



## Investigating Mediterranean Ecosystems: A Student Research Project on the Cycladic Islands of the Aegean Sea

by Johannes Foufopoulos

I am sitting in a stone hut barely six feet high, made out of rough-hewn rocks, and through a veil of smoke I am trying to decipher the thoughts of a fierce-looking shepherd with a huge mustache, who eyes me suspiciously. I am trying to convince him to let us work on his land in order to better understand the impacts of grazing on the native vegetation. Together with a group of UM students I am spending the summer on the Cyclades, a group of archetypical Greek islands, investigating the relationship between humans and the natural environment.

The team consists of an interdisciplinary group of students and faculty from UM, Israeli and Greek universities. Our goal is to both elucidate the function of these Mediterranean island ecosystems and figure out ways to promote sustainable livelihoods for the local communities.

The Aegean islands where we have been working are an excellent place to investigate how humans have shaped the local environment. The region has been inhabited for thousands of years, and walking over the island landscape, one constantly stumbles over historically significant structures. I still remember the first time I was dropped off on an uninhabited islet to document the local wildlife, and instead discovered a Neolithic settlement. On Naxos, our base island, one can visit within an hour's time Paleolithic worship sites, Classical period temples, Byzantine chapels, Venetian fortresses and Ottoman era buildings, in addition to more recent, but still traditional, island settlements. Human agriculture and animal husbandry have, over the millennia, profoundly affected the vegetation, replacing the original forest with an open agricultural matrix. The islands are covered with the characteristic dry-stone walls and terraces, a network of pharaonic proportions, which, built over millennia, have made agriculture possible on the steep island slopes. Yet, despite the pervasive human influence on the region, the islands harbor an impressive diversity: Naxos, smaller than metropolitan Detroit, harbors as many plant species as the entire state of Michigan.

The region is unusual because an abundance of historical and archaeological sources provide a unique perspective on past human activities in the region, as well as their effects on the local ecosystems. The human evidence is important to our work, and for this reason, the team also includes Dr. Despina Margomenou, UM faculty in the Modern Greek Program with expertise and extensive research experience in both the anthropology and archaeology of the region. Her participation has added interdisciplinary depth to the project by shedding light on the cultural factors shaping the ecology of a region, providing historical depth to the human-environment interactions. While traditional agriculture has been largely sustainable, modern livestock rearing practices are not. Massive overgrazing, caused by thousands of goats and sheep, has degraded the vegetation of the Cyclades, and one of the focal aims of our research is to apply cutting-edge ecological science to under-

stand which practices are sustainable. Our research has demonstrated how rising numbers of livestock foraging on shrubs and other woody plants in an area lead to decreases in vegetation cover, declines in wildlife populations, as well as a collapse in the number of wild bees, a critical group of organisms responsible for the pollination of crops. At the same time, overgrazing, which degrades flower cover, also undermines domestic bee populations and hence honey production, one of the key natural products exported from the region. By understanding the nature of the tradeoffs between increased livestock numbers, declining biological diversity, and the associated ecosystem services provided by nature to local societies, we hope to be able to provide management guidelines to local communities.

Although research has been the primary focus our effort, education and training of students are equally important. Each UM student has a different research topic and is spending the summer collecting data towards a paper or thesis. Students



Kinsey Brock



get involved in all aspects of research, from the inception of a project idea, through planning and data collection, to analysis and results interpretation. At the same time they get hands-on experience learning how various academic disciplines operate and gain valuable insights by putting these approaches together. Becoming comfortable operating in this very international environment, students gain appreciation for the common traits that all humans share irrespective of their ethnic background.

The project gives students of diverse backgrounds working with an interdisciplinary team of scientists the opportunity to experience different modes of inquiry. And by interacting with the local communities they witness the diversity of human societies and values. They expand their cultural horizons and become citizens of the world.

Johannes Foufopoulos is an Associate Professor in the School of Natural Resources and Environment at the University of Michigan. His research focuses on issues of biodiversity conservation especially in Mediterranean ecosystems.

Top Photo from left to right: Colin Donihue (w/ blue shirt, Yale University), a local field assistant, Johannes Foufopoulos, Erin O'Brien (SNRE, UM); Panos Stratis, Scott Brenton (SNRE, UM).





# NOTES FROM THE COORDINATOR

## UM's STRONG PRESENCE AT THE MODERN GREEK STUDIES ASSOCIATION 2013 SYMPOSIUM

by Artemis Leontis

This newsletter gives prominence to research and curricular initiatives drawing our students into Modern Greek Studies, an important dimension of our Program's work. With this column I want to give focus to another dimension, our contribution to the professional field of Modern Greek Studies.

