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Memories of Myrtos*

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Recently Krzysztof Nowicki, a colleague taking part in an archaeological excavation at Karphi in the mountains of Crete in 2008 directed by his wife, Saro Wallace, made some remarks in an email to my husband, Peter Warren, on running an excavation in Crete. He supposed that things must have been very different in the sixties and early seventies, on sites like one my husband excavated on the south coast of Crete at Myrtos, or in the White Mountains at Debla. As Peter and I recalled those days, I thought it might be of interest to record the conditions on a dig only a generation or so ago while I still remember some details. This account is therefore not so much about archaeology as the logistics and daily life on a dig and my experiences in trying to make things, if not comfortable, at least bearable.

The excavation at Fournou Korifi, Myrtos, was done in two seasons, both in July to mid-August, the hot-

* Editors' note: This article by Elizabeth Warren represents a departure from the core mission of *Aegean Archaeology*, which emphasizes results of current fieldwork, studies of assemblages, and contextual and material analyses. Offering an autobiographical perspective on the excavations of the British School of Archaeology at Athens at Myrtos Fournou Korifi in 1967 and 1968 (and study seasons in 1969 and 1970), the paper presents a vivid representation of contemporary physical, social, and cultural contexts of the project itself – and the confluence of local, scholarly, and administrative communities that shaped fieldwork at Myrtos and indeed more broadly, on Crete, in the 1960's. The personal reflection on archaeological practice and experience represents discussion that is normally excluded from final publication of fieldwork results, but is no less relevant to our understanding of the history of archaeology on Crete, and the construction of narratives resulting from archaeological fieldwork.

test time of the year. In 1967 we dug for just three weeks with a team of three site supervisors, Keith Branigan (later Professor at Sheffield), Hugh Sackett and Ken Wardle and three site assistants, John Falconer, Anthony Harding (later Professor at Durham and Exeter) and Hansel Hewitt, one architect, Ken Minto, one person to catalogue and draw small finds, Marilyn Wright, our Greek vase mender, Petros Petrakis and his wife, Eleni, three pickmen from Knossos and up to six local workmen at any one time and at least one local woman washing the potsherds along with Eleni. As for my role, Peter had said in advance that we would surely find a local woman to cook for us, but that I might need to help with shopping and organising. Otherwise I would work on the site or with the finds as necessary. It proved impossible to find any woman willing to do the cooking. In reality almost all my time and energy were taken up with shopping and cooking and seeing to a multitude of domestic and other matters so that Peter could concentrate entirely on the archaeology.

The following year, the dig lasted five weeks and there were four site supervisors, Ken Wardle again plus Gerald Cadogan, Don Evely (later the School's Curator at Knossos) and Ian Sanders, with four assistants, Hansel Hewitt, Lloyd Bookless, Penelope Mountjoy and Nigel Wilson, and eight local workmen plus the pot washing women. In addition to the same architect, Ken Minto, and a different small find drafts-woman, Rosemary Brewer, we had a cook, Mary Wesley, throughout and Oliver Rackham came at the

start to do an ecological survey of the area while Mark Cameron came for part of the time to study the wall plasters from the site and to help with the pottery.

But I will go back a bit before the dig to explain how I came to be there at all. In 1966, at the age of 20, I married Peter Warren, an archaeologist, then a Research Fellow at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. About two months before the wedding, which was in mid-June, Peter was asked if he might be able to undertake, at very short notice, an excavation at a site on the south coast of Crete which Sinclair Hood, Gerald Cadogan and he had found during their travels in 1962. Peter had already expressed an interest in excavating the small Early Bronze Age settlement on the top of a hill west of Ierapetra, and 3.5 km east of the village of Myrtos, but had not expected to be offered a British School of Archaeology permit (one of three a year to each foreign Archaeological School) so soon. Another project had fallen through and the possibility loomed. It was a terrifying prospect to organise an excavation at such a location in a matter of weeks, and fortunately came to nothing – but the promise was made that for the following year, 1967, the Myrtos dig would be on the list of BSA projects proposed to the Greek Archaeological Service for permission.

I was not completely without archaeological experience. I had gone on a couple of Romano-British excavations in Lincolnshire in and after the Sixth Form. I was even in charge of the potshed for two weeks at the start of an excavation under Ian Stead because the usual person was not available. Ian was the first to teach me how to do technical archaeological pottery drawings – something that I have since spent a great deal of time doing. It was not, however, my particular passion – my connection with Greece arose from having begun Ancient Greek at school at the age of thirteen, when a lively young teacher arrived and persuaded the Headmistress that, if it was to be taken seriously, the school, Wycombe High School for Girls, must offer Greek. I was one of the first group to take up Greek and was ensnared from the start.

After obtaining a place at Newnham College, Cambridge in December 1963 for the following October, as was the pattern at that time, I had two terms at my disposal and was determined to spend much of the time in Greece. The ‘Gap Year’ barely existed, but I managed to organise myself to travel to Athens by train in January, with enough money from my parents for about a month and the intention of extending that by earning from English teaching. I became a ‘reader’ at the

British School at Athens – where I read the texts Cambridge had prescribed (most of Homer and Virgil) – and met the PhD students who were working on their various subjects both in Athens and Crete, where the BSA has a base at Knossos. Indeed many of my most enjoyable trips away from Athens were spent with these students. I stayed in Greece until July.

Peter had been involved in archaeology rather longer. His passion was for Crete, a passion which had developed in the Sixth Form at Llandovery College. Inspired by Leonard Cottrell’s *The Bull of Minos* and John Pendlebury’s *A Handbook to the Palace of Minos at Knossos* which he found in the school library, he gave a lecture to his fellow Sixth Formers on Minoan Crete. In 1961, he worked at Knossos at the excavations of Sinclair Hood on the Royal Road as the ‘apotheker slave’. Subsequently he joined Sinclair for three of his travels in the island of Crete tracking down previously unknown sites. He spent a season on the British School excavation at Palaikastro in the far east of the island under the direction of Mervyn Popham and Hugh Sackett, and two seasons at their BSA dig at Lefkandi on the island of Euboea.

