

CHAPTER II

A BRIEF HISTORY OF UNDERWATER
ARCHAEOLOGY IN GREECE



The possibilities of underwater archaeology in Greece were appreciated rather early by Greek archaeologists. In 1884 Keeper of Antiquities Christos Tsoudas, with the help of sponge divers, concluded the first systematic underwater survey in the strait between the island of Salamis and Attica¹. Yet it was not archaeologists that raised some of the Ancient World's few surviving masterpieces; it was ordinary fishermen and sponge divers. Some of these works of art include the Poseidon of Kreusis found in the Gulf of Corinth (1889), the Boy or Ephebe of Marathon (1925) extricated by Evangelos Leonidas from his fishing nets, the Poseidon (or Zeus) and the Jockey of Cape Artemision (1928).² Nevertheless, the field of underwater archaeology continued to develop in Greece over the past century and finally reached the stage in 1996 where Nikos Tsouchlos, then director of the Hellenic Institute of Marine Archaeology (HIMA), could state that 'in Greece underwater archaeology has now finally established its place in the archaeological field.'³

In 1900, Symiote sponge divers returning from North Africa accidentally discovered the *Antikythera wreck*, which dates back to about 80 BC.⁴ This was the first cargo of an ancient ship for which a deliberate attempt was made to salvage the objects, and the first time a government sponsored an underwater archaeological expedition.⁵ The difficulties early archaeologists encountered, however, when dealing with shipwreck sites made them turn to harbour surveys, which were easier to complete. As a result, harbour studies such as the ones conducted by P. Negris (1903), A. Georgiades (1907), J. Paris (1915-1916), and S. Marinatos, have been a small, but consistently examined aspect of Greek archaeology ever since.^{6 7}

It was not until World War II (1943) that the revolutionary invention of the Aqualung by Jacques-Yves Cousteau and Emile Gagnan offered archaeologists the

¹ Agouridis (1997), 181.

² Agouridis (1997), 181; Chabert (1972), 169.

³ Tsouchlos (1995).

⁴ Agouridis (1997), 181.

⁵ Blot (1996), 31

⁶ Agouridis (1997), 181.

⁷ It is estimated that the sea level in Greek waters has risen approximately 3-4m since the Classical Period. However, this must not be viewed as a uniform rise because other natural phenomena (such as tectonics, sliding of the continental sea shelf, subsidence of land due to the weight of sedimentary formations) can drastically modify this pattern. As a result, two decades ago, there were already nearly 300 known locations concealing underwater archaeological remains; Κριτζής (1978), 416; Tzalas (2002), 62.

opportunity to investigate sunken ships and submerged sites for themselves. Hence, after the war, there was a significant increase in the number of expeditions undertaken by Greek and foreign scientists. It was off Greek shores that diving started under the auspices of the French School of Archaeology in Athens.⁸ Its teams, taking advantage of the new techniques that had been developed during the war, surveyed areas in the Bay of Marathon where they raised anchors and ceramics. Around the same time, the British School of Archaeology explored the sea of Chios (1954) and Crete (1958). The port town of Knossos, Kaeratos, the Venetian port of Heraklio, and several other sites were also surveyed. The next year, the first Greek archaeologist-diver, Nikos Yalouris, explored the seabed of Katakolou where the remains of ancient Pheia are located.⁹

In the beginning of the 1960s an expedition set out to survey the Bay of Navarino under the supervision of another pioneer of underwater archaeology, Yiorgos Papathanasopoulos, working in cooperation with the Hellenic Association of Underwater Activities and Edwin Link. Meanwhile, the American reporter-diver Peter Throckmorton, already well-known for his work elsewhere, began working in Greece. He performed surveys in Methoni and in Porto-Luogo Bay of the neighbouring island Sapienza. Towards the end of the 1960s an American expedition headed by Robert Scranton successfully surveyed the Corinthian port of Kehrai¹⁰, while J. Show studied a structure in the internal part of the other Corinthian port of Lehraion. During the same decade, British archaeologists explored the sunken remains of a prehistoric settlement at Pavlopetri in Lakonia. Finally, the University of Pennsylvania began a large-scale survey at Porto Cheli of Ermionida, exploring the remains of the ancient city Halieis and a temple dedicated of Apollo belonging to it.¹¹

The 1970s marked a very important turning point in the development of Greek underwater archaeology. The Archaeological Service, under the pressure of extensive illicit trade in antiquities, began to regard underwater archaeological research more seriously. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Nikos Yalouris, then General

⁸ Chabert (1972), 169.

⁹ Κριτζάς (1978), 418.

¹⁰ Apart from numerous structures and a temple dedicated to Isis, the expedition proceeded in uncovering a plethora of ancient treasures, including about three hundred stained glass paintings;

Κριτζάς (1978), 420

¹¹ Κριτζάς (1978), 419-421.

