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Underwater Archaeology in Greece: Past, Present, and Future

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Greece's importance and role in the heavy maritime traffic plowing the Eastern Mediterranean Sea since times immemorial is well known. The country is surrounded by and shares with her neighboring countries three major bodies of water, the Ionian, the Aegean, and the Libyan Seas. These waters have become the receptacle of an amazing number of human remains, which are part of one of the most significant chapters of the Greek history: her maritime cultural heritage. This heritage has also been a part of other peoples' history and culture interacting in numerous ways across this blue whimsical sea. And that is what enhances the significance of Greece's maritime history and underwater cultural heritage: her multi-faceted international character that demands intense study and active protection.

<u>The Greek archaeological legislation in relation to underwater heritage</u>

In Greece, awareness about the importance of and protection for the national cultural heritage on land and its submerged counterpart came as early as the emergence and formation of the new independent state in the late 1820s-early 1830s. In 1828, Governor Ioannis Kapodistrias issued the order 2400/12.5.1828 addressed to

the temporary Commissaries throughout the Aegean Sea, which forbade the export of any archaeological remains from the Greek State.[i]

An official provision, in regards to the protection of antiquities found underwater, is embedded in the first comprehensive legal text of the national antiquities law of 1834 (10/22.5.1834). Articles 61 and 62, stressing for the first time the issue of ownership of antiquities on land and underwater, state, here in summary, that: all antiquities within the Greek territory are deemed as national possession of all the Greek nationals, and any archaeological remains, found on national soil, or beneath it, or underwater, in rivers and public rivulets, in lakes or marshes, are the property of the State.[ii] Later, the law of 1834 (10/22.5.1834) was superseded by the stricter 'Antiquities Act' of 1899 (BMXST/1899) and by the re-drafted 'Antiquities Act' of 1932 (K.N. 5351/1932) successively.[iii] Both the 1899 and 1932 laws contained more or less the same articles as their predecessor, giving special mention to submerged antiquities and propounding the rights of the State as primary owner of all antiquities.[iv] In fact, the lack of essential amendment is apparent in the 1932 law, which almost repeats the one-century older articles of the 1834 law, stating that: "All antiquities, movable or immovable, found within Greece and in any other of her national territory, in rivers, lakes and underwater, in public monastic and private land, from the ancient times and forth, are the property of the State."[v] A mix and match of the previous legislation, the so-called 'Archaeological Law' of 1932 contains scores of contradictions; it was amended in time, and is still in use today.

Confusion and grave indifference about the status of the Archaeological Law in relation to the state civil laws, as well as meager explanatory directives resulted in passing the Greek Constitutional provision of 1975. This provision, explicitly provides for the protection of the archaeological sites, monuments, folklore, natural,

and cultural resources, holding the State fully responsible to do so.[vi] The Department of Marine Antiquities, the official delegate authority on maritime archaeological matters, was established at last in 1976. The Department, in formulating a national policy for the protection of underwater antiquities, targeted mainly the widespread underwater plundering. It chose to respond by cutting off its nose to spite its face: it made a petition, in 1978, to the Greek Ministry of Culture and Sciences which forewith issued an order forbidding 'in principle' scuba-diving in Greece. No system of assessment for the significance of sites had been established, and the action was based on the assumption that antiquities could be found throughout the entire breadth and width of the Greek seabed. The measure created a mixed public response, which swayed under the influence of press articles that looked for scape-goats in the form of any native and foreign diver who could easily be charged as 'antique' looter. As a consequence, the public exhibited an unwarranted suspicion about the intentions of every scuba-diver; an attitude which alienated both the national and international community to the detriment of underwater project collaborations.

In due course, the banning of scuba diving produced dubious results and the public began realizing the irrational and totalitarian nature behind this measure. Intense reaction and pressure led in 1992 to the so-called 'Opening of the Seas': since then, the Department surveys Greece coast to coast, and in the absence of antiquities, opens up certain coasts to recreational scuba diving only. However, there is still to be announced a national policy providing clearly defined criteria about what and to which extent a site merits protection and relevant management.