The permit for the excavation at the site known as Fournou Korifi, a few kilometres east of Myrtos on the south coast of Crete, was granted for work in July and August 1967. Now there was sufficient time to organise the team and plan the campaign. I had very little idea what would be involved and I had not visited the site before arriving for the excavation.

Peter went out to Crete some weeks earlier – I was taking my finals and had planned to go to the graduation ceremony before driving out with Ken Wardle in his *Triumph Herald* – he was to be one of our site supervisors. Communications in those days were fairly limited: the post was not at all bad, but international telephone calls were expensive and not very reliable. I knew one of the most important things Peter had to do was to buy the land we were about to excavate. Greek law forbids excavation, other than rescue archaeology, on land belonging to anyone other than the Greek State. This land belonged to a local farmer. Therefore it was necessary to buy it from him and give it to the Greek State. Fortunately, Manolis Dhaskalakis proved amenable and I received a telegram: ‘Land bought. Bring shaving things.’

I am not sure if I had realised before that moment that Myrtos lacked electricity. I had never lived in a place without electricity. It also lacked drains. And refuse collection. And an asphalt road to it. There was

mains water, though not necessarily 24 hours a day. There was a battered country bus a couple of times a day that bounced along the old Turkish kalderimi (large cobbles in earth) road and over the beautiful Venetian bridge north of the town. Peter, it turned out, had hired a bicycle in Ierapetra to go and buy the land. After the initial agreement in Myrtos, he and Manolis Dhaskalakis had to meet up at the office of the symvouligraphos (legal contract writer) in Ierapetra. Peter handed over 4500 drachmas (£54 at the exchange rate of the day), and the symvouligraphos handed over to Peter all the paperwork for the sale and the transfer to the Greek State was completed.

So, land bought, all was set. The team was due to gather. Three experienced archaeological workmen from Knossos had agreed to come, including the foreman, Andonis Zidhianakis, to do the pickwork. The plan was to hire local workmen for the shovelling and barrowing, and after initial discussions in the village Peter did not anticipate problems. Peter had talked to the local schoolmaster, whose small collection of pots and sherds from the site and another later site nearer the village had originally alerted Sinclair, Peter and Gerald, to the existence of this Early Minoan settlement. He seemed pleased with the plans and offered the use of the school in the village which would make an excellent base.

There had been one alarming development since the application for a permit originally went into the Greek Archaeological Service. In April 1967 there was a military coup in Greece and the junta of colonels took political power. The foreign archaeological schools were strictly non-political and Greek archaeologists generally encouraged their foreign colleagues to continue working in Greece, although some foreign scholars refrained from visiting throughout this period (1967–74). As a result of the political situation, the police were very evident everywhere, including in the village of Myrtos. They displayed considerable nervousness, which translated into mild harassment – such as demanding to see our permit almost every day, requiring Peter to take it to them the moment he got back from the site. But it was a minor irritation and without any significant effect on the dig.

Back at Knossos a lorry was hired for the day and loaded up with stacks of equipment – trestle tables, chairs, camp beds, picks, shovels and wheelbarrows, plus theodolite (hired from Lord William Taylour's Mycenae excavations) and surveying poles, notebooks and a two ring Calor Gas hob with its gas cylinder.

There was a bakery and a couple of ancient general groceries in Myrtos, with an array of tinned food, biscuits and the like and a minimum amount of local fresh produce – most people grew their own.

Some of us arrived at Myrtos by bus, others in one of the two cars members of the team had brought, including the one I had travelled out in. The lorry pulled up as near the school as it could. Disaster. The schoolmaster had changed his mind and would no longer let us use the school as our base. We had already arranged that Peter and I would have a room at the home of the man who had owned the land. He also ran the main cafeion and was the local butcher. He pondered our problem and shortly a solution was found. The local priest Papas Steiakakis had recently built a fine house to provide a dowry for his two daughters, Ismene and Maria. As it was not quite finished it was still unoccupied and this now became our headquarters. His wife came and dismantled her magnificent loom to provide a room for our vases and his wife. Somehow everyone was fitted in and that was where we ate together and the finds from the site were brought to the lower floor for washing, mending and preliminary study.

The following day we had asked for the men who would like to work to come and make themselves known to us. Next disaster. Nobody came. We never entirely worked out what was the problem, but it proved necessary to hire men from Malles, a village up the valley high in the mountains, in order to get started. Before long many Myrtiotis did work for us as well.

We worked six days a week. I got up every morning by 4.30 a.m. to put the large kettle on the calor gas ring in order to make tea or coffee for breakfast by 5.00. It was still dark when the team left on foot for the 30 minute walk to reach the site by 5.45 a.m., when work started. The sun soon got up and it became very hot indeed, temperatures regularly reaching 44° Celsius in the shade, though there was no shade on the site. They had a break of about forty minutes on the site at 9 o'clock for 'kolatso' or 'second breakfast' – or really lunch (certainly the workmen brought considerable supplies of food) – then worked through to 2.30 p.m., though everyone was encouraged to find a good time to have a ten minute break close to the rather sparse shade of a terebinth shrub for a beaker of squash and a biscuit during the later hours. The finds of the day had to be brought back to the village, either on donkeys or mules belonging to the workmen or by taking a car at a snail's pace along the distinctly

rough dirt road. At the end of the first season, most people threw away their shoes as they were completely worn out by the daily tramp to and from the site.

This dirt road was washed away in several places by storms during the winter between our two seasons of excavation, making it impossible to take a car along at all. Peter and I went to see the Nomarch in Aghios Nikolaos to request that a 'grader' should make the road just about passable again. Rather to our surprise, he agreed, divulging that there were plans for this. Unfortunately as far as we were concerned, the plans were for the mighty new highway along the south coast of Crete, which now goes along the foot of our hill. The bulldozers cutting through the landscape just became visible in the far distance shortly before we finished our second season.

In fact the impossibility of taking a car along in the second year led to a different solution and we were able to arrange for a little fishing boat to take the finds and some people back along the coast – unless the wind got up too much. It wasn't much quicker but felt less exhausting.

