

Professor Stephen G. Miller in Athens

- Among the most distinguished foreign archaeologist in Greece.

"Kosmos Plus" is reprinting a recent interview with Professor Stephen G Miller.

Stephen G Miller, ex-director of excavations at Ancient Nemea, talks about his craft on the occasion of the publishing of the children's book 'Plato at Olympia'.

It is with unconcealed pleasure that Stephen G Miller looks back on his career, 40 years spent between the US and Greece. Former professor of archaeology at Berkeley (1973-2004) and ex-director of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (1982-1987), Miller is among the most distinguished foreign archaeologists in Greece. During three decades of excavations, he transformed the site of Ancient Nemea from a rarely visited, poorly understood backwater into a major attraction featuring a partially re-erected temple, well-preserved stadium and excellent museum. In 1996, he revived the Nemean Games. The Modern Games, which trace the footprints of antiquity (in costume), took place for the fourth time last summer.

Although Miller has authored dozens of academic publications, his new book *Plato at Olympia* (Bragiotti Editions, 13 euros) is not one of them. It is a children's book about the famous philosopher Plato as a child striving to become an Olympic athlete. Illustrated with lovely watercolours by the Greek artist Athena Stamatis and told in an accessible, erudite but light-hearted manner, it introduces the reader to ancient Greece and the site of Olympia.

What made you choose Greek archaeology as a career?

As an undergraduate, I studied Ancient Greek because I wanted to read Plato in his own language. Plato turned out to be my nemesis; his philosophical language was beyond me. When George Mylonas, excavator of Mycenae, visited, he mesmerised me. By the time he left, I wanted to be an archaeologist. It seemed a great combination of outdoor and indoor work. I chose it not really knowing what I was in for. It worked out very well.

What was your first experience of Greece?

A cheap dinner of lobster in Palaioakastria, on Corfu, in 1967. I thought it was paradise.

Has Greek archaeology changed since then?

Then, the basis of classical archaeology was ancient Greek. My Greek has been a tremendous advantage to me: as finds come out of the ground, I can read inscriptions, or graffiti on the stadium tunnel and ancient texts about Nemea. Nowadays, prehistory is a major field, where Ancient Greek is less important.

"I CAN'T tell you how gratifying it is to sit in my office, look down at Ancient Nemea and see the busloads coming in, knowing I excavated the site, planted the trees, built the museum..."

What should change in Greek archaeology?

I wish there were more funds available so that the time we spend raising money could be used in outreach to the public.

You directed excavations at Nemea for three decades. What were your most important discoveries?

The most important physical discovery was the stadium tunnel. It proved that by the 4th century, the Greeks knew to build arches and vaults. The graffiti in the tunnel add a sense of what Greek athletes did while waiting to compete.

Even more important is the history. We now know that the Nemean Games took place at Nemea, otherwise uninhabited, during two separate periods - from the early 6th to the late 5th and from the late 4th to the early 3rd century BC - and that the site was de-



stroyed at the end of the 5th century, probably during the Peloponnesian War.

What further discoveries at Nemea do you expect?

The hippodrome. No ancient hippodrome has been uncovered. We know roughly where it is. The early stadium also needs work. Unlike any other known stadium, it goes back to the 6th century BC.

How has Nemea changed since you started working there?

In 1973, Ancient Nemea had 400 people, one television set, one automobile, many donkeys and the ubiquitous fresa tilling machine. Now there are 220 people, tractors, cars, telephones and televisions everywhere. In 1973, we had

one visitor all summer. The site was three columns, weeds and thistles. Last year, there were over 40,000 visitors.

Why did you launch the Modern Nemean Games?

For me, the Games are educational, a way for people to feel and touch antiquity. A transformation takes place in the stadium tunnel. People enter the locker room, put on a tunic, walk barefoot through the tunnel and come out in the 4th century BC. For the villagers, they promote Nemea. That's OK with me.

In the 1980s, you were director of the ASCSA. Has American archaeology in Greece changed since then?

When I was a student, the ASCSA

was quite isolated from the other foreign schools and the Greeks. As director, I tried to change that, inviting Greeks to come and use the library. I see with pleasure and pride that

the school is more integrated today.

Tell us a few things about your children's book "Plato at Olympia". What's it about?

It's about the young Plato, who decides he wants to become an Olympic victor. It follows his development towards that goal and his experience. The basic purpose of the book is to provide an easy way for readers (and not just young readers) to understand Olympia and the Olympic Games, but to do that through the eyes of Plato (at least the Plato I recreated). So, the book's basic purpose is pedagogic. I provide the written sources for all that happens in the book and also pictorial sources. The watercolour drawings that illustrate the book are based, with some exceptions, upon ancient artefacts, vase paintings, statues and reliefs.

You divided your time between Greece and the US for 4 decades. Is it still exciting?

I have a very good life. Travelling is tiring, but I've never been bored.



A couple of days ago "Kosmos" newspaper wrote about Professor Stephen G. Miller's reply to our editor's invitation (on behalf of the Greek paroikia) to visit Australia.

In this edition we include the email the Professor sent to George Hagivassilis.

Thank you for your letter and for the invitation. Might I also alert you to our web site: <http://macedonia-evidence.org>, and the fact that we now have 340 scholars from 22 different countries who have co-signed a letter to President Obama.

I would love to visit Australia and your invitation is very tempting, especially since my wife - who used to work for Qantas - has such wonderful things to say about your land, and Neville Shute is my favourite author. I am afraid, however, that there is a health issue which must be resolved before accepting your invitation. I am now in Greece, but will return to California in late January. Perhaps something could be worked out around that time. Could I ask for your patience? If you and yours are still interested, could you contact me again in November? By that time I will know the answers to my issues, and my plans for the future.

*Thank you
Stephen G. Miller*

PS: If you know any scholars of Graeco-Roman antiquity whose names do not appear on the list of signatures to the Obama letter (see the web site) perhaps you could encourage them to join us.

