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JOHN FARDOULIS:

“Crazy passionate” about archaeology

INTERVIEW: ANNA ARSENIS

Tell me a few things about yourself.

I've met a lot of new people over the last nine months, through helping organise archaeology excavations in various sites in Kythera and Antikythera during the Greek summer this year. The one thing that most people comment on, is my enthusiasm.

The degree of difficulty in organising archaeology projects in Greece is quite high. Many questioned if they were actually possible. But others said “*your enthusiasm might get you through John*”, and it did!

A phrase that sums it up is “crazy passion”. Being so motivated and enthusiastic that almost no hurdle is too high. Crazy passion is necessary to get some things done in Greece, particularly at a time of difficulty, like now.

How do you spend your free time?

Every spare moment (even sneaking time out from work) over the last nine months has gone into helping organize archaeology in Greece. It has been really time consuming. Meeting and networking with a wide range of people, writing proposals, attending lectures, committee meetings, formulating budgets, talking through logistics with the archaeologists in Greece via Skype, and so on. Then, a crazy time on the ground over there in July/August; and after returning, sifting through over 3000 photos and 30 hours of video that I took. Plus the reporting phase at the moment and writing stories for the community about what happened. It's been like a full time job.

Before I became “crazy passionate” about archaeology, shipwreck diving was the thing that took up most of my free time. This went past just diving, extending to equipment engineering and maintenance - such as rebuilding compressors, boats, gas mixing and the more technical side of deep diving.

What attracts you to history?

Curiosity. Understanding what life was like under different civilizations and painting a mental picture of it.

Trying to understand the jig-

saw puzzle, based on random pieces scattered all over the place. Plus building up research to share with the community. Archaeology is a bit like a form of CSI but with evidence from hundreds or thousands of years ago. All of this is because of a bond with the island of my ancestors and yearning to explore it.

Tell me a few things about your project held in July 2010. How it all started.

After ten years without a proper holiday, my dream was to do some exploratory diving around Kythera last year. Laws changed in Greece in 2005, which made Scuba diving legal around much of island. There was challenge though, no dive shop for filling tanks.

So I had to become totally self-sufficient. This meant sending over a compressor and other equipment, about 800 kilograms of gear in total. We ended up packing it in a box trailer to be portable, which itself weighed about 200 kilograms. So adding the trailer to the dive gear, a tonne of equipment was sent over, literally.

Kythera is located at the cross roads of the Mediterranean so there's over 5000 years of maritime history associated with the island. So the big adventure last year was to go exploratory diving around Kythera, not knowing what we might find.

A passion for diving corresponds with a keen interest in maritime archaeology. Maybe a connection with the sea stems from a bloodline that comes from a Greek island? A relative who knew about my crazy passion for maritime history introduced me to the publisher of a local Kytherian newspaper - who in turn introduced me to the resident (land) archaeologist for Kythera, Aris Tsaravopoulos, in August last year.

I first met Aris in a cafe in Potamos, the village where my dad was born. We met one Sunday morning and he mentioned that they were off to dig in a 300 BC pirate fortress the next day. Would I like to come, Aris asked? Ummm... Silly question. Of course I

would!

So while digging with a team of volunteers in Antikythera, I started to see how some people really love archaeology. We were with Greek government archaeologists who took annual leave to go and dig in Antikythera while on holidays, rather than just visiting the beach or doing something relaxing. Students also came and roughed it, camping, without a hot shower for weeks during the dig period.

After participating in a project where you never know what you'll find next, I was hooked. Without any prior experience - or need for books, I was digging, under the supervision of experts.

So naturally I started on Aris' case, asking about 2010 archaeology, in Kythera.

After speaking with Aris on a fortnightly basis for months in the latter part of 2009, I learned enough to put in a proposal to the Kytherian Association of Australia and Nicholas Anthony Aroney Trust for funding support in 2010. This was primarily to feed a team of volunteers to help the archaeologists.

The contribution wasn't just in money though, I took full responsibility for logistics. Where to house 25 volunteers, being responsible for over 900 meals (excluding breakfast) during the 18 day stay, getting volunteers and visitors up and down the mountain every day. Even buying toilet paper.

The idea behind the whole thing!

The concept is a 360 degree approach, where the community/Diaspora assists archaeologists by helping support volunteer manpower and other resources, so they can go out and discover new evidence from the past.

The archaeologists then write reports and share the story about what they found. Pretty much digging up enough evidence to write new chapters of ancient history, in turn - sharing these chapters with the community. We help them, they make new discoveries and teach us more about the history of previous races that inhabited the land of our forefathers.

Archaeology is far from new



in Greece, but what was new, is the inclusion of the local community and members of the Diaspora in the project, both as sponsors and beneficiaries. Times are really tough for archaeologists in Greece at the moment. There's a lot of politics, funding has been axed, so support from the Diaspora can help a lot. But it's not a one-way street - supporting archaeology isn't just a donation but in fact an investment in our heritage.

