

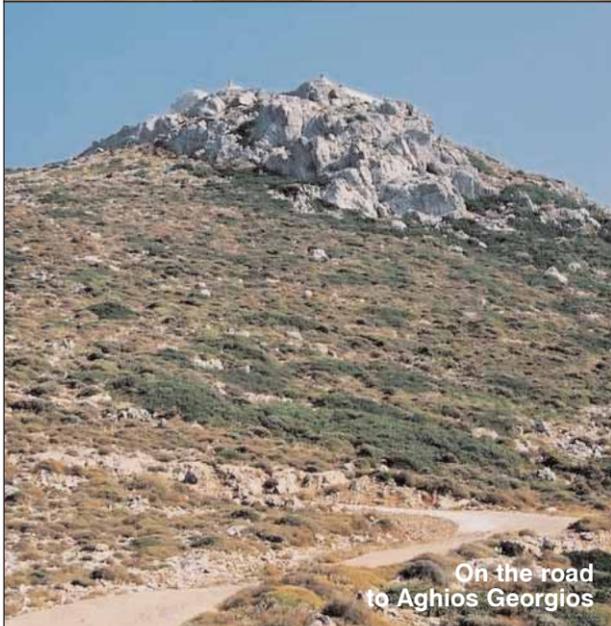
Professor Yannis Sakellarakis

a larger than life archaeologist

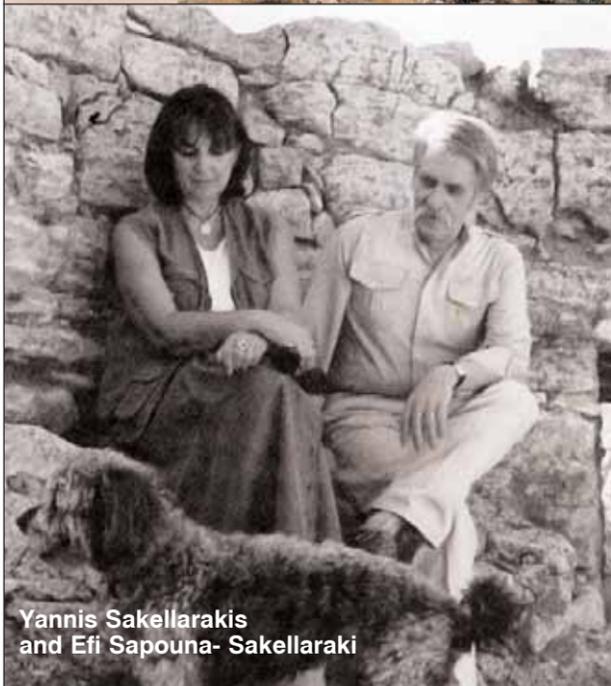
In September 2003 I was in Kythera for a conference when I met Professor Yannis Sakellarakis, a larger than life archaeologist who had uncovered a Minoan peak place at Aghios Georgios tou vouno on Kythera a decade earlier.



The Minoan finds on display at the Archaeological Museum of Piraeus



On the road to Aghios Georgios



Yannis Sakellarakis and Efi Sapouna-Sakellarakis

He had just published his book “Digging For the Past” in which his belief that digging for Greece’s past becomes a “descent into a rich and varied history out of which western civilization was born”, was brought out in the text as well as stunning photographs of the Aghios Georgios excavations. However, whilst the book dealt with some of his other famous excavations, particularly at Archanes on Crete, there was no actual discussion of the Kytherian dig (apart from the photos). When I asked why, he replied laconically “I am working on that. It’s a labour of love. You’ll see”.

Regrettably, on 28 October 2010 Professor Sakellarakis passed away after a short illness, aged 74.

Yannis Sakellarakis was born in Athens in 1936. He graduated from the Department of History and Archaeology, University of Athens and gained his PhD at the University of Heidelberg, where he also taught. He served at the Heraklion Museum in Crete, first as curator (1963-1968) and later as Director (1980-1987). In Athens he was a curator of the Prehistoric Societies (1970-1980) and Deputy Director (1987-1994) of the National Archaeological Museum. He was a member of the Archaeological Society at Athens, the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, and the Society of Antiquaries of London.

He was also a member of many Greek and foreign scientific societies, receiving awards from numerous bodies, including the Academy of Athens, the University of Crete, the Technological Education Institute of Crete, the National Bank of Greece Cultural Foundation and the Municipality of Kythera. In 2004 he was honoured with the Gold Cross of the Order of Honour of the Greek Republic.

