, enabling GIS-based fore-searches, building project evaluations and much more – a significant change in approach to a record which has built up gradually over many decades.

In closing, however, I return to the archaeological achievements which are the essence of *AG*, and where yet again there is much to celebrate. A personal highlight was the online publication and (live-streamed) conference presenting the work of the international team researching the outstandingly rich Geometric and Archaic deposit found in a basement at Methoni in Pieria back in 2003. This dump of amphorae and pottery, deposited around 700 BC, included the richest collection of transport amphorae in the early Greek world (many local products plus vessels from Phoenicia, East Greece and Euboia) and 191 sherds bearing graffiti, trademarks and fuller texts. The first publication transforms our understanding of this region (http://ancdi-lects.greeklanguage.gr/sites/default/files/studies/methoni_pierias_1.pdf). The year was also marked by the passing at the age of 92 of Nikolaos Yalouris, a distinguished figure in the Archaeological Service and excavator of many sites in the Peloponnese (Elis in particular). It is fitting that his achievements are marked by Daniel Stewart in his chapter on the Peloponnese below.