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A hit with MYTHS

Classics prof
compared to swashbuckler
Indiana Jones

By Paul McKie
Staff Reporter

PROFESSOR MICHAEL Cosmopoulos has a picture a student gave him of movie adventure hero Indiana Jones white-water rafting. But, instead of actor Harrison Ford's face, it's Cosmopoulos grinning back.

That's not the first time the comparison has been made to the famed Indy, but the University of Manitoba classics professor and archeologist distances himself from the artifact-looting action hero. Not that he doesn't think archeology is an adventure.

"It's more of an intellectual adventure," he says, grinning broadly.

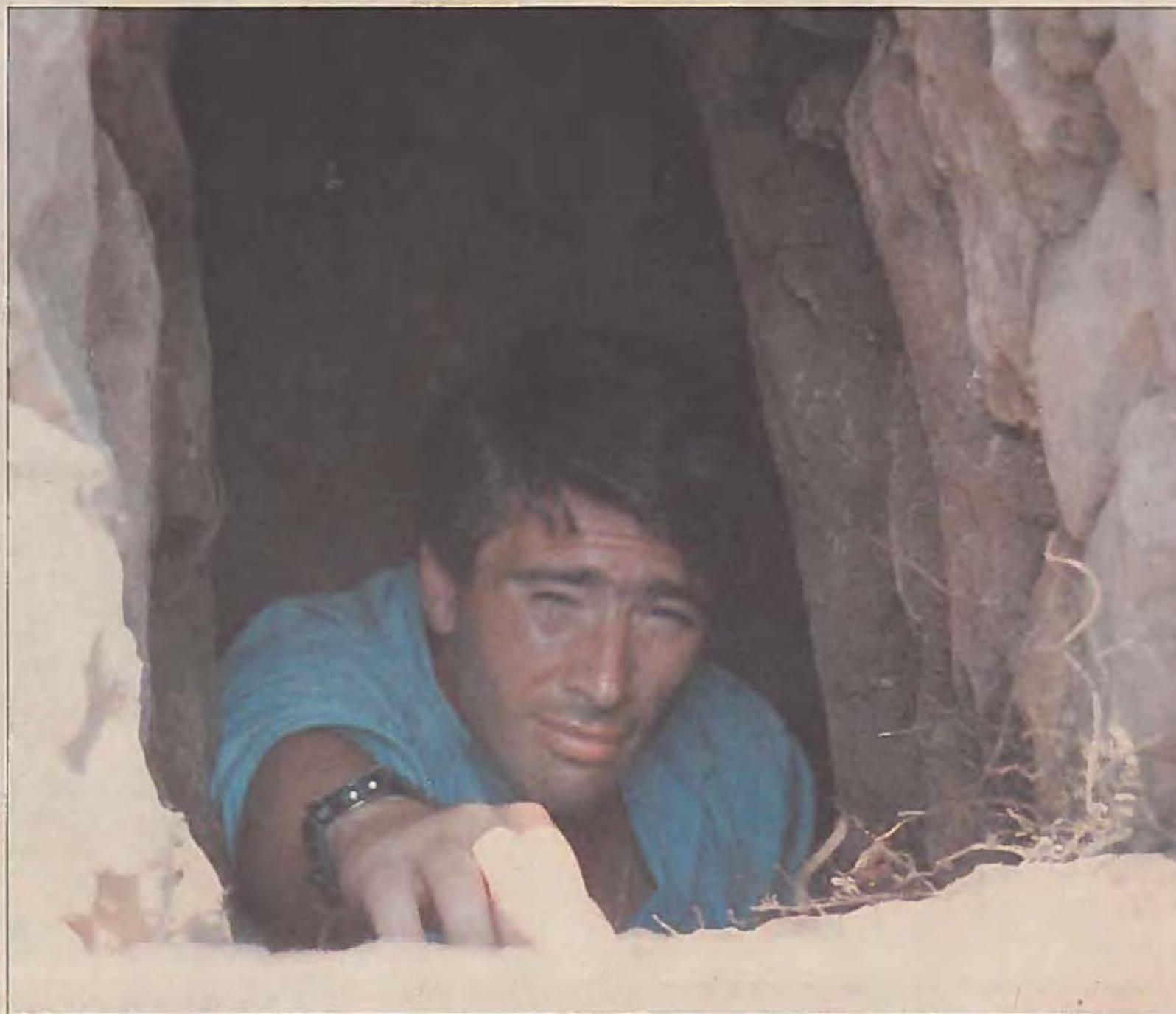
How people lived



Greek site. He says the site is second in importance to the Acropolis, the royal palace and armory in ancient Athens. It's at Eleusis that Cosmopoulos hopes to increase the world's knowledge of the way ancient Greeks thought and lived. He's writing two books about the digs, one of them a general-interest social history of the site.

