

# THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF KYTHERA COMES TO LIFE AT KYTHERA HOUSE

The archaeology of Kythera, encompassing the island's rich and complex history, people, geology and cultural and natural landscapes, is always intriguing as we are keen to delve into our past to gain a better appreciation of our heritage.

That task has been made much easier by the publication of the definitive book on the island, *The Archaeology of Kythera*, by the highly-regarded Professor Tim Gregory and Lita Tzortzopoulou-Gregory. The work, the product of years of research and analysis, provides a well-written and comprehensive guide to Kythera, or as Dr Stavros Paspalas has written in the forward to the book, an "insider's view of the archaeology and history of the island from pre-history to the present".

On 16 February 2016 more than 70 people gathered at Kythera House for the launch of the book by Professor Jean-Paul Descoedres, the founding editor of *Mediterranean Archaeology* and the publisher at *Meditarch*, and by Dr Paspalas of the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens. Amongst the guests were former Australian Ambassador to Greece, Ross Burns, Angelo Crones and Stephen Aroney of the Nicholas Aroney Trust and many friends and interested observers. Unfortunately the authors are still overseas but their intellectual presence was felt.

Professor Descoedres praised the scholarship that is evident in the book and described it as THE book on Kythera for a generation; a comprehensive volume without peer. A cursory glance of the various chapters, the extensive bibliography and the multiplicity of illustrations, including maps and photographs, certainly bears testimony to this.

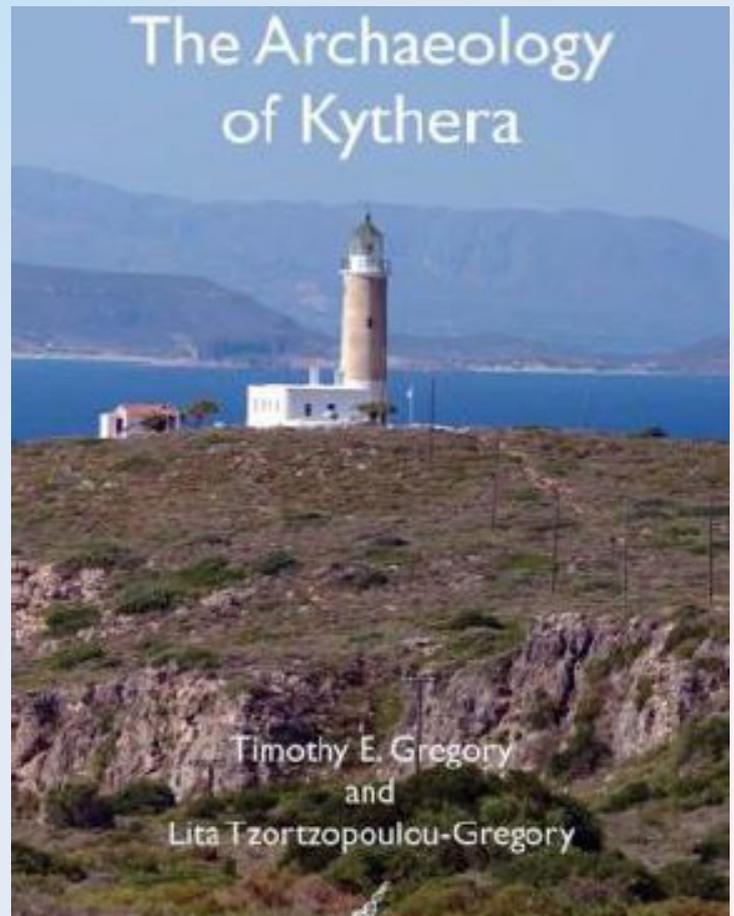
Dr Paspalas echoed these thoughts. An abridged version of his speech on the night is reproduced in this newsletter.

After the launch, the crowd was delighted to mingle and partake in the beautiful array of food, sweets and beverages arranged by the Kytherian Association under the guidance of Kathy Samios. Many copies of the book were sold on the night.

