

THE ZIBBY GARNETT TRAVELLING FELLOWSHIP

Report by Heather Maxwell Dowling



Panagia Vlaherna
Conservation Project

Romiri, Zakynthos, Greece

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INTRODUCTION

The “Romiri project” was a pilot international workshop organised in agreement with the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, in collaboration with the University of York and under the patronage of ICCROM. It was held in September 2011 in Zakynthos, Greece, on the historic chapel of “Panagia Vlaherna”.

Designed for graduating Archaeologists, Architects, Conservators and Civil Engineers, the main aim of the project was the conservation treatment of the architectural elements of a historical chapel through the learning process of interaction between young professionals of different specialties related to Conservation Science.

I was selected as one of 8 international students and awarded the 2011 Zibby Garnett Travelling Fellowship to travel to Greece to participate in the workshop. As a graduate of the MA in Conservation Studies (Historic Buildings) from the University of York I was also part funded by the University of York Alumni Association.

My name is Heather Dowling and I have recently completed an international study tour to Zakynthos, Greece with funding from Zibby Garnett Travelling Fellowship and the University of York Alumni association. I first became aware of Zibby Garnett Travelling Fellowship as part of my Masters in Conservation Studies at the University of York. I attended the University from September 2010 to June 2011 while I completed my MA. Prior to embarking on my studies at York I completed a four year BA Hons in Interior architecture at Griffith College Dublin. As part of my BA I studied conservation studies as an elective for four years and due to my keen interest in historic buildings and adaptive reuse projects I embarked on further study in the area of conservation and historic buildings. As part of my MA I completed a dissertation focussed on the philosophical and practical conservation issues surrounding post fire reconstruction. I carried out a two week work placement with a Conservation Consultancy firm based in Dublin where I became introduced to the St .Mel’s Cathedral restoration project. St. Mel’s Cathedral was extensively damaged by fire in 2009 and Carrig Conservation Consultants with whom I carried out my placement are lead conservation consultants for the rebuilding project. Following on from my work placement Carrig offered me a further summer work placement to help compile the conservation report for St. Mels. This allowed me to use aspects of my dissertation research to contribute to the conservation and restoration process. I submitted my MA dissertation on September 7th 2011 and completed my placement with Carrig on September 13th 2011. Five days later I travelled to Zakynthos, Greece to partake

in the Diadrasis Romiri Project.

ZAKYNTHOS

The Island of Zakynthos (or Zante) is situated in the waters of the Ionian Sea, about 17 km off the west coast of Greece. The island has a very diverse topography, ranging from flat to mountainous. With its indented coastline the beaches of the island are considered to be some of the most attractive in Europe. Many of the beaches cannot be reached by road, as



Figure 1. Location of Zakynthos Island. (www.vacationstogo.com/cruise_port/Zakynthos__Greece.cfm)

they are nestled among high and inaccessible cliffs and are accessible only by water.

Due to the picturesque nature of the island and Mediterranean climate, tourism is the island's primary resource, particularly popular with UK and Irish tourists. The production of olives, citrus, grapes and, of course, wine also contributes much to the local economy. Zakynthos has a population of almost 40, 000 inhabitants. Most of them live in the coastal southern and eastern regions with the interior of the island being relatively sparsely populated.

During the first week of my MA studies at York I was introduced to the 2011 Romiri project by director of Studies, Dr. Peter Gouldsbrough. Details of the course at that point were not fully developed but I was informed that a former graduate of the York MA was one of the key organisers. I immediately expressed interest and asked to be kept informed of its progress. I applied for the Zibby Garnett Travelling Fellowship in advance of my application to DIADRASIS requesting in excess of £2,000 to cover the course fee. On receiving word

of being accepted on to the Diadrasis course York Alumni Association announced funding for a MA student in support of the course. For this reason I received joint funding from York



Figure 2. Buildings Archaeologist Hilary Oldfield Gould

I were the last to arrive. Correspondence from Diadrasis in advance of course was very minimal. While we knew the destination and general synopsis of the course, details of fellow participants and accommodation arrangements had been not been disclosed. However we were greeted at the airport by Diadrasis Co-ordinator and University of York graduate Laura Melpomeni Tapini. In the

and Zibby Garnett Travelling Fellowship to secure my place on the course.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

On September 15th 2011 I travelled to London Gatwick where I met with a fellow Romiri participant, Hilary Oldfield Gould, and from there flew direct to Zante. The six other participants had arrived via Athens that morning and so



Figure 3. Course co-ordinator Laura M Tapini

journey in the car we quizzed Laura for further details on the course, our planned activities



Figure 4. Course co-ordinator Lucia Gomez

and so forth. However she inquisitively replied that all would be revealed in due course. While we travelled along a main road from the airport after approximately 15 minutes we turned off onto a rural road and from there onto a dirt track. After driving through a gated entrance we approached a stunning 2-storey villa located deep in the Zakynthian countryside surrounded by an olive tree plantation and mountainous terrain.

On entering the house we were greeted by Lucia Gomez – the second Diadrasis co-ordinator on the Romiri Project. We were then shown to our rooms where we met our fellow participants. I was paired with Yolanda Gomez – a history of art graduate from Madrid. Pedro Freitas –

an architecture student from Brazil resided in the room adjacent to ours. Somi Chaterjee an architecture graduate from India and Cynthia Fortes from Brazil another architecture graduate also shared a room while Buildings Archaeologist Hilary shared with Buildings Conservation MA student Kyriaki Yiakoupi from Cyprus and architecture student Gabriella Fernandez from Dominican Republic. The diverse range of cultures and skills was immediately apparent and we all got to know each other a little better over a welcome dinner organised by the co-ordinators later that evening. While at dinner we were all officially introduced and were informed of the “House Rules” with regard to living, eating, working and sleeping in such close quarters for the duration of the workshop.

GAINING AN UNDERSTANDING



Figure 5. Venetian style streets of Zante Town.

On the first morning of the workshop we were each provided with an A4 binder containing details of the workshop and a week-by-week timetable of activities. Each day was broken up into specific tasks varying from lectures to presentations by participants as well as hands-on physical intervention scheduled for latter weeks. Our first day was spent getting to know

the history and cultural context of the island. We were taken into Zante the island's capital town and were assigned an exercise to identify buildings from old photographs taken prior to a devastating earthquake in 1953.

The island of Zakynthos, where the chapel of Panagia Vlaherna is located, is one of the Seven Ionian Islands of Greece, and due to its strategic location between the Greek and Italian territories, has always been an appreciated land, from the Roman Empire times to the Second World War. One of the most important and significant periods of the history of

Zakynthos took place when the Venetians arrived to the island in 1484. Their occupation lasted until 1797, when the system was completely changed by the ideas of the French Revolution.

Before Venetian occupation, people had escaped from the island to the Peloponnesian mainland due to the attack of the Turks in 1480. During the last years of the fifteenth century, with the new Venetian power, people were allowed to return to their homes and fields, the island developed, and the city was reconstructed in an impressive architectural style.

When the Venetians acquired the administrative power of the island, they established a hierarchical system for the population, which gradually increased the divide between social classes. The upper class society was composed of the 'nobili' (archontologio), and the names of the families who had a title of nobility were recorded in the Libro d'Oro (The Golden Book). The middle class were the 'civili' (asti), the well-to-do in general but who lacked titles and civil rights. And the lowest class were the 'popolari', the common people who had humble



Figure 6. Panagia Vlaherna prior to Romiri Workshop.

professions and a low cultural level. Thus, during the three centuries of the Venetian power, the Zakynthians lived according to a European and especially to an Italian culture. The Venetian nobility brought to Zakynthos the typical Italian villa, a single-family house in the countryside, generally used as a second residence. This idea of the Venetian villa was combined with

the strong religious character of the local population, creating as a result a new typology of residential complex formed by the main house, the land for the crop, and a small family chapel used to give service to the owner family and also to the people who worked the land.

On the second day of the workshop we were finally introduced to Panagia Vlaherna – the subject of our study tour. The small chapel is located within metres of the modern two storey villa. The architectural structure of the chapel is very simple: a rectangular shape



Figure 7. Organising photos of the site

of approximately 8 × 5 metres, divided into two different spaces by a typical orthodox iconostasis. The altar is located 30 cm higher than the main floor, the elevation reachable by two steps. The structure of the chapel has stone walls and a wooden truss roof.

The Panagia Vlaherna Chapel, due to its limited dimensions and conservation status was an excellent case study as we could hope to complete the whole intervention by the end of the workshop. We were brought out to the building and without receiving any contextual information we were asked to assess its condition and overall appearance. We were then provided with basic information regarding ownership and use of the chapel and then given a series of photographs which we were asked to arrange in what we believed to be chronological order. The photographs documented what appeared to be an entirely different building and one which we assumed had been significantly damaged in the 1953 earthquake. After this exercise we were informed of the cultural context and social history of the building.

The Panagia Vlacherna chapel is located in the community of Romiri, a rural area in the interior of Zakynthos. There is no record of construction of the chapel, but it is believed to have been built in the nineteenth century, as the date of 1860 is inscribed in the front of the altarpiece within the chapel. The church was later moved from its original place and relocated on the top of the hill, some meters above its first location. As a consequence, the church changed its orientation, and is now facing South instead of East. In 1953 the Ionian Islands were affected by a strong earthquake causing the destruction of the whole town of Zakynthos. Fortunately, the Panagia Vlacherna chapel did not suffer serious damage during the earthquake. In the aftermath of the disaster Nikolaos Varvianis, owner of the chapel gathered several artistic

and historical objects from Zakynthos town and surrounding areas and stored them inside and around Panagia Vlaherna, turning the hill of the chapel to an open-air museum of the lost city. His manuscripts describing the incident are a precious document recording the condition



Figure 8. Site used as an open air museum after 1953 earthquake. (Varvianis 1953)

of the chapel in the mid twentieth century.

Valuable manuscripts of the National Poet Dionysios Solomos and the iconostasis and the icon of St. Ignatius amongst many other things were all gathered and stored at the chapel.

From 1930 to 1980, the family, led by Nikolaos Varvianis, used the house and chapel as a unified complex. These private chapels were used for the celebration of the everyday family rituals for special ceremonies, such as baptisms and weddings. In later years these functions were transferred to local parish churches and in 2007 the Greek Orthodox Church prohibited the celebration of social ceremonies in the private chapels.

Around 1980 the family of Nikolaos Varvianis left the island, and in the following ten years the property was vacant and not maintained. As a consequence the church and surrounding areas deteriorated considerably. In the 1990's a new generation of the Varviani's family became interested in bringing life to the Panagia Vlaherna environment and in 1992 excavations for the new house which stands today started.

SURVEY

Having been provided with a greater understanding of the building and its cultural context we spent the remainder of the first Saturday assessing the buildings structural and material condition and discussing possible future interventions. Conducting a measured survey of the building was one of our starting points for planning any future interventions and therefore the first week of the workshop was dedicated to surveying the architectural and structural features of the building. Lecturer Henning Burwitz from the University of Cottbus, Germany assisted us for the duration of survey week. We conducted a full measured survey of the building using hand methods such as triangulation and photogrammetry. All architectural drawings were produced initially by hand and then digitized into AutoCAD. While we worked on surveying the building using traditional methods two visiting specialists from the USA Centre for Advanced Spatial Technologies conducted a laser survey of the historic building and worked alongside us digitizing 3D spatial information in support of their research into the use and benefits of 3D laser scanning. By the end of week one a full measured architectural and structural survey of the building was completed as well as a 3D laser scan record of the structure. The contribution of both these specialisms provided fertile ground for discussions on traditional techniques vs. technological advancements and on how to best apply both



Figure 9. Triangulation



Figure 13. Evidence of cementitious mortar in use on the building.

