North American Archaeological Work in Crete 1880 to 1990

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The First Phase of Research

The island of Crete with its rich Minoan and Classical civilization has been the field of intensive archaeological exploration for over a century. In the early part of the 19th century, English explorers with an antiquarian interest, such as Robert Pechley (1834) and Captain (later Admiral) T.A.B. Spratt (1851-3), located ancient sites and discussed aspects of their topography and history. After Greek independence from Turkey in 1828, the Greek people themselves became involved. Cretans from Herakleion (Candia), calling themselves the Association of the Friends of Education, founded the Archaeological Museum of Herakleion in 1878. During the same year a Herakleitoune, prophetically christened Minos Kalo-
kairinos, excavated trenches at Knossos, at "Kephala," within what was later identified as the West Wing of the Knossos Palace. Arthur Evans began excavating there in the spring of 1890, the third year of Cretan independence from Turkey.

Some interesting and relatively unknown incidents in Cretan archaeology had already occurred. William J. Stillman (Fig. 1) had been appointed U.S. Consul in Crete, one of Abraham Lincoln's last official acts before he died in 1865. Not long after Stillman's arrival in Crete, as he wrote in his autobiography (1901), "Having no occupation but archaeological research and photography, I decided to make a series of expeditions into the mountain district." He later visited and studied the great walls and pithoi that Kalokairinos revealed at Kephala (Fig. 2), and in the spring of 1890 he received assurances from the Turkish governor of the island, Photiades Pasha, "that he should desire to make explorations of any of the sites of ancient cities in the island, every assistance should be given him to do so" (Archaeological Institute of America Annual Report 1889-1891:32).

Stillman consequently approached the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA), which was interested in archaeological research but also desired antiquities for the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. He then applied for a Turkish "firmman" (permit) through the U.S. Department of State that would "authorize the agent of the Institute to investigate the sites of Gnoossos [Knossos] and Gortyna [Gortyn]" (AIA Annual Report 1889-1891:33). Gortyn is a very large and well-preserved Graeco-Roman town in south central Crete, for a time the capital of a Roman province consisting of Crete and Cyrenaica. In January of 1881 Stillman was in Crete ready to carry out his mission, accompanied by a Mr. J.H. Haynes who had been sent out by the AIA as a volunteer assistant. Local unrest, however, and the reconquest of the Turks, still governing Crete, of Stillman's former friend relations with Cretan revolutionaries, prevented Turkish approval, and Stillman and his companion returned disappointed to Athens.
Like Stillman, Halbherr was also provided with an official "companion," Mr. John Alden, a graduate of Harvard and at the time a student at the American School. In the original arrangement Alden was to be the expedition's photographer, so in December of 1883 he went to join Halbherr at Cnossus, not realizing the excavation plans had fallen through. Instead, he stayed on to accompany Halbherr on his survey trips and to witness the discovery, on behalf of the AIA, of the site of Priniás, where Halbherr and Pieri were later to unearth an Archaic Cretan temple still unique for the quality of its sculptural decoration. To help prepare these reports he commissioned M. Gilliéron to come to Cnossus and make drawings; Gilliéron and his son were later hired by Evans for work at Knossos.

Halbherr was to fulfill his obligations to the AIA fully. In turn for $2,942.42 for expenses, he and his Italian colleagues (Lucio Mariani, Paolo Orsi, Antonio Taramelli, and others), along with a local archaeologist, Stephanos Xanthoudides, prepared a surveying the entire area in the detailed reports in the American Journal of Archaeology (1886-1901) that still serve as an introduction to Knossos, Halbherr, and with the encouragement of the British archaeologists, especially Evans and Piggott, Minoan, and Graeco-Roman Crete.