However, that was still in the future, and in the first year the team arrived back after 3 o'clock hot, dusty and tired. Some would go straight off to the beach for a swim but most needed to recover first with large amounts of weak lemon tea. Since we had no refrigeration, it was not possible to provide really cold drinks – the cafeneions had ice boxes to chill gazozas (clear lemonade) or beers a bit but at our base hot drinks proved more refreshing. There was also food put out but in the heat of the afternoon no one was particularly hungry. The main meal came later, just as it was getting dark.

Peter generally spent some time looking at and photographing the day's finds – the pottery, broken (although not a few were amazingly found intact after more than 4,000 years) but identifiable, or just the zembils (baskets made of old rubber tyres) of sherds, plus the small finds – figurines and the like. We often had time to go and have a drink at Manoli's cafeneion, or to visit a friend. One in particular was Andonis Papadhakis. He had been village president until the junta and had been helpful to Sinclair, Peter and Gerald on their first visit in 1962. He had a lot of land, where he grew tomatoes and early crops of melons, courgettes, aubergines and so on. He lived in probably the best house in the village with his aged mother and two unmarried sisters. He was a wise, intelligent man whose conversation was always interesting and measured. He

married at a fairly advanced age some years after the dig and had a child.

Other members of the team made other friends with whom they would have a drink, usually at Manoli's cafeneion. Ken the architect was a Scot, and partial to strong liquor. The Cretan cry was 'aspro pato' – white bottom, meaning you drained the glass in one draught. Ken set about teaching the Scottish equivalent – 'doon in a wanna' (down in one). Before we left there was scarcely a man in the village who would not cry out 'doon in a wanna' at the mere sight of Ken. The local raki was the most common drink for this – always with a nibble or two to eat – but ouzo was available as well, and of course beer. Wine was scarcely ever drunk except with a proper meal.

Washing facilities were almost non-existent. People would take a bowl of water to some fairly private corner. In due course we bought a bit of hosepipe and rigged up a 'shower', of sorts. It was pretty public so everyone showered in their swimming clothes. The second year keen diggers (or perhaps those who had felt the banana grove had had its limitations the year before) dug a latrine in the adjoining field where the chickens scratched and erected a rough shed.

In our kitchen on the main floor there was a tap over the sink, but the waste pipe did not exist below the plughole and you had to notice when the bucket underneath was full – and chuck the contents onto the verge of the street outside. All waste food was rescued and taken off to feed to goats – except for a few things like teabags. I developed a considerable dislike for teabags found lurking in mugs that one came across in washing up in the semi-dark. I cooked and served the evening meal before dark, but during the meal the one Tilley lamp was lit and then taken into the kitchen for the washing up.

Clothes washing was one thing we did well on. Lacking remotely adequate facilities of our own, we were able to take great baskets of washing to an excellent washerwoman and they were returned the following day beautifully clean and fresh – and ironed, with the most amazing smoothing irons that had white hot charcoal put inside them to provide the heat.

In the second year, some of the team preferred to take their camp beds into the field behind the house where chickens scratched by day. The excavators were up and away before the chickens were awake, but one day Mark Cameron, who was helping with the pottery at the base and so woke much later, found his sleep curtailed by the arrival of the chickens, one or more

of which even hopped on his bed. He was reported by the potwashers to have risen like a vertical take-off aircraft, flapping furiously at the chickens. They flapped in turn all over the place, one unfortunately into and straight out of the bowl containing not very dilute hydrochloric acid (for cleaning the pots of the very limestone based earth). Its feathers had almost all gone within a couple of days – but it survived and seemed to recover, though it still looked somewhat naked when we left.

Before Myrtos I had heard constant stories from archaeologists about food on digs, not just in Greece, but Turkey and elsewhere as well. Either there was not enough, or it was the same thing day after day, or it was not very appetising. I was determined that at the very least there should be enough, given that people were working very hard in quite difficult conditions. I was also keen that they should feel meals were worth looking forward to. We had brought a few things out from Britain (especially in the second year when Peter and I drove out from England in our own car) to try to give a bit of variety – or just a bit of familiarity, like cornflakes for Sunday breakfast (not easily obtainable in Greece in those days), but that could only be a tiny element.

It proved to be something of a challenge, and even more so once the fast began at the beginning of August for the fortnight leading up to the ‘Panagia’ – the festival of the Dormition/Assumption of the Virgin Mary on 15th August. During the fast no meat was eaten in the village and even eggs became hard to get as people stockpiled them for the feast. Twice a week at least I drove to Ierapetra to buy food. 17 kilometres of dirt road left me pretty hot and dusty, especially on one occasion when I got behind a local van which was going rather slowly, but all over the fairly narrow road – as one did to avoid the worst hollows and rocks. Unfortunately, the horn on Ken’s car was inclined to fail – and did on this occasion. When we reached the last couple of kilometres where the road became asphalt, I got by in relief. Later in Ierapetra, the driver, Giorgos Maroulakis, saw me and asked why on earth I hadn’t hooted – of course he’d have let me by. The horror on his face when I explained the horn wasn’t working made me laugh out loud.

On arrival in Ierapetra, once a week I would start by going to the bank to draw the wages. The bank manager would sit me down and send for a coffee and some lovely ice cold water. He would then ask if he could help with anything else. Very often the answer was ‘yes – where will I find...?’ I don’t think it would

be easy in a small English town to acquire all the things I managed to buy in Ierapetra: goggles when the wind blew unceasingly and the workmen downed tools until they had something to protect their eyes; a large canister of hydrochloric acid when the sherd washing ladies ran out; new taps and washers, wheelbarrow tyres and various tools. Often I had forgotten to get the words I needed properly established in advance, so that my Greek was very stretched trying to explain exactly what it was I was looking for.