Director of Antiquities, personally encouraged young archaeologists to learn how to dive and work underwater.¹² In 1970 ceramics looted from a Byzantine shipwreck in the Bay of St. Peter near the island of Pelagonisi appeared in foreign museums. This prompted the first systematic rescue excavation of a shipwreck in Greece¹³ under the supervision of Peter Thockmorton and Katerina Romiopoulou, (who was later replaced by Charalambos Kritzas)¹⁴. In 1971 two investigative sonar surveys were conducted on the seafloor near Aegio in an effort to locate the ancient city of Eliki (which was engulfed by the sea after an earthquake in 373BC). In both cases the efforts did not bring substantial results.¹⁵

One of the most important developments however, came a few years later, when the first specialised institution dealing with underwater archaeology was founded; in August 1973 the Hellenic Institute of Marine Archaeology (HIMA) was established as a non-profitable, scientific and technical body. It was rapidly flanked by amateur divers and members of other specialities, and Y. Papathanasopoulos was elected president. Subsidized by the Ministry of Culture and Science, its stated purpose was the development of underwater archaeological research in Greece with the assistance of the Greek Archaeological Service, with which it cooperated closely.¹⁶ According to Nikos Tsouchlos, until recently the director of HIMA, perhaps the most important contribution of the Institute was the impetus its establishment provided for the creation of an Ephorate dealing with underwater archaeology. Indeed, only a few years later in October 1976, the Ephorate of Underwater Antiquities was founded.¹⁷ Consequently, the Archaeological Service acquired for the first time a medium for the planning and co-ordination of underwater research.¹⁸

Almost at the same time, in November 1975, the most important and influential figure in underwater exploration, Jacques-Yves Cousteau, came to Greece at the invitation of the Greek National Tourism Organization (*EOT*). Under the co-ordination of Y. Papathanasopoulos, Cousteau's team and a team of young Greek

¹² Agouridis (1997), 181.

¹³ Agouridis (1997), 181.

¹⁴ Κριτζάς (1978), 421.

¹⁵ Vichos (1993), 9.

¹⁶ Κριτζάς (1978), 423.

¹⁷ The Ephorate's first Ephore was Y.Papathanasopoulos.

¹⁸ Κριτζάς (1978), 424.

archaeologists participated in numerous projects of varying scale and importance. An effort was made to locate the position of the *Artemision wreck*. In the straits between Kea and Makronissos the wreck of the *Britannic*, a hospital ship torpedoed during WWI (and also the largest wreck in the world), was located and examined. A systematic survey was conducted in Navarino Bay where in addition to a Hellenistic ship, many wrecks of the homonymous battle were located. The programme included a brief expedition aimed at locating Eliki but the survey only confirmed earlier negative results. With the use of a bathoscope, the caldera of the volcano of Santorini was explored, along with the area of the sea in front of Marinatos' Akrotiri excavation, but no archaeological remains were found. A systematic survey of the majority of the Cretan coastline was undertaken and an immense number of underwater antiquities and ancient shipwrecks were located. Finally, there was a highly successful systematic survey conducted at the site of the *Antikythera wreck*, as with the aid of the bathoscope archaeologists were able to reach the depth of the wreck (62m).¹⁹

During the same pivotal decade, underwater archaeology expanded past the limits of the sea. Exploration spread to lakes, with Marinatos exploring the Lake of Kastoria and Spyropoulos exploring Paralimni, as well as caves, with Papathanasopoulos exploring the the prehistoric cave of Diros in Mani, discovering stalagmites at the bottom thus proving that the lakes were once dry.²⁰

Since the 1980s the Ephorate of Underwater Antiquities has been engaged in many surveys and excavations. Ancient harbours such as those of Samos, Naxos, Thasos, Toroni, and Phalasarina have been investigated, some as collaborative projects with foreign institutions. Highlights of the period include the excavations by Delaporta and Spondylis of the Early Bronze Age settlement of Platygiالي in Western Greece, the wreck of Louis XIV's flagship *La Thérèse* (Lianos 1989), and the post-Byzantine wreck found off the island of Zakynthos (Delaporta and Bound 1997).²¹ Perhaps the most important discovery to date is a 425-400 BC large merchant vessel

¹⁹ There was a detailed examination of the surrounding seabed and among the various artefacts collected (ex. pottery, pieces of bronze and marble statues, woodplanks), there were two very fine bronze figurines and the head of a third one, fine gold jewellery with precious stones, as well as a series of scientifically important silver coins of Pergamos, which confirmed the dating of the wreck to approx. 80 BC and provided a clue as to the origin of the ship; Κριτζής (1978), 424-427.

²⁰ Κριτζής (1978), 423.