Salvage and underwater archaeology in Greece

While legislation relating to underwater heritage was introduced at an early date, the same was not true for the establishment and development of underwater archaeology in Greece to a professional level and standards to those introduced by maritime archaeology centers in other countries.

In Greece, underwater archaeology grew slowly through the winding paths of chance discovery and salvage to reach only recently an acceptable level of methodic investigation and proper archaeological excavation. From the early 1800s to the 1950s news was spreading quickly about skin divers recovering objects from underwater, fishermen harvesting ancient artifacts, and sponge divers stumbling upon underwater 'tombs' topped with 'clay jars'. It was the sponge divers who became the wreck "tracers" and brave salvors until the new 'generation' of scuba divers emerged in the 1950s and 60s.

The protagonists of salvage attempts were a special kind of people with unique abilities: the skin divers and the helmeted sponge divers from the islands of Syme, Kalymnos, Nisyros, Aegina, Hydra and other. In 1802, skin divers recovered from 60 feet of depth seventeen cases of antiquities sunk aboard the British brig 'Mentor', commissioned the same year by Lord Elgin. Many were the fishermen who netted individual pieces of art, the majority bronze and marble statues, and many more pieces of pottery.[vii]

At the turn of the 19th century, few Greek land archaeologists, such as Ch. Tsountas, A. Economou, S. Stais, realized the importance of underwater investigations and heartily supported them. Successful was the first deliberate attempt, in 1900, to raise the cargo from an ancient shipwreck that also became the deepest salvage job up to that time. Helmeted sponge divers under the supervision of the

Greek Archaeological Service carried out the first-full scale art salvage of the famous Antikythera shipwreck.[viii] In the following years, many sponge divers and fishermen made individual discoveries, but the state abstained from sponsoring any other full-scale salvage operations.[ix]

In the wake of the breakthrough of the aqualung, the Greek waters hosted a number of underwater investigations organized by foreign archaeological institutions after receiving the necessary permissions from the Greek Archaeological Service that held the absolute authority to supervise them. There were also certain Greek institutions such as the Hellenic Federation of Underwater Activities (EOYDA) and later the Hellenic Institute of Marine Archaeology that undertook projects and co-sponsored foreign projects. Many times, they facilitated the issuance of permits for the foreigners, while providing opportunities for young Greek archaeologists to participate in the field and learn more about maritime archaeology.

The projects that took place in the 50s in Greece were indeed pioneering. They ranged from systematic shallow-water surveys of ancient harbors to deeper surveys and investigations of shipwrecks. Starting in 1950, only to mention few, the Greek Professor Dontas conducted an underwater survey in search of ancient Helike;[x] in 1953, Captain Coustaeu dived twice the Antikythera shipwreck;[xi] in 1954, the British School organized their first official underwater exploration off the island of Chios and transferred their activities to Crete the next year;[xii] and last but not least, since 1959, the Hellenic Federation located and surveyed the remains of ancient cities and shipwrecks off the

coasts of Peloponnese and Attica respectively.[xiii] Most of them, however, were conducted by foreigners.

Interest in coastal and shallow-water archaeology increased progressively in the 1960s and 70s. Projects, conducted mainly by foreign archaeological institutions, were concentrated on surveying submerged harbors, towns and individual buildings. In 1963, the University of Chicago and Indiana commenced the survey of the ancient harbor of Kenchreai,[xiv] and not far from there, in 1965, the University of Pennsylvania organized the survey of the harbor of ancient Halieis.[xv] Both sites were excavated and both teams used dredges for the first time as a better alternative tool for shallow-water excavation conditions.

During the same period, Dr. Fleming, a prominent geologist, worked extensively on the earth movements and eustatic sea level changes in the Aegean Sea. He surveyed numerous sites, including Pavlopetri and Plytra in southeastern Peloponnese, and Agios Petros in Northern Sporades.[xvi]

A pioneer in maritime archaeology since the late 1950s, Peter Throckmorton resided in Greece until 1975 and became a leading figure in the development of underwater archaeology in this country. He conducted extensive underwater surveys off Cape Spitha and the harbor of Porto Longo on Sapienza Island, around the Bay of Navarino, and the harbor of Methone on the southwestern coast of Peloponnese.[xvii] He sponsored either by the Hellenic Federation or by the Greek Department of Antiquities and Restoration, and took over as technical director in several projects. Many Greek professional and amateur archaeologists dived beside him, learning first hand the newly formulated techniques and methods of underwater archaeology. Throckmorton was also a founding member of the Hellenic Institute of Marine Archaeology (HIMA), which is the first national agency founded for and dedicated to the study and preservation of underwater heritage in Greece.