Cosmopoulos believes people will be interested because the Bronze Age period of the site is the time of Greek mythology — the ancient stories that everyone has heard.

"Myth represents the psyche of people," he says. And myth



Cosmopoulos, at work at Eleusis (shown below), will produce two books on his findings.

those early archeologists wanted to discover the rites, the artifacts themselves were simply extracted from the ground, labelled and forgotten.

He says the artifacts remained in museum basements (untouched and uncatalogued) until the Second World War.

Disappeared

facts from those original digs. But to determine the ages and types of artifacts, it was necessary to dig up a new area at Eleusis and use newly found artifacts as a comparison to the originals.

It's the kind of work the Greek-born Cosmopoulos loves. "I'm like a kid on a dig," Cosmopoulos confesses.

But he has reason to be. This

"We were able to push back the history of the site 1,000 years," Cosmopoulos says, beaming. The site now can be dated back to the early Bronze Age, about 3200 BC.

"We know this site was 5,000 years old," he says with awe.

Almost axed

The Eleusis project was funded initially by the U of M, ironic con-

largely those of sheep, cattle and pigs, giving Cosmopoulos a snapshot from the past of what those people ate and raised as livestock.

Next year, he returns to Greece to analyse the artifacts dug up this year. The information will be published in 1997 in a catalogue of the original artifacts. That will be the academic side of the job.

chasing Nazis, Cosmopoulos uses trowels, brushes and picks to uncover the past. Some people may look at an archeological dig and see only bone fragments and ancient broken vases. But Cosmopoulos sees those as a means of getting information about how people lived.

More importantly, he likes to find out what people used to think about.

"People in antiquity had the same questions about life as we do today," says Cosmopoulos.

"The ancients came up with the answers, so we don't have to start from scratch."

Cosmopoulos, 31, and a team of six students from the U of M just returned from Eleusis, an ancient

site celebrated Demeter, goddess of agriculture to the ancient Greeks. Annually, thousands of people would gather at the site to honor Demeter. All who took part had to take an oath of silence. The penalty for breaking that silence was death.

The Eleusinian Mysteries, as they were called, remained shrouded by time. When the first excavations took place at the turn of the century, archeologists were only concerned with discovering those rites. The rites themselves dramatized the myth of the kidnapping and return of Demeter's daughter, Persephone, by Hades, god of the underworld. But Cosmopoulos says because

relocated and all labels with information on where they came from disappeared," Cosmopoulos explains.

That meant no one knew where the artifacts came from within the site, their time period, position — all information was lost. Examining the artifacts today without the context of where they came from makes them impossible to understand, he says.

"You remove an artifact, you have all the information about it, where it comes from. Now it's like reading a book and throwing away each page as you read it," he says of the uncatalogued artifacts.

In 1989, Cosmopoulos began an ambitious plan to publish a catalogue of the 13,000 to 15,000 arti-

site will allow Cosmopoulos and his team to complete work begun by his mentor and teacher, the late George Mylonas, who died in 1988 at age 92.

"He was a major figure in Greek archeology," says Cosmopoulos.

COSMOPOULOS'S work with Mylonas, and his Greek citizenship, helped the Manitoba archeologist obtain the special permits needed from the Greek government to work on the site.

But the dig this year yielded an unexpected find. The team discovered evidence, such as jars and vases, that pre-date the middle Bronze Age of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

axed Cosmopoulos and the classics department four years ago because of budget cutbacks. But intervention from students, faculty and coverage in the Free Press saved the department, his job and began those Indiana Jones comparisons which Cosmopoulos is kidded about.

But now, Cosmopoulos is plenty busy. He holds up a bag of broken bones from the site that his team will be analysing during the next year. (The Greek government allows the temporary export of bones and plant matter for study but artifacts must remain in Greece.)

"This is what they ate 4,000 years ago, this is their garbage," he explains, holding the bones.

