

FROM MUSEUM TO THE FIELD: MY ARCHAEOLOGICAL LIFE AT THE NICHOLSON MUSEUM AND IN PAPHOS IN CYPRUS

July 11, 2014 Craig Barker Day of Archaeology 2014, Education, Excavation, Expeditions, Museum Archaeology, Public Archaeology Cyprus, Macleay Museum, Nicholson Museum, University of Sydney

My name is Dr Craig Barker. I am the Manager of Education and Public Programs for Sydney University Museums, which includes the Nicholson Museum, home to the largest collection of Egyptian, Near Eastern and Classical antiquities in Australia, and the Macleay Museum which has significant holdings of cultural material from Indigenous Australia, Papua New Guinea and various locations in the South Pacific. I am also a classical archaeologist who is the co-director of the University of Sydney's excavations of the Hellenistic-Roman theatre at Nea Paphos in Cyprus. So I get the best of both worlds: fieldwork and museum work.

My activities today during 'Day of Archaeology 2014' have actually been similar to a relatively typical day for me. As I write this I have just completed a museum tour along with the Nicholson Museum's senior curator, Michael Turner. This was a morning tour for a number of benefactors to the University of Sydney, so it was a relatively formal tour, although still lots of fun, as I led a hands-on workshop with the group where Egyptian and Roman material in the Nicholson collection was handled. Although Australia is currently in the middle of school and university semester holidays for the winter, our education team has been kept busy with school holiday programs and other activities. Yesterday I and other curatorial staff welcomed over 50 school aged students from the Matavai Cultural Arts group of Pacifica communities in Sydney who came and explored the various museums and the material culture of the Pacific held in the Macleay Museum, as well as having a look around the grounds of the university. So even without our usual undergraduate and school visitors it has been a busy time using the museum collections. Discover our collections: <http://sydney.edu.au/museums/>



Part of the Nicholson Museum's Egyptian collection

One of the key components of any archaeological museum's educational activities is explaining to visitors the aims and aspirations of archaeologists to interpret the past by using material culture, so it is great to actually be able to use genuine archaeological material. In the case of the Nicholson's collections of Egyptian and Classical artefacts this is even more so, as it is relatively rare for Australians to be able to access this type of material easily. The hands-on artefact workshops are always a highlight of organized museum visits by school groups and tutorials.



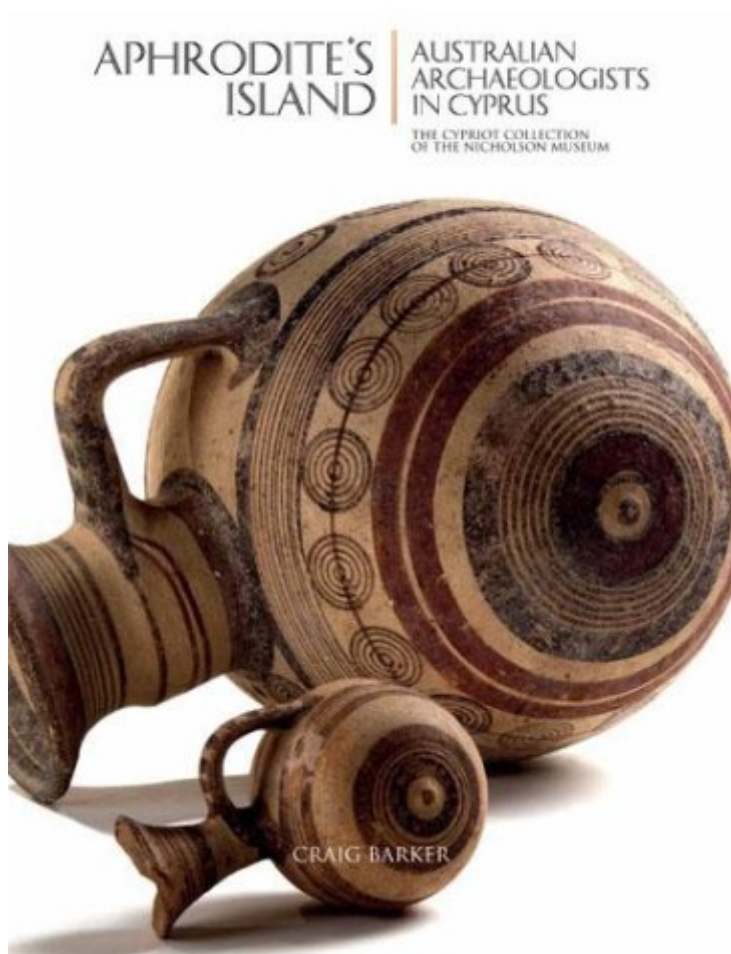
Craig Barker teaching in the Nicholson Museum