In 1884, Halbherr's request for financial backing was rejected by the AIA, which was no longer interested in sponsoring research in Crete as the ideal was still under Turkish domination. Rather, the AIA wished to establish an archaeological domain for itself on the mainland of Greece. The concession for the great Greek sanctuary at Delphi was first offered to the American School, but was lost in the following year to the French, at least in part because of a new commercial treaty concerning Greek curiums! On the other hand, as early as 1886 ancient Corinth was granted to the American excavators, and AIA funds were diverted from Halbherr's project in Crete to fund the excavations at Corinth, although Halbherr was promised he would receive funding as soon as Corinth was completed. Halbherr, nevertheless, went on to found the Italian Archaeological Mission to Crete in 1885, began major excavations at Phaistos in 1900 (at the same time that Evans started excavations at Knossos), and established the Italian School of Archaeology in Athens in 1910.

Boyd, Seager, and Hall

The better known and more successful chapter of North American excavation in Crete begins with Harriet Boyd (Fig. 4). After graduating from Smith College and teaching for four years in various secondary schools, Boyd joined the American School at Athens in 1896. Her initial consciousness was soon expressed by serving as a volunteer nurse on the Thessalian front in the Greco-Turkish conflict, for which she was to be decorated by the Greek people. Her attention was next to turn to Crete, where she determined to take advantage of the archaeological opportunities made possible by the freeing of Crete from the Turks (Crete remained independent of Greece until 1913). Following Boyd's lead, Halbherr, and with the encouragement of the British archaeologists, especially Evans and Piggott, Minoan, and Graeco-Roman Crete.

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Boyd arrived in the spring of 1900 and first visited Knossos where, to her delight, the now famous Throne Room was just being laid bare in the West Wing of that palace, only meters from where Minos Kaloikarios had excavated twenty-two years before. She was encouraged by Evans, who had already begun his long trips throughout the island, to search in the Isthmus of Hierapetra, in particular at Kavousi, for an early Geometric Greek site. After exploring and excavating at Kastris and Vronda near Kavousi, she returned to Athens and during the next year gained the backing of the American Exploration Society of Philadelphia, an affiliate of the University of Pennsylvania, through the suggestion of the Secretary, Mrs. Cornelius Stevenson. This began a long relationship involving excavators and the Society, but especially the University of Pennsylvania, which not only received all the work from the field, but became the first major North American university to sponsor excavation and publication of Cretan antiquities.

In 1901, accompanied by Blanche E. Wells (who was to make significant contributions to later publication), Boyd began excavating Kotino, a project that served as the basis for her M.A. thesis at Smith College. Perhaps elucidated by the Early Greek remains, she also searched for an important Minoan site. Thanks to a peasant who heard of her interest she was brought to the Minoan town of Gournia which, with the help of local workmen and numerous North American staff, she excavated through 1904 (see Boyd 1904-1905). Her choice was a good one. Even now Gournia is still considered as one of the most significant Minoan sites (Fig. 5). So much of the town was revealed that one gains a clear idea of a medium-size town as one visits its central building and meanders about the streets that follow the gentle curves of the hill upon which it was built.

An aspect of Boyd's character can also be sensed in both her choice of site and approach to it. Just as she had gone earlier to help others, and was at a later point in her life to champion women's suffrage, so was she to be sensitive to the everyday life of the Gournia inhabitants, whom she termed "gente folk." Most important, perhaps, her acumen appears in her major publication of 1908 (under her married name, Hawes) where the detailed descriptions and interpretations of artifacts such as pottery and bronze and stone tools remain fine examples of archaeological reporting.

Boyd's career in the field, while intense, did not go beyond Gournia. In 1908, returning by boat to Greece to address the First International Congress of Archaeology in Athens, she renewed acquaintance with an anthropologist, Charles H. Hawes, whom she had met the year before in Crete (P. Bouchet, pers. comm. 1990). Not long afterward they married, and together they would write Crete, the Forerunner of Greece (1909). Later, she turned to other interests, especially political and social issues. Her effect on the archaeology of Crete, however, was to be a permanent and positive one.