²¹ Agouridis (1997), 181.

found northeast of the island of Alonnesos. The site began to be excavated under the direction of Dr Elpida Hatzidaki in August 1992. It was the largest underwater project the Ephorate had conducted in its history and it was also the first wreck of the Classical Period to be excavated in Greece. Yet what may be most noteworthy is that it is the largest known ship of its period in the world that is being scientifically studied. The find overturns several theories concerning ancient shipbuilding and the economic history of the 5th century BC. Another classical wreck has also been under excavation by the Ephorate in nearby waters since 1994.²²

Meanwhile, over the same time period, HIMA has also undertaken several significant projects. Among them, the most important are the ones at Dokos (1988-1992), at Cape Iria (1991-1994), and at Kythira (1993-1997).²³ The Early Helladic shipwreck of Dokos, sometimes cited as the earliest known wreck, was the first systematic full-scale investigation of an ancient shipwreck to be conducted in Greece.²⁴ The rich ceramic finds (raised among 10,000 objects) dating to the Early Helladic II period are judged to be particularly important both for their large size and type variety, and also in that they constitute the largest closed group of Early Helladic ceramic ware found to date in the Aegean.²⁵ Two years later in 1990, HIMA, under the direction of archaeologist Haralambos Pennas, began exploring a site previously noted by Haralambos Kritzas, Nikos Tsouchlos, and Peter Throckmorton. The relatively small wreck at Cape Iria appears to have been carrying a mixed cargo of Cypriot and Mycenaean vessels dating to about 1200 BC. Finally, the Kythira excavation, or what should more properly be called the Antidragonera excavation (which is a small islet off the southern coast of Kythera), began in 1993 and has since recovered numerous finds amongst which are nine wedge shaped stone anchors almost identical in form, the first time such a number have been found in situ at a single location. Available information suggests that the sunken vessel was part of a 4th century BC convoy, the other members of which managed to escape during a sudden storm which forced them to cut their anchors and set sail.²⁶

²² Agouridis (1997), 182.

²³ Agouridis (1997), 182.

²⁴ Vichos (1993), 11.

²⁵ Vichos (1993), 25.

²⁶ Kourkoumelis (1998).

From this brief and hence limited history of the development of underwater archaeology in Greece, the cultural wealth lying within the Greek seas can be easily ascertained. The first government sponsored underwater archaeology survey and expedition, very early use of the aqualung for archaeological purposes, as well as possibly the oldest known shipwreck in the world, are notable highlights in the story of the field. However, despite its noteworthy accomplishments, developments in this sector of archaeology have been slow and erratic. As will be examined in the following chapters, even today several issues hinder the advancement of the field. Nevertheless, if the current difficulties are overcome, and eventually they will be, the future looks promising. As demonstrated by the new law on cultural heritage discussed in the next section, underwater archaeology has now firmly established its position in the country.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Agouridis, S. 'Greece' in Encyclopaedia of Underwater and Maritime Archaeology, James P. Delgado (Ed.), British Museum Press, London, 1997.

Blot, Jean-Yves. Underwater Archaeology: Exploring the World Beneath the Sea, London: Thames and Hudson/Horizon, 1996.

Chabert, Jean. 'The Archéonaute' in Underwater Archaeology: A Nascent Discipline, UNESCO, Paris, 1972.

Kourkoumelis, D., '4th century B.C. Shipwreck near Cythera Island' 1998 GEORAMA Ltd. <http://www.georama.gr/eng/history/index.html>

Κριτζάς, Χαράλαμπος. 'Η υποβρύχια αρχαιολογία στην Ελλάδα' στο Βουτιά στα Περσμένα: Υποβρύχια Αρχαιολογία Χαννς-Βολφ Ρακλ, Μετάφραση με πολλές συμπληρώσεις Ηλία Μαυριγία, Gutenberg, Αθήνα, 1978.

Tsouchlos, Nikos. 'Underwater Archaeology in Greece: Conclusions and Proposals' in Ενάλια: Annual Edition of the Hellenic Institute of Marine Archaeology, Yannis Vichos (ed.), H.I.M.A, Athens, 1995.

Tzallas H. during his presentation 'Hellenic Institute for the Preservation of the Nautical Tradition' at the Milos Conference Centre during the 'Maritime Transport and Communications in the Mediterranean: From the Palaeolithic Age to Early Roman Times' Conference (13/09/2002).

Vichos, Yiannis 'Underwater Archaeology in Greece through the explorations by the Hellenic Institute of Marine Archaeology (HIMA)' in Motion: The magazine of Olympic Airways, 1993.

PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING CITATION:

Catsambis, Alexis. 'Chapter II: A Brief History of Underwater Archaeology in Greece' B.A. Dissertation The Pursuit of Underwater Archaeology in Greece: Past, Present and Future. University of Birmingham, Institute for Archaeology and Antiquity, 2003.