Then I would go off and do enough shopping for food for three days or so. The biggest problem was keeping meat without a refrigerator. I could risk putting frozen chickens in a zembil hanging from the ceiling till the next day but any fresh meat had to be eaten the same day. Once or at most twice a week, Manoli might go up into the high hills above the village to select a sheep or goat or two for slaughter. The village would be queuing to buy a fresh cut from the still warm carcase. I learnt that the offal is particularly prized in this super fresh state – liver is absolutely delicious, for example – but you were expected to buy a whole collection of these parts, some of which I had no idea how to cook, and was not sure anyone would eat them if I did. On the other hand, cooking completely unhung fresh meat is another matter. The result is not tough as from an old animal, but the meat was fibrous and had a very different texture from anything I had ever experienced. We should perhaps have tried to roast a tray of meat and potatoes in the village bread oven, as most locals did, but the oven operated from early morning to midday and we ate our main meal in the evening. I didn’t like to leave the meat for so many hours in the afternoon temperatures.

The second year, after the experience of the first, we took out some papain – a meat tenderiser which we were told should break down the fibres and make the meat more digestible. The effect was dramatic: we scattered the papain on a good bowlful of diced lamb. Even before we could stir it in, the whole lot began fizzing. Within a few minutes, the plentiful supply for the whole team had reduced itself to about half the quantity – far too late in the day for any still to be available for purchase!

Once the fast for the 15th August began, there was no hope of any locally slaughtered meat until the feast day itself. So provisions had to come from Ierapetra, including for any glendi (party) towards the end of the dig to which the workmen and villagers who had been involved in the dig were invited.

I only rarely went on the Myrtos bus and only remember one occasion in particular. Unfortunately I am not sure exactly when it was, but it could even have been my first arrival there, as Ken may well have come in his car at a different time for the start of the dig. I had got on the bus and found a seat – on the sunny side, alas, as the locals were wise enough to have filled up the seats that would be more or less in the shade during the journey. As departure time approached, the scene became more and more manic and the volume louder and louder. Even before I boarded there had been lots of shouting as bags and boxes were taken up the ladder attached to the back to be stowed on the roof. A woman had a pair of (live) chickens which kept fluttering out of her grasp – and even off the bus so she would leap off shrieking in pursuit to catch them.

The final crescendo related to an elderly couple who wanted to take two ‘cafeneion’ chairs on the bus with them. The man had sat his black-clad wife firmly on one of them in the aisle at the back and she was moaning quietly and crossing herself repeatedly. He meanwhile was being told by the conductor that he could not have the chairs inside the bus at all. Gesticulating with the second chair, he was unable to sit down on it as long as people (including the woman with the chickens) had still not taken their seats, so he was hovering around on and off the steps, his voice switching from a wheedling whine to a full volume roar. Nothing appeared to have been resolved when the driver, appearing suddenly, opened his own door and leapt into his seat. Turning on the engine, he planted his elbow on the horn. The blare overwhelmed the shouting voices and he kept his elbow there while the conductor herded the chickens and their owner and any other remaining passengers onto the bus. At the last second the man banged his chair down and sat triumphantly in the aisle. The driver only released the horn once the bus was moving. Not that it made it possible to speak as the roar of the engine drowned out any conversation – unless one bellowed directly into one’s neighbour’s ear.

Only very ancient buses were used on these dirt roads. This one was relatively short as the Venetian bridge just before the turn into Myrtos village was steeply humped and a normal length bus would have been grounded on it. But their old noisy engines were powerful enough and indeed had to be for the routes up to some of the mountain villages.

I probably went on donkeys or mules more often than on the bus. I was always fairly reluctant especially

if the route involved any steep climb up or down, but on occasions it would have been rude to refuse. Although only young at the time, I had a certain status by being the Director’s wife and sometimes it was considered appropriate to my position to be carried, magnificent rugs being piled onto the wooden saddle (ridden sideways) for my benefit. But I was always taken by surprise when the animal changed pace – faster at the owner’s cry ‘vre, vre’ and slowing down (instantly) to a hissing sound between the teeth. As for climbing uphill – that was bad enough, but the coming down was even more scary as I constantly feared falling forward over the neck and head of the beast despite hanging on to the pommel on the saddle. Doubtless I provided any onlookers with plenty of amusement.

One day, during the fast, the priest came to visit me at the base – his own house indeed – as he did from time to time. Sometimes he had a complaint: he didn’t like the very few female members of our team swimming in skimpy bathing costumes. As far as we could see, they were pretty discreet and certainly didn’t go about the village scantily clad. However, the priest seemed to have antennae which uncannily took him down to the waterside at just the right moment to observe the female swimmers, and he was sure to report back if he could find anything indecorous to complain about. Sometimes he would invite us to his garden for a drink in the evening, where he would ask for a progress report and comment on all sorts of current issues. But on this occasion he was behaving quite oddly.

He had a petrol can in his hands, with rough rags visible at the top. He was being very secretive, making hush hush gestures and rubbing the side of his nose. ‘Archaia (antiquities)’, he whispered several times, with meaningful winks. My heart sank – whatever else it was not possible for us to accept finds of ancient material, even from the priest. He wanted to go inside where we would not be seen. There, to my astonishment, he pulled off the rags to reveal the contents: a large and very lively rabbit. Like many locals, he kept rabbits to provide a good source of protein. ‘Your husband will kill it and you can all enjoy a delicious rabbit,’ he boomed, ‘but no one must know where it came from.’ I could cope with the final part of the sentence. If the village knew the priest was supplying us with meat during the fast, there would be outrage. I had no problem agreeing to total secrecy. But the first part was a real difficulty. Refusing the gift

would have given enormous offence. To face Peter with a live rabbit and expect him to do the deed on his return was just not an option. So I had to arrange for the rabbit to be dead and skinned before he got back. Now I was just as unable to kill a rabbit and even if I had cared to do it, I had no idea how to. I certainly didn't want to botch it. But the whole business had to be kept secret. The priest made it clear that he considered his generosity in providing a rabbit during the fast was completely exceptional, and could in no way be extended to killing it as well. Off he went, satisfied with my gratitude and in the expectation that we would dine well.