A hands-on workshop at the Nicholson Museum

Although all museum staff like to pretend that they don't have favourite collections, in reality we do. And mine is the Nicholson Museum's Cypriot collection. Obviously I work in Cyprus so know the material culture well, but the story of the 1500 Cypriot objects in the Nicholson Museum in Sydney is fascinating, and is largely associated with the work of our previous curator Professor J.R.B. Stewart (1913-1962), who was the first Professor of Middle Eastern archaeology in an Australian archaeologist, but also the first ever Australian to excavate in the Mediterranean, firstly in Cyprus in 1937 for the British School at Athens,

and then again at a number of Bronze Age cemetery sites in northern Cyprus in the 1950s, including his final dig at Karmi in 1961; the first time Australian students had worked on an Australian funded and directed excavation project in Cyprus, and developing a strong scholarly contact between the two island nations. 2013 was the centenary of his birth, and a major conference was held at the Cyprus American Archaeological Research Institute (CAARI) in Nicosia to commemorate his contribution to the archaeology of the island, particularly the Bronze Ages. We at the Nicholson Museum marked Stewart's contribution with an exhibition titled *Aphrodite's Island: Australian Archaeologists in Cyprus* which I curated; displaying material from the various excavations he directed, and material he acquired from Cyprus in the 1950s to be used for teaching his students. It is interesting that decades after Stewart's death, we returned to Cyprus to continue that link of research, education and excavation.



Aphrodite's Island: Australian Archaeologists in Cyprus

The University of Sydney has been conducting excavations in Nea Paphos since 1995 when the project was established by Emeritus Professor J.R. Green. The work is conducted under the auspices of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus, and is sponsored by the Nicholson Museum and the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens. We are currently planning our 2014 field season which will take place in late August and early September. As the season gets closer I have been liaising with the team members and students, and have a few emails to send out this afternoon discussing aims for the season with senior team members and dealing with questions from the team. Although I really should be putting some work into a publication that I am only half-finished this afternoon I realistically don't think I will have a great deal of time to work on it today. Over the weekend instead perhaps?

It is a real pleasure to be able to excavate and study in Cyprus, especially at such an interesting site. Nea Paphos is inscribed on the World Heritage list and was the capital of the island during the Ptolemaic and Roman eras. Despite today being a major tourist area and heavily developed, the area has spectacular archaeological remnants, including famous mosaics, an incredible necropolis site at the so-called Tombs of the Kings, and some very impressive Crusader remains when Paphos acted as one of the major ports for trade and pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land in the 11th and 12th centuries. The Danish King, Erik the Good, died in Paphos in 1103 on pilgrimage.



Paphos theatre from the air following excavation

The theatre of Paphos was constructed in the late 4th century BC, and was used as a space for performance and entertainment through various renovations and phases of architectural remodeling until its final destruction via earthquake in the late 4th century AD. At its largest extent in the mid-second century AD phase, under the Antonine emperors the theatre was expanded to hold a capacity of over 8000 spectators. The architectural development of the theatre has proved fascinating and much of our research has concentrated upon identifying the different phases, and the influence of Alexandria and Rome on each phase. The later Roman theatre was adorned with marble which was imported from across the Mediterranean Sea. As befitting a site used for so long, the ceramic, glass and small find evidence, while often fragmentary, documents the incredible history of the site and its role in major maritime trading networks, particularly with Alexandria in Egypt, two days sail to the south. In more recent seasons we have begun to explore the urban layout of the precinct near the theatre, firstly with GPR surveying in 2010 and more recently through excavation. We have located a major road surface directly to the south of the theatre and have excavated a Roman nymphaeum very close to the theatre which will be the subjects of publications currently being developed. It is providing a fascinating insight into the Hellenisation and Romanisation of Cyprus, as well as indicating the significant role theatre

played in the development of a Hellenistic cultural *koine* across the eastern Mediterranean in the period following Alexander the Great's conquests. <http://www.paphostheatre.com/>



Corinthian capital from the theatre at Nea Paphos

I (and many of the returning team members) cannot wait to return to Paphos. One of the great things about long term research and excavation projects is that you get to spend time with colleagues and friends in the area you are working. Paphos has become a second home to myself and many of the senior team members, and it is always nice to return and catch up with people and enjoy haloumi, Keo beer and other pleasures of Cypriot life. You will be able to follow the work we do over the five weeks of our field season in Paphos in 2014 on our blog: <http://www.paphostheatre.com/paphos-theatre-education-blog.html> A colleague of mine at the Nicholson and I are currently investigating us Skyping some excursion classes in the museum live from the site in Paphos so school students see the archaeologists live at work (we are working out time zones at the moment!).



Excavation at the theatre in 2012

This season we are hoping to open two trenches – one in the area of the foundations of the theatre’s stage building, the other a continuation of work we did in our last season in 2013 at the rear of the cavea (seating) area of the theatre. There will also be considerable recording work to complete as we near the publication of our first volume of the project’s excavation report. It will be hard work in the summer humidity, but should help with our understanding of the ancient theatre and the urban layout of the Roman city of Nea Paphos.

So for the ‘Day of Archaeology 2014’ I have been planning for future excavation, but also spending time with people exploring the collections of the museums I work in. Its not a bad life at all.

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<http://twitter.com/paphostheatre>



Guiding students through the University of Sydney's historic Great Hall



Recording the nymphaeum at Paphos