



# Stelida Naxos Archaeological Project

## 2026 Season

Greetings from Naxos, or rather the cavernous basement of our *apotheke*, the official Ministry of Culture artefact repository and storage facility where we are conducting our 2026 study season. To be honest most study seasons have felt lesser affairs than our summers in the field – yes, we acknowledge how important they are (what’s the formula, three months study to every month digging?) – but they lack that certain *je ne sais quoi* of being battered by sun and wind at the trowel’s edge of discovery atop the hill. This year feels different though, and I for one am glad we paused the digging, and am thoroughly enjoying the various hives of activity dotted around the room: seven tables laden with pottery, a further three with 50,000+ year old lithics, others with animal bone, plaster, emery, etc. The break from fieldwork has been all too necessary, as we onboard our new pottery specialist Foteini and as we drag ourselves into a new, user-friendly database, with dig house work hours (5–7pm) a tippity-tappity of laptop data entry, from trench descriptions, artefact counts and weights, to more detailed information from our specialist studies. We cannot over emphasize the importance of this investment (\$3,000 USD for a two year license), not only in terms of simply keeping on top of our hundreds of thousands of artefacts, but also our ability to interrogate and represent our data in a standardized fashion, a process aided by the relatively novel – and very low-tech – practice of recording the volume of soil excavated in each context (**Fig. 1**).



**Figure 1.** Density plot (weight/L of soil excavated) of plaster from the peak sanctuary (M. Harder)

The work we are conducting this season operates on different cycles, balancing the long-term documentation of all finds, with medium-term (2-3 year) graduate research projects, and single season studies that we can quickly turn into publications to keep our profile high and aid our grant applications. One of this summer's major achievements has been to clear the backlog of soil samples from the peak sanctuary, with 110 sacks processed through our water sieve (**Fig. 2**), its fine mesh designed to retrieve plant remains and the tiniest artefacts (**Fig. 3**), from Mesolithic microliths, to bone fragments, to over half of our metal finds! The plant material and carbon are put aside for a specialist who will visit next year, along with our animal remains. The study season also includes photographing finds for various publications and entering all of our information into the database(**Fig. 4**).



**Figure 2.** Left: Loredana, Mackenzie, and Kristine process one of the 110 soil bags through the water sieve; right: Emma checks some of Mackenzie's finds as the team works through our heavy residue samples.



**Figure 3.** Left: Loredana sorts the flotation (plant) sample from water sieving; right: a copper strip from the heavy residue sample.



**Figure 4.** Left: Vita taking pictures of a stone tool. Right: Emma, Kristine, and Matt working on various projects.

One of the main aims of this study season is to reintegrate our various studies. In the field an array of different objects and materials are found together, be that on a floor deposit, or the contents of a pit, or the collapse of a building. The post-excavation study process traditionally ‘explodes’ these clusters of finds (‘assemblages’) to the tables of several different specialists: someone studies the pottery, another person the plaster, and others the metals, stone tools, charcoal, animal bones etc. Our task this summer has been to put these artificially separated datasets back into conversation with one another, by hosting early evening talks by our team members (**Fig. 5**). Those attending are encouraged to comment on these early visions of what we think occurred at the peak sanctuary, feedback that can support, temper, or negate the presenter’s theories. These talks have been enormously productive, help make everyone feel that their work and voice counts, and provide us with new ideas and theories to test as we move forward.



**Figure 5:** Vita (BA (Hons) New York University '26) presents her work on the carbon assemblage to the group.

## The Team

This year we have a relatively small team, no more than 15 people at any one time, including several long-term project members, together with several students, both graduate and undergraduate, including four young scholars who join us for the first time from Canada and the US. Thanks to the support of the Municipality of Naxos – who so kindly let us stay for free in the village of Vivlos – plus the various funding agencies and private donors, we have since 2013 provided **tuition free** experiential education to 82 undergraduates from Canada (n=54), Greece (n=19), France, the UK and US, plus 51 graduate students. This year team members come from Canada, Greece, Serbia, and the US (**Fig. 6**).