In November 2013, a host of UM faculty, graduate students, and an alumna descended upon Bloomington, Indiana for the 23rd biennial Symposium of the Modern Greek Studies Association (MGSA).

The MGSA Symposium is the academic conference of scholars working on subjects relating to Greece and Cyprus in the modern world. It is a key initiative of the MGSA, the 400-member strong professional organization bringing together people from around the world who work on Greek subjects in almost every discipline of the Humanities and Social Sciences. Each Symposium takes place at a different North American location. The Symposium 2013 was hosted by the Modern Greek Program of Indiana U under the direction of Dr. Franklin Hess. It included 21 panels of academic papers, three special sessions, informal caucus meetings, and a keynote address.

UM's Modern Greek Program made a strong appearance with no less than eight colleagues: Natalie Bakopoulos (English), Etienne Charriere (Comparative Literature), Maria Hadjipolycarpou (Comparative Literature), Vassilis Lambropoulos (Classical Studies and Comparative Literature), Despina Margomenou (Classical Studies), Nevila Pahumi (History), Yona Stamatias (School of Music alumna, now at U Illinois, Springfield), and me (Classical Studies). Each had an active role in the Symposium. Several presented current work (Bakopoulos, Charriere, Pahumi, Stamatias); one organized caucus meetings of the subdisciplines of Modern Greek (Hadjipolycarpou); two chaired panel sessions (Lambropoulos and Margomenou); one performed music (Stamatias); and I chaired the Program Committee for the entire Symposium.

The Symposium had several highlights. Among them, "Writing Greece," the opening plenary session organized by Natalie Bakopoulos and chaired by Vassilis Lambropoulos, attracted special attention. The two panelists, Bakopoulos and Christopher Bakken, offered the perspective of American authors whose imaginative work centers on Greece, adding their creative voices to the analyti-

cal work of scholars. In their hour-long discussion, each read from their work: Bakopoulos from her novel, *The Green Shore* (Simon and Schuster, 2012) and Bakken from his non-fiction book on the elements of food in Greece, *Honey, Olives, Octopus: Adventures at the Greek Table* (U California, 2012). Then they addressed some of the intricacies of writing imaginatively about Greece for American readers. A rich Q&A raised a number of questions. How do writers select and research their material? How do they add their voices to a culture with a vivid, magnetic presence? How do they access the rich traditions of a place and culture without reducing it to the clichéd? Bakopoulos and Bakken kept returning to those questions as they explored how their writer's perspective contributes to the literary composition of Greece.

Another highlight was the keynote address of Yanis Varoufakis, Professor of Economic Theory at U Athens, Visiting Professor at the School of Public Affairs at U Texas, Austin, author of many books, and a prominent contributor to debates on the recent economic crises. Many of us have been following his blog, "Thoughts for the Post-2008 World" (yanisvaroufakis.edu). As chair of the Program Committee, I created a committee to call for papers, build a website for submissions and communication, review 136 abstracts and five special session proposals, and create the Symposium Program. The committee selected Varoufakis as the keynote speaker, inspired by his prominence in the public sphere at a time when the economy has been touching everyone's life in new and confusing ways. I had the honor of introducing him to an audience of several hundred people. The talk may be heard or downloaded from the MGSA website, MGSA.org.

We are proud of the UM involvement in the MGSA, an organization that depends on the voluntary work of its members. We presently serve as members of the Executive Board and chairs or members of several committees. Through efforts such as ours, the biennial Symposium has grown in reputation; the JMGS, published by Johns Hopkins University Press, has become the most reputable periodical in the field (as of January 1, 2014, I became its Humanities Editor). The MGSA.org website serves as an important conduit of information and research portal. We have contributed to the developing of a strong academic field with a worldwide audience.



C. P. Cavafy

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# EXPLORING PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUES IN GREECE

by Alex Kiefer

Standing at the corner of Leoforos Alexandras and Fidippidou, a busy intersection in the Greek capital, I anxiously checked my iPhone for missed calls. My two large duffle bags packed with clothing for three months rested at my feet, marking me as visitor in this bustling, working class area of the city. Several minutes had passed since the arranged meeting time and numerous failed phone call attempts left me feeling uneasy. As I began to brainstorm how I could successfully locate and settle into my summer housing independently, my eyes shifted to a woman running through the crowd on the other side of the intersection.