INTERVENTION

Week two saw the arrival Dr. Peter Gouldsborough, former director of the Conservation Studies MA at the University of York. Peter gave a series of lectures on stone pathology and possible interventions with stone buildings. With Peter's assistance we carried out an in-depth condition survey of the building assessing varying

degrees of erosion and degradation of the stone building. One of the key causes of decay identified within the buildings structure was the use of non-porous cement mortar causing delamination and scaling of the stone. Lime mortar was identified as the most suitable mortar for a stone masonry building of this nature due to it enhancing the breathability of the structure and its function as a sacrificial layer to combat the effects of weather and chemical erosion. Due to the maritime climate of the island and the high salt content in the air salt posed a significant threat to the chemical composition of porous limestone and sandstone used in the buildings construction. Therefore a highly alkaline lime based mortar was seen to be the best method of combating the effects of erosion and prolonging the durability of the natural stone construction. Evidence of a lime wash was identified on the building's façade which would have provided a protective barrier around the building preventing excessive erosion and degradation. However due to the personal taste of the owners and a desire to see the natural stone masonry this lime wash had been removed and there was a preference towards not reapplying such a finish. With Peters assistance we devised an approach for intervention in order to conserve and repair the existing structure. It was unanimously agreed that the cement mortar was posing the most significant threat to the building and therefore should be

removed and replaced with a suitable lime based mortar.

In order to gain a greater understanding of stone masonry buildings and the relationship



Figure 14. Marking out the parameters of the bench.

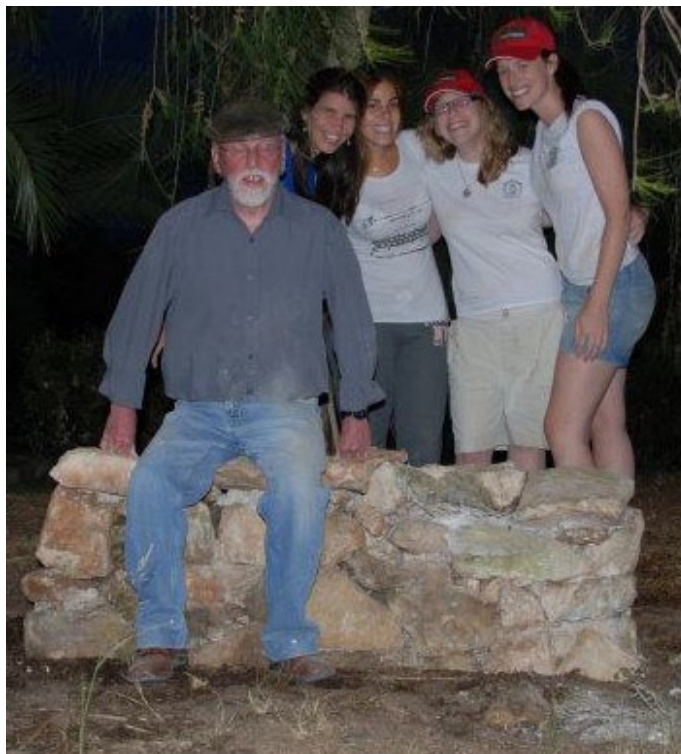


Figure 15. The successful team with the completed bench.

between mortar and stone the eight participants were divided up into two teams of four and allocated a task to build a stone bench which would become part of the environment surrounding the chapel. Each team set about sourcing suitable stones in the surrounding area and marking out the parameters of their bench. We dug foundations for each bench and with the assistance of Laura and Peter each team engaged in the task of stone wall construction using a mud and lime based mortar. This task allowed us to gain a greater understanding of stone masonry construction and the function of individual elements within the formation.

As we agreed to re-point the building using lime based mortar week three was spent removing the cement based mortar from the building prior to re-pointing. On further inspection it was found that various phases of cement repairs had occurred with differing consistencies of concrete varying from easily removable

cement with large aggregate content to incredibly durable and hard cement mortar with fine



Figure 16. Removing the cement mortar.

ground sand aggregate content. For this reason the removal of cement from the building took much longer than had been envisaged by the course co-ordinators. As a team eight of us worked incredibly hard for a full week removing cement from the between the stones with hammers and chisels. By the end of the week the cement had been successfully albeit difficultly removed. Large holes remained in the building's facade and it was decided to fill bigger gaps in the masonry with stones from the surrounding landscape and a

mud based mortar. In order to re-point the building as a team we had to decide on a consistency and colour which we felt most appropriate. We carried out a number of mortar tests mixing various coloured sands and crushed terracotta tiles with lime mortar to decide on a colour which best suited the building. These mortar tests were left to dry for twenty four hours in the sun before deciding on a final selection. Re-pointing the finer joints in the building required skill and further training. Our stone benches which had been constructed earlier in the workshop were used to practice lime pointing to finer joints before working on the chapel.



Figure 17. Lime mortar colour tests.

As we completed the re-



Figure 18. Repointing under the tarpaulin.

pointing of the building the weather began to change from warm dry conditions requiring us to hose down the building every morning and evening to keep the mortar moist to avoid cracking to humid conditions with torrential rain and thunder and lightning. The poor weather had the potential to adversely affect the drying out of the mortar causing saturation and failure of the material. In order to address this problem we constructed a tarpaulin over the building which maintained humid conditions while preventing the fabric of the building becoming saturated. The tarpaulin also improved working conditions for those of us on site.

Whilst enjoyable as an excellent hands on experience the third week of the workshop referred to as “Intervention Week” was particularly difficult. The eight participants were divided into two teams in order to complete the work and it appeared from visible results that one team was not working as hard as the other hence affecting team morale and workload. Adverse weather conditions as well as long, physical days meant that tensions and emotions were high. One particular evening towards the latter end of week three saw us working well after dark. At approximately 8.30pm having started our day at 7.30am we washed up our tools in torrential rain with head torches. Cold, wet and hungry we all entered the house after our days work to find that due to the bad weather there was no power or water. What could have been a terrible situation turned out to be exactly what the team needed. We sat in our work

clothes and boots around the kitchen table with candles and leftovers from the previous night's dinner. We shared stories from home and told jokes and laughed. Any issues which had occurred on site had dissolved away and by the next morning the sun had come back out, our tarpaulin had stayed in place and we were on track to complete the final stages of re-pointing.



Figure 19. The completed north facade.

COMPLETION & DISSEMINATION

The final week of the workshop was dedicated to compiling a conservation report on the building including a conservation management plan highlighting our future recommendations for the building which due to soil subsidence identified during survey week causing severe movement and subsequent cracking to the north facade, one of our key recommendations were high priority ground works to stabilise the surrounding soil. Lime – washing was also recommended in order to protect the stone from further decay however in the event of this not being carried out continual maintenance and monitoring of the historic fabric was recommended with regular re-pointing and replacement of stones which were no longer fulfilling their structural role within the building. As part of the final week a dissemination

project was also planned whereby we would devise a form of audience interpretation and effectively hand the building back to its owner. For the final week eight of us were divided into four teams of two. We were paired in combinations of which the co-ordinators felt would work best together and were allocated tasks which they felt best utilised individual strengths they had identified over the duration of the course. I was placed on the dissemination team with Brazilian architect Cynthia. We were required to assess the project as a whole, to identify our audience and to decipher what message we wished to communicate and what we hoped would be the overall outcomes. A method of communication also had to be devised. Following group discussion we felt we wanted to communicate the cultural context and



