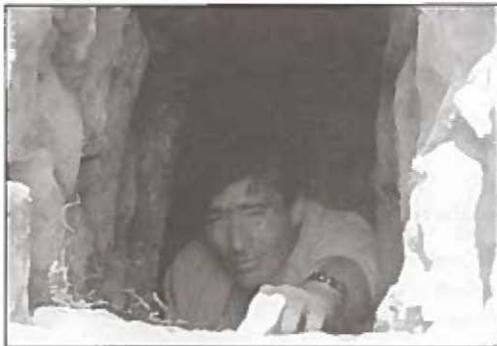


In the Shadow of the Acropolis: A Profile of Archaeologist Michael Cosmopoulos

Michael Cosmopoulos's passion for archaeology began early in life. As a child growing up in Athens, he was surrounded by some of the most inspiring ancient monuments and antiquities in Greece. Archaeology became not just a catalogue of dusty artifacts, but the focus of both his professional and personal life.

He was taught about archaeology from a very early age, both in Athens and at Oropos, where his parents owned a cottage. He fondly remembers many summers playing around the ancient ruins of the sanctuary of Amphiareion. "It is very easy to fall in love with the ancients in such an environment," he says nostalgically.

Professor Cosmopoulos graduated summa cum laude from the University of Athens in 1985 and, after earning a degree in French literature from the Sorbonne, he was awarded both his master's and his doctoral degrees from Washington University in Saint Louis, Missouri.



Michael Cosmopoulos digging at the ancient site of Eleusis.

"Teaching is a very important part of my job, both in the university environment and in the wider, public community. I believe that archaeology has a tremendous potential, not only in educating us about the past, but also in helping us to understand our world; this is why in my teaching and research I try to strike a balance between addressing the specialists and the public," Cosmopoulos says.

Teaching students is a year-long practice for Cosmopoulos.

During the school year he teaches in the classroom, while in the summer he continues to teach at his field schools in Greece. His current projects at Iklaina (Pylos), Eleusis, and Oropos focus on the culture, religion, and politics of early Greek society. At Eleusis, he studies the origins of ancient Greek mystery cults; at Iklaina, the origins of statehood in ancient Greece (www.iklaina.org); and at Oropos, the rural history of ancient Greek city-states.

Currently Professor of Archaeology and Greek Studies Chair at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, Cosmopoulos has taught courses from archaeological theory to ancient languages. Some of his students have gone on to pursue advanced degrees in archaeology, while others have gone into related fields like architecture.

In the field, students excavating with Cosmopoulos are given an interdisciplinary education, as they are exposed to a variety of techniques and related fields, such as geophysics, GPS, GIS, ceramics, lithics, etc. Moreover, students attend evening lectures and seminars and accompany Cosmopoulos on visits to major sites and museums. Students have responded to his teaching philosophy very positively. This year he was awarded the AIA's prestigious Undergraduate Teaching Award at the 2004 Annual Meeting in San Francisco, California.

Like most field archaeologists, Cosmopoulos is often faced with funding and bureaucratic obstacles. In general, funding is one of the most difficult hurdles for archaeological projects. Governments and private donors vary in terms of how much funding will be provided to archaeological endeavors. Cosmopoulos feels very fortunate that Aegean Bronze Age research—his main field—is supported by the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, which greatly helps in ensuring that his projects and field school for students can continue.

Having served as an Academic Trustee of the AIA, Vice President of AIA-Canada, President of the Winnipeg Society, as well as lecturing on the AIA National Lecture Program for years, Cosmopoulos has been deeply involved in the AIA. He is currently a member of the St. Louis Society, an active member of several AIA committees, and the coordinator of the AIA's Response Task Force for the Olympic Games, a group formed to answer press queries about archaeology and the Olympic construction. "The AIA has helped me to place my research, teaching, and overall work into perspective," he says, "by bringing me in touch with a large number of colleagues and the wider public." ■