SIR ARTHUR EVANS AT KOMMOS
A Cretan Village Remembers its Past

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The four elderly gentlemen shown in Figs. 3, 7, 9, 10 have a few things in common. Their ages range from sixty-five to ninety years and they are all residents of the small town of Pittadia, presently serving as the headquarters of the archaeological team excavating just a little to the northwest, at the Minoan-Classical site of Kommos on the south coast of Crete. From the readers’ point of view, what is more important is that all four men, as well as a compatriot of theirs now living in Herakleion, were in the area when Sir Arthur Evans visited the ancient site half a century ago, in 1924. Little did they know at that time that this was an exceptionally distinguished visitor with a long, varied, and brilliant career, at first as a political correspondent in the Balkans, later as a numismatist, Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, honored member of learned societies, archaeologist, and, above all, a pioneer, incisive, and fundamental interpreter of the civilization of Minoan Crete. Nevertheless, in those days, when Greek villagers were not yet jaded by widespread tourism, the arrival of any stranger could be an exceptional incident in their otherwise uneventful lives, especially since the visitor, as rumor now has it, had brought with him tools to excavate. The event stamped itself deeply in their memories.

For Kommos, Kommos, or, to use his own spelling, Komos, was the culmination of a series of exploratory expeditions undertaken by him in 1923 and 1924 in search of a great road he suspected crossed central Crete to link Knosos with Minoan harbors on the Libyan Sea. Already earlier, in the late 19th century, a young Italian archaeologist, A. Taraselli, had romantically linked the shores of Knosos with Homer’s description of Menelaus’ shipwreck off the south coast of Crete on the hero’s return voyage from Troy after the Trojan war (Odyssey, III, 293-299). Evans’ search was for physical evidence of a route by which imported objects arriving at the south coast of Crete from North Africa and, especially, Egypt would have found their way to northern Crete and, in particular, to Knosos, where he had already excavated an important Minoan palace. In those expeditions he had often been accompanied by three men: Duncan Mackenzie, his right-hand man throughout his excavations at Knosos; Manolis Akamianakis, his faithful and “lynx-eyed” excavation foreman; Piet de Jong, then architect of the British School of Archaeology at Athens, ready at hand to make lively sketches and drawings of how ancient remains came upon their journeys. There was also a young Cretan man, Myron Spilthakis, who during the visit to Kommos acted as male boy and general caretaker.

The outcome of these explorations is described in great detail in the second volume of Evans’ Palace of Minos (London, 1928) and in shorter notices which appeared in the London Times, the Morning Post and other papers during the time of the explorations. This is naturally not the place to discuss aspects and implications of the discovery of Kommos. Suffice it to quote a few remarks from Evans’ diary, kindly made available to us by the Ashmolean Museum, from which one can grasp some of the spirit of adventure and excitement of the occasion:

1924. Pittadia. Camp in olive grove beyond “Pegada” [the village Spring]. Sea...about 35 mins. away. Sandy. Ponente [west wind] blowing high sea, but cliffs to left exact break against “Notion” [south wind]. To N. a knoll...forms the boundary of a valley now buried in sand but formerly evidently central quarter of a large Minoan town. Pottery and other remains extend on both sides of it and up the flanks of W. headland to S...Running along N. flank of plateau towards this south headland very evident remains of a mound and supporting block and terrace blocks of old road which could be traced some way in Pittadia direction. The end of the Great South Road and to great Minoan haven on the Libyan Sea?

Now there is a chance to see this same unknown facet of Evans’ rich and relentless career as a Minoan archaeologist may be revealed.

We start with Kostis Pasoulakis, an eighty-three-year-old man, who was twenty-eight years old when Evans came to Kommos. He had grown up in Pittadia and, like many other villagers, both he and his father, earlier, had owned land at the seashore site of Kommos, which had remained uninhabited since ancient times. As a young man Kostis went there frequently to cultivate his plot, but even earlier he had come there as a youngster with other boys to graze his family’s goats

1 Portrait of Sir Arthur Evans made by F. Dodd in 1915. [J. Evans 1943, opp. p. 301]

2 Map of Crete

3 Kostis Pasoulakis. [Photograph by R. C. Vincent, Jr.]
and sheep. The boys had their favorite spot at the very bottom of the hill, where large hewn stones were sticking out of the sand, a touch of mystery in the otherwise idyllic countryside. The name of this spot, as he came to know it from his older contemporaries, was, rather appropriately, "Petrokia," meaning "Hewn Stones." The ruins were normally covered by a deep blanket of sand, but every now and then strong winds would blow away some of the sand and unveil the wall blocks. The older men knew that a hidden city lay underneath; we now know, through excavation, that there is a Greek sanctuary overlying earlier, Minoan, remains.

