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CAN AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE CONTRIBUTE TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF A REMOTE ISLAND¹?

(A proposal for the creation of an Archaeological Park on the island of Antikythera, Greece)

The immediate answer to the question of the title is “Yes”, if we examine the archaeological sites at Olympia and Epidaurus in the Peloponnese, Delphi in Central Greece, Dion in Macedonia, and a number of other sites that do not offer other, tourist, activities of equal importance². The popularity of the above sites, however, exceeds the limits of Greece and, apart from the case of Delphi, they are located in regions that would not face any financial problems or problems of isolation even without the existence of antiquities.

The case of Antikythera, however, is totally different. The island is located in the middle of the distance between Kythera and Crete (Marčić et al. 2005, pl. 1), with a harbour exposed to the north winds that prevent the safe departure of small boats and also the entry for bigger boats. The island has today only 30 permanent inhabitants (from approximately 700 inhabitants 80 years ago) with a stable progress towards isolation, since there is not any prospect in the production sector.

The island does not have good beaches and traditional settlements, and thus the visitor does not have a lot to see or do if he stays on the island for more than two or three days. But, a whole fortified ancient city is located on the hill, the history of which can be a big pole of attraction for visitors from all over the world (fig. 1 [10]).

This fortification appeared little after the middle of the 4th century BC and occupies more than 30 hectares on the hill of Kastro (ancient Aigila). A sanctuary dedicated to Apollo, dated from the 4th to the 1st centuries BC, is located in the gulf of Xeropotamos (fig. 2 [11]). Deeper in this same gulf was also located the harbour of the ancient city (Tsaravopoulos 2009).

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¹ I would like to thank my colleague Geli Fragkou for the translation, in English, of this text.

² I do not include here the archaeological sites of Akrotiri at Santorini, of Knossos in Crete, of Lindos in Rhodes etc, the visit of which is one of the activities of a bigger program, the main aim of which is the sea bathing, and by the way the visit of the archaeological site.

The walls of the fortification can be seen in all their length; on the highest point of the site there is an inner fortification, the acropolis (fig.3 [7]). In the whole area, of around 30 hectares, sanctuaries, military installations, houses, cisterns, and other building remains are preserved.

The movable finds excavated from the city are dated from the late 4th to the early 1st century BC, limiting the duration of the city's function in the Hellenistic period (fig. 4-6 [9, 12, 13]). Except from the great quantity of ceramics, weapons and 'ammunitions' (sling bullets, catapult stones, arrow and spear heads) are continuously being uncovered. From the almost 150 coins found, the largest amount comes from Phalasarna, in the Western Crete, in the territory of which the island seems to have belonged in antiquity.

From the study of the literary sources, the excavation and the epigraphic data, it is confirmed that the fortification was constructed in the years of Alexander's the Great wars against the Persian Empire – which finally disappeared under his new rule–, and was subsidized by the Persians through the aid of the king Agis III of Sparta (Stais 1889, Tsaravopoulos 2009, Secunda 2009). The movable finds show that the life of the city ceased completely in 69 BC, when the Romans send Metellus "Creticus" to clear the situation of the 'unruly' rebellious Crete.

The data that make the presentation of the history of the island interesting to the world audience are the following:

- 1) The fortified city, as it has been said above, was founded during the years of the great conflict that finished with the disappearing of the Persian Empire and the appearance of the Hellenistic kingdoms, changing from within the Greek, but also the world history.
- 2) The participation of the island in the piratical activity of the Cretan cities, which was intense during the Hellenistic period, and due to the key geographical position the island had in the maritime routes of commercial and war ships, it became a target for the big powers (the Rhodians, the Macedonians, the Spartans etc) who competed for the control of the Aegean Sea.
- 3) During the "Cretan Revolution", in the 1st c BC, against the Romans, Antikythera that belonged to the Cretan city of Phalasarna, became the first target of the Roman attack that ended with the destruction of Crete and its conquest (69-67 BC). With the conquest of Crete the whole Greek world came under the Roman rule. The life of the ancient city of Antikythera stopped then.

My proposal consists of the creation of an **"alive"** Archaeological Park, which, I believe, could give to the island a new chance to revive. I am not talking about a simple, well organized archaeological site, but about a site where the visitors will have the opportunity to participate and from simple spectators to become active. The difference is that the visitor exhausts a simple archaeological site in one or two full day visits. But the visitors to this particular island are obliged by the irregular ship schedule to stay more days on the island, something that does not encourage the visit to the island at first place. With the proposal I suggest

shortly, there is the possibility of creating an interest for the visitors that would make them stay on the island for two or three weeks.

As the island of Antikythera is located in the southern point of the Aegean Sea the sunny days that allow out door work start in the mid March and finish late in November. This gives the chance of an organized archaeological activity throughout the above mentioned period.