**Figure 6.** Mid-season photo of the SNAP 2026 team. Top row (L-R): Mackenzie Harris, Foteini Kalogridi, Nico Carere, Danica Mihailović, Emma Lipsett; bottom row (L-R): Travis Shaw, Matt Harder, Kristine Mallinson, Tristan Carter, Vita Jackman Kuwabara, Loredana Santolo, Marie N. Pareja.

## Graduate Projects

SNAP has always prided itself on making intellectual space for young scholars providing research materials for MA and PhD students. These include nine MA/MSc projects (five completed) for students from Athens, Cambridge, McMaster, St. Andrews, and Trent universities, plus six PhDs (five completed) from Belgrade, Bordeaux, Boston, McMaster, Missouri, and Toronto. This summer, five graduate students have been working on their research materials:

### **Foteini Kalogridi** (MA candidate, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens)

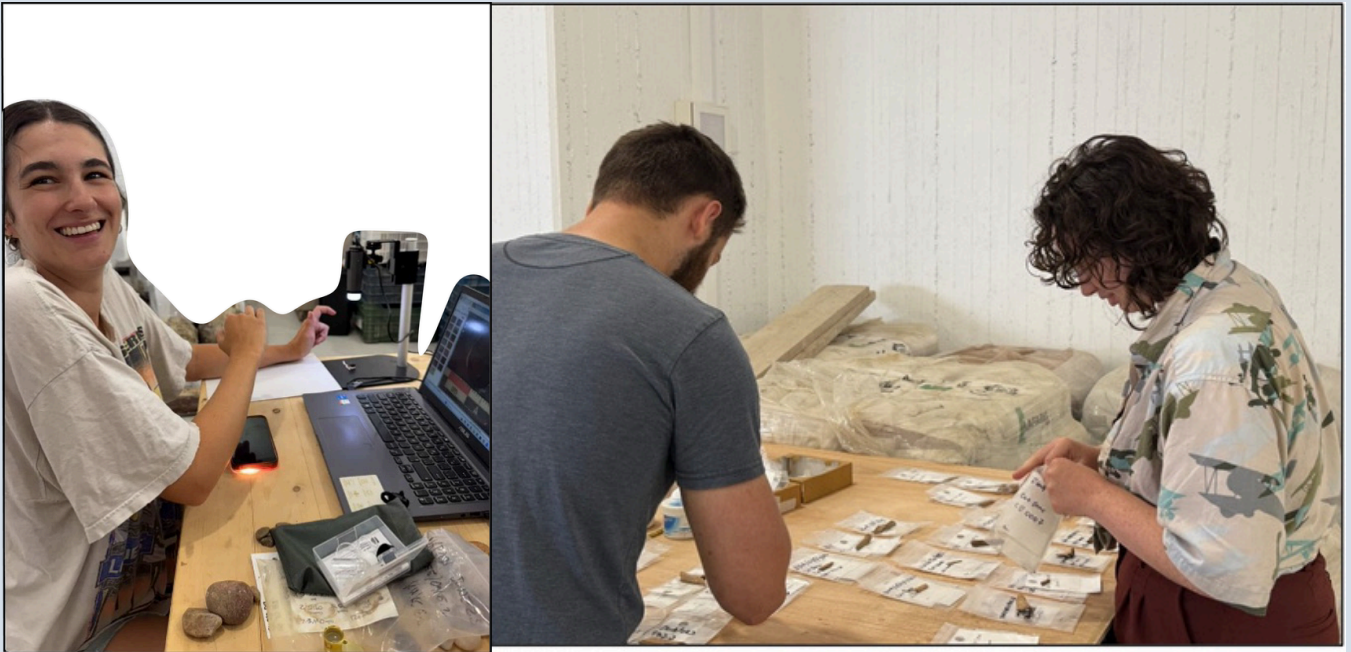
Foteini, who joined us in 2024, is our new Bronze Age pottery specialist. She is initially studying the cooking pottery from the peak sanctuary to help us understand one of the main forms of ritual activity at the site and to clarify the links with Minoan Crete (**Fig. 7**). Her aim is to then start a PhD on the larger ceramic assemblage later this year, hopefully as a joint student between Athens and McMaster.



