During late July and early August, a small team of archaeologists and students undertook a brief season of underwater diving survey along the island’s east coast. The project follows four seasons in and around Episkopi Bay on the south coast, and is carried out under permit of the Department of Antiquities Cyprus, with financial and logistical support from the Institute of Nautical Archaeology, Texas A&M University, the University of Pennsylvania, and RPM Nautical Foundation, as well as a research vessel and equipment from the Thetis Foundation.

Three weeks were spent at sheltered inlets and dangerous promontories in the area of Cape Greco and north toward Protaras in an effort to determine the area’s long-term maritime history in advance of eventually locating well-preserved shipwrecks. A total of six stone and metal anchors recorded throughout the area testify to a long history from antiquity through at least the Medieval period of merchants stopping at the numerous natural and manmade ports that dot these shores.

Several important ceramic deposits, representative examples of which were raised for drawing and then re-deposited, tell the more specific history of these inlets and promontories. In certain cases, the amphoras and other cultural material provide solid evidence for maritime traffic dating from the Archaic or Classical period. The much greater quantities of Hellenistic through Late Roman pottery, though, probably indicate these centuries as the most commercially prosperous, an observation that is perhaps understandable when one considers that this was the area of ancient Lefkolla (Λευκόλλα), attested in the early Roman era by the geographer Strabo (14.6.3) somewhere along this coast but thus far never positively identified through survey or excavation.

Among the more important finds is an extensive wreck site dating to the early imperial Roman era, around the latter 1st or 2nd century A.D., and carrying a mixed cargo of several amphora types: predominantly jars from the area of southern Asia Minor. Though the wreck is in shallow to moderate waters and thus disturbed by the environment, the site can still be recognized as one of some significance for the understanding of the region’s maritime trade during the period of Cyprus’ early incorporation into the Roman Empire.

Plans for the future, beginning with the summer of 2008, include returning to several large ceramic concentrations for more extensive documentation, as well as more intensive mapping of this early Roman wreck. The search for cultural material, including better preserved shipwrecks, should also be extended to the deeper sandy seabed well suited to remote sensing techniques, especially sonar but potentially also magnetometry. Yet the area’s prominent maritime history is testified not only by the ceramic deposits recorded at ports, anchorages and promontories, but also by reports from local divers and specific events in the historical record. According to Diodoros (20.50-53), it was at somewhere in the area where in 306 B.C. the Macedonian Demetrios Poliorikes triumphed over Ptolemy of Egypt in one of the largest naval engagements of antiquity. Although Ptolemy eventually returned, proved victorious, and thus controlled the island through the rest of the Hellenistic period, nearly a hundred warships reported as sunk during the combat provide another hopeful target for archaeologists working in deeper waters offshore.