Some local Greek people take their heritage for granted, a little like the equivalent of it being like bread and butter, just there, and in plentiful supply. We see our Greek heritage as more of a delicacy because our parents or grandparents were transplanted over here, thousands of kilometres away. That's why some people in Greece don't really appreciate archaeology and may have a short sighted view.

Paranoid about how it may affect their farm land rather than respecting cultures that existed in that area thousands of years prior, well before our civilization was born.

Education can help change this though. Especially by being open and sharing information, explaining the process and highlighting the value of objects that are found. Archaeology needs to be made accessible and welcoming.

Inviting local people along for a tour or to volunteer is important and should not be neglected due to tunnel vision regarding the academic and scientific side of things. Increasingly, due to the recession, academic research will struggle to get funding support in Greece. But in contrast, inspiring the community - including a large Diaspora from abroad, which is hungry to learn more about heritage, could become the solution regarding shortfalls.

This year, the majority of our permanent volunteers were Greek university students studying archaeology,

plus a few members of the Greek-Australian Diaspora. We also had about half that number again as casual volunteers - mostly from the Diaspora, who each volunteered for several days at a time.

In future an archaeology project could double as a youth program, bringing together locals and members of the Diaspora from around the world, creating a form of unity from doing something intense together.

How did the project change you?

Change started to occur from when I volunteered on my first dig in August 2009. Before that, I was pretty much a black sheep as far as the Greek-Australian community was concerned, not having much to do with it for the last 15-20 years. The problem was getting bored with gossip, fashion, cars, nightclubs, squabbles over inheritances and what I perceived was a generally conservative tone of the community.

What turned me into a born-again Kytherian was exploration, combining history with adventure. The Indiana Jones side of things - for want of a better analogy. Being part of a group of pioneers, digging in an ancient pirate settlement in Antikythera last year. This helped provide both intrigue and meaning.

The same may not occur for everyone but it did for several other members of the Diaspora this year, in a similar way to what happened with me in the summer of 2009.

Even where we stayed this year was an adventure, in a 170 year-old mountain top monastery, Agia Moni. A place where Kolokotronis was sheltered in the early 1800's and promised to rebuild it if the Fatherland was freed during the Greek revolution. It was, and he did, with Agia Moni being rebuilt in 1840.

Quite frankly, Kythera has a

lot more adventure to offer me than Australia. I've been a bit of an adrenaline junky in the past, particularly with deep diving. Now I can't think of any place in the world that can offer me more adventure than Kythera.

The island's approximately 30km long and 20km across, at its widest point. There's no way I can help find parts of a forgotten 2500+ year-old ancient city or shipwrecks from thousands of years ago within 30km of where I live in Sydney! And my right to be able to explore is afforded by a blood line from the island on both parents sides. So it's my island too!

There was also a bond with a number of people in Kythera. Especially the Metropolit, Bishop Seraphim.

We built rapport from working on a number of tasks together. Having him bless (conduct an Αγιασμός) one of the archaeological sites for example. Plus collaborating on the historic reopening of Agios Kosmas, which gave us an opportunity to get to know each other. Conducting the first service at Agios Kosmas in well over 100 years was a really special event.

We also got to know Father Yiorgios who is in charge of the monastery where we stayed. This helped build a friendship with him. Similarly, spending time with Father Mariatos because one of the tasks was to archaeologically survey a site where he wants to build a youth camp, which helped create a bond with him too. I've never been very religious but now have close ties with three important members of the Kytherian clergy. And a lot more empathy for what they do.

Respect for the Metropolit's wishes has already stirred enthusiasm for next year - to cut trails through agathia and thick bushes, opening access to another two currently inaccessible churches. Why? Because it seems like a good thing to do, will bring joy to

the community and make Bishop Seraphim happy.

I'll drum up support from a few local farmer friends who have chainsaws, tractors and other tools.

Then find members of the Diaspora to help with labour, forming a working bee to open up paths to the inaccessible churches in question. The reward for everyone will be for the Metropolit to conduct historic services in each, creating history and bringing culture to life. How about that as a complete turn-around for a black sheep? From steering clear of the Greek community, to helping influence a religious calendar of events!

How did it change other people?

In a similar way to me. Volunteering doesn't appeal to everyone, especially those who don't want to wake up really early to dig before it gets too hot. But those who 'connected' with the past became more patriotic, and curious - wanting to learn more. They understood how much of an adventure they were involved in, one that was unique. Heritage is also something to share, particularly with people stemming from the same origins. People connected with each other in two ways, through sharing an intense experience and similar ancestry.

Members of the Kytherian Diaspora connected with others from around the world. People who would never have met any other way. Volunteers from Brisbane, Canberra, Sydney, the United States and all over Greece worked side-by-side. I made friends with a group of Kytherian-Australians from Brisbane who I wouldn't have ever got to know if we didn't work together on the dig.