**Figure 7.** MA students at work #1: Left – Foteini studying the cooking vessels; right – Travis working through the emery assemblage.

### **Travis Shaw** (incoming MA student, McMaster University)

Travis, having just completed his undergraduate degree at Leiden University in the Netherlands, joins us on Naxos for the first time to get a head start on his MA project that he officially begins this fall (**Fig. 7**). His work focuses on emery, the dense, heavy, abrasive raw material that is native to Naxos, but not to Stelida, having been brought from the northeast of the island. Travis aims to detail what emery was used for during the Palaeolithic and the Bronze Age.



**Figure 8.** MA students at work #2: Left – Emma working on the pebbles; right – Mackenzie helping Nico take dental moulds of the animal cut-marks.

**Emma Lispett** (MA student, McMaster University)

This is Emma’s fourth season at Stelida, her second as an MA student, working on the huge (10,000+) pebble assemblage from the peak sanctuary (**Fig. 8**). Her study aims to clarify which beaches the pebbles came from to help us understand where the worshippers originated; was Stelida a local, pan-Naxian, or regional sanctuary? She also hopes to better understand the meaning of these pebbles within Minoan ritual by considering where they were dedicated on the peak and with what they were associated.

**Nico Carere** (MA student, McMaster University)

Nico also rejoins us for his fourth season, but this time as an MA student studying the microscopic cut marks on the animal bones that tell us how they were prepared for the ritual feasts that took place at the peak sanctuary (**Fig. 8**). He is particularly interested in what types of tools were used, were they made of the local chert or the razor sharp non-local obsidian or did they use metalwork? Drawing on artistic representations of sacrifice from the later Bronze Age, Nico then aims to understand the ritual activities at Stelida within its larger Minoan context.

**Danica Mihailović** (PhD student, University of Belgrade)

Danica is one of only two team members to have worked on SNAP from the outset, joining in 2013 when still an undergraduate. She is now working on her PhD on Lower/Middle Palaeolithic Stelida, focusing on stone tools from our deepest trenches, dated to at least 50,000 years old, probably the largest dataset of such material in Greece.

## Specialist studies

Thanks to the continuing support of the Institute for the Study of Aegean Prehistory [INSTAP], we have also benefitted enormously from conservator Kathy Hall and illustrator Doug Faulmann. Kathy used a portable X-ray fluorescence spectrometer [pXRF] to determine if our metal figurines and tools were made of copper, lead, or true tin-bronze, as well as cleaning and conserving these items. Doug drew a set of finds for our upcoming publications and provided keen insights on our pottery, thanks to his vast experience of working with Minoan ceramics throughout Crete and the southern Aegean.

## Public Outreach and *The Secrets of Stelida*

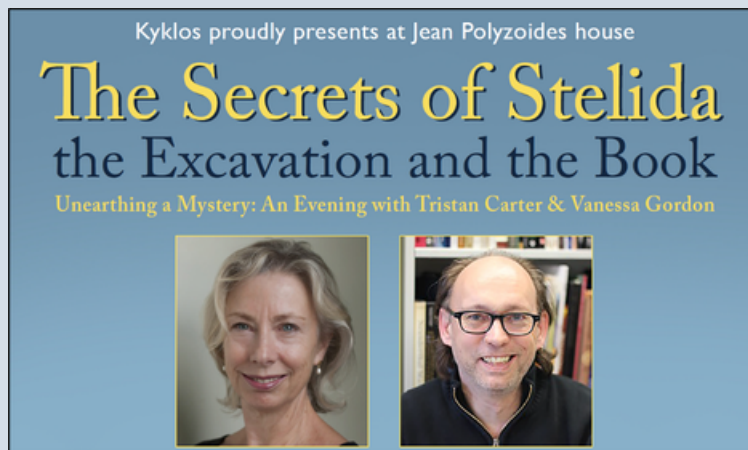
It has always been our wish to share our work with the public, giving numerous lectures in Greece, Canada, the UK and US. In 2018 and 2025 we had our two exhibitions: *Neanderthals on Naxos!* and *Ariadne's Thread: Weaving 200,000 Years of Naxos' History*, which you can see online in Greek, French and English – at [www.stelida.org](http://www.stelida.org) and our [YouTube](#) channel. This year, a wonderfully different representation of our work appeared in the novel *The Secrets of Stelida* by Vanessa Gordon (**Fig. 9**).