This activity, as I imagine it, is integrated in the wider frames of an “alternative tourism” programme. The interested visitors-tourists would come to the island, not for a simple visit, but in order to participate in the procedure of uncovering and organizing an archaeological site. They would work as personnel and at the same time they would be taught the archaeological process and all the other activities required for the creation and function of the Archaeological Park, such as the reconstruction of four old houses of the 19th century that are located in the area of the archaeological site and rest on the ancient fortification, the formation of pathways, the guiding around the site, while in the afternoons they would take lessons relevant to: 1) the history of the site and of the wider area (Crete, Kythera and the Peloponnese) 2) the way historical conclusions are extracted from archaeological data (the finds from the excavation), 3) the aims of the archaeological research and also 4) the ways antiquities should be presented to the wider audience.

The site is extensive, cultivation terraces cover almost everywhere the antiquities and their total reveal will require work (for more than five months a year) that will last more than eight decades. This gives the possibility of a continuous liveliness in the archaeological site, since the evidence will always change and new areas will be uncovered. If we see the way it will function, the visitors-workers in the site will have the chance to see the progress of the reveal and also the deduction of conclusions from the results of the excavation in which they themselves will participate. Some of them will also guide the passing visitors, who will also watch live the excavation procedure.

Until today, corresponding to the wish of the Antikythera Community as an archaeologist of the 26th Department of Antiquities I have cleaned and uncovered parts of the fortification walls and the architectural remains of the sanctuary of Apollo that is located at the bottom of the hill. Volunteers, students and others have already participated in the above procedure for eight summer seasons (fig. 7,8 [1, 14]). From this experience it seems that volunteerism, even that during which lodging and feeding are not guaranteed, has a great response not only by people who are associated with the humanity sciences, but also by people whose professions are different.

There is the possibility to refer to tourists who seek for an alternative way of vacation, who are prepared to offer, by paying, volunteering work in an archaeological site. In many archaeological sites abroad, in Spain, in France, and also in Rumania, the excavations are carried out this way and thus, their financing is being assured. Another target group could be the world community of

archaeology students that require field work for their portfolios. Their expenses are assured often by the universities they study.

With the above proposal three aims are achieved:

1. The revival of the archaeological site with the uncovering of functional parts of the ancient city, the assurance of personnel presence and the guiding of visitors during the touristic period which can start from May and last until October and even more. This aim belongs to the immediate goals of the Archaeological Service. The constant presence of a team that will be in the archaeological site will help the preservation and protection of the pathways in order not to appear abandoned as more of the archaeological sites do.
2. The presence of a large group of people not only during the summer months (July and August), but also during the rest of the year will lead to the overcome of the abandonment procedure. The personnel will work on the conservation of the finds for their display in a museum, while the need for guard personnel will lead to the “repatriation” of some of the island’s inhabitants, since a number of jobs will be offered on the island. This means that the function of the Archaeological Site this way will allow the formation of other job positions on the island for the convenience of the personnel, volunteering or not, in the archaeological site. There will be guaranteed at least six job positions³ (archaeologists and conservators) for more than 5 months on the island.
3. With the open excavation, the Greek visitors, many of which have experienced the uneasiness of delay in their attempt to build in their property, either for a simple inspection of the digging or for a proper excavation, will be able to see that their “sacrifice” has a direct result to the uncover and interpretation of our history, and possibly⁴ they will stop facing the archaeologists as “dangerous beings” whose aim is only to prevent them from building. Already, this mentality, which we came across in the local society when we first visited the island, is surpassed and all the inhabitants support our effort.
4. The volunteering participants in the excavation, restoration, etc become advertisers of the island attracting a lot more visitors. From my experience, I have concluded that although the difficulties of surviving on the island the volunteers come back asking to participate in the excavation in the next years, while continuously new volunteers express their desire for participation.

As it is described above, the archaeological site instead of being closed to visitors “due to excavation”, as it happens in the majority of the systematic and rescue excavations that are carried out in the archaeological sites of Greece, it will

³ The payments of the archaeologists and conservators working at the site will be guaranteed by the participants in the excavation-teaching procedure

⁴ I use the word “possibly” bearing in mind that the financial interest always goes beyond the cultural. I believe, however, that at least it should be tried!

“open” for exactly the same reason making able the visit during the archaeological excavation.

I hope that this experiment will be realized, proving in practise that the antiquities, when they are correctly promoted, is possible to contribute effectively to the development of a place providing a positive answer to the question we put in the title.

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Fig. 1. Satellite representation of the fort at Aigilia (the ancient name of the island of Antikythera).



Fig. 2. The foundation of the temple, the altar and the *peribolos* of the Apollo Sanctuary.



Fig. 3. Part of the wall of the ancient city as it is uncovered with the excavation.



Fig. 4. Detail from a tomb relief that belonged to *Filina from Myndos, daughter of Eupolemos*. 2nd century BC.



Fig. 5. A *kantharos* vessel of the 3rd century BC.



Fig. 6. An oil lamp that is dated to the early 3rd century BC.



Fig. 7, 8. Cleaning works in parts of the ancient fortification with the participation of volunteers.