Figure 20. Dissemination material.

significance of the building and its associated story. We felt the immediate audience were the Vivianis family with a secondary audience of visitors and friends to the Romiri area. We also felt that our five weeks working and conserving the building had also become part of its story and we therefore wanted to communicate that to a wider audience. We were restricted in terms of time and budget and so needed to develop interpretive tools which could communicate our message in a simple yet effective manner. We chose to design an informative brochure which would be kept in the house for people staying in the villa. We

also designed souvenir bookmarks which communicated the message in a very simple way to those not directly associated with the building. In order to communicate our message and experience to a wider audience we recorded documentary footage of each of the eight participant's experiences. We each described our favourite moment, our highs and our lows and our overall thoughts on the Romiri experience. The video of our experiences is available on Youtube as well as the official Diadrasis website. This allows us to communicate the significance of the building, our personal experience and is a useful tool for future Diadrasis participants for gaining an understanding of the mission behind Diadrasis.

FREE-TIME

As well as advancing our skills and knowledge we were also given the opportunity to experience Greek culture. As a relative of the Vivianis family co-ordinator Laura had spent many summers on the island giving her excellent local knowledge. The Romiri project proved to be more than just lectures and work-based activities. As a group we were encouraged to experience Greek nature, culture and traditions. Themed excursions and side activities were organised



Figure 21. Me in the ancient site of Olympia.

for weekends and some evenings. Our first excursion was to the ancient site of Olympia on the island of Kefalonia, led by the Hellenic Ministry's conservators Maria Krini and Katerina Efthimiou. Olympia is an archaeological site representative of the ancient history of Greece and a significant example of excellent cultural heritage management and

interpretation. The following weekend we took a boat trip around the coast of Zakynthos as a means to experience the natural beauty of the island. As well as wonderful architecture and picturesque landscape Zakynthos is also renowned for its wildlife in particular the loggerhead sea turtle. The turtles referred to as "caretta" are an extremely important aspect of the island's



Figure 22. Female loggerhead turtle under our glass boat.

culture with many restrictions in place in order to protect this endangered species. One of the highlights of the experience was a boat trip to visit the amazing coastal landscape and to turtle watch. We travelled in a glass bottomed boat and got to see a female turtle directly

underneath us. We also visited caves and got to swim in the clear blue seas before returning to shore for a wonderful evening of Greek food and dance. We also discovered the lesser known side of the island spending a day visiting the mountain area and villages, exploring local craftsmanship and traditions. We also visited a local quarry to see where the signatory white chalk limestone which adorns so much of the island's architecture was excavated and we visited a stone mason workshop where we observed the work of traditional stone-cutting artisans. This linked well with our workshop's case study in relation to stonemasonry building and the extraction and processing of stone, a traditional skill of the island.

We then visited Kiliomeno and Louha, two rare examples of traditional villages untouched by



Figure 23. Group photo in the authentic greek town of Kiliomeno

earthquakes and tourist development. Here we had the opportunity to meet the inhabitants, and feel Greek hospitality, which goes beyond language barriers. We also had free time to travel to Zante town to explore the venetian style streets and to witness Greek culture at our leisure.

CONCLUSION



Figure 24. Me giving a presentation on St. Mels Cathedral during the workshop.



Figure 25. Planning the dissemination



Figure 26. Making my voice heard!

Diadrais, from the Greek word διάδρασις, meaning “interaction” was set up with the main aim of encouraging interdisciplinary research in the areas of Conservation, Preservation, Restoration, Protection and Dissemination of Cultural Heritage. However one of the biggest challenges of the workshop was to apply the concept of “interaction” not only to the way conservation methods interact with other cultural elements but also between participants and between participants and lecturers. The opportunity to cohabitate reinforced the need for successful interaction. We all experienced this workshop as a unique opportunity for learning to confront our differences and similarities, and to become more open-minded.

