

# BROACHING THE BRONZE AGE

## Dickinson digs in with a progressive archaeology program

BY BARBARA SNYDER

**R**emember Agamemnon? If you're fond of mythology, opera or classical literature, you probably do. Legend has it that he led the Greeks into the Trojan War, kicking up a dark family tragedy in his own house, and he was king of a place called Mycenae.

It's no wonder the academic world is fascinated with Mycenae. All myths and legends aside, in 1,600 B.C. the city was a major center of the ancient world. Today it's one of the three most important archaeological digs on the planet.

And Dickinson is there.

Only two years ago, students could not major in archaeology, though the college has long enjoyed a rich presence in the discipline through the classical-studies department and field work with Professor Leon Fitts. In 1974, Fitts began taking students to Yorkshire, England, to excavate Roman ruins. Today his work with students continues with excavations at East Lothian, Scotland, in a joint venture with the University of Durham, England.

Despite these long-standing student opportunities there still was room to grow. A chance meeting at the Acropolis in Greece between Fitts and a rising star in the field, Christofilis Maggidis, is rocketing Dickinson to the national forefront of undergraduate archaeological studies.

"I've never seen anything like this," says Maggidis, now here as assistant professor of classical studies and the first holder of the Christopher L. Roberts Chair in Archaeology. "In effect, we set up the whole program in less than a year. The support from the administration and cooperation within the classical-studies department has been incredible."

Maggidis, who hails from Greece and the University of Athens by way of Penn, Brown and Harvard universities, brings to Dickinson not only his expertise and whirlwind energy

level but an important connection to the ancient city of Mycenae.

In the United States, Maggidis is an archaeology professor; in Greece, he's assistant to the director of this legendary Bronze-Age citadel. His reputation in his homeland is long established—at 17 he was the youngest archaeologist invited on a major dig at Archanes and Crete and, when inducted at age 30, he became the youngest member of the prestigious Greek Archaeology Society, an organization that counts only 430 professionals among its membership.

As a result, Maggidis was able to secure an unusual academic affiliation between Dickinson and Mycenae, one that puts the college in the

During their first week of excavations in June, Dickinson's field archaeology team gathers in Mycenae, Greece. Kneeling, from left, are: Charles Meade '03 and Harry Rubenstein '04. Standing, from left, are: Elizabeth Madaus '02, Prof. Leon Fitts, Owen Thomson '03, Justin Solonick '04, Prof. Christofilis Maggidis, William Dildine '03, Christiane Hartmann '04 and Jennifer Frisbie '04.



At this dig site, Dickinsonians discovered and excavated a building in the ancient citadel of Mycenae. The remains of a basement and a corridor were partially uncovered, as well as the inner face of the North Cyclopean fortification wall.



enviable position of being the only undergraduate institution in the world that can offer its students the opportunity to conduct research and excavation at the landmark.

"The situation is strange with the government of Greece," Maggidis says, pointing out that there are only three excavations by foreign schools allowed in the entire country each year. "Usually the three schools are graduate programs from places like Princeton and Columbia universities—big places. It's a difficult system to infiltrate; they have a fierce grasp on what they have."

But, because of Maggidis' established position in Greece, Dickinson is able to function outside the three-university rule and collaborate with the local archaeological service at Mycenae.

Living up to this honor requires a commitment to excellence. To prepare students for their responsibilities in digging at such a renowned site, the classical-studies department has made additions to the curriculum, like modern Greek (taught by Maria Anastassiathé-Maggidis, lecturer of modern Greek and wife of Christofilis) and a hands-on training facility called the simulated-excavation field (SEF).

Though a large, rectangular box of Plexiglas-enclosed dirt may be an unexpected sight in the basement of Denny Hall, the SEF is a model

program of practical field experience in a controlled, indoor environment.

"This is unique. Most schools literally use sandboxes," Maggidis says. "We bury everything—Mycenaean reproductions, seeds and animal bones—in limestone construction with local soils from Carlisle and stone from Dickinson's quarry. It's a big coincidence because it is very similar to the conditions at Mycenae."

Students taking the course Archaeological Theory and Field Archaeology spend their time not only digging up the artifacts, but learning how to measure, describe, label, photograph, transport, store and catalogue each of their finds. The result, when combined with a solid command of the modern Greek language, is a group of students so highly prepared for field archaeology in Greece, that when eight of them traveled to Mycenae last summer, they made quite an impression on the local professionals.

"Their jaws dropped," Maggidis says of his colleagues in Greece, clearly proud of his students. "The foreman at Mycenae, who has been digging for 20 years, had never seen students excavating like this. They did a better job and worked harder than most graduate-level students."

Owen Thomson '03 went along on that first trip to Mycenae. "We felt prepared because we



had done it all before on a smaller scale [in the SEF]," he says. "The only differences were getting used to the weight of using full-size tools—and being outside. There is no wind in the basement of Denny. In Greece, when we dumped loads of dirt over the cliff, it all blew back in our faces. By the end of the day, you were dirt. Back at the hotel, we would hose off in the parking lot until we were clean enough to go inside to take a shower."

During the month-long excavation campaign, students focused on the northwestern part of the citadel, not far from ancient Mycenae's famous Lion Gate, and they managed to locate a previously undiscovered structure. Their portable finds included 19 zoomorphic and anthropomorphic Mycenaean figurines, eight stone or clay beads, eight obsidian blades, two stone grinders, a Hellenistic coin and thousands of ceramic pot sherds.

"The work load was tough," Thomson says. "But it was a blast. There we were, swinging pick axes, singing songs like a chain gang."

The Dickinson-Mycenae experience is about to expand. While summer-program excavations will continue inside the citadel, Maggidis also has discovered a new dig location just outside the ancient city, which he says is another forti-

fied Mycenaean-era city. Next year, students will carry out a survey of the prospective site using ground-penetrating radar and Geographical Information System technology in combination with remote-sensing devices to determine the size, potential and feasibility of the new project.

If all goes well, the plan is for the college to secure the newly discovered site and obtain the necessary permits through Maggidis' position within the Greek archaeological community.

"Dickinson is small, but it's dynamic," he says. "With our own site, we can create productive affiliations with other institutions like Johns Hopkins University or the University of Pennsylvania, wherein their graduate students will come work along with our students at our site. It's an incredible opportunity for learning."

Maggidis says that for any American institution, much less a small, liberal-arts college, to have its own Bronze-Age excavation is unheard of. And since Dickinson field work will continue inside the ancient citadel of Mycenae, in East Lothian, Scotland, and stateside at the Ephrata (Pa.) Cloisters, the college might easily lay claim to the best undergraduate archaeology program in the United States.

Thomson says it's the professors, like Maggidis and Fitts, who make all the difference,

because they can provide something akin to insider information.

"There is so much enthusiasm," he says. "When you're in a classroom looking at slides of things that have been found, like a pot or a piece of jewelry, it's not just a photograph because there is a professor in the room who actually found it, or who dug at that site for a few years. And he can tell you how it was found and what they were doing at the time. There's always something extra—you get these stories." ●

Along with thousands of other artifacts, these Mycenaean anthropomorphic clay figurines of various stylized types, dating to the 13th century B.C., were uncovered last summer by the students' excavations at a newly discovered building inside the citadel of Mycenae.