In the 1970s, other scholars undertook significant underwater projects such as Dr. Scoufopoulos who in co-operation with Dr. Edgerton of Massachussets Institute of Technology carried through surveys in the harbor of Gythion, and the Bay of Sami on Kephallonia, and off the harbor of the island of Poros.[xviii] The Hellenic Institute also organized a small number of preliminary investigations, but excavations started much later in 1989.

Important landmarks, during that period, were the foundation of three agencies, one state and two private, that serve the management of underwater heritage according to their operating constitution. The Hellenic Institute of Marine Archaeology, a private non-profit body established in 1973, was the first serious attempt towards the development of underwater archaeology in Greece. Since 1989, members of the Hellenic Institute have excavated three important shipwrecks: the early Helladic wreck at Dokos dated to 2,200 BC,[xix] the Cypro-Mycenean wreck at Point Iria dated to 1,200 BC,[xx] and a shipwreck off the Island of Kythera dated to the end of the 4th c. B.C.[xxi] The Institute is publishing the only specialized journal on underwater archaeology in Greece with four issues per year in Greek and an Annual in English.

The foundation of the Hellenic Institute precipitated the long awaited establishment of the Department of Marine Antiquities in 1976, which is the government delegate service responsible for the management of all marine antiquities under the aegis of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture. On a regular basis, the Department has been conducting inspections and preliminary investigations of private and public works on the water, assessing the degree of potential harmful effect on any nearby ancient remains.

In addition, it has been undertaking surveys of ancient sites and some full-scale underwater excavations around Greece. These include the investigation of the ancient port of Thasos,[xxii] the excavation of the harbor of Phalasarna,[xxiii] the investigation of the ancient harbor of Samos,[xxiv] the excavation of the French 17th c. vessel 'La Therese',[xxv] the excavation of the late 5th c. BC shipwreck off Alonnesos,[xxvi] and the excavation of the post-Byzantine wreck off the island of Zakynthos only to mention few.[xxvii] Consequently, the conservators treat any artifacts on the lab at the premises of the Department, and the primary investigator-archaeologist publishes a preliminary report, usually in a Greek archaeological journal.

The third agency, the Hellenic Institute for the Preservation of Nautical Tradition founded in 1981, is also a private non-profit institute. In promoting the study and dissemination of the latest news in maritime history and archaeology, it organizes experimental archaeology projects and hosts the biennial 'International Symposium on Ship Construction in Antiquity' in Greece. All three agencies have sprung from the need to study, preserve, and protect the national maritime heritage. The degree of their contribution and results, however, are mainly determined by their infrastructure, philosophical approach to maritime archaeology, financial resources, availability of specialized personnel, and last but not least, their willingness to overcome inevitable obstacles in the name of progress and success.

It is unfortunate, however, that different perspectives and priorities, as well as miscommunication, have brought apart these three institutions, creating a collaboration rift between the state and the private ones. The latter have repeatedly faced adverse situations and unfair denials in their effort to carry through their work. The state holds an enigmatic attitude which, coupled with bureaucratic indifference, irresponsibility, and malignant party politics have repeatedly taken their toll not only

on the members of the two private institutes, but also on some most dedicated state employees who advocate unity and balance. The lack of agreement and collaboration upon a common national policy on underwater heritage matters very much resembles a chronic infection that flares up at unpredictable intervals. With the most sobering statement, past General Director of Antiquities, Petrakos describes the fate of a country where, and I add, not only its antiquities, but its state employees and policies depend always on the disposition of the ruling government that might change as often as every four years.[xxviii] In a more caustic note, Peter Throckmorton in 1970 describes a universal situation where: "The barriers in the way of marine excavations are mainly the result of political bickering in city offices. The problem is desperate. Soon the object of the bickering will be vanished like the American buffalo or the whooping crane; nor can we mate the last survivors, and hope against hope they will breed."[xxix]