The visible blocks proved too much of a temptation as a source of ready building material. Villagers nowadays report that numerous blocks were "quarried" on two occasions. Apparently, some blocks were removed around 1821 to build a bridge on the Platia river, just outside the sea-resort town of Hagia Galini (ancient Soulia), further northwest along the coast. More stones had been removed earlier for use in one of the many building expansions of the rich Monastery of Preveli, some distance northwest of Kommos along the Cretan shore. It is impossible now to link this event with any of the phases of the monastery's long history from the 17th century on. Our expeditions to both locations have failed to reveal any definite
ancient blocks. In the first case because the old bridge was washed away by a flood and replaced by a new one in cement, in the other because most of the walls of the monastery had been heavily plastered.

Kostis went to meet Evans at the site, perhaps partly out of curiosity, but more likely because he was concerned about the fate of his land in case there would be an excavation. He remembers vividly Evans talking about the ancient remains, about their being "deep inside the earth" and the amount of money it would take to excavate them. When Kostis innocently wondered "but can't your company dig them up?" Evans expressed another concern, that in fact he might be trespassing the territorial rights of "Mr. Albert," Evans was naturally referring to his close friend Federico Halbherr, the Italian epigraphist, explorer, and archaeologist involved then in the Italian excavations at Phaistos and Hagia Triadha, some eight kilometers northeast of Kommos. Evans also remarked that Kommos must have served as the harbor of Corty, a city in south-central Crete which had a long history from prehistoric to modern times, and which in Roman times became the capital of the North African and Cretan Province. Kostis added further that the British archaeologist did not stay long, "just for two or three days and then he left." To the interviewer's question of how he could remember so much of an incident which took place some fifty years ago, Kostis gives the simple but engaging answer that "well, I remember it because, when you are young with nothing much to do, such things make an impression on you."

George Fasoulakis is Kostis' first cousin and is now seventy-nine years old. At the time of Evans' visit he was working at Kommos as a Field Watchman and he had also been hired by his uncle Kostis Fasoulakis, alias "Chalkias" ("The Smith"), to help him till the land and tend the vineyards planted on the top of the hill where the latter owned a plot. As a Field Watchman he accompanied Evans to the hill and he still remembers some of the archaeologist's remarks as he looked down towards the south, following with his eyes the faint traces of Minoan walls. Evans once again referred to the presence here of a Minoan town. He then pointed to a small submerged reef, some four hundred meters off shore, and expressed his belief that in Minoan times this reef would have been linked with Nesus, the southern headland which now separates Kommos from the popular sea-resort town of Matala to the south, the two headlands acting as natural barriers against west and south winds and providing ancient mariners with a real haven. In the Palace of Minos Evans discusses his theory of a land subsidence along the south coast of Crete, which he estimated at some five meters. It was partially on this premise that he visualized the well-protected character of Kommos as a harbor. George claims he still remembers Evans' exclaiming that this was "Egypt's biggest port; Egypt used to get its provisions here..." He also remarks on the archaeologist's appearance as "not tall, rather heavy... very handsome and very courteous. He also spoke Greek."

It was after Evans had left that George made an exciting discovery, which, in the light of what he had recently heard, must have acquired a special meaning for him. This was a large storage jar, a pithos, provided with "70 ears" (a rather graphic term for "handles" in the local dialect). George had found the pithos some twenty meters away from where the local people nicknamed "The Smith's Tree," an old cedar tree which his uncle, the smith, had cleverly trimmed and turned into a shady, functional shelter. With further trimming this tree is used even today by the present watchman of the archaeological site. The location specified by George seems to correspond to the area in Evans' plan where he notes rows of pithoi in a building which the local owner of the land, probably the smith, had apparently nicknamed "Tolometon" or "Customs House." Although one should not build theories of sea trade on the basis of pithos storerooms, which are, after all, common in Minoan houses and palaces alike, village and archaeologist seem to have been on the right track. For, although only houseware has been found on the top and on the south slope of the Kommos hill, at the bottom to the south and right along the shore was recently discovered a Minoan building of impressive proportions, built of huge blocks, which definitely implies a seat of power, most likely deriving its strength from commercial activity.

The pithos must have turned into a matter of contention for the two men, for soon after its discovery George was fired by his uncle; the vase, probably already cracked, was left to fall apart, its fragments eventually scattered and lost.

