

Interview of Dr. Vyron Antoniadis, Associate Researcher, Institute of Historical Studies (IHR/NHRF)

12.03.2020



Picture 1: Photo from a recent mission in Ancient Olympia

You belong to the Section of Greek and Roman Antiquity of IHR/NHRF. Where your research interest is focusing on, at this period of time?

Every day we have new archeological findings that enrich our knowledge of Antiquity. The same is also true in the case of the new interpretations of the texts of the Greek and Latin literature. The aim of the research is no longer the next great archaeological discovery that will make us famous (fortune and glory that Indiana Jones said), but the "re-reading" of the data and the formulation of new questions. Of particular interest is the combined study of different aspects of an ancient society, such as economic, political, and religious organization, or burial customs. Thus, we can better understand the way of thinking of the ancient Greeks and Romans. My research in both the Hellenistic and Roman Delos, as well as in Epirus, is based on this approach. In this

context, in collaboration with Ms Papageorgiadou and Ms Zoumbaki, we have organized a very successful series of study seminars for the economy of Roman Epirus. At the same time, I continue my collaboration in the **Tabula Imperii Romani** Program of the Academy of Athens, having already published a monograph about Epirus.

What new data have emerged so far regarding the historic sites you are mentioning? Tell us about their significance.

I will discuss about an article recently published in which I argue that the science of Archeology is not only a creation of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and Romanticism, but it has its roots deep in the past and in the ancient civilizations of the East. The most important ancient excavation was carried out by the Athenians in Delos in 425 BC, perhaps following a protocol of systematic research. After another outbreak in Athens, it was decided to clean up the sacred island of Apollo in Delos. In order to cleanse Delos, the Athenians transported all the tombs and bones of inhabitants to the opposite island of Rineia and banned burial in Delos. From the study of Thucydides and the excavation of Stavropoulos in 1899 in Rineia, it appears not only that the purification was real, but also that it was done in a fairly systematic and diligent manner. Thucydides mentions that the ancient excavators attributed some old burials to Carians because of the weapons they discovered and the orientation of the tombs. This interpretation of the Athenians may seem simplistic to us, but it is an archaeological interpretation based on the observation and collection of data. Yet, to remind ourselves the difficult times we are going through these days, I believe that the real reason the Athenians wanted to cleanse Delos from the burials was related to the fact that the latter were contaminating the aquifer of the tiny island, putting the lives of the inhabitants in imminent danger.

What other fields of study are of high priority for you in the near future?

I would say that the systematic study of Roman Attica is an absolute priority. For many of us, Attica and Athens may mean the same thing, but in fact, there is a lengthy gap between them in terms of research. While we have some information about the Classical Period, we know almost nothing about Roman Attica. In fact, many are unaware that Herod the Atticus, who built the Conservatory (Herodeion) and renovated the Panathenaic Stadium, was from Marathon. Having grown up in Nea Makri, I made my first "exploration" in the Sanctuary of the Egyptian Gods founded by Herod on this coast of Attica. First of all, we need to gather the number of findings that can be found

from the walls of Athens to the boundaries of Ancient Attica, in Megara and Boeotia. There is so much data that even if we look outside the windows of the NHRF, we will find something. For example, on Vasileos Konstantinou Avenue, between NHRF and Athens Conservatory, there was a Classical sanctuary dedicated to Hercules and Pagratis, a chthonic local deity. During the Roman Period, a small district was created at this location, perhaps the first Pagrati in history. Also, within the next year I plan to start the study and publication of a building block of the Theater District in Delos.

At the same time, you are preparing a book. Would you like to tell us about it?

Continuing from your previous question, I plan to publish a book on Roman Attica in the next two years and mainly on its economy. I have started collecting archaeological data and creating maps through a geographic information system (GIS). At the same time, I am studying about various economic theories related to this period. I feel very lucky to be in the Section of Greek and Roman Antiquity of IHR/NHRF, because it is the ideal environment for such a study.