I could not ask the obvious person, Manoli, as I could hardly expect him not to inquire where the rabbit had come from. There was only one person I could turn to. Our vase mender, Petro, was a man of many talents, and at least I could consult him on the problem. He roared with laughter at my predicament and took control. I never inquired too closely what happened next, but the rabbit reappeared some time later duly dead, skinned and jointed. Peter was able to thank the priest sincerely for his present, and without losing face.

Cheese could be found, but was remarkably expensive. One year I bought a whole local sheep's milk cheese which I expected to last for ages. Unfortunately quite a part of it turned out to be infested with maggot like larvae munching away, which gave me a great shock and quite put me off cheese for a while! There were various dry beans and lentils available locally, but the village women always spent hours sitting outside their houses going through pulses, picking out little stones or other impurities. The fact that in the first year, Marilyn, the small finds assistant was a vegetarian and needed different food, was just one additional consideration, but I don't think the vegetarian food I provided for her was very imaginative.

On the other hand, there was a plentiful supply of tomatoes and cucumbers to be had in the village. People would often bring us a gift of fruit – small hard pears for example, which did not look all that appealing, but were excellent stewed in Cretan red wine. Bunches of early grapes would arrive too, or a bag of freshly picked almonds. There was never any shortage of local red wine – and sometimes the priest or another well wisher would bring us a bottle of their best old wine – more like sherry and quite strong. Our foreman from Knossos, Andonis Zidhianakis, had brought a considerable amount of wine with him too and made sure we were never without.

Only occasionally did a fisherman bring back fish for general sale and one had to be very quick off the mark to get any. If I had meat that needed to be eaten, I couldn't risk it, so the moment had to be right and we only managed to have fresh fish once each season, if I remember rightly.

Getting enough eggs could involve considerable persuasion – and I caused the greatest hilarity when I once tried to say that I had been given some turkey eggs – but instead of saying 'gallopoulo', I said 'gournopoulo' – which is a word for pig. Word soon got around the village that the English woman thought pigs laid eggs! For days after, whenever I asked any village woman if she had eggs I could buy, she would fall about laughing and, almost unable to utter the words through her mirth, ask me if I wanted hen's eggs or pig's eggs. I should never have got the word wrong, as it was a constant village joke, there and elsewhere in Crete, that archaeologists went to a site to dig for the golden pig and her nine little gold piglets. The number of times people called by to ask if we had found the 'gournopoula chrysa' should have fixed it forever in my mind.

Turkeys were kept on the flat roof of the house next to where Peter, the female members of the team and I lived in the second year. I slept in Manoli and Photeini's double bed indoors, as they had lived and slept in their apartment at the cafeneion since the birth of their daughter Yanna in the winter. Their son Niko was already about eleven years old. Their room was the only place where I could fit up my mosquito net although the room got very stuffy and airless. Unfortunately the bed sagged so much in the middle that the two of us would end up hot and sweaty and sleepless – so Peter generally took to sleeping in a camp bed in the courtyard, as did the girls since their room was equally hot and airless. There wasn't much sleeping in late, except on Sundays: then they would be roused once the sun was up by the turkeys on the roof gobbling at them over the edge – and a dreadful sight they were, with no feathers on their necks so they were known as the vulture necked-turkeys, and not much loved, I am afraid.

Manoli and Photeini's house was a traditional courtyard house. On the left were two rooms, a living room with dining table – hardly ever used – and formal chairs where Peter and I had our camp beds the first year and which the girls had as their room in the second year. Then there was Manoli and Photeini's bedroom which Peter and I had in the second year. At the

furthest side from the road was the kitchen, with several storage jars remarkably like the ones we were digging up, and a stone sink. That was where we washed ourselves. To the right of the gate from the road was a cubicle with a real lavatory. It could only cope with fairly modest usage so unfortunately we could not invite the whole team to use it. There was also, kept locked, Manoli's apotheke, a windowless storeroom where he kept his oil and wine and other produce in a row of large storage jars or pithoi: this was indeed exactly equivalent to our Early Bronze Age finds, four thousand years older than his.

Photeini Dhaskaliki, Manolis' wife, was a large lady with a very loud voice and a great guffaw of a laugh. They had a serious, academically able son, Nikos, aged ten or eleven. In the first year, I was constantly being asked why Peter and I had not produced a child even though we had been married over a year. One day in self defence, I said to Photeini, 'Well, you've only got one child and you've been married very many years. What about a brother or sister for Nikos?'. With gales of laughter, and pointing at her stomach, she shouted 'Mesa!' – 'Inside'. I was somewhat taken aback and not entirely sure she wasn't having me on, but it turned out to be fairly general knowledge in the village that she was in fact pregnant. Sure enough, Yanna was born at the end of the year and was very much in evidence in our second year. She was constantly being handed to me to hold (I'm not sure if this was supposed to improve my chances of producing a child myself), which could be disconcerting as she wore no nappy. Finding one had been weed on produced further gales of laughter and an assurance that it was extremely lucky. This all contrasted very strongly with practice in northern Greece, where Jane Renfrew, on her husband's excavations at Sitagroi, was much rebuked for not binding their baby, Helena, tightly in swaddling clothes. Jane was told the child would not grow up with strong limbs unless she was swaddled.

In the second year, we included a cook, Mary, in the team, which was a great relief to me. I still did all the shopping and organising, and got up to get the kettle boiling for breakfast. But in the first year I had reacted badly to sandfly and mosquito bites and had become increasingly unwell. Although I had been treated at Addenbrooke's Hospital once we got back to Cambridge and I was taking great precautions against getting bitten by wearing clothes down to my ankles and wrists and sleeping under a net, I had been nervous about the prospect of being unwell again.