More copies are available from Kythera House for \$50.00 plus postage. If you would like to order a copy please call our office on 9599 6998 or email [info@kytherianassociation.com.au](mailto:info@kytherianassociation.com.au)

It is a must read for anyone interested in Kythera. A further launch with the authors present is planned for later in the year when Tim and Lita return to Australia.

*George Vardas*  
*Cultural Officer*



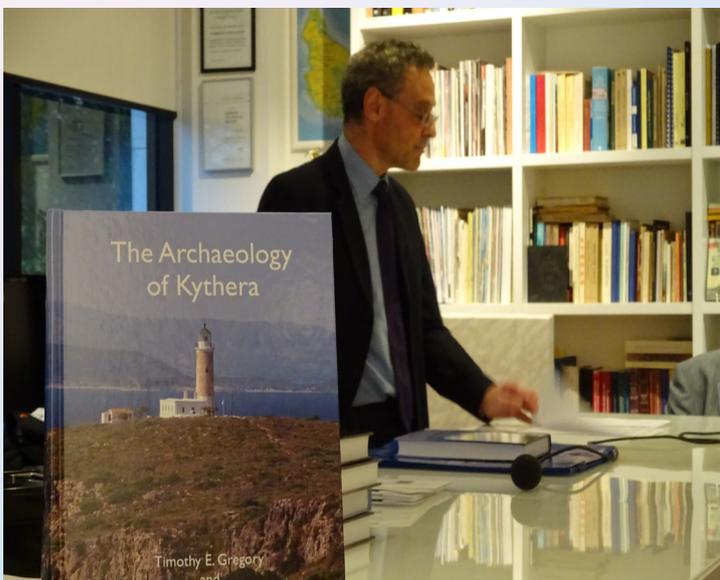
# BOOK PRESENTATION: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF KYTHERA

Stavros A. Paspalas

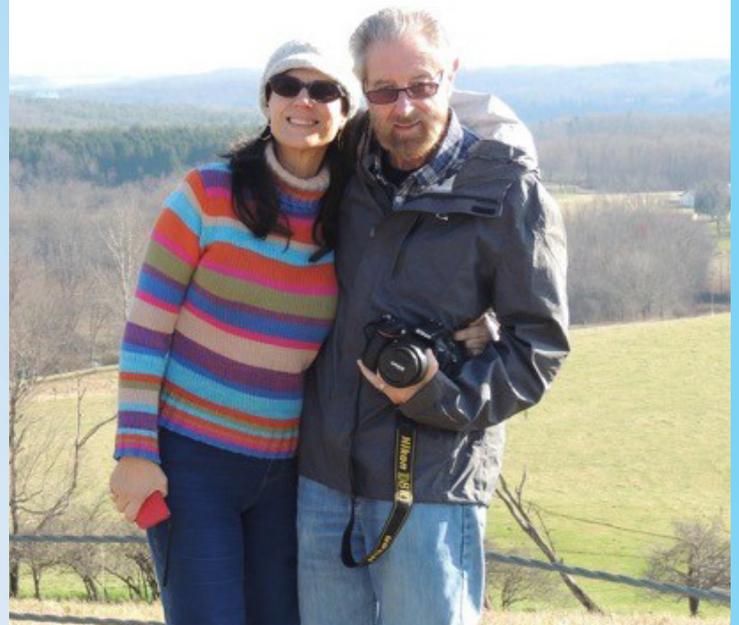
*The text appearing below is an abbreviated version of the book presentation delivered by Dr S. A. Paspalas (Co-Director of the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens) at Kythera House, Sydney, on 12 February, 2016.*

Timothy Gregory and Lita Tzortzopoulou-Gregory's recently published book, *The Archaeology of Kythera*, is a boon for all those interested in the island and its past. It is unfortunate that neither of them could be here this evening, and everything that I will say is only a pale reflection of the insights they would have offered you. Before presenting the book I would like to state that this very handsome volume owes a debt of gratitude to the publisher, Professor Jean-Paul Descoedres, and his team, and most importantly to the Nicholas Anthony Aroney Trust which agreed to cover a significant part of the production costs. In conversations with the authors it has also become clear to me that the encouragement and support that the late Professor Manuel Aroney offered them was instrumental in the realisation of their book, and I am certain that they would want this placed on the record.