One of her most talented staff members was Richard Berry Seager (Fig. 7). Because of ill health Seager had abandoned his B.A. work at Harvard to come to Greece and Crete where he joined Boyd as trenchesmaster and pottery specialist in 1903. His personal means allowed him to excavate on his own, and he first investigated the site of Vasiliki in 1903. There, the next year, he was to find the first substantial Early Minoan architecture discovered in eastern Crete, and the first examples of the moulded, handmade Early Minoan II pottery type known as Vasiliki ware. "Recently Vasiliki has been restudied by various people, but especially by Antonios Zara. It has been revealed as a much more complicated site than Seager or others suspected. Seager came to love that general
area of Crete. In the fall of 1905 Boyd transferred her excavation permit to him, and the next spring Seager completed Vasilikí and then went to explore the Late Minoan I town on the island of Ikaria, a project he continued into the following year. Then, in 1908, he excavated the rich Early Minoan graves at Mothlos, now separated from the shore by a shallow strip of water.

In about 1910 he built a large house in the village of Pachia Ammos, on the side of a hill overlooking the coast and the sea (Fig. 6). It was to serve as a base for his excavation work there (1913, 1915), in which a rich Late Minoan cemetery was uncovered (Seager 1918). One little known fact, and perhaps a melancholy postscript to his career, is that one of his projects was a search for the Late Minoan cemetery at Kato Zakros on the eastern end of Crete, still unlocated today. Toward this end, in the spring of 1924 he excavated for a short time at Zakros under the auspices of the American School. Although he found houses along the southern shore of the harbor, his aim had been to recover objects comparable to those he had found at Mothlos, and so he subsequently reported to Carl Blegen that "Zakros was a flat failure" (letter of 24 May 1924 in the American School archives). Some years later, beginning in 1963, Nicholas Platon was to discover the unpillarized palace of Kato Zakros in the same general area.

In the spring of the next year Seager visited Egypt. On his return to Crete he fell unaccountably and died not long after being disembarked at Heraklion. Arthur Evans arranged his burial in the Agios Constantinos cemetery on the outskirts of Heraklion, and wrote his obituary in *The Times*. The governor of Crete delivered the eulogy at the funeral, ending with "[Crete] is the second native land and holds with true affection and pride thy bones." Seager's contribution had not ended, however, for in his will of 1923, which generously provided for his domestic staff, he left approximately $100,000 to be split between the British and the American Schools of Archaeology, sums that continue to yield interest to be used for excavation work, as stipulated in the document.

Boyd's second major helper was Edith Hall (Fig. 8) who, like Boyd, received her B.A. from Smith College. She went on to Bryn Mawr College which gave her a fellowship to attend the American School in Athens. Her field work began in 1904 at Cournina, after her husband was recruited at the American School by Richard Seager. Her character was gentler than Boyd's and less given to confrontation (Hall was amazed at how Boyd could "get angrier than any woman I ever saw") (Page 1978:9). Hall's interests are shown by her choice of thesis topic, *The Decorative Art of Crete in the Bronze Age* (1907).

Hall developed a strong affection for Seager ("one of the cleverest, and most lovable people I ever knew" (Page 1978: 11)). After the Cournina excavations were complete, her affection continued as she participated in his work or labored, with his help, to publish sites that he had explored earlier—Sphouragas in 1910 (Hall 1911) and Vrokastro in 1913 and 1918 (Hall 1914) where she was in charge of the field work (P. Betancourt, pers. com. 1990). In 1915 she married and returned to the University of Pennsylvania, where she was appointed Assistant Curator at the University Museum. She became known as a teacher of great integrity, with "a unique balance of vigorous active life and enthusiastic scholarship" (Janes 1971:407).

More Recent Work on Crete

There is a long lapse of time before North American archaeological work in Crete resumed. In 1955 J. Walter Graham of the University of Toronto visited the island to carry out a re-search on Minoan architecture, resulting in *The Palaces of Crete* (1962), the first major synthesis of our understanding of the subject. In 1959, Gladys Weinberg of the University of Missouri excavated at ancient Tarha at the mouth of the Roumeli Gorge in an unsuccessful search for a Roman glass factory (Weinberg 1960:90-108).

Graham's work with Homer Thompson at the Athenian Agora led to the hiring in 1965 of Joseph Shaw, then working as an excavation architect. During the previous summer Shaw had worked for Nicholas Platon at Kato Zakros (Seager's last site). Eventually this acquaintance led to Shaw's replacing Graham at

![Figure 6. Seager's house at Pachia Ammos, used as his excavation headquarters.](Image)

![Figure 7. Richard Seager, excavator of Vasilikí, Pyrira, and Mothlos, in Crete.](Image)

![Figure 8. Edith Hall, excavator of Vrokastro, at the site.](Image)

![Figure 9. Kommos during an early season. Left to right: Peter Warren, Joseph Shaw, Martha Agosto, and Ephor Stylianos Alexiou.](Image)
the University of Toronto upon the latter’s retirement in 1972. Thus Toronto became the institutional base for Shaw’s excavation at Kommos, which he first saw in 1965. Kommos, on the southern shore of the Messara Plain, was first identified as a possible Minoan harbor town by Arthur Evans in 1904. It took over ten years to make the picture come together, to arrange for the expropriation and subsequent purchase of the land, to raise funds, and to obtain an excavation permit from the American School. Excavation began in 1970 under Shaw’s direction (Fig. 9), with the sponsorship of the University of Toronto and the Royal Ontario Museum. Part of a Minoan town, a broad road, and an enormous Late Minoan I ashlar building (Fig. 10) with a great court (possibly part of a palace) were exposed. The latter, as well as its huge Late Minoan III successor, seems to have been devoted to seaborne commerce. Above the buildings, in later levels, a series of trenches had been cut during Greek and Roman times (ca. 925 B.C. - A.D. 250). These were part of an unusual Cretan cemetery.

Working with Shaw at Kommos was his Greek wife Maria (née Troubákki), who also held an appointment at the University of Toronto. Other colleagues were Philip Betancourt of Temple University; L. Vance Watrous, teaching at the State University of New York at Buffalo; James Wright of Bryn Mawr College and John McEwan of Hamilton College. There was a host of scientists, including geologist John Gifford of the University of Miami, Jennifer and Tom Shaw of the University of Manitoba advising on botany and archaeology, ancient and modern, and David Reese, an expert on fauna. Richard Hope Simpson of Queen’s University led a survey team, including Lucía Nixon, to examine the Kommos area.

The Kommos excavations had offshoots elsewhere in Crete. Thus Watrous (Fig. 11), who in 1973 began and later published the first archaeological survey of the Laithi Plain (Watrous 1985), continued with further survey work in the Mesara area, beginning in 1985 in cooperation with Despina Vlaxa of the Greek Archaeological Service. In 1987, Nixon initiated a survey in the Sphakia region of western Crete in cooperation with Jennifer Moody, who brought to the project her own survey experience in the Chania area of western Crete. Reese, Simpson, and McEwan were to continue work with Betancourt at Phaistos. Even while excavating at Kommos, Betancourt (Fig. 13a) maintained his interest in eastern Crete, in part an outgrowth of his research on the Minoan collection in Crete at the University Museum in Philadelphia. The collection was the result of Harriet Boyd and Richard Seager’s work in the ishmenos of Hierapetra. In 1984 Betancourt published a book on East Cretan White-on-dark Ware (University Museum Monograph 51, Philadelphia), with the collaboration of other scholars. He was also drawn to Seager’s site of Phaistos, where he returned in 1993 with the aim of producing a detailed and systematic publication through renewed survey and excavation (see article, this issue). The process in this instance was much easier, with the interest and kindness of Costis Davaras (Fig. 13b), Ephor of Antiquities, who made possible a joint project involving the Archaeological Society of Crete and the Archaeological Institute of Crete.

Quite separate from any work at Kommos were the re-investigations of Kavousi, Mochoi, and Vrokastro. At Kavousi, after preliminary study and cleaning seasons beginning in 1978, an American School excavation permit made possible further excavation both in the lower (Vronda) and upper (Kastro) sites under the general direction of Geraldine Gesell (a contributor to this issue), of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, with the collaboration of Leslie Preston Day (Fig. 12) of Wabash College as Field Director of the Vronda site, and William Coulson, present Director of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, as the Field Director of the Kastro site. Their work has already strengthened our understanding of the architecture, pottery, cult, tomb types, and burial practices of the end of the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age in Crete.

At Mochoi in 1989, Jeffrey S. Solis (Fig. 14) of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro began a long-term project of investigating the island, again in cooperation with Costis Davaras. Solis was hardly a stranger to the area, having written his dissertation in 1973 on The Gournia House Tombs (University of Pennsylvania). He was allowed to carry out limited cleaning at Gournia later, he cleaned partially excavated tombs at Mochoi.

Finally, at Vrokastro, Barbara Haydén (Fig. 15), with the collaboration of Jennifer Moody of the University of Minnesota, is re-examining the site and its environment through an intensive archaeological survey of a 50-square-kilometer area near the Bay of Mirabello (see article, this issue).

Other active North American participating in this recent "renaissance" of Cretan studies should be mentioned as well. Harriet Blitzer, a member of the Kommos team has done extensive ethnological work in contemporary pottery production, pastoralism (see her contribution in this issue), and Minoan industries. Karen Foster, who spent much time in Crete, has published widely on Minoan faience and relief work. John Hayes, of the Royal Ontario Museum, has studied Roman pottery from many sites, including that from Knossos and Kommos. J.A. MacGillivray of Columbia University joined L.H. Sackett as Co-Director in the reopening of the Phaistos Excavations (1987), where part of a large Minoan town was excavated by the British School of Archaeology early in the century. Polymnia Muhl, author of another article in this issue, has worked for many seasons at the
Minoan and Greek Kato Syme sanctuary site with her colleague and Director of the excavation, Angeliki Lembessi. David Wilson, of the University of Western Ontario, has dealt with Early Minoan pottery and architecture at Knossos, especially the buildings below the western court of the palace there. To the above and many others (for this list is far from complete), the ancient, welcoming island of Crete has been a rich field for archaeological research.

We have briefly reviewed the steps taken by North Americans to involve themselves in the investigation of Crete. We have also seen how the imagination, initiative, and devotion of a few pioneers—Boyd, Seager, and Hall—contributed to the study of Minoan and early Greek culture in the eastern part of the island.

Now, during the third phase of work, that of the past two decades, we can consider the initiatives taken. For example, the popularity of re-examining the old sites is striking and certainly a tribute to the wise choice of Boyd and her associates. It is also significant that five of the principal investigators of the sites (Betancourt, Hayden, J. Shaw, Soles, and Ward) received their doctorates from the University of Pennsylvania, the base for so much earlier work in Crete. The return to Crete is also partly due to the growing awareness that the island's distinctive prehistory and formative stages gave impetus to the Graeco-Roman culture, a culture that would eventually provide much of the basis for the European civilization that we in North America have to a large extent inherited.

It is of compelling interest to imagine how this present phase will end, a matter that only our successors will be in a position to evaluate. What substantive new results will the work produce? To what extent will old ideas be renewed or modified, new material and new concepts introduced? In the meantime the debate concerning aspects of Minoan and Greek culture in Crete will continue as we discuss issues with, among others, our Greek, English, French, German, Italian, and Swedish colleagues. Each of them could tell a tale of archaeological commitment and achievement similar to, and in some cases greater than, the one sketched out above.

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