She dodged businessmen walking purposefully to the Ampelokipoi metro station, elderly women window-shopping for shoes, and teens idling outside the corner Everest Bakery sipping frappes. My unease began to disappear. As she continued to run, she lifted her long, black dress slightly so that her black high-heeled shoes would not get caught. I couldn't help but smile as I watched this, elegantly dressed woman run, causing heads to turn. When she was within a few feet, we made eye contact. With a wide smile she flung her arms out for an embrace. I hesitantly asked, "Dr. Kontou-Filis?" Her warm, welcoming embrace answered my question.

In the summer of 2013, I was required to complete an internship for my master's degree in Public Health at the University of Michigan's School of Public Health. I was fortunate enough to obtain a position combining my academic and personal interests, Mental Health and Greece. When I learned I would be heading to Athens, Greece in a few months, I decided I needed to advance my Modern Greek language skills.

The knowledge, confidence, and support I received from taking Modern Greek at UM more than adequately prepared me for my summer experience. Through my studies, I became aware of an endowment established by UM alum Dr. Kalliopi Kontou-Filis to assist UM students in academic and research endeavors in Greece. When I received the award, I had no understanding of the impact that Dr. Kontou-Filis would have on me both personally and professionally during my time in Athens. From our memorable first meeting on that busy street corner, I knew I would be cared for and mentored throughout my stay and beyond.

My summer work took place at the University Mental Health Research Institute (Ερευνητικό Πανεπιστημιακό Ινστιτούτο Ψυχικής Υγιεινής). I worked alongside a team of epidemiologists, psychologists, sociologists, and biostatisticians to analyze the debilitating effects of the Greek economic crisis on overall mental health. Specifically, I was responsible for generating a manuscript for publication that focused on Greece and other countries experiencing similar economic crises and how mental health and social capital were influenced. Additionally, I aided in analysis of a cross-sectional study examining the link between individual/family variables and mental health. Through this research, I learned that the severe austerity measures bestowed on Greece by the European Union have caused unemployment rates to soar to frightening levels. As many Greek citizens fall into unemployment, financial insecurities begin to be crippling and insurmountable, and ultimately culminate in increased rates of depression, suicidal ideation, and completed suicides.



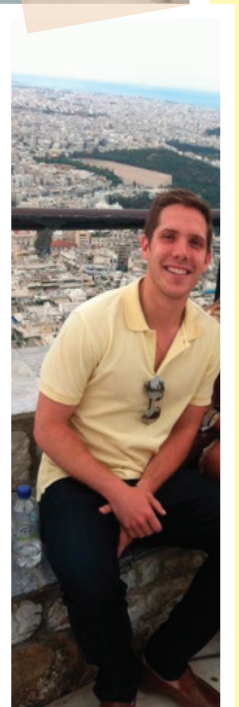
It is almost impossible to pick up a newspaper today and not see a headline pertaining to Greece and the European economic crisis. Physically being in Greece and witnessing the impact and influence of the economic crisis on public health and society added a valuable component to my education and personal growth.

Additionally, my relationship with Dr. Kontou-Filis continued to grow throughout the summer. We would often meet for dinner, a theater show, or a quick chat about health policy in Greece. Aside from our passion for health in Greece, we were strongly bound by our ties to UM (and our mutual love for Michigan football).

Unfortunately, there was a stark contrast between my welcoming from Dr. Kontou-Filis in Greece and the overall plight of Greek citizens. I gained support while Greeks were losing it. Through my work and personal experience, I learned how influential support could be in my own precarious times in an unfamiliar society, and that health issues in Greece are in drastic need of support as well.

I also came to understand not only the strength of the UM alumni network and the UM Modern Greek Department, but the true meaning of "floxenia." My summer experience in Greece solidified my intent to pursue a career in international health. More importantly, the generosity and opportunity offered to me, make it clear that I now have the responsibility and privilege of "paying it forward." The UM Modern Greek Department and Dr. Kalliopi Kontou-Filis have forever influenced "My Greece."

Alex Kiefer is an American of Greek descent originally from Weirton, West Virginia. He is a graduate of Bucknell University ('12) where he earned a BS in Neuroscience. He is currently a graduate student pursuing an MPH at the UM School of Public Health (Degree expected '14).



# UM Modern Greek Curricular Initiatives:

## New Courses

- Modern Greek 499 Language Immersion Study Abroad (taught Spring 2013 in Thessaloniki and Limnos as “Activism and Greek Heritage in Times of Crisis: Learning Modern Greek Through Ethnographic Exploration” by Dr. Despina Margomenou).
- Classical Civilization 121, “Odysseys” Freshman Writing Seminar (taught Fall 2013 by Prof. Artemis Leontis).
- Modern Greek 350 / Classical Archaeology 375: Archaeology and the Public: Archaeology and Heritage in a Globalized world (taught Winter 2014 by Dr. Margomenou), a new course studying how archaeology and the past reach the general public, organized around a series of Ethics Bowls debating the ethical implications and impact of archaeological practice in the contemporary world.