Any other projects in the future?

Yes! There's a very important shipwreck to excavate in relatively shallow water off Kythera, one of world-wide significance to the Hellenic

community. A project that needs to be conducted by the Greek Underwater Archaeology Ephorate, with support from the Diaspora, just like the land dig this year. But because of greater engineering/equipment requirements, underwater excavations are more expensive.

Plans for this project in 2011 are progressing well, but I'd like to know funding is available before making promises.

Overall, I see my role as a bit of a pioneer. Paving the way for a project to then continue on a long term basis, perhaps run by other teams. For example clearing paths to old Churches which are no longer accessible.

Or systematic excavations where the ancient capital of Kythera is currently buried. Who knows what might be found in a city that thrived for a period of 500 years before Christ, which is now buried on the side of a mountain.

Hopefully going in with crazy passion can lead to a movement that proves the value of such projects, creating longevity in Kythera and also sparking enthusiasm from others to spread throughout Greece.

What's your greatest achievement to date?

Helping rediscover sections of a 2500+ year old forgotten city. Without resources from Australia, and bringing people together from all walks of life, the project wouldn't have taken place this year.

Would you ever consider living in Greece?

I could for set periods of time. I've been fortunate to have met lots of archaeologists and could probably volunteer on digs for about 3 months each year. But that would be labour of love rather than income producing.

Perhaps I could take a year off if I sell my business one day and spend that time adventuring in Greece, particularly around Kythera and Antikythera. There's more than a lifetime's worth of exploring to do in that region.

The same career opportunities would be hard for me to find in Greece though, so I'd have to maintain a career in Australia and visit Greece for philanthropic causes and adventure.

Describe major goals you've set for yourself recently.

Helping organise a project that rediscovered sections of Kythera's ancient capital was a pretty major achievement this year. The icing on the cake was that this took place on the Greek island of my ancestors.

Going exploratory diving in Greece was a goal achieved last year. Things sometimes s-



start as a dream, then morph into a goal and if lucky, turn into reality.

And Dreams?

Several. To one day organise an excavation of the Antikythera shipwreck, where the Antikythera Mechanism was found. This dream may never come true. But who knows, daring to dream, combined with crazy passion sometimes overcomes the odds.

Another dream is to help discover evidence of a Phoenician presence in Kythera, either buried on land or in the sea. We know the Phoenicians inhabited and visited, they were the race who brought Aphrodite to the island, with worship then spreading across the entire Hellenic world.

What's known is primarily from ancient text, finding physical evidence would be a major discovery. An even bigger discovery would be a Phoenician shipwreck!

There was also a strong Minoan presence in Kythera. Finding a well-preserved Minoan shipwreck is another dream. A general dream is to circumnavigate Kythera and Antikythera searching for shipwrecks (with the endorsement of authorities), perhaps over the next ten years.

Don't forget, these are just dreams - not promises.

What are the major reasons for your success?

Determination. I'm a pretty good networker too. It's often helpful if you can call on the right people to get things done.

Tell me something about your-

self that we haven't mentioned in this interview.

My Greek isn't very good. I can probably read at the level of a 4 year old, and speak at the level of a 12 year old. I haven't needed Greek here in Australia and the main times I've used it is when older relatives speak to me. They speak in Greek, and I usually reply in English. Both parties understand and it's been simple.

I learned a lot of new words while in Greece. Especially modern Greek. A few random examples include;

γρασαδόρου - grease gun - this was needed to fix seized boat steering on the day that we wanted to visit a small island just off Kythera to inspect a 2300 year-old Sanctuary to Poseidon.

Σεβασμιότητα - respected one - a way of addressing the Metropolit. I couldn't get my tongue around the word for weeks. Bishop Seraphim politely suggested that I could use the word πατέρ - father - as an alternative.

τομή - trench - a word often used when referring to test trenches, a marked rectangle where archaeological excavation systematically takes place, layer by layer.

ανασκαφή - excavation - a word used for an archaeological excavation, or dig.

Tell me about your most difficult work or personal experience.

I'm a workaholic and find it hard to switch off. The intense amount of adventure just listed has made it hard for me to concentrate on work at the moment, so I'm a bit torn between two different worlds.



John is giving a lecture outlining the concept of Community Backed Archaeology, perhaps sparking similar initiatives in other parts of Greece, plus a presentation of what the team discovered while excavating parts of Kythera's ancient Laconian-controlled capital; at Sydney University on the evening of Wednesday November 10th. 7pm for a 7.30pm start. Perhaps you'd like to join the team as a volunteer next year? Come along and find out how.
Kathy Samios is taking RSVP's for the lecture on 02 9349 1849 or email john.fardoulis@gmail.com to reserve your place on November 10th. This project was graciously supported by the Nicholas Anthony Aroney Trust and Kytherian Association of Australia. The lecture is being sponsored by Laiki Bank and presented in conjunction with the Sydney Friends of the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens.