As early as 1930, at the fortress tell of Megiddo, the biblical Armageddon, vertical balloon photographs were used to help interpret the unusually complex and confusing patterns revealed by that excavation. Made at lower altitudes than those possible from airplanes, such photographs recorded and preserved details and relationships not always noticed at ground level and not easily rendered in an architect's drawn plan. More recently, balloon photographs have proven useful for archaeological exploration and salvage work, for comparing successive levels of excavation, and for saving for future study visual data being lost through erosion.

Our own balloon recording work on Crete began in 1976, at the sites of Knossos, Pyrgos Myrtos, and Kommos. It soon became clear through discussions with individual excavators and district museum directors Costis Davaras and Stylianos Alexiou that the value of such individual site photographs would be greatly increased if a group of many sites closely related by culture and geography could be recorded for comparative study. The island of Crete, lying at the crossroads of the West, the Near East, and Africa but
still isolated enough to develop its own distinctive culture, offered a prime opportunity for assembling and publishing such a collection.

In 1981, with a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, we began the five years of field work necessary to assemble materials for the *Aerial Atlas of Ancient Crete*, co-edited with Gerald Cadogan and soon to be published by the University of California Press. Operated by a ground crew that varied from four to six, the essential equipment included a 30-meter, four-finned tethered blimp and a pair of radio-controlled cameras: a medium format Hasselblad ELM/500 and a 35 mm Canon AE-1. Photographs were made from altitudes that varied from 10 to 500 meters, some at the better known sites and some at sites only briefly identified in the literature and not yet excavated or surveyed. At the end of each season we were able to provide individual excavators with photographs of their sites for study and research.

The work was a cooperative international effort requiring the help and permission of the French, British, Italian, and American schools in Athens, the Greek Archaeological Service, the Archaeological Society of Athens, and the Civil Air Service. Our field crew of hardy volunteers often found themselves camping through wind and rain storms at remote spots, getting up before sunrise to prepare the balloon for inflation, hiking with the captive blimp overhead for an hour or more up steep mountain trails to reach the more remote sites, and then working at the exhausting pace necessary to raise and lower the cameras and move to the predetermined stations for photography while the sun angle was still optimal. The sun angle was a critical concern and close to 45 degrees usually proved best. A photograph taken when the sun first rises and very long shadows stretch clear across a site can look tangled and confusing; later, on the other hand, when the shadows are too short, the image will be flat and lack the contrasts that give definition and a sense of depth. It would be hard to overstate our debt to the ground crew volunteers who so cheerfully pushed themselves to make the difficult work possible.

But on Crete we also owe much to the generosity and hospitality of villagers we met as we worked along the coasts and in the mountains. They often brought food to our camps, invited us into their homes for family meals, and gave us much welcome advice about the wind and weather on which the safety of our flights depended. We owe a particular debt to the late Marcos Pernikos, the knowledgeable archaeological guard at Gournia, for his friendly help and encouragement through the many seasons we spent in Crete. He and his wife Maria always made us feel at home with them and their family. From him we learned that the older villagers around Mirabello Bay still held of the excavations in which their parents or grandparents had participated at the beginning of the 20th century—with Harriet Boyd Havens at Gournia, Richard Seager at Petsa, and Edith H. Hall at Vrokastro, excavators and sites all evidence of The University Museum’s long tradition of interest in Crete. It has been a satisfaction for us, at the end of the 20th century, to have shared in the continuing investigation of this remarkable island.
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