

Benjamin Jones

2012 Field School Report

Attending the Liman Tepe underwater excavation run by the University of Ankara was, while hopefully not a once-in-a-lifetime adventure, a brilliant introduction to the archaeological field experience. I have been certified in SCUBA diving since I was twelve, and have always been fascinated by the ocean. It is probably unsurprising, then, that I have wanted to work on an underwater excavation ever since I learned such a thing existed. When I was told that some students from Brown might have the chance to work in Turkey with the University of Ankara's expedition, I didn't believe that it would truly be an option for me. Something, surely, would get in the way, be it space on the team, scheduling, or a lack of funds. It is for the solution to that last problem that I owe a great debt to the Jane Waldbaum fund and the AIA. The funding I received enabled me to have one of the greatest experiences of my life.

When I arrived at the airport in Izmir, a short trip from the expedition's camp in Urla, I had no idea what to expect. I knew that we would be working on a Bronze Age harbor under the existing harbor of Urla, and that the site was at least near the famous ancient port of Klazomenai, but apart from that, I was flying more or less blind. When I arrived, everyone was extraordinarily friendly, though I quickly discovered that English speakers would be relatively uncommon. Nevertheless, I found I was able to make friends and be understood by a combination of asking some students to translate and what our site director called the "Tarzan method". In the end, I certainly learned as much about communicating without words as about underwater methodologies.

Days began at seven, when we would all load into the bus and drive down to the site, just a pier with a camper van permanently parked on it that served as a field house. We would assemble our gear and began filling tanks, while the site director gave a briefing for the day's work. Since these were always in Turkish, I would then look around for someone to explain to me what we would be doing. A small team would help get the rescue boat in the water, in case of emergency, and the students would vie to take it on an excursion around the bay.

The underwater work was fascinating. We would descend in teams of three or four and work on the site, 12 to 20 feet underwater, for an hour at a time. We spent this time excavating by trowelling sand and *posidonia* seaweed into a water-pumping dredge. There were two trenches, of which one was not yet deep enough for cultural material, so work there went quickly, as we cleared layer after layer of sand. The deeper trench was another matter altogether. The bottom of the trench was absolutely littered with potsherds. It was a precarious balancing act, trying to hover just above the ocean floor to dust the sherds for photographs without landing on them. Breathe out a little too much and you'd hit the pots, breathe in and you'd find yourself soaring away from them. We learned to perfect our buoyancy and find rocks for handholds to stabilize ourselves while working the temperamental dredging hose. As much as digging in the upper trench was almost meditative, the lower trench made minutes feel like hours, as I struggled to keep my balance and above all, not damage the artifacts just below me. Seeing the kind of material that started to emerge from the trench made all the stress worthwhile, though; the conservation lab was able to piece together some truly beautiful kylices that we were told were destined for local museums.

The amount I learned in Turkey was sometimes baffling. The constant practice adjusting my buoyancy meant that by the time I left, I could hover better than I ever thought possible. I learned to operate and repair the air compressor we used to fill the tanks, and to clean the water dredges and refuel the pump. I got to row a reconstructed Cycladic ship across the bay, to feel what life must have been like for the people whose artifacts we were uncovering; we fished off the boat in the entrance to the Mediterranean, and then, finding ourselves becalmed, rowed back against the setting sun. Trips to Ephesus and Pergamon, where we got a tour of the German team's excavation, helped place our dig in the broader context of Bronze Age Anatolia.

When it came time to go home two months later, I was tired, sunburnt, but intensely comfortable onsite. I am now convinced that underwater archaeology is what I want to pursue, and can't wait to get back in the field. I have the AIA and Jane Waldbaum's generous fund to thank for this magnificent experience, and greatly appreciate the support, without which my dream of working on an underwater dig could never have been realized so magnificently.