

Eastern Cyprus Maritime Survey 2008 Field Season

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From mid-August through mid-September, a small team of archaeologists and students undertook the second full season of underwater diving survey along the island's east coast in the area of Cape Greco and north toward Protaras. The project is undertaken by kind permission of the Department of Antiquities Cyprus, and is financially and logistically supported by the Institute of Nautical Archaeology at Texas A&M University, the University of Pennsylvania, and RPM Nautical Foundation, with additional support from the Thetis Foundation of Cyprus.

Four weeks were dedicated to the investigation of a shallow shipwreck discovered during 2007. The site's limits were established and a preliminary site plan was initiated. In addition, several ceramic samples, representative of the cargo components, were raised for further study and subsequently re-deposited.

The site, dating probably around the early 2nd century AD, appears to have been carrying a mixed cargo in at least three amphora types: predominantly jars from southern Asia Minor, along with a large assemblage of what may be either imports from the Mediterranean coast of France or else regional imitations, and a small number of a poorly documented type of unknown origin, perhaps from Cyprus itself or the neighboring mainland. Thick remains of a resinous lining were observed in certain of the amphora bases, probably indicative of a wine content. Additional non-cargo ceramics were recorded among the remains, although no anchor or other ship fittings have yet been found.

Where the ship was heading remains unclear, but its location in shallow, near-shore waters, and the Roman presence along this coast at sites like Lefkolla (Λευκόλλα)—attested in the early Roman era by the geographer Strabo (14.6.3) somewhere nearby but thus far never positively identified through survey or excavation—suggests that either the vessel was nearing an intended port-of-call, or else engaged in short-haul coasting trade. Though scattered, the remains may provide new insights into the long-distance and regional commercial connections of the quiet island province during the height of the *pax Romana*.

Plans for the future will focus on completing the mapping of the site and documentation of the visible ceramic remains. In addition, the search for better preserved shipwrecks and other cultural material will be extended to the deeper sandy seabed well suited to remote sensing techniques, including sonar as well as potentially sub-bottom profiling and magnetometry. 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 Poliorketes 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.

For more information and updates, see the website of the Department of Antiquities for press releases: http://www.mcw.gov.cy/mcw/da/da.nsf/DMLexcavat_en/DMLexcavat_en