

Rediscovering Kythera's Ancient Laconian - Controlled Capital

By John Fardoulis



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John Fardoulis was born in Sydney as a second generation Greek-Australian on his father's side, and third on his mothers. His dad Themistocles was born in Potamos, Kythera. His mum Helen was born in Ballina, Northern NSW (from grandparents also from Kythera).

John is the publisher of a mobile industry trade publication, called Mobility. Mobility is the main trade publication in the Australian mobile telecommunications sector and has been run by John for the last 11 years. In his spare time, he is passionate about history, archaeology and shipwrecks.

John has been a certified SCUBA diver since 1991, having dived in a wide number of locations around the world over the last 19 years, including under the ice in Norway's Arctic Circle, wrecks in the South Pacific, most places in NSW and over recent years - around the Greek island of his forefathers, Kythera.

A sense of adventure has sparked John's seemingly boundless enthusiasm regarding his Greek heritage, having participated in archaeological digs at six different sites in Kythera and Antikythera over the last eighteen months. John was the Co-director of a project that in July, 2010 rediscovered parts of Kythera's Laconian-controlled ancient capital, buried in the Paleokastro mountain on the island.

Going beyond just reading about history, he's passionate about actively discovering it in the field! He believes that heritage and history is something that should unite us all, thus being an evangelist in sharing knowledge with the community.

Kythera (also spelt Cythera in ancient times) is an island approximately 30km long, by 20km wide and is known as the place where the worship of Aphrodite originated for the Hellenic world. What's not commonly understood is how significant the Laconian influence has been.

Located off the Southern tip of Peloponissos, Kythera's location was strategic as both a military and trading outpost. In a way the gateway to Greece from the Middle East and Africa - plus a vantage point for attacking Laconia (Sparta).

Ancient text tells us that from sometime in the fifth or sixth century BC, Sparta sent out officials called 'Kytherodikai' to oversee the running of the island, as it functioned as a Lakedaimonian Perioikoi or outpost, guarded by a garrison of Spartan hoplites. Control of the island changed a number of times between the Laconians and Athenians during the Peloponessian War but generally remained under Laconian influence for approximately 500 years during the Classical period. More than double the modern age of Australia!

Archaeologist, Aris Tsaravopoulos from Greece's 26th Ephorate of Classical and Prehistoric Antiquities and a handful of Greek colleagues planned to survey a path along the side of a mountain where Kythera's ancient capital is currently buried; an arduous task considering how overgrown the area was with dense, inhospitable scrub.

Members of the Kytherian-Australian community and a team of twenty full-time volunteers were assembled to assist archaeologists, resulting in approximately 3780 man hours of volunteer labour.

Accommodation for the team was provided by Bishop Seraphim, Kythera's Metropolitani at a picturesque 170 year-old, mountain-top monastery, plus help from Kythera's



Dimos (council) and local businesses.

Hundreds of members of the public also visited the site on tours, many being Greek-Australian children on holidays in Kythera at the time. So the end result was an active, unifying, adventurous and intellectually stimulating project involving youth, parents and grandparents.

Sections of the mostly forgotten 2500+ year-old Laconian-controlled capital were found, helping discover new evidence from ancient times. The team found walls, columns, coins, thousands of roof tile fragments, ancient ceramics and dozens of other different kinds of artefacts.

Kythera's ancient capital was located on the Paleokastro mountain from approximately 600BC - 100AD. Even though the mountain-side city was likely to have been populated by over 1000 people during this period, little has been done to explore what is now an overgrown, inhospitable part of the island - where the ancient capital is now buried.

Hardly any evidence is present aboveground, apart from approximately 2600 year old Doric columns inside the church of Agios Kosmas, which is located where a strategic part of the city functioned. Plus part of a fortification wall along the Northern side of the mountain.

Walls and moveable objects discovered during July, 2010 dig suggest that excavations had uncovered items from approximately 100BC - 100AD, the fi-

nal phase of Laconian rule and a changeover time between Classical and Roman periods. Objects from several hundreds of years earlier will be buried deeper, requiring further excavations to tell us more about the city during its prime.

Opening a path up the mountain through thick scrub also cleared access to the Agios Kosmas church, which was an added bonus. This church is unique as it was constructed using Doric columns from approximately 600BC, from a temple to the Dioskouroi, Castor and Pollux, which is believed to have been located inside the Laconian-controlled capital from the sixth century BC. The Byzantines reused columns from the Dioskouroi temple carved around 1900 years prior - in parts of walls and to hold up the roof when building the Agios Kosmas church in 1290AD. In a way, this has preserved and sheltered a number of such Doric columns from the ancient Laconian city, keeping them in good condition until today.



Other Laconian sites discovered in Kythera over the last few decades include a Sanctuary to Asclepius (actually Aiglapios according to an inscription in Laconian dialect) and Sanctuary of Poseidon Gaieochos, where over 250 coins and other objects

have been found as offerings from 54 different cities of the ancient Mediterranean. In a way tolls left for good luck before or after sailors made the treacherous journey around Cape Malea during antiquity.

A presentation of what was discovered while excavating parts of Kythera's ancient Laconian-

controlled capital and an outline of how "Community Supported Archaeology" might work in other

parts of Greece will be held at Sydney University on the evening of Wednesday November 10th. 7pm for a 7.30pm start.

It's an interesting story, about more than just 2000 year-old artefacts but a way of unifying the community on many levels, engaging youth and providing an inspiring connection with ancient Greek heritage. Come along to the free talk and find out more.

Call Kathy Samios on 02 9349 1849 or email john.fardoulis@gmail.com to reserve your place at the free lecture.

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