There were no medical arrangements in Myrtos of any kind in those days. A doctor who originated from Myrtos generally came back to spend his summer holiday there – but he was very much off duty. By a curious historical hangover, the only medically related provision was an area dentist who visited every few months, not in Myrtos, but in a village up above – Gdhochia. Myrtos itself had originated as the harbour for Gdhochia, a prosperous mountain village, and other villages up the main valley all of which needed a harbour for the transport of goods. Gradually, once piracy had disappeared and needs had changed, Myrtos had begun to grow and Gdhochia gave way in importance. By now, only a few aged, black clad crones lived there in once substantial but now crumbling houses, though there may have been other inhabitants out in the fields. Certainly many Gdhochians also had a place in Myrtos and often spent much of the summer down by the sea. Like Myrtos and other villages in the area, Gdhochia had been burnt down in the war by the Germans during reprisals for resistance activity.

Yet this was where the dentist still went. I was taken aback one day when a deputation arrived asking me to take mothers and children up in the car to see the dentist. We packed in as many as we could in our little Austin A40, and another van or two were also commandeered, and the car groaned and bumped up the rough dirt road to Gdhochia. The dentist had a reclining chair and mechanical tools. Mothers cajoled and held down their offspring. Being somewhat squeamish, I wandered off to look round the village until it was time to take the somewhat tearful carload back down to Myrtos.

In the second year, our draftswoman, Rosemary, got sunstroke the day before the dig began after overdoing things on the beach. She had only just come out from England. I think that was the only time it was quite frightening to have no medical assistance in reasonable reach. But she recovered quite quickly and we all took considerable care after that. Amazingly there were no accidents on site that needed medical attention. Blisters and minor cuts and scratches could be coped with and I had taken out a fair supply of basic First Aid items.

I did not myself go to the site every day – I probably got there a couple of times a week, to see how things were coming on and to understand what everyone was talking about. Up on the site there was always a good supply of fresh water – brought up on Vassili's donkey in traditional stamnes – unglazed

earthenware jars. In the heat the water sweated through the fabric and the evaporation kept the water cool. We had to be careful that they did not get contaminated between seasons, and if in any doubt they would be replaced with new ones. A handful of sweet smelling herbs was used as a stopper. No one ever got sick from the water – in villages they were very fussy about water in those days and would tell you where really good water could be sourced.

I sometimes made it to the site in time for kolatzo, the welcome mid morning break. The team took up bread and tins of sardines, luncheon meat, cheese and the like, with olives, cucumber, tomatoes and so on, and usually a good large melon. I had become quite expert at picking out juicy sweet melons by smell, as well as by feeling the weight as you do for citrus fruits. Any spare food went to the donkeys which were a great feature of the dig. In those days almost every household had a donkey or a mule and the dawn chorus was mainly the highly competitive braying of dozens of donkeys. The donkeys could get restless, especially if there was a female in season, and though I never witnessed it myself, I was always hearing stories of the cry going up ‘zoa’ as a mule or two broke free and half the workmen disappeared off site in hot pursuit. It was still the case that the word for a donkey (‘gaidhouri’) was regarded as distinctly rude – men would apologise if they used it in front of a woman, and generally just used the word for ‘animal’ – zoon.

This did not prevent the occasional rude joke being played on a woman. On one occasion, our neighbour at the priest’s house, a buxom lady called Tsitsinio, a real earth mother type, was leading her mule along as our workmen were bringing in the finds. One of them called out to her that a strap had come loose underneath. She groped around beneath the animal, feeling for the loose strap. She gave a great shriek as instead her hand clutched a rather different long dangling part, causing the men to fall about laughing till they wheezed – sounding a bit like braying donkeys themselves!

When the village priest made his visits to the site, he always arrived on a mule, looking wonderfully impressive as he came slowly up the hill. Peter recollects that he was asked to bless the site early on. He brought holy water to shake over the area to be dug. It was firmly believed that the shrine with the Goddess of Myrtos was found where the holy water fell.

There were other visitors, though not a great many. In those days it took time to get to Myrtos. The French

excavators at Mallia, Henri and Micheline van Effenterre visited each year and were very helpful and supportive, admiring our efforts and raising our morale as well as discussing the archaeology. Jean-Claude Poursat came with them on one occasion. Squire (Richard) Hutchinson also arrived to visit, coming on the bus from Ierapetra and bringing a very welcome demijohn of wine. This was a very great delight and a wonderful link to past British work in Crete.

In the second year, Dr Stylianos Alexiou, the Ephor of Crete and Director of Iraklion Museum, made a visit. He was already a good friend and had himself dug in equally difficult circumstances when he excavated the Early Minoan tombs at Lebena. He was absolutely delighted to see the Early Minoan material emerging from a settlement in such quantities and so well preserved, though surprised as all of us were that we had not been able to locate any associated tombs.

As he sat at the base after visiting the site we naturally offered him refreshments – he was returning to Iraklion that evening. One of our prize comfort foods was a large tin of really nice biscuits that we had brought out from England for Sundays and special occasions. As Peter held out the tin to Stelios, it slipped from his hand and they all crashed to the dirt floor. Consternation on every face – except Stelios’s. ‘Ah,’ he said, ‘As ta phane i ornithes (let the chickens eat them)’. We had not realised till then that the word ‘ornithes’, the ancient Greek for ‘birds’ is used in Crete to mean ‘chickens’. The subsequent philological discussion about the preservation of ancient words on the fringes of the Greek world helped to cover our disappointment over the loss of so many of the biscuits!

During our study season at Aghios Nikolaos in summer 1969, Professor John Evans and his excavation team from Knossos (where they were doing a Neolithic excavation) asked if we could meet them at Myrtos to show them the site. They came in two vehicles south from Knossos, through Viannos – which meant they were on dirt roads for a great distance. Those in the Landrover arrived with dust caked all over any bare skin, their eyes peering out strangely. It was the fast again and I had to go round begging almost every woman I knew for an egg or two to provide them with omelettes for a late lunch before they made the long trek back to Knossos. Among the company was Athanasia Kanta, currently Director of Iraklion Museum. Similarly, we met Dr Costis Davaras and his wife Dione to show them the site when he had become Ephor of East Crete. Dione was vegan, and so this time

it was a question of trying to find some horta – wild edible green leaves – in that dried up terrain.

