Kommos Excavations
Late Spring and Summer, 1977
Director's Notebook by
J. W. Shaw
14 May, 1977

Relatively early arrived, with John McEvance, at Pitsidia, for the lengthy preparations and the eight weeks of excavation scheduled for this coming summer at Kommos.

Our present schedule is as follows:

15