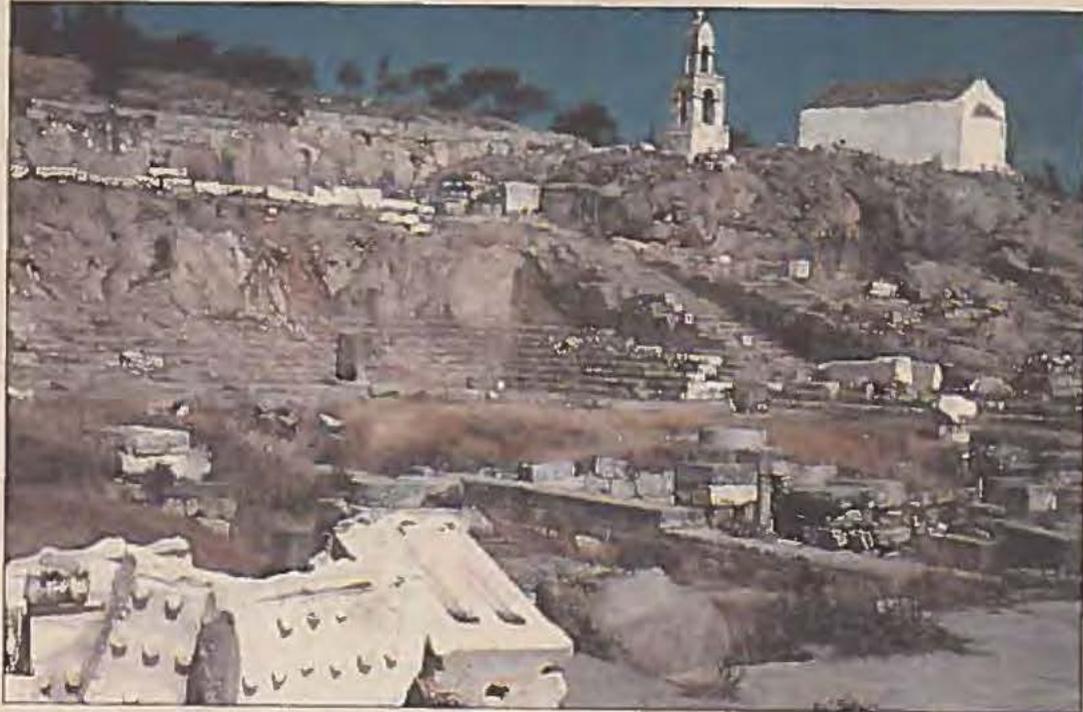
He adds that the bones are

the general-interest book on the site, also set for 1997.

It's not exactly the glamor part of the job, sitting in an office in a city famed for its sub-zero temperatures. Cosmopoulos admits to missing the blue sky and sea of his native Greece.

He quips that his new office in University College is called the Aegean Room, because he had it painted blue and white. But he also looks forward to teaching, both the advanced students and the first-year classics students, whom he says soak up the mythology.

"What is exciting is to teach the knowledge of the project to the students," he says, enthusiastically.



Students dig archeologist

By Bill Redekop
Staff Reporter

THERE ARE two sides to archeologist and classics professor Michael Cosmopoulos, his students say.

One is a demanding professor who leads archeological digs under a hot Mediterranean sun in Greece each year.

The other side is the man students saw play air guitar while standing atop a bar in Greece.

"It's not all hard work," says classical history graduate Jean Paul Grondin, one of six students who accompanied Cosmopoulos to Greece last year.

Little wonder students are so devoted to the University of Manitoba classical history professor.

"I think he's wonderful," says Desiree Single, 22, a classics major.

"He opens your eyes to what university is all about. University is about learning about yourself, and learning to think in different ways."

Students describe Cosmopoulos as loaded with energy, and passionate about teaching and his subject.

"You just absorb his energy," says Stephanie Middagh, 21.

Cosmopoulos can lecture a class for 90 minutes without bor-

ing students, says Grondin.

"He's mesmerizing," Grondin said.

At the same time, says Grondin, Cosmopoulos will bring some levity to classes, kicking off each week by reading out a David Letterman Top Ten list.

He's also a Star Trek fanatic.

"He's a Trekkie for sure," says Single. "He makes frequent references to Star Trek."

But no one should think the trips to Greece are easy, says Middagh.

"It was really dirty and it was really hot," she says. "But in retrospect, it was the best experience."