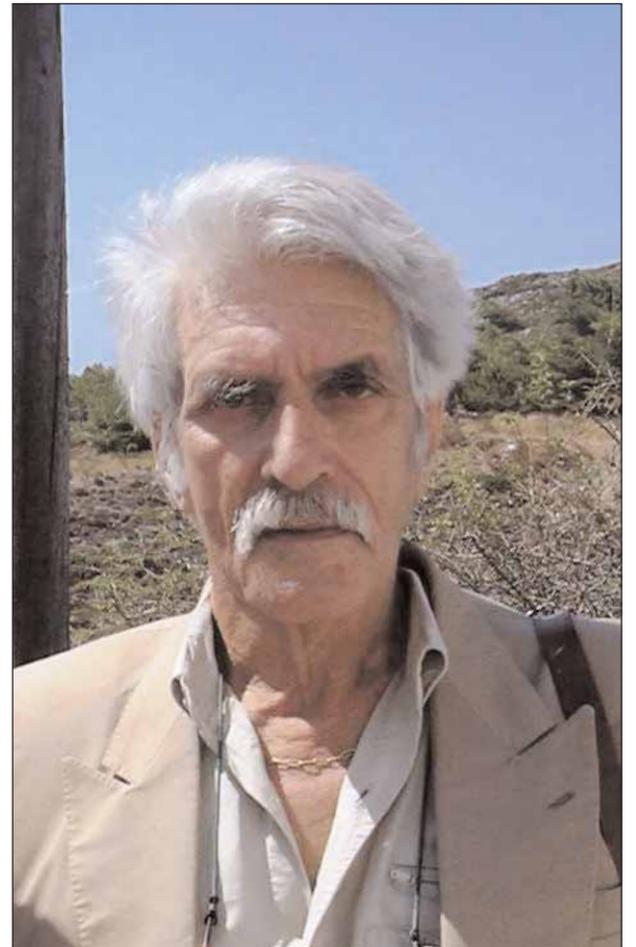
He excavated at a number of sites, including famously the Minoan palatial site of Archanes, the Idaean Cave, and then Kythera. Sakellarakis would later describe the discovery of the Minoan sanctuary at Aghios Georgios as a “last, almost dream-like journey to Kythera”. That dig yielded rare Minoan artifacts, including mostly miniature Minoan figurines and statuettes, which are now on display in the Archaeological Museum of Piraeus.

In recent years he had been overseeing along with his wife, Dr Efi Sapouna-Sakellarakis, the excavations at the archaeological site of Zominthos on Crete, and had almost completed an epic 3 volume work on the excavations on Kythera. Indeed, his last wish was that his bones be taken to Zomithos and buried there for eternity in the Minoan serenity of the mountains.

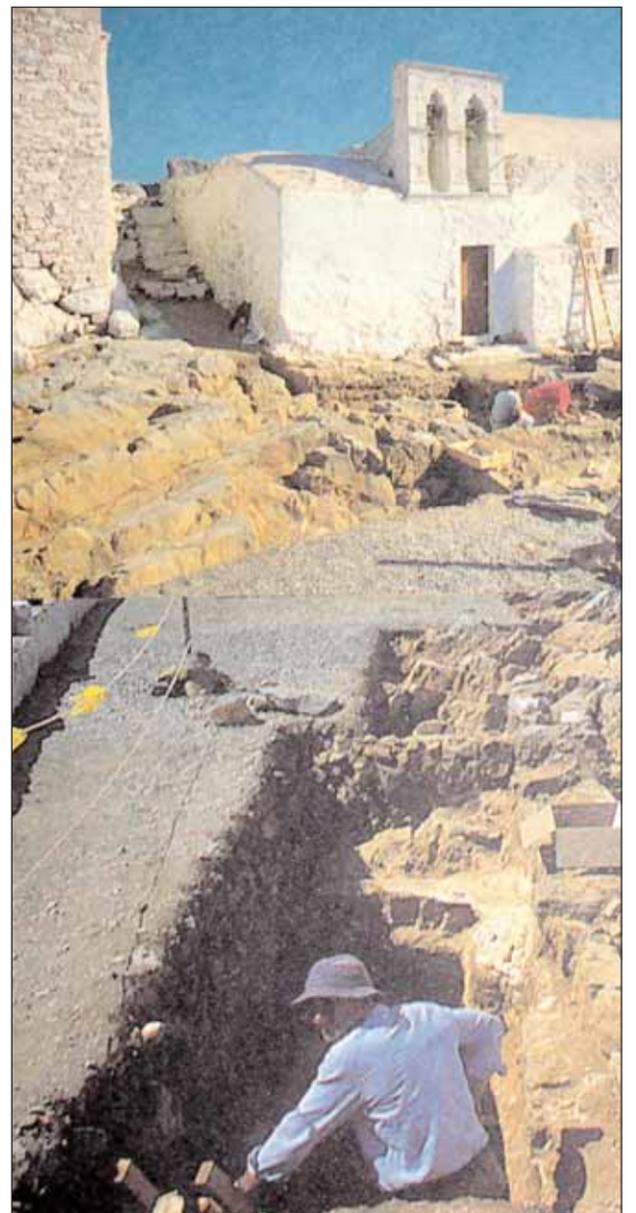
The famous British archaeologist Sir John Boardman in the prologue to “Digging for the Past” wrote that both Yannis Sakellarakis and his wife were “prime examples of the devotion and skills that Greek archaeologists have bestowed on the study of their land”.

Yannis Sakellarakis was an archaeologist of international renown and recognised universally as one of the foremost authorities on Minoan Archaeology. As one commentator recently wrote, Yannis Sakellarakis was a man who in digging up the Greek earth not only discovered ancient treasures but also its internal soul. As another colleague remarked on AegeaNet, he never suspected that Yannis was mortal.

Greece has lost a great archaeologist. He will always remain in our collective memory.



Yannis Sakellarakis (photo taken in Kythera in 2003)



Excavation works at Aghios Georgios (taken from “Digging for the Past”)

George Vardas