To return to the actual excavation seasons – the site had proved astonishingly productive. When Manoli sold the site, he was seriously afraid that there might be virtually nothing there: they had ploughed the hill in the war when life was really tough and the Germans took everything. There is a plaque in the centre of Myrtos marking the spot where 17 men and one woman were lined up and shot in reprisals. When we went there, people would still come and tell us that no one had gone from the village to work in Germany whatever people from other parts of Greece were doing. But attitudes were changing and the huge growth of tourism in the next decade swept away most of the old ill-feeling, at least in public.

In fact on the site, walls were excavated to a depth of about two metres and the preservation of the Early Minoan pottery and other finds was astonishing for a settlement site. Storage jars stood where they had been abandoned over 4000 years ago and the material coming back to base everyday – especially after Petros had mended many of them – caused a great stir in the village. One large storage jar was almost unbroken and brought back from the site with some difficulty, as it was still full of earth, in the little boat. Sometimes the local people were able to explain to us what things would have been used for as shapes had changed so little over time. They were not always in total agreement with each other – but it was fascinating to hear their suggestions – and sometimes someone would bring out a piece of equipment he or she had used in the past for wine or oil making, or winding wool. We constantly became aware that we were seeing things at the very end of a long period of very slow change and development. We felt we were just catching the last glimpses of a traditional way of life going back nearly five thousand years. How right we were – life as it is today in Myrtos would have been unimaginable when we were digging there. As you walked through the village, you would see strong women, young and old, turning hand querns to grind their corn for a rough porridge like dish. Bread from milled wheat was of course baked at the bakery, but it was amazing how many ancient practices still continued. Now they have vanished, along with the donkeys.

The village women who visited the site constantly commented how narrow the doorways into the rooms were. But many of them were very large, perhaps because they consumed so much bread and olive oil. Slim

girls would change shape utterly after they had had one or two children. Taking the idea from a Greek film we had seen, we would sometimes refer to one of these magnificent women as ‘mia bulldozer’. It seemed to do them little harm as there were many octogenarians and even nonagenarians, both men and women. The Mediterranean diet was very much in evidence and since the end of the war food had become plentiful. Their ancestors many thousands of years before had probably not grown to such a size. The women of Myrtos were very lively and full of their own ideas. They spoke fast and loud and it was not always easy to follow what they were saying. If one had obviously not understood, they spoke louder – and louder again till they were bellowing at full volume. After all, there could be no possible reason you had failed to understand except that you had not heard them!

On Sundays, most people just felt they needed to laze about and recover, but there were one or two expeditions made. In the first year a group decided to go off on foot to visit the village of Arvi along the coast. They did not leave especially early in the day, but as the afternoon began to turn to evening we wondered when they might be back. Time passed and we started to feel mildly anxious. Just as we were really wondering whether to delay our evening meal, the sound of weary but determined singing was heard and the exhausted little band trudged in. It had been a much tougher walk than they had anticipated and getting back was a real effort. Not exactly refreshing for the week ahead. Peter was much blamed for giving misleading indications of time and distance – all of which accusations he considered utterly unfounded!

The second year when we had the fishing boat to bring finds back from the site it seemed like a good idea to do a boat trip one Sunday to the island visible out at sea. We questioned the fisherman repeatedly as to how long it would take and he reckoned a couple of hours or maybe three at the most. We thought we had made an arrangement to meet him after breakfast, but to our surprise he was nowhere to be seen. When we eventually tracked him down he was no less astonished: yes, of course it would only take two or three hours to get there – but it might be a couple of days or more before we could get back if the wind was wrong. So often one learnt too late that you must never ask a leading question, or make any assumptions – such as that it would take the same time to come back as to go.

One day I got back to the house I slept at to find that our car, which was parked right against the wall,

was heavily splashed with whitewash. I was not pleased and went in pursuit of the miscreant. It turned out that the village secretary, who had been put in office by the police after the military coup, had decreed that all external house walls should be refreshed with whitewash before the 15th August holiday. So a boy had been taken on to go round with a spray and do the actual work. While he could not get at the wall behind the car he had not taken care to avoid getting whitewash on the car. My determination to get him to clean the car up before I moved it so that he could do a proper job on the wall won full support and approval from the onlookers who gathered – as they always did when any sort of ‘situation’ developed. There was not much agricultural work at that time of year – it would all start up again immediately after the Feast of the Panaghia with the grape harvest. So the men generally sat around for much of the day in the cafeneions though the women did not experience quite the same leisure.

There was little formal entertainment in the village, but each year the travelling cinema would arrive to show a film. It had a noisy generator and benches would be put out in a dusty square. The village were amazed that most of us chose not to go. But it began late as it needed the darkness of night and we mostly tended to go to bed pretty early in view of the need to get up before dawn. Few of us took a siesta either. So the prospect of sitting rather uncomfortably through a film in Greek (eaten alive by insects in my case) had rather less appeal than to most of the village. But I usually heard all about it the next day, even if the plot sometimes seemed a bit mystifying.

As the dig neared the end of the second season, Peter constantly bemoaned the fact that it was impossible to get a good bird’s eye view of the site. As it was on the top of a hill, a ladder only gave a very partial view of the excavations. He grumbled on about aerial photography but without any clear plan of action. Then about 10 days before the end, a helicopter began buzzing around spraying olive trees not far away. This was just what was needed and Peter began hatching plans to contact the pilot and make some arrangement. The helicopter seemed to be flying lower and he became convinced it would land somewhere not too far off. Not listening to any objections, off he ran in the direction of the helicopter, racing along over the rough ground to try to get in touch. One might well have anticipated that either he would fall and twist an ankle, or that the helicopter would regain height after

spraying low and disappear off to wherever it came from. But virtue was rewarded, and about 4 kilometres away the helicopter landed and Peter found two men beside it. It turned out that a belt had broken and they were going to have to get a replacement before they could finish their work. They would be gone about a week. Perfect! That would bring us to within two or three days of the end of the dig, just when aerial photographs would include almost all the work done. They were perfectly happy with the idea of taking him up to do the photography. And this was a man who still hated going in an aeroplane!

