

# Mentor Dive update 2015



**O**n a warm summer's evening on Friday 10 July, the team of the Ministry of Culture, Ephorate of underwater antiquities, held a "show & tell" for the local Avlemonas community and interested visitors.

The talk took place at the fishing wharf in the cove of Avlemonas, surrounded by their compressors, tanks and a truck loaded with equipment. Mr Dimitri Koukoumelis, who lead the dive team, presented in Greek and our own John Fardoulis, who also partook in the dive with the team, translated in English. There were about 60 people present, a combination of interested locals, visitors from Australia and a group of archaeology students led by Tim Gregory & Lita Tzortzopoulos-Gregory.

*The following is an account of the information presented about the dive and the findings by Dimitri and John.*

Normally no-one would have cared about a ship sinking of this size during that period, except for the fact that this ship was carrying very precious cargo. In Sept 1802 The Mentor set sail from Pireaus loaded with 17 crates which contained the looted freezes of the Parthenon Marbles, bound for England. The ship was on route to England via Malta and Gibraltar, when it started to take in water as it past Cape Tenaro (lower Peloponnese). The

crew decided to turn back to Kythera to the harbour of Avlemonas or St Nicolo, as it was known then, as Kythera was considered safe in regards to their cargo, due to their being a British consul on the island at the time. However on route into the harbour, it hit rocks just outside the port and sank in shallow water with it's masts still visible. All crew and passengers survived. Elgin was informed and sent Hamilton to organise the salvage of the crates containing the marbles. For 2 years he collaborated with Greek divers and with the help of Lord Nelson who sent a warship and a merchant ship transported the cargo to Lord Elgin in England. After a few years the Parthenon Marbles were purchased by the British Museum where they remain until this day.

About four years ago John Fardoulis went to see Dimitri regarding interest in diving to the Mentor and with their collaboration, permission from the Ministry of Culture and funding from the Nicholas Aroney Trust began the current series of dives in 2011. The Ephorate had also done a short dive of a few days in 2009 and Jacques Cousteau also dived to the wreck back in the 1970s. There has been a myth since those days that there are still marbles down there, but to date nothing has been found. The dive is a very important one as it sends a message on



an international level that Greeks are very involved in the history surrounding the Parthenon Marbles and not just calling for the Marbles to be returned to Greece.

One quarter of the ship has been exposed and that is what has been explored. This section measures 11 metres x 5 metres. The team come back each year as they are still not sure what else is down there. A lot of ancient artefacts found to date do not appear on the ships official manifest.

A compressor is used to send air down which the divers use to suck the sand around the wreck. The sand comes up and is sifted revealing artefacts. Two divers go down each time at a depth of 22 metres for 30 minutes at a time.

This year three divers came from the Anti-Kytherian ship dive who used a Rebreather, this allows them to stay in the water up to 2 hours. As a side Dimitri mentioned that Kythera and Anti Kythera are currently hosting the world's most important dives relating to Greek antiquities.

Most items found to date have been from the ship itself such as mechanisms used on board and personal effects such as pistols. But also found over the past few dives have been some small ancient artefacts believed to be



Egyptian, Greek and Arabic. As many of these items did not appear on the ship's official 'Cargo' manifest, the team believe that they were collected in addition to the official cargo.

In the 1700s and early 1800s Europe and England were gripped by what was known as the "Curiosities". It was the time of Charles Darwin and others. Of particular interest was the Mediterranean. Elgin posted people around the region to survey and collect artefacts of interest. One such object was taken from Alexandria in Egypt known as the Rosetta Stone, which was instrumental in deciphering the Hieroglyphics of Ancient Egypt as there was a Greek and Hebrew translations inscribed on the stone as well. Elgin then commissioned a team to take parts of the Parthenon Freezes, which as mentioned earlier was the primary cargo on The Mentor when it sank.

In 2012 Ancient Egyptian and Lebanese artefacts were found amongst other things. In 2013 they found Spanish and Dutch coins of the period. There was no dive in 2014 due to issues and this year the team has found a combination of more ship equipment, personal effects and small ancient artefacts.

The items presented to the crowd this year were kept in plastic bags containing seawater to preserve their delicate state. Dimitri took them out for a short while to show the crowd. The items will be taken to Athens to the Ephorate's workshop/warehouse, where they will be treated slowly in due course with a combination of sea and fresh water and then cleaned and dried, thus preserving them. As the newly recovered items have not been officially catalogued and presented to the Ministry of Culture, no photographs were allowed to be taken or mention of the artefacts can be made at this point, as protocol must be followed.

The show and tell takes place each year at the conclusion of the dive, mostly for the local Avlemonas community as a thank you for putting up with dive team's disturbance and intrusion to this normally quiet inlet village.

Kalie Zervos

