

Seeing Cyprus from

Playing with kites has always been a past-time for Thomas Sagory. As a child he would fly kites in the skies of Brittany in the west of France, and as an adult, his remote controlled kite has flown mostly in the Middle East, a journey that has combined his profession as an archaeologist with the art of kite flying, as a kite aerial photographer.

It was in 1999 when Sagory went to Egypt on an excavation that, by chance, the French archaeologist got a clear vision of his life's calling. "I brought my kites with me when I went to Egypt, to relax during my days-off," recalls Sagory when I ask him how he was introduced to kite photography. "There, in Tanis, a main site of the Egypt Delta I met Yves Guichard, a kite aerial photographer, who was kind enough to share his knowledge with me."

Yet his admiration for kite photography enthusiasts goes further back than his initial encounter with Guichard. Coincidentally, Pierre Montet, a French archaeologist who also worked in Egypt in the first half of the 20th century and who discovered the undisturbed royal tomb of Egyptian King Psusennes had taken kite aerial photographs there in the 1930s.

"From then I started to work as a kite aerial photographer with several archaeological excavations, mostly in the Middle East. I have been working in Egypt since then, in Yemen for a few years when the country was relatively safe, the Emirates, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia or Uzbekistan..."

And it was in 2007 that Sagory began to photograph Cyprus from above, a project which will be exhibited on



Thomas Sagory at work



Tuesday at the Famagusta Gate in Nicosia.

Initially in Cyprus for a workshop on geographical information systems, Sagory met Odile Le Brun who invited him to come to Cyprus to work with the French archaeological mission at Chirokitia.

"Like in Egypt, it was more a chance encounter with Odile and Alain Le Brun that led me to take aerial pictures of Cyprus. Through the French mission, I started to meet several Cypriot archaeologists and foreigners who asked me to take aerial photographs. From one site to another, from one side of the border to the other, I started to gather thousands of aerial pictures from above," reveals Sagory. "Even if I knew Chirokitia from my readings when I studied archaeology at university, coming to Chirokitia was a great

moment for me."

Eventually, Sagory met the new director of the French Cultural Institute here and this is when the idea of an exhibition started to take fruit.

But Sagory went further than catering for the needs of archaeologists while on the island. "At first I was going where the excavations were and where I was asked to go. Then I started to look for places I'd really like to photograph, places that would be interesting and show the incredible Cypriot heritage.

"One of my best guides to Cyprus heritage was a friend, Lefteris, who was working for the Department of Antiquities to preserve and protect sites and especially mosaics. He was kind enough to spend his free time with me, usually under the blazing sun, for me to get aerial pictures. If I had to dedicate the exhibition it would be both to Odile Le Brun who invited me to come to Cyprus the first time and Lefteris who made me discover the island he knows and loves and who I hope is going to carry on because there's still so much to discover."

Sagory's visits to the island three or four times a year going from one site to another to register, record and catch views from above since 2007 were smooth, given that most of the pictures were taken on behalf of the Department of Antiquities or with foreign archaeological missions. Yet the few difficulties he faced, aside from the wind which required patience and experience, were part of the adventure.

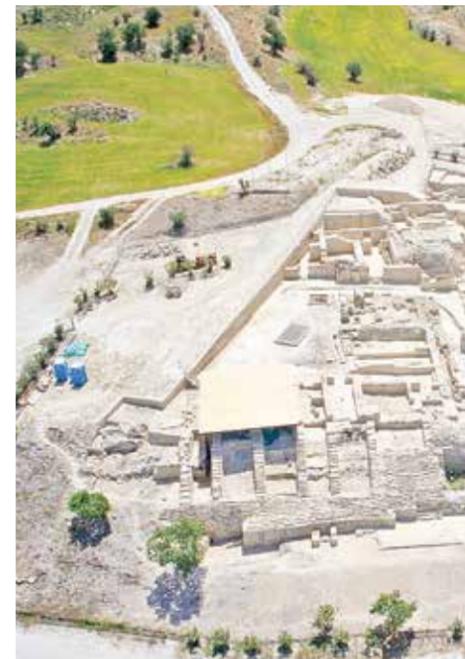
"I had only two difficult moments. The first was in Kourion. I was asked to obtain aerial pictures of the beautiful basilica down the hill of Kourion. I went to the site, but I forgot to ask for the key of the gate, so I jumped over it. I took pictures for a while and went I went back to my car, a man came.