Education on maritime archaeology and waterlogged artifact conservation

In terms of education, the situation is no less discouraging. No Greek University has established any sort of program in Maritime History and Archaeology. Occasionally, the Hellenic Institute of Marine Archaeology has offered seminars, which provide, however, minimal education and training for a professional job that other countries require two to three year postgraduate degrees. It should be noted, however, that some of their volunteer archaeologists, who participate at their projects, are graduate students in nautical archaeology programs abroad. The Department of Marine Antiquities is the only place where one could find a paid job as underwater archaeologist in Greece.

The Service has been hiring youth as state employees from the ranks of the newly graduated land archaeologists who might hold some sort of diving certificate, but have no other training in underwater archaeology. Basically, they learn the job from their

fellow senior archaeologists, only a couple of whom have been through a formal training and hold a degree with emphasis in maritime archaeology.

In regards to the issue of conservation of waterlogged artifacts, there is yet to be achieved a balance between theory and practice in the field. Both the Hellenic Institute and the Department of Marine Antiquities have their own conservation labs. The staff, particularly at the Department, has received no formal specialized training, let alone certification, in the conservation of waterlogged artifacts. The necessary procedures and methods have been learned in practice and after communication and consultation with specialists, some of them conservators-chemists at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens. As far as education in the field of conservation of artifacts other than the waterlogged ones the situation is somewhat better. General conservation training is offered at private and state technical senior high schools, Institutes for Professional Training, Centers for Continuing Education, and at the Institute for Technological Education operating under the supervision of the Hellenic Ministry of Education. I should like to think that it is a matter of time before any of these institutions add specialized classes for waterlogged artifacts, thus providing a nursery of these much-needed conservators.

The Future

The future of maritime archaeology and the protection of the underwater cultural heritage will be largely determined by its present state. This may not sound encouraging in the light of what has been taking place so far. At this point, in order for things to change, we have to ask ourselves specific questions and be brave enough to give sincere answers: where do we stand in any aspect of maritime archaeology and underwater cultural heritage management?; where do other countries stand and how have they dealt with similar issues to ours during their growing pains?; what lessons

could we learn from these examples and how could we apply them to the needs and demands of the Greek national territory?

Of course, any questions and ensuing answers will be of no use, unless all interested parties, state and public agencies, institutions, educational departments and maritime museums decide to build bridges of communication that would strengthen their relations. Remedy for the current situation should be sought at the national level where all voices and most important of the public's have to be heard; because the Greek land and the sea is no one's personal back yard: no government employee's, no historian's, no archaeologist's. It is the heritage of the Greek people, and humanity's at large. All efforts should promote public understanding, at home and abroad, about the significance of the Greek maritime history and the importance of nautical archaeology as the tool to learn more about it.

A course of action, in my opinion, could be the organization of an International Conference in Maritime History and Nautical Archaeology in Greece. The conference, focusing on the development and progress of maritime history and archaeology in countries around the world, would provide the opportunity for the exchange of ideas and experiences on a global scale right at home, where both the Greek specialists and the public would learn about up to date developments. A temporary panel of representatives from private and state Greek institutions that deal with underwater cultural heritage matters should be responsible for the planning of the conference. The purpose of the panel would be twofold: first to discuss the current situation of underwater archaeology and underwater cultural heritage protection and management in Greece, and second to plan the organization of the conference which will serve as a basis for a subsequent formulation of recommendations and proposals for the Greek government.

With the completion of the conference, the panel should be enlarged with additional representatives and specialists and be divided into committees. Each committee, after selecting a president for practical purposes, would be assigned a specific topic relating to the interest and expertise of its members. Such topics could be the legislation in relation to underwater cultural heritage, the establishment of academic education for maritime historians and archaeologists, or the establishment of a specialized track in conservation for waterlogged artifacts only to mention few. The main purpose of such a committee would be to use all the information and data presented at the conference as a springboard to answer questions to help its members formulate a picture, as complete as possible, about the topic under discussion. It is imperative that the span of time of the discussion(s) should be finite. At the end, the goal of each committee should be to generate a set of guidelines and recommendations that would be presented by each president before the full panel at a General Session. Here the puzzle of intentions and trends will be put together and each member will have the opportunity to see things in some sort of perspective. Finally, all recommendations should be forwarded to the Minister of Education, Culture and Sciences, the Governing Board of the Greek University, and the Greek Parliament with the purpose, and in the hopes of: a) developing high standard maritime archaeology programs in education, and b) implementing new policies and laws, as well as comprehensive and effective measures for the protection and management of the national underwater cultural heritage.

