

Going beyond 'Raiders of the Lost Ark'

Archaeology prof. uncovers a new Bronze Age settlement.

This story has all the elements of an Indiana Jones movie—looted tombs, stolen treasure and, of course, a dashing hero.

But this is real life. Where Harrison Ford's archaeology professor ditches his students and runs off to the Arabian desert on a moment's notice, our hero, Assistant Professor Christofilis Maggidis, observes the academic calendar. Where Jones swashbuckles his way through catacombs and tosses artifacts around like fastballs, Maggidis teaches his students to meticulously catalogue the location, con-

dition and composition of every item they uncover, whether it's in the simulated dig site in Denny Hall or at Dickinson's real-world excavation at Mycenae, Greece, one of the most important archaeological sites in the world.

Our story starts with looted tombs. In 1978 the Greek Archaeological Service began excavating a Bronze Age cemetery at Aidonia, a site not far from the citadel of Mycenae. The Aidonian cemetery is one of the richest in the area and the burial chambers were loaded with jewelry, tools, weapons and figurines. Before the archaeologists could get to all of the tombs, grave robbers made off with many choice artifacts.

In 1993, some 50 similar artifacts, including gold signet rings, jewelry and seal stones, turned up at an auction house in New York. After a legal battle to return the plundered treasure to Greece, the items were repatriated and put on display at the Nemea museum near Aidonia.

Maggidis was in his 20s at the time, but already on the rise in the Greek archaeology world. He oversaw his first excavation at age 17, studied at the University of Athens, Penn and Brown universities and earned a research fellowship at Harvard. At age 30 he became the youngest member of the elite Athens

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Archaeology Society. An assistantship to the director of Mycenae and an endowed chair at Dickinson soon followed, but the Aidonia case never left his mind.

Last summer he led Dickinson students in excavating the Mycenaean ruins, but his thoughts strayed to the town he was convinced he would find near the Aidonian tombs.

It's one of the most basic tenets of archaeology—when there's a cemetery there's bound to be a settlement nearby—so at the end of Dickinson's summer program, Maggidis told his students he was going to visit Aidonia and they were welcome to come along.

After weeks of digging in 100-degree heat, "We were all so tired and homesick we decided to go home," says archaeology major Charles Meade '03, "I'm sure regretting it now."

Deep in the undergrowth near the tombs, almost completely covered by soil, Maggidis spied the remains of a Cyclopean wall. Legend has it that the stones used to build the walls were so big that they must have been erected by the Cyclops.

One-eyed giants may have put the

two-ton boulders in place, but if he has his way Maggidis will be the first to move them. Since his discovery, he's made plans for a team of Dickinson undergrads and Temple University graduate students to survey the area this summer while continuing to work at the Mycenae site.

The walls, he says, indicate that the site was fortified. In most Bronze Age settlements, only citadels with grand palaces were fortified. There's no evidence of a palace at Aidonia, so the walls, combined with the settlement's proximity to Mycenae, make the site that much more interesting.

Why was a satellite settlement so close to Mycenae walled in? Maggidis speculates that it could have been an administrative center for the civilization, while Meade thinks the Aidonians must have been subject to frequent attacks from neighbors.

Unlike his silver-screen counterpart, however, Maggidis counsels caution before making any conclusions. "Many of these questions will be answered better with the survey and excavation of this site," he says.

That means using powerful com-



Assistant Professor Christofilis Maggidis, left, and Professor Leon Fitts instruct classical-studies students at Dickinson's 2002 excavation site in Mycenae, Greece, one of the pre-eminent archaeological digs in the world.

puterized survey equipment like ground penetrating radar and GIS tools to comprehensively map the site before the first shovel of dirt is removed. If Maggidis' suspicions are confirmed, he'll work with the Greek government

to secure a permit for Dickinson to purchase and excavate the site, which could keep students in the classical studies department busy for decades to come.

But what will our real-life hero uncover next? ... Stay tuned for the sequel.