Many valuable publications have previously appeared on the history and archaeology of Kythera but Tim and Lita's book is different in character to all these earlier works as it provides an unrivalled, up-to-date, overview from prehistory to the present day. It's as if everything ever written on Kythera, from its geology to its military history, from its flora to its early path-cum-road systems, has been read and analysed by the authors and then re-worked to take its place in a coherent whole. However, the book cannot be considered a derivative work, for the authors have spent years in situ, over the length and breadth of the island, examining both



Authors Tim Gregory & Lita Tzortzopoulou-Gregory



often-visited areas and others that are far more isolated so as to gain further insights in to the island's past.

I have had the privilege of working with Tim and Lita on Kythera in the context of the "Australian Paliochora Kythera Archaeological Survey," a project conducted under the auspices of the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens and with the permission of the Greek Ministry of Culture. The Institute is the vehicle through which Australian archaeologists can conduct fieldwork in Greece; fieldwork projects which, most importantly, also provide an on-hands introduction to Greek archaeology and history (as well as to the modern country) to those Australian university students who participate in them. Between 1999 and 2003 our survey intensively examined wide tracts of the north central part of Kythera, that included areas north and west of Potamos, east of Aroniadika and around the mediaeval settlement of Paliochora. A great deal of important archaeological information, dating to the Early Bronze Age through to yesterday, was retrieved during those campaigns. Some of this has already appeared in print in research journals aimed at the specialist, but this book offers the first account of some of these finds presented in a manner that brings the landscape and its past to life. This also holds true for the authors' treatment of the results of the other major archaeological investigations that have taken place on Kythera over the last 20 or so years: the British-led "Kythera Island Project" that focussed on the southern central part of island, Yannis Sakellarakis' excavations at the Minoan peak sanctuary at Aghios Georgios sto Vouno, and the various excavations conducted by the Greek state archaeologists, primarily Aris Tsaravopoulos, as well as the restoration work undertaken on various mediaeval buildings. Tim and Lita's book, though, is not simply a handbook, though its second part admirably fulfils this role. The

first part of the volume provides the reader with an accessible background to the island's past, as it examines what archaeology is and how archaeologists have thought about their raw data throughout the discipline's history. After this explanatory essay the authors' focus narrows to Kythera itself; its geology, a critical factor in determining the range of forms that human settlement could take, is introduced along with its geography: where are (and were) the possible anchorages, the more fertile expanses, sources of water and the like. In effect, the stage is now set. Next follows a concise account of the history of archaeological research on the island. From the hands-on reality of archaeological artefacts the authors then present the mythological stories associated with Kythera in the ancient written sources along with the often amusing accounts of early western travellers to the eastern Mediterranean who happened to visit the island albeit in very restricted areas of it. Here mythology and history intermingle, and the western romantic view of Kythera as Aphrodite's haven comes very much into view.

The first half of the book finishes with an archaeological history of the island which provides an overview of developments on Kythera, as testified to by the archaeological record with supplements from the preserved written sources. This overview is arranged by chronological period starting from the Late Neolithic, c. 5000 BC through to the present. The second part of the book is divided into seven chapters; the first six examine the archaeology of the six geographical sectors into which the authors have divided the island for their purposes; the seventh examines the archaeology of the small island often, but not always, a dependency of Kythera: Antikythera.

The second part is truly the marvel of the publication. It makes for revelatory armchair reading and, I would argue, for indispensable reading when visiting the island. The reader can easily orientate (with the help of the publication's many maps) him- or herself and then set out on a tour of discovery of the area in which he or she is standing or driving through.