This old man with the keen, sharp mind
still maintains a lively interest in the site. In his periodic inspections he suddenly turns up on the edge of a trench in his picturesque local garb—large black baggy trousers billowing in the wind, a long striped apron reaching to his ankles and a black fringe kerchief around his forehead—quietly but intently following what is going on.

Iakovos Kadanakis, the oldest man of the group, now over ninety years old, has an astounding memory and an enviable lucid mind with a teasing twirl. Upon being questioned he repeats most of the information we covered before, but he also brings up another detail which makes one wonder at his memory. He recalls how Evans came to Kommos from the south and on the southern hill, Viges (see plan, Fig. 3), he noted some walls which he believed to be an Early Minoan square ossuary. Evans, in fact, notes this discovery both in his diary and in his publications. The structure he referred to has been relocated by us, but it is partially destroyed because of the construction there of a Nazi bunker during the war.

George Sphakakis, an extremely pleasant and helpful man, was only eleven years old when Evans came. His comments are necessarily brief, but he adds the vivid detail that the tent the archaeologist set up next to their spring was yellow, or as he puts it “the color of egg yolk”. Of interest is his view why the site is called Kommos. "Kommos" he said "is a sort of a sea plant, growing on the sea bed. When the sea is rough it is uprooted and thrown out on the beach. At times there may be 50 or 60 tons washed up here."

Now it is important to note that the name Kommos is applied by the local people to a sandy cove just south of the hill with the Bronze Age remains (ca. 1600-1200 B.C.) and south of the Greek buildings (9th century B.C.-2nd century A.D.) at Peleki at the bottom of the slope. Following Evans' usage we now also use the name Kommos in a generic sense to include the entire site. Adhering, however, to the theory of an etymological connection of the name with seaweed we have changed the spelling from Evans' "Komò" to "Kommos". The latter also conforms with the local pronunciation.

The last person to be interviewed was Myron Sphakakis, now about seventy-nine years old, who had accompanied Evans in his exploratory campaign starting at Knoossos, where Myron had also worked as a digger and at odd jobs. He says that this man might have something substantial and illuminating to convey. Unfortunately, years had weighed more heavily on him than on his contemporaries and his memory has been failing. We must also remember that the visit to Kommos was not an isolated event for him, but part of a series of similar occasions in his long association with Evans. Paradoxically enough, however, Myron's garbled account beautifully conveys information about another archaeologist, Duncan MacKenzie, whose contribution to the early days of discovery we tend sometimes to forget. Such as his love of enjoyment, his warmth and accessibility to the local people with whom he had closely worked. Myron remembers with nostalgia a series of local musical concerts every evening in which the latter had often been the generous patron. Despite their foginess, his descriptions accurately reflect the Jean Evans' lucid and sympathetic assessment of MacKenzie's character in her book Time and Chance (London, 1943, a family biography, in which she describes him as one with an inner understanding of the native workmen and a fellow feeling with them that was a real asset in the course of our spade-work. To them, through a master, he was a true comrade. By contrast, Arthur Evans'heart lay elsewhere in those days. To quote his sister, once again from the same book, it lay in the civilization set in a beautiful Mediterranean country, aristocratic and humane in feeling; creating an art brilliant in colour and unusual in form, that drew inspiration from the flowers and birds and creatures he loved. It provided him with enigmas to solve and oracles to interpret, and opened a new world for eye and mind to dwell in: a world which served to isolate him from a present in which he had found no real place.

This has been largely an article of quotations. We cannot even claim in the case of the men interviewed that theirs are accurate recollections of what was originally said, although several of their remarks mesh incredibly well with facts we can now gather from Evans' publications or from developments in the present excavation. Their real value, however, lies in the fact that they recreate part of the atmosphere of the discovery of those days and of the great expectations which are only now beginning to be realized at Kommos.

In some ways the excavation has surpassed these expectations. The plan and photograph of the site provided here (Figs. 4 and 5) give a clear impression of the present state of recovery after four seasons of digging. The telephoto view shows the Kommos hill with Minoan house walls visible among the scanty tamarisk and cedar trees. Echoing Evans' description, a beautifully preserved stone room full of pithoi and other smaller vases was just found in a Middle Minoan III (ca. 1600
old Cretan plan known from earlier examples at Dreros and Prinias. To which god[s] this sanctuary was dedicated still remains a tantalizing mystery, but, as inscriptions are just beginning to be found, there is still hope that this question may be answered some day.