**Figure 9:** Cover of *The Secrets of Stelida*, the 7<sup>th</sup> of *The Naxos Mysteries* series by Vanessa Gordon.

This is book 7 in *The Naxos Mysteries* a series of archaeology-themed mysteries, with murders, tavernas and romance (oh my!), whose central character – Martin Day – is an archaeologist and TV presenter. Back in 2024 we discovered this series in the wonderful bookshop Papyrus in Chora, which led to us contacting the author to see if she would like a site tour. Alas, Vanessa was in the UK, but the connection was made, and ideas began to ferment. Later that summer, when back in England, we took the opportunity to meet up with Vanessa with the proposal that *Stelida* could form the backdrop of her next novel, an offer that was most positively received!

The Secrets of Stelida was published this spring, after which Vanessa put her best foot forward to celebrate the new novel at a series of events in Greece that were timed to coincide with our 2026 study season. We thus became a double act, the first part of the proceedings involving our giving an introduction to the site of Stelida, twice without visual aids which took a certain level of energy and manic pointing to the hill and sea to breathe life into the affair! The first event was hosted by Kedros Villas on Naxos, the second by the Cultural Society on Paros at the home of Jean Polyzoides (**Fig. 10**), and the third – something of a coup – at the N.P. Goulandris Museum of Cycladic Art in Athens. These gatherings were enormous fun, and hugely satisfying to see so many people interested in our work, and the stories we have to tell, from Neanderthals to Ariadne...



**Figure 10:** Flyer advertising one of the public talks on The Secrets of Stelida (V. Gordon).

### Products since 2025

Finally, we can share the work that has been completed since last season, including academic presentations in Canada, Greece, and Serbia, plus another five articles submitted for publication.



**Figure 11.** Left: Dr. Shannon Crewson (PhD, McMaster '26); right: Amelia Tamez (MSc, St. Andrews '26).

### Graduate theses (Fig. 11):

Crewson, S. (2026), *The Challenges of Representing Long-Term Histories: A Middle Pleistocene - Anthropocene Case Study at Stelida, Naxos (Greece)*. PhD dissertation, Department of Anthropology, McMaster University, Canada.

Tamez, A. (2025), *From Pebbles to 'Parishioners': Sourcing Lithic Manuports from a Bronze Age Sanctuary (Greece) to Reconstruct its Catchment Area*. MSc thesis, School of Earth & Environmental Sciences, University of St. Andrews, United Kingdom.

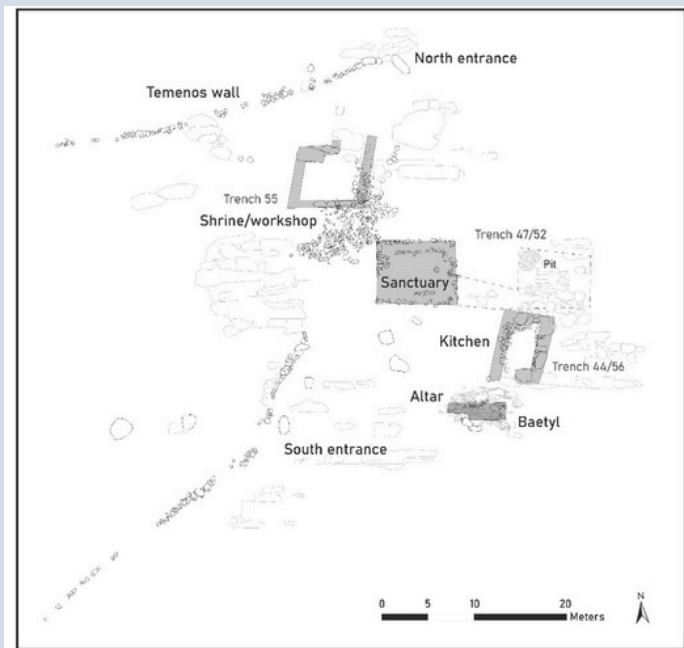
### Publications:

Carter, T., Contreras, D.A., Mihailović, D.D., Moutsiou, T., Pitt, Y. Singh, N., & Zogheib, C. (2025) 'Middle Paleolithic behavioral insights from the Stelida chert source, Naxos (Greece)', *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies* 13(1-2): 32-59. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jeasmedarcherstu.13.1-2.0032>.

Carter, T., Crewson, S., Holcomb, J.A., Harder, M., Lipsett, E. Mallinson, K., Mihailović, D., Mastrogiannopoulou, V., & Athanasoulis, D. (2025) 'From Neanderthal camps to later Bronze Age ritual landscape: Springs at Stelida, Naxos', in R. Laffineur & G.J. van Wijngaarden (eds.), *Hydor. Water Resources and Management in The Aegean Bronze Age*. Aegaeum 50: 17-24.

### **Stelida 2027 and Supporting the Project:**

We are already planning our work for the next season! Ideally this will involve a return to the peak sanctuary to finish excavating the shrine/workshop (**Fig. 12**), and clarify the long-term character of the 'kitchen'. Alongside the excavation, we will have a small team in our study facility, beavering away on conservation, illustration, databasing, graduate theses research, and publication preparation.



**Figure 12:** Plan of the later Bronze Age peak sanctuary complex (M. Harder).

We are also working out the budget to cover food for the team, car rentals, the bags and tags to organize and store the finds, the wages for the Ministry of Culture guard who supervises us... the list goes on. As soon as we get home from Naxos our work on fundraising begins, with grant writing and planning lectures for interest groups with the hope that they sponsor our work.

Over the years we have successfully attained grants from Canadian federal agencies (*Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council*), and various high-profile non-profit research organizations (*Archaeological Institute of America, the Institute for the Study of Aegean Prehistory, National Geographic*). Alas, as many of you will know, such agencies face major budget cuts, making fund raising even more challenging. Fortunately, we have been supported by private donors over the past few years, without whom it would have been impossible to do our work. These individuals have covered students costs and some of our scientific analyses.

We are one of the only major archaeological projects in Greece that do not charge students a fee to participate, because we firmly believe that **such experiences should be accessible to all**. We also take the students' training seriously, providing them with all the skills a fee-paying field school would teach: excavation methods, mapping, artefact recording, and databasing. We also give them a detailed site tour, and an introduction to the archaeology of Naxos more generally, from the Temple of Dionysus, and the kouroi of Melanes, via the Zas Cave, and the emery mines of Koronos.

If you would like to support our students and studies, however, large or small a donation, we would love to hear from you. All donations are processed through McMaster University, and are tax-deductible for Canada and US-based supporters. If you would like to support us, please click the [link here](#), scan the QR code below, or email the director ([@stringy@mcmaster.ca](mailto:@stringy@mcmaster.ca)).

- For those based in Canada: gifts can be paid [online](#), or you can send a cheque payable to:
  - McMaster University (with a cover letter designating that the funds are for SNAP or the Stelida Naxos Archaeological Project) to Cassiana Giardini, Advancement Coordinator, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, McMaster University, LRW 2019, 1280 Main Street West, Hamilton, L8S 4L9, ON, Canada
- For those based in the US, you can send a check payable to:
  - Friends of McMaster Inc. (with a cover letter directing that the funds are for SNAP, or the Stelida Naxos Archaeological Project) to Cassiana Giardini, Advancement Coordinator, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, McMaster University, LRW 2019, 1280 Main Street West, Hamilton, L8S 4L9, ON, Canada
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Please keep in touch with us by following our social media on Facebook and Instagram ([@stelidanaxos](#)). If you have any questions about how to support our work or to request digital copies of any of our publications, please reach out to Dr. Tristan Carter ([stringy@mcmaster.ca](mailto:stringy@mcmaster.ca)).

