

Treasure Found in Kythera

By John Fardoulis

The underwater shipwreck excavation of the *Mentor* shipwreck was really successful this year, a lot of new items were found, particularly personal items from the passengers and crew.

2012 Excavation

A greater number of coins were also found, at least two ancient silver coins which were antiquities acquired by Lord Elgin, passengers or the crew. Plus two gold coins, used as currency at the time, from the late 1700's.

Other coins were also recovered but require conservation before they can be identified. Some of these may also be ancient.

Finding three ancient coins on the wreck last year created international news, prompting questions about what other antiquities Lord Elgin was transporting, in addition to crates of Parthenon marbles/sculptures. There may be even more questions from this year's finds, after conservation of currently unidentified coins is completed.

Another pistol was recovered, a fob (pocket) watch, personal seal with a cannon on it and gold chain, a pipe, ring, part of navigation instruments, bottles, musket balls, cannon balls, crockery and ceramics possibly from the galley (kitchen) area.

On a different note, some people believe that cannons in the small fortress in Avlemonas were from the *Mentor*. We took two cannon balls raised from the wreck this year and placed them in the cannons, which revealed that the four cannons on the *Mentor* would have been smaller.

Diaries from the time tell us that the 16 crates of Parthenon sculptures and marble throne were recovered by sponge divers from Simi and Kalymnos in 1802-1804. We don't yet know what else remains, buried on the bottom of the sea, near Avlemonas.

This is a project of international significance, putting Kythera in the news around the world last year, with many stories written in national Greek newspapers, television and radio coverage, plus features in magazines in many different countries.

Uncovering the Ship

The *Mentor* was a small Brig, carrying 16 crates of Parthenon sculptures and a marble throne, en-route to Malta for the United Kingdom, which sank off Avlemonas in Kythera in September 1802.

A large section of the hull was uncovered this year, revealing much more wood that was buried (and preserved) under the sand. Many small objects have also been preserved under the sand, which is promising for future excavation seasons.

Our team has re-covered exposed wood on the bottom of the sea for now, so that marine organisms don't attack parts of the hull that have survived.

Display

So far we have found enough material for an excellent museum display. Plus, parts of the wooden hull are still buried in the sand, which could be raised at some stage. Promising new finds – of international significance because of ties this wreck has with the Parthenon, which will hopefully increase awareness regarding the need to reopen the archaeological museum in Chora.

A small exhibit might also be possible in the new Acropolis museum in Athens, perhaps a cabinet or two



As you can see, a substantial proportion of the hull was uncovered this year. Most of this wood has been blanketed by sand for 210 years, almost the modern age of Australia. In other words, this vessel was from a period close to that of Australia's "First Fleet".
Image credit: John Fardoulis



(Above) A gold Dutch coin from the period. The date stamped on it is 1788. (Right) A fob (pocket watch). Both of these were recovered in July, 2012. Image credits: Ephorate of Maritime Antiquities, Greece



with artefacts from the shipwreck, photos and video, explaining Kythera's link to the modern history of the Parthenon.

Thanks & Acknowledgements

The major sponsor in 2012 was the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (snf.org), supported by my foundation, the Kytherian Research Group, with help from the Kytherian Association of Australia and Nicholas Anthony Aroney trust.

Dr. Dimitris Kourkoumelis is the archaeologist in charge from the Ephorate of Maritime Antiquities and deserves a lot of thanks for adding this project to the 2012 Ephorate research program. The team from the Ephorate brought a lot of equipment this year, including an 8.5m RIB (dive boat), a truck, many compressors and a lot of other diving-related machinery.

To put things into perspective regarding how significant

this project is, I've personally donated over \$50,000 in volunteered time towards it. Cosmos Coroneos has also volunteered his extensive experience, gratis.

Team members from the Ephorate included; Louis Mercenier, Manolis Tzeferonis, Petros Tsampourakis and Themistocles Troupakis, highly experienced government divers and engineers. Plus archaeologist Alexander C. Tourtas, Dimitris J. Dimitriou and Manouil Kourkoumelis.

Myself and Scott Leimroth went from Australia for the project and Cosmos Coroneos supported from back in Australia this year.

Adonis Kyrou also deserves thanks, he's had an inspiring influence on the project.

For more information see: www.krg.org.au/mentor

We have taken a lot of underwater video and photos, which may be used in producing a documentary at some stage. In the meantime, more will be added to the web site: www.krg.org.au/mentor over the next few months.



Image credits: John Fardoulis



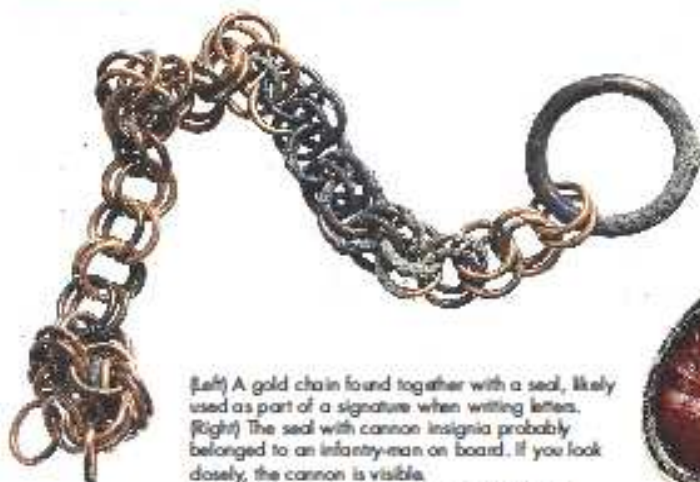
A compressor is mounted on a boat, with hoses extending to the bottom. This compressor sucks up water and sand to the surface as a way of removing a blanket of sand over remains of the hull. Any small items slipping through are collected in a sieve. It's a bit like vacuuming 210 years of sand off the wreck.



Image credit: Scott Leimroth



Louis Mercenier, a Greek government diver, sanding the hull by removing sand with the jet.



(left) A gold chain found together with a seal, likely used as part of a signature when writing letters.
(right) The seal with cannon insignia probably belonged to an infantryman on board. If you look closely, the cannon is visible.
Image credits: Ephorate of Maritime Antiquities,



(left) A ring was also discovered, requiring restoration to help expose greater detail.