Though, this suggestion may sound to some as a large-scale time-consuming plan, the truth of the matter is that time is relative, because for our purposes, time will be in reverse relation to will and effort: when will and effort increase, times decreases!

Every accomplishment would largely depend on the willingness and decisiveness of all collaborating parties to reach a consensus for the sake of the protection of the Greek underwater cultural heritage in the name of humanity.

We should all remember that our future, our heritage's future is not a matter of chance, but a matter of choice.

Please, adopt dialogue as your first choice before our underwater heritage is vanished!

Abbreviations

AAA Athens Annals of Archaeology
AJA American Journal of Archaeology
BSA Annual of the British School at Athens
HIMA Hellenic Institute of Marine Archaeology
HIPNT Hellenic Institute for the Preservation of Nautical Tradition
IJNA International Journal of Nautical Archaeology

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ENDNOTES

[i]Doris 1985, p. 28-9; please note that the date order of laws, eg. 2400/12.5.1828, the day comes first, and then the month followed by the year.
[ii]Ibid., p. 29: the translation of the legal text is mine. I have translated as close as possible to the original text.
[iii]Legislative texts are published in the Newpaper of the Greek Government (FEK).
[iv]Doris op. cit., p. 35-39.
[v]Ibid., p. 39.
[vi]Ibid., p. 31.
[vii]Throckmorton 1970a, p. 163.
[viii]Throckmorton 1991, p. 16-19.
[ix]Karo 1948, p. 179ff; Vranopoulos 1975, p. 32ff
[x]Katsonopoulou and Soter 1996.
[xi]Karo "Some Notable Wreck Excavations: (a) Antikythera," in du Plat Taylor 1965, pp. 37-39.
[xii]Garnett and Boardman 1961, pp. 102-115, and Leatham and Hood 1958-59.
[xiii]Vima, 29-11-1960; Kathimerini, 9-7-1961; Kathimerini, 28-7-1961.
[xiv]Shaw 1967, p.223ff., 1970, pp. 179-180; Jameson 1969, p. 331.
[xv]Jameson 1972, p. 195.
[xvi]Harding 1970, pp. 242-250; Harding et al. 1969, pp. 113-142; Fleming et al., "Archaeological Evidence…," in D. J. Blackman 1973, pp. 1-2; Efstratiou 1985.
[xvii]Throckmorton and Bullitt 1963, pp. 16-23, and p. 29; Throckmorton 1964, pp. 250-256; Throckmorton 1970b, pp. 35-40; Frey 1972, pp. 170-5.
[xviii]Edgerton and Scoufopoulos 1972, pp. 202ff; Scoufopoulos and McKernan 1975, pp. 103ff; Stavrolakes (alias Scoufopoulos) and Edgerton 1974, p. 330.
[xix]For comprehensive reports in English see Enalia Annual, Vols. 1 (1990), 2 (1992), and 3 (1995).
[xx]Pennas and Vichos 1995, pp. 4ff.
[xxi]Kourkoumelis 1996, p. 32ff., and 1998, p. 32ff.
[xxii]Lianos et al. 1988, p. 119ff; Archontidou-Argyri et al. 1989, p. 51ff.
[xxiii]Hadjidaki 1988, p. 463ff.
[xxiv]Simossi 1991, p. 281ff.
[xxv]Lianos 1986 (publ. 1990), p. 54ff.
[xxvi]Hadjidaki 1996, pp. 561ff.
[xxvii]a preliminary report is undeway to press in TROPIS V, the proceedings published by the Hellenic Institute for the Preservation of Nautical Tradition.
[xxviii]Petrakos 1982, pp. 174-6.
[xxix]Throckmorton 1970a, p. 229.