Throughout the course of the workshop individual participants presented lectures on conservation issues in their country and what heritage meant to them. With such a diverse range of people this enabled excellent group learning and discussion and introduced

us to many case studies and international issues which we may not otherwise have become aware of. Discussions and debate often carried on late into the evening with many of our visiting lecturers such as architect Joseph King Director of the Sites Unit ICCROM sharing their professional experiences and knowledge.

Having spent time in Zakynthos during the summer of 2005 and I was aware of the rich cultural heritage of the island and held a great affinity for the island and its people. To be given the opportunity to engage in a hands on conservation project which allowed me to put into practice the theory and knowledge I had obtained during both my Undergraduate and Masters degree was a wonderful opportunity and one which I thoroughly enjoyed. I was particularly interested



Figure 27. Peter and I surveying the building.

in the survey and recording elements of the workshop as these were areas on which I had not focussed during my MA. I feel engaging in these tasks has very much added to my skills and increased my knowledge. During my MA I studied under Dr. Peter Gouldsborough and carried out a 2 day lime and stone skills workshop under his direction. A two day taster into the area of stone pathology and practical hands on stone masonry made me incredibly hungry for more and I would have to say that the practical intervention with the stone building in the company of Peter was my favourite aspect of the course. As

a previous student of Peter's we shared many a cup of tea on site and worked together for a whole day chiselling out cement mortar from the west elevation of the Chapel facade. From chatting with Peter on site I not only gained further insight into the area of conservation from listening to his past experiences but I also gained a friend and an excellent mentor for my future career.

The last few days of the workshop were spent tidying up the site and general surroundings as well as making an official presentation to Nicolas Vivanis. On the last day of the workshop, having been the first to arrive, Hilary and I were also the last to leave. I spent some time outside by the Chapel and looking and photographing the building I must admit I felt a great sense of achievement. I felt particularly proud that as a group we had succeeded in rehabilitating what five weeks previous had been rather melancholy building. I also felt particularly proud of the stone bench four of us had constructed on site. The other team had not strategically positioned their bench and it lay in the way of the gardener and so Laura informed my team and I that the other team's bench was to be demolished after we left site – hence reinforcing the need for good planning before any construction works. A valuable lesson it has to be said!

From a personal perspective the Romiri workshop was an excellent experience. Eight young professionals cohabitating in a relatively small, rural, foreign environment for five weeks was no easy feat. There were personal highs and lows but many laughs were had and lifelong friendships were made. As the pilot workshop we are the first group to complete a Diadrasis course and so our testimonials and experiences will go on to inform and encourage future participants. Our ideas and comments have also been taken on board and there are plans to create a Diadrasis Alumni whereby we can all keep in touch and continue to interact and share ideas in the true spirit of Diadrasis. We all agreed that as an international workshop there may be scope in the future to arrange conferences or workshops in past participants countries as contacts and networks will be created all over the world.

I thoroughly enjoyed my experience and feel it has been greatly beneficial to my career and development as a young heritage professional. I feel the accolade of being a Zibby Garnett Scholar and Romiri Project participant hold great weight in the professional environment. Two days after returning from Greece I travelled from Dublin back to North Yorkshire to interview for a job with Heritage Consultants PLB limited. As part of my interview I was required to prepare a five minute presentation which I focussed on my experience in Zakynthos. I am now six weeks into my new job with PLB and truly believe that the knowledge and confidence gained during my experience in Zakynthos is largely attributable to gaining my first step on the career ladder just twelve weeks after completing my Masters.

I am entirely grateful to the trustees of the Zibby Garnett Travelling Fellowship for supporting

me financially and helping me to advance my knowledge and skills. I feel privileged to be associated with the organisation and would highly recommend to all young heritage and conservation graduates to embark on an overseas study tour as a means to advance both personally and professionally. I am also grateful to the trustees for their warm welcome and enthusiasm towards me during my interview in Lincoln and subsequent correspondence from Clare Parker.

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