And so it worked out. Peter made one trip up to take the photos and Nigel Wilson did a second one. We had immediately invited the helicopter pilots to join us at the end of dig glendi, though it meant having it a couple of days earlier than originally planned. No matter – the glee at having got the aerial photography done added enormously to the atmosphere of excitement and pleasure as the dig drew to its close. The pilots were a great asset, telling various complicated and very risqué jokes – the most memorable about why Queen Soraya of Persia (much in the news at the time – she visited Aghios Nikolaos later in the summer while we were studying there and we did manage to catch sight of her!) had not succeeded in producing an heir – and adding generally to the jollity. It was a good evening, going on well past our normal bedtime.

The next morning, after the excavators had gone off to the site, I became aware of some agitation in the village. Apparently the police sergeant was greatly disturbed. Well before we arrived for the second year, the police had actually moved into the main floor of the priest’s house – naturally the priest wished to let it year round, not just during the dig. So we had the roof (where the zembils of pottery were spread out for study and to find joins) and the basement floor with the yard and adjoining field for our use, with the police in between. It was a slightly curious set up but we managed without friction.

The morning after the glendi, then, this policeman had gone early to the cafeneion as white as a sheet and fearing for his sanity. In the middle of the night as he did his last walk around the village, he had seen a *neraidha*. The *neraidha* is the descendant of the nymphs of ancient Greece – a water nymph in origin. But the word has become a generic term for nymphs in any location. And they are very much to be feared. For they turn a man’s wits and take over his life. There are many stories about *neraidhes*, though nowadays no one

would admit to believing in them at all. As I heard the description of what the sergeant had seen, I began to suspect something. The draftsman got up later than the team at the site as there was no point in her trying to work until it was really light. Today she was later than usual after the *glendi* and all the excitement of the previous night. Once she appeared I asked the usual sort of questions – whether she felt any after effects of the night before, whether she had slept well.

All was quickly revealed. She had not felt at all sleepy once our guests had left and the clearing up was finished and had gone for a walk up the road out of the village through the banana groves. There was a nearly full moon and it was a brilliant night. As she came back towards the house, she began dancing and singing, out of sheer *joie de vivre*. I didn't dare tell the policeman or any of the villagers (though I suspect some had guessed roughly what might have happened) for fear of injuring his *philotimo* (honour) which might have caused trouble for us or the villagers. But I'm afraid once the team came back the story was told and if the police heard particularly uproarious laughter coming from the British below them, one can only hope they never realised quite what the cause was.

The dig drew to a close and everything had to be packed up to be taken to the recently built but still unopened museum at Aghios Nikolaos. One particularly outstanding find was the so-called Goddess of Myrtos – a curious ceramic vase shaped like a female with a very long neck carrying a water jug. One of the villagers who had come to look at our finds had stared at it long and hard and eventually, vestigial though its breasts are, especially by Minoan standards, remarked, 'Inai pragmatikōs gynaika' (It really is a woman). It was much too precious to be entrusted to the lorry and was carried on her lap by our last visitor to the site during the excavations, Alison Duke, Classics don at Girton College, Cambridge and aunt to John Falconer who had been a member of the team in the first year.

In Myrtos we asked one or two local ladies if they could use any of the empty bottles and jars – we had not wanted to throw them out and were wondering what to do with them. Every vaguely reusable container was seized in delight. Most of the food we had bought had very little packaging otherwise and it is remarkable how little waste there was. I did notice when we came back the following year that a good many of our bottles and jars seemed to be still standing on the shelf

in Manoli's house apparently unused – but they were still willing to add more to them when we left after the second season. Change was already on the way – the trenches were being dug for drains throughout the village; the new main road was coming nearer along the coast from Ierapetra. Mains electricity arrived two or three years later.

The team dispersed: I should say that in spite of the obvious difficulties there were in providing for a team of British in the village, everyone was patient and appreciative and I really cannot remember any grumbling – at least not to me. I hope their memories are not too different!

Each year after the dig Peter and I along with Petros and Eleni, the vase mender and his wife, moved into the flat at the Aghios Nikolaos museum for a short study season, at the very kind invitation of the Ephor, Stylianos Alexiou. The museum had still not been connected to the electricity supply, though mains water and drains were both connected. The guard was delightful and gave us every assistance, both then and during much longer study seasons in 1969 and 1970. It was there that I set about doing the technical drawing of the pottery as it was mended, 700 catalogued pots in all, and the 240 other finds. I prepared the small find drawings for publication by tracing what had been done on site, or drawing and tracing anything that still needed to be done.

Regular visitors at Aghios Nikolaos were Denys Page, the Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge, and his wife, Katie (herself the daughter of Edith Dothan, née Hall who participated in the American excavations at Gournia and directed the excavations at Vrokastro), plus occasionally a daughter, who took their summer holiday there and would arrive to see us, sometimes saying we needed a break and should make a trip with them. The only time I ever visited the island of Pseira was with them as they hired a little boat with a motor and we had a glorious day out. We often had meal together in the evening, and they were very kind to us and always excellent company – in spite of a certain divergence in our political opinions.

At the museum, happily Eleni would generally prepare us some lunch, and in the evenings, in the absence of electricity at the museum, we walked down the hill to eat in one of a number of tavernas at the harbour. Sometimes we had a drink before – there was a charming little ouzeri where for one drachma you got a glass of ouzo and a baby jacket potato plus the odd bit of cucumber or olives or nuts. Our favourite taverna

was Kioulmetis'. The owner was from Asia Minor and his food was fresh and well prepared, though without a great deal of variety. He had a most elegant long-bodied cat, which had jumped ship and was believed to have come from Argentina. It did very well at the taverna, but never got fat. It was a huge relief to me not to have to worry about shopping and cooking while we were at Aghio.

After the finds had all been studied, many were exhibited in Aghios Nikolaos museum. Stelios Alexiou and Kiki Lembesis came to set up the first exhibition at the museum while we were there. A small collection, including several quite select pieces, was returned to be exhibited in Myrtos village, something highly unusual at that time. The excavation report was published in 1972.

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