Needless to say all the major sites on the island have been covered. However, it is the authors' treatment of the not-so-obvious antiquities that really stands out; a real contribution to the interested visitor as well as to the professional archaeologist. Indeed, how many other publications, for example, have discussed, or brought to the attention of the wider public, the (unfortunately now ruinous) church of San Martino (aka Aghios Minas) at Chora which was originally built as a Roman Catholic place of worship? Or indeed its later life as an Anglican church in the precinct of which very informative funerary inscriptions belonging to the graves of deceased members of the British garrison were found? Or, again, how many know of the mediaeval tower at Yerakari?

The second part of the book brings to life the Kytherian (and Antikytherian) countryside, towns, villages and hamlets by bringing to the readers' notice its hidden or partly-hidden cultural monuments, be they ancient, mediaeval or early modern. Moreover, it supplies a wider cultural context, one that ranges from religious observances all the way to folkloric tales. I am certain that many who read this book will be introduced for the first time to the smartly-attired singing pigs of Mavri Limni south of Phratsia, who bring ill fortune to all those who come across them. The authors have made, to our benefit, a special effort to include such details thus enriching the reader's appreciation of the island's past (and indeed present in many cases).

Other areas of special interest, at least to me, that are presented in Tim and Lita's book include the welcome discussion of the site of Aghios Georgios Kolokythias, on the height just north of Aghia Pelagia, with its early mediaeval fortifications and church – a site of intensive investigation by the Australian survey conducted under the aegis of the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens. More recent monuments are not overlooked. The statues erected in the island's squares are documented and the stories pertaining to those they honour recounted. Similarly the very modest, but truly moving, monument on the road from Potamos to Aghia Pelagia at the "Place of Tears of Joy and Sadness" also finds its proper place in this book, as a testimony to the impact of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century migration from the island. I wonder how many have driven past it without realising its great significance. This book, hopefully, will rectify this.

It is particularly noteworthy that the authors have managed to include reference to some very recent finds. I note, for example, the account of the Minoan remains at the height of Leska (southwest of Mylopotamos), which their excavator has argued may be Kythera's second Minoan peak sanctuary after that at Aghios Georgios sto Vouno. Similarly, Tim and Lita were able to incorporate the conclusions of Ioannis Petrocheilos, the excavator of Paliokastro (the centre of the polis of Kythera of the historical period). Petrocheilos has concluded that the highest point of the city was occupied by a sanctuary dedicated to Athena. Clearly, the readers of this book will benefit from the most-up-to-date information. A final appendix written by Aris Tsaravopoulos, the state archaeologist who was responsible for Kythera for many years, gives a brief account of recent, and yet-to-be-published, discoveries throughout the island and Antikythera.

Both on Kythera and beyond the readers of this book will be well served. It captures all the developments in Kytherian archaeology over recent years as well as providing a very accessible account of that conducted by

earlier generations. Its glossary and appendices, including a time chart, are valuable supplements that further enhance the value of the work. There is no reason to fear that one will be confused by opaque academic jargon.

The past few decades have been very good for those with an interest in the archaeology of Kythera, and this has been capped by the book which is presented here this evening. Furthermore, it is very encouraging that the Greek Ministry of Culture has renovated the Archaeological Museum at Chora which is to open shortly. The Ministry's commitment to make the archaeology of Greece as accessible as possible to the public, throughout the country, is laudable. The new museum at Kythera is a prime example of its commitment and the dedication of the archaeologists on its staff, as well as the Friends of the Kythera Archaeological Museums who also worked very hard for this result. And here I note that the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens hopes to arrange a guided tour of Kythera and Crete in 2017, by which time the museum will be well and truly opened.

Clearly, the Australian commitment to the island and its past is strong, as your presence here testifies. The clearest, though, evidence of this is Tim and Lita's book, a publication from which we shall all benefit; indeed, on a repeated basis. So, our thanks to the absent authors.



*George Vardas MC of the evening*



*Professor Jean-Paul Descoeudres*



*Meditarch and University dignitaries*





*Dr Stavros Paspalas*





*A full house turnout at Kythera House - including many relatives of Lita's in the middle rows.*







*Photos courtesy of George Poulos, Victor Kepreotis, George Vardas & Kalie Zervos*