

The Stelida Naxos Archaeological Project:
Report for the Archaeological Institute of America

Rose Moir

McMaster University

After having been home for a little over a month, I have had the chance to reflect on my experience working with the Stelida Naxos Archaeological Project (SNAP) on the Cycladic island of Naxos, Greece during the 2018 season. Let me start by stating that this experience would not have been possible without the generosity of the Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Field School Scholarship and the Archaeological Institute of America, to whom I am very grateful.

SNAP was started in 2013 under the direction of Dr. Tristan Carter of McMaster University and the Canadian Institute in Greece, becoming a collaborative project in 2015 through the co-directorship of Dr. Demetris Athanasoulis of the Cycladic Ephorate, the work being conducted with permission of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sport. The chert outcrop and associated archaeology of Stelida was first discovered in 1981 by the *École Française d'Athènes*. Their brief survey of the hill revealed a large amount of chipped stone tools scattered across the hillside that did not resemble the prehistoric tools previously documented in the Cyclades that were usually made of Melian obsidian. The chert source's importance is due to it apparently having been exploited from the Lower Paleolithic through to the Mesolithic, making it by far the earliest site in these islands, the knapping having been undertaken by early modern humans and their ancestors, including *Homo neanderthalensis* and potentially *Homo heidelbergensis*. Stelida was a prehistoric quarry, where the remains of stone tool production are visible and immense, and which made my first excavation experience both interesting, since artifacts are not always so prominent at an archaeological site, and challenging because of the need to dig through layers of artifacts on a hillside in order to get to the cultural layers desired.

During the six weeks that I worked on Naxos I gained experience using common excavation tools, such as trowels, triangles, pick axes, sieves and brushes. Using these tools taught me how much patience is needed in an excavation, and that going slow is usually

appropriate. However, around week four I was assigned to Trench DG/A-01 on the west side of the hill, which had been excavated in previous years and was thus being extended in an attempt to find more evidence of material culture from some of the earliest dated stratigraphic layers at the site.

Extending Trench DG/A-01 meant that we had to dig quickly in order to get down to the lithostratigraphic unit that we needed to be at, while still taking the time to take elevations, notes and pictures in order to document our quick process. During these last couple of weeks I also had the chance to work as a temporary trench supervisor after my supervisor had hurt her knee and the hike up and down the hill hindered her healing. This provided me with the opportunity to gain experience filling out context forms and seeing how trench reports were written, as well as taking on responsibilities such as making decisions about when to open and close a context, taking detailed notes about what was being observed in the trench, and determining cultural artifacts from natural stone. Unfortunately, we ran out of time before we could get exactly where we had wanted to be; this is a goal for next year's work at Stelida.

Working on SNAP also made me appreciate how the study of the archaeology of early humans is organized, especially at an open-air site where preservation of organic remains is very poor and natural processes have altered the appearance of the landscape over the years. However, there are many ways that Stelida is being studied that extends beyond excavation. I was able to see how multi-disciplinary research is an invaluable asset to an archaeological project in order to create a more holistic picture of how people were living in the past. During the six weeks of the project there were geologists studying the landscape of the hill; an ethnobotanist examining plant remains found in flotation samples; a thermoluminescence dater who could only work during the middle of the night and an ancient DNA sampler, who had to cover his entire body in order to stop contamination his samples. Because it is not known whether people were living on the hill or just periodically visiting Stelida to extract raw materials for tool making, understanding as many aspects of a space with evidence of human activity is crucial to the study of early human behaviour.

While working at the project's dighouse in the town of Vivlos I digitally cropped scanned illustrations of the lithics found at Stelida in order for them to be assigned to the corresponding

information in the database being created, which catalogued all of the data gathered throughout the years the project has been active. This took both time and patience, since most of the illustrations from the 2013 to 2017 seasons were in the form of multiple drawings on a single page that then needed to be cropped and saved as individual digital files. However, taking the time to do this gave me the chance to see the important work that goes into a project after excavation. Working with these illustrations also provided me with the opportunity to study the artifacts that had been dug up in previous years, giving me examples of what to look for in the future when sieving through dirt and stone.

The valuable experiences I gained working with the Stelida Naxos Archaeological Project gave me the chance of being part of a project that genuinely interested me and I think it was the perfect stepping stone for my pursuit of archaeology. Again, this opportunity would not have been possible without the Jane C. Waldbaum Field School Scholarship. Since SNAP provided meals and accommodation the biggest obstacle that I faced during this time was getting to and from Greece, and having resources available to students who may not be able to afford the cost of travelling is incredibly supportive. I look forward to working with the Archaeological Institute of America again in the future and I am thankful for the opportunities they have given me and other students.



Trench supervisor Shannon Crewson (left) and myself (right) opening up a trench.



Documenting the progress of trench DG/A-01.



The 2018 team on site at Stelida.