He was the owner of the field just next to the basilica, and obviously held a grudge against archaeologists because when I started to explain that I was an archaeologist working for the Department of Antiquities...The second time was in Kofinou. I was also taking pictures of the excavations around a basilica. There was no fence this time, but a man came and asked me what I was doing here. He called the police. I had to explain why a grown up man was playing with a kite in the middle of the fields," he chuckles.

Sagory is quite conscious that his snapshots 'meddle' with heritages which are not his own. "Taking aerial pictures is always a way to change perspectives. Even if you spend your life around a place, seeing it from above will change your point of view. You'll feel like a child looking at a map or at



Round houses found in Chirokitia



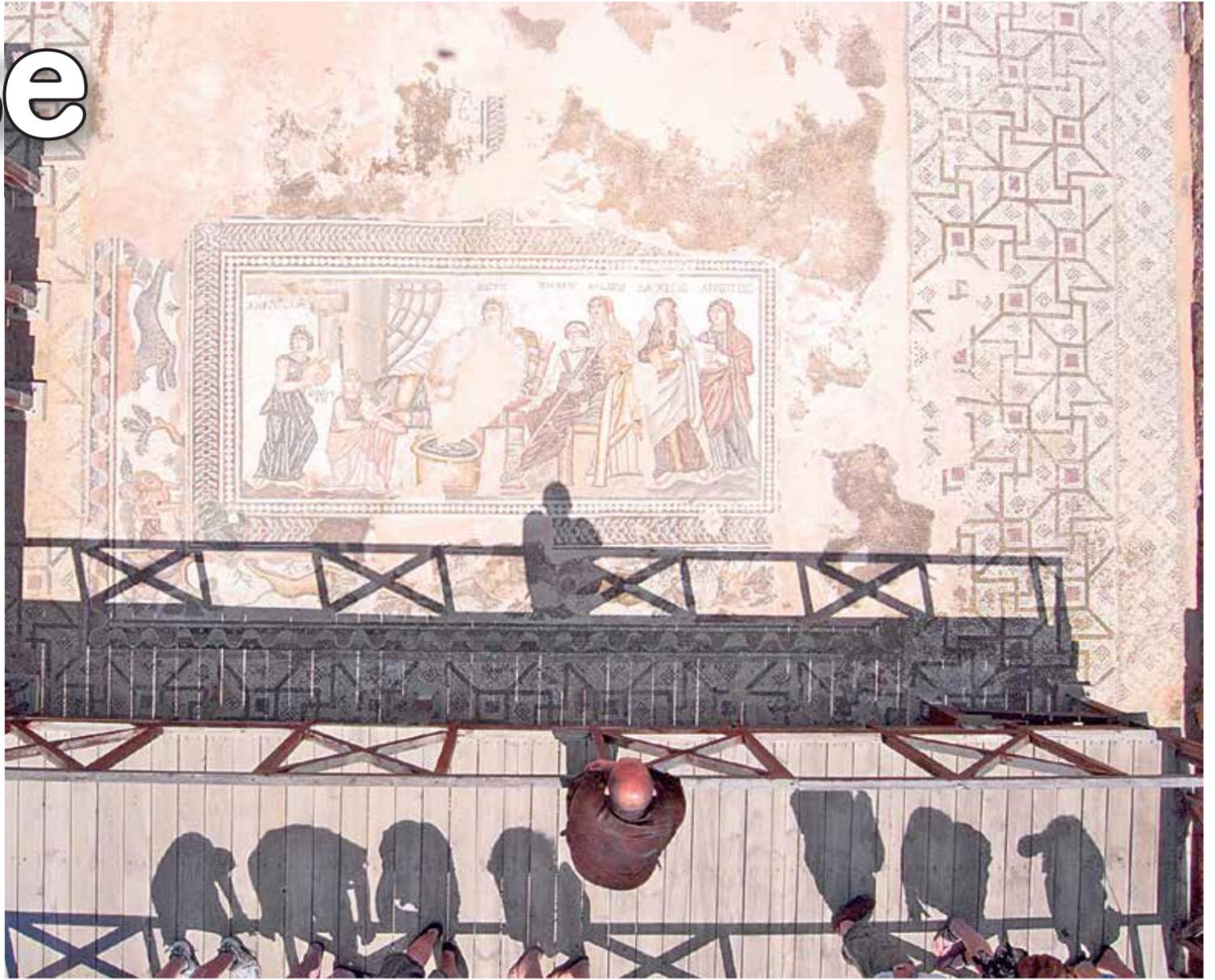
The Palace of ancient Idalion

a kite



The town and harbour of Famagusta in northern Cyprus photographed this year (left)

Achilles' Bath Mosaic from the early 5th century at the House of Theseus in Kato Paphos taken in 2011 (right)



the globe, seeking for your country: "This is my house", "This is my friend's house"...

Nevertheless, his photographic endeavours are valuable to his professional work as an archaeologist.

"In order to understand remains from old times, archaeologists have to dismantle, to break down, and to destroy. They have to record very precisely every step of the excavation so that they can understand and explain the several phases of the evolution of a structure, a monument or a site. To record, you can draw, you can take measures and you can take a picture. An aerial picture is one way to record the evolution of an excavation and it also helps to understand the organisation of a settlement, the structure of an old city and to see the link between a site and its natural environment."

