

The Delos Underwater Survey Project (2014-2016)

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This paper presents the results of the three-year Delos Underwater Survey Project (2014-2016), a *synergasia* between the Ephorate of Underwater Antiquities of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports and the Institute of Historical Research of the National Hellenic Research Foundation under the direction of the Head of the Ephorate of Underwater Antiquities, Dr. Aggeliki Simosi. The survey focused on the submerged areas of two Hellenistic neighbourhoods that were created at the height of Delos' urbanization period, the Stadion District and the Skardana District. The Cyclades has seen a relative rise in sea-level of about 2m over the last 2,000 years, engulfing many areas of the once heavily urbanized island. By examining the submerged areas of these two neighbourhoods the aim of the project was to define their use and role in the commercial activity of the island in the late Hellenistic period.

Over the course of three seasons the survey project identified structures providing evidence for commercial activities in the submerged area of the Stadion District, changing the predominant assumption that this neighborhood did not have an instrumental role in the operation of the Delian emporion, as well as remains of harbor installations in the submerged area of the Skardana District, indicating that the bay of the Skardana was an anchorage. These finds are significant as they clarify the function of the bays that were located next to the newly-formed neighborhoods on the island. It seems that commercial harbors operated both in the bay of the Stadion District and in the bay of the Skardana District, complementing the activities of the central harbor. Whereas previous research had focused on the main harbor area, assuming that the emporion of Delos depended solely on a single harbor, the Delos Underwater Survey Project—the first underwater survey to be conducted around Delos—provides a different picture of the ways in which the port-city functioned. Although the mechanisms of trade were weighted towards direct preferential links between emporia ports, rather than towards random coastal tramping or cabotage, an emporion has several harbors, which could be used according to the weather conditions. The results of the survey project show that the bays of the Stadion District and the Skardana District served as anchorages around the island, allowing skippers to avoid crossings in difficult weather conditions, thus facilitating the busy emporion of Delos in the late Hellenistic period.

Finally, the project conducted a preliminary survey for shipwrecks during the 2016 fieldwork season. The six shipwrecks that were found around Delos, Rheneia and in the channel between Delos and Rheneia date from the Hellenistic through the late Roman period. They point to the continuation of the activity of the harbour of Delos and the usage of the channel between Delos and Rheneia, which must have continued to operate as a main waterway of the Aegean through the late Roman period connecting the Eastern and Western Mediterranean.