Crowning this past season’s discoveries is a large Minoan building just west of the temple and the bench room, set along the shore (J). Two large rooms have so far been discovered with monumental entrances and huge monolithic thresholds. There is clear evidence that the building had two main building phases and that it went out of use around 1200 B.C. The magnitude of its construction is such that, ironically enough, when the first blocks appeared nobody doubted it must belong to the adjacent Greek sanctuary and that it was perhaps sponsored by some rich 4th century or Hellenistic donor! As excavation proceeded in its interior, to our great amazement, the first scanty Minoan sherds were gradually replaced by larger quantities and finally by complete Minoan pots as we reached the floor. Whether Evans’ term “Customs House” can be attached to this building it is too soon to tell, but that it had a public function of importance and perhaps one connected with maritime and commercial activities is a fair hypothesis.

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INVESTIGATING AN ANCIENT SUBURB

Excavations at the TUV Mound, Tal-e-Malyan, Iran

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Archaeology is often described as the science of the human past, a discipline which seeks to explain such complex phenomena as the evolution of early man, the domestication of plants and animals, and the origins of cities and state societies. However, archaeology also continues to shed light on the development of less monumental but intrinsically human institutions and activities. One recent University Museum expedition, the Malyan Project, has, for example, unexpectedly found itself excavating a slice through ancient suburbia.

What is suburbia? Strictly speaking, it is merely the suburbs of a city. According to Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, the word ‘suburb’ is derived from the Latin suburbium (sub-underneath + urbs-city), and is (a) an outlying part of a city or town, or (b) a small community adjacent to a city. Thus one cannot have suburbs without cities. However, suburbs also have additional connotations. Suburbs are not thought to be just small communities lying by chance very close to a larger settlement. Rather, suburbs are believed to have very close functional and psychological ties with the city they border. For example, modern suburbs serve as a bedroom zone for people who actually work in the city proper.

Sociologists would say that suburbs are highly specialized communities which lie outside a central city and are politically independent of that city, but culturally and economically dependent upon it. The specialized function of such a suburb need not be wholly residential, but will represent one or more of the total functional range which the true urban center occupies. Many of the current connotations of

It is easy to poke fun at the superstitions and medical ignorance of earlier generations and hard to believe that our so-called distant ancestors were so gullible as to accept all the wild and exaggerated cures made by patent medicine proprietors. Nevertheless, the archaeological and historical evidence demonstrates how immensely popular patent medicines were in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in different forms and with different names, patent medicines continue in popularity today although the advertising may be more sophisticated and less blatant than in former years. The inheritors of the nineteenth century patent medicine tradition continue to make fortunes and their advertising agents continue to show that what was true in the nineteenth century is still true today, that most people will believe what they want to believe.

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Ozomalous was claimed to cure “Consumption, Coughs, Colds, Whooping Cough, Bronchial Affections, Asthma, La Grippe, Pneumonia, and all Pulmonary Diseases, also for Scorbuta, All Blood Disorders, Chronic Catarrh, Nervous and General Debility, Sleeplessness, Night Sweats, Pervers, Rickets or Softening of Bones in Children, Anaemia or thin Blood, Loss of Flesh, and all Conditions of Wasting” (Cramp 1921: 98) and was obviously very handy stuff to have around. Bromo-Seltzer was for mental exhaustion, headache and brain fatigue and Muyson’s Pave-Pave was a nerve, heart and stomach tonic and also cured dyspepsia and acted as a laxative (Devorar 1908: 160). Harry S. Atwood had the conditions which he cured embossed on the sides of the bottle—rheumatism, heart and lung trouble.

Not surprisingly, in view of the money and expertise expended in advertising and merchandising these remedies, they gained a wide circulation throughout the United States. Ozomalous, Lydia Pinkham’s Vegetable Compound, Doctor Kilzer’s Swamp Root Kidney Liver and Bladder Cure, and Doctor Jayne’s Expectorant have all been found in nineteenth century drug stores and are components of most nineteenth and early twentieth century archaeological sites. Despite the passing of the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906, which was designed to inhibit the growth of the patent medicine industry, many of the companies continued to prosper. Between 1902 and 1912, dates which straddle the suggested dates for the deposition of the Bartram’s Garden bottles, production of patent medicines in the United States increased by sixty percent (Stage 1979: 111); predictably, the popularity of many of the proprietary medicines incurred polemical attacks from Arthur J. Cramp, Director of the Propaganda Department of the American Medical Association, in the 1920s.

The excavations added nothing to our knowledge of John Bartram’s botanical activities but they do illustrate a not uncommon archaeological situation in which, although the hoped-for results are not obtained, other interesting information comes to light. In this case a fascinating insight into an aspect of the nineteenth and early twentieth century ‘mind-set’ was obtained. From the standpoint of the 1800s