On a personal note, I asked whether both Sagory's professional and photographic skills have something to do with a potential need to travel back in time. "That's hard to say," he tells me, "I'm probably the worst person to judge whether it's an introspective rush into time or a way to satisfy my need to discover the world. Indeed I certainly feel a personal need to travel. Discovering new places, new cultures help me understand and value mine. It's probably the same thing for history."

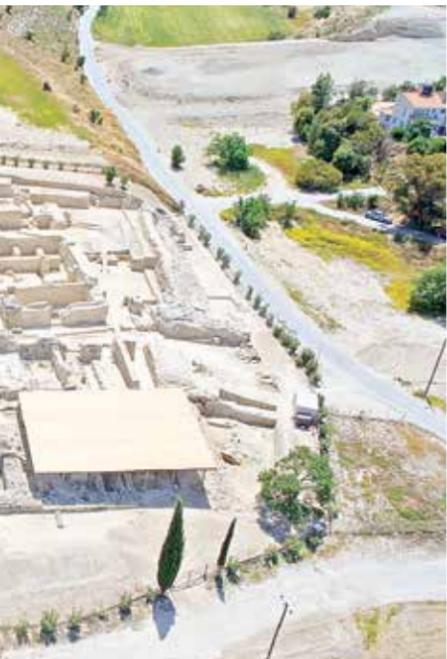
"Cyprus - An Aerial perspective" by Thomas Sagory opens on Tuesday at 7pm at Famagusta Gate in Nicosia. From Wednesday October 30, to Friday November 8, the exhibition will be open from 10am to 1pm and from 4pm to 8pm (closed Saturday and Sunday). Admission is free.



Church of Timios Stavros (Holy Cross) in Pelendri

Aerial archaeology is the study of archaeological remains by examining them from above. The advantages of gaining a good aerial view of the ground had been long appreciated by archaeologists as a high viewpoint permits a better appreciation of fine details and their relationships within the wider site context. Tiny differences in ground conditions caused by buried features can be emphasised by a number of factors and then viewed from the air; slight differences in ground levels, in soil colour, in levels and buried features.

Kite aerial photography is a means used to lift a camera by using a kite and is triggered either remotely or automatically to take aerial photographs. The camera rigs can range from extremely simple, consisting of a trigger mechanism with a disposable camera, to complex apparatus using radio control and digital cameras.



The Byzantine church of Ayios Philon named after Saint Philo



Kolossi castle in Limassol