## Pedagogical interventions

- “Conversations on Culture” Module for Intermediate Modern Greek: Task based peer teaching via Skype: Teaching language through cultural comparisons. Collaboration between UM Modern Greek (Dr. Margomenou) and the Center for Foreign Language Teaching, University of Thessaloniki (Dr. Anna Maria Hatzitheodorou).

## Research and Internship Opportunities in Greece

- Sustainability in Mediterranean Ecosystems: Naxos and surrounding Cycladic Islands (Spring/Summer 2013, 2014 research project led by Prof. Johannes Foufopoulos). The project brings together UM students of Modern Greek and Ecology or Biology (Colton Babladelis, Joseph Jozlin, Scott Brenton) with UM students from Natural Resources and students from the Universities of Athens, Tel Aviv, New Orleans, and Texas (Professor Johannes Foufopoulos).
- UROP: Exotic Encounters in the Mediterranean: Mapping the impact of human interactions on the distributions of species and habitats (multiple semesters, led by Dr. Margomenou and Prof. Foufopoulos with students Amelia Runco and Nicholas Mulcahy). The project maps the distributions of different species of reptiles across the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. These distributions occasionally cannot be attributed to biological imperatives or natural phenomena. The project explores the significance of human interactions and cultural factors and therefore engages

archaeological, historical, and archival evidence.

- UROP: Chalkidiki Peninsula Archaeological Project, compiling a full bibliography of all pertinent archaeological reports and publications on the region where a new excavation of Olynthos excavation will take place (the Chalkidiki peninsula) under the direction of Dr. Margomenou and Professor Lisa Neveff. This is a required stage for any new excavation project. The UM student, Kostantinos Demetral (Modern Greek/Archaeology) is researching the most comprehensive Greek journal for excavations in Northern Greece, “Archaeological Research in Macedonia and Thrace” (AEMΘ) and is even compiling in English an archive of short abstracts for each Greek report, to be searchable by non-Greek speakers.

## “Ellinomatheia” testing:

UM Modern Greek will again be a testing center for the Greek language proficiency exam, “Ellinomatheia,” given by the Greek Ministry of Education, in May 2014. The exam offers six levels of exams testing reading comprehension, writing, listening, and speaking and gives certificates of attainment to those who achieve proficiency at each level. The exam is for people of all ages and levels of Greek learning, whether Greek or non-Greek, studying Greek as a second or foreign language. Registration is handled by Mrs. Anna Georginis, a Greek School teacher in the Detroit Metropolitan Area. In particular, she encourages Greek School teachers in the area, parents of Greek school students, and students of Greek at the university level to contact her at [egeorginis@wowway.com](mailto:egeorginis@wowway.com) or 248-528-3531 at the time of registration.

Exams will take place on the following days in designated rooms in Angell Hall or Mason Hall at UM, 435 S. State Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan and will be overseen by Professor Leontis. Testing dates are:

- Tuesday, May 20: levels A1 (students 8-12, students and adults above 12), A2, and B2.
- Wednesday, May 21: levels B2 and Γ1.
- Thursday, May 22: level Γ2.

## 2014 Winter Events

For more on Modern Greek's events, visit our web site: [www.lsa.umich.edu/modgreek](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/modgreek)



### Screening: SMYRNA: The Destruction of a Cosmopolitan City, 1900-1922

Director, Maria Iliou

4PM January 26, Auditorium A, Angell Hall, 435 State Street

The film focuses on the cosmopolitan character of the city and how it was destroyed in an era of nationalist conflict. It seeks to present a balanced narrative that honors the discipline of history as well as all the victims of the city's destruction.



### Civilization Gone Awry: Culture, Capitalism, and Conflict in Contemporary Europe

Peter Bratsis, City University of New York

4PM February 20, 1636 School of Social Work Building, University of Michigan

This lecture is part of the Conversations on Europe series presented by the Center for European Studies and co-sponsored by the Modern Greek Program.



### 12th Annual Pallas Lecture

Prof. Neovi Karakatsanis, Prof. of Political Science, Indiana University South Bend

7PM March 26, Michigan League

Karakatsanis will analyze and assess the U.S. perspective and its reaction to the Colonels' coup of 1967. Highlighting the complex, contradictory nature of the U.S.-Greek relationship, this presentation sets forth a nuanced understanding of the actors, strategies and interests involved in the run up and immediate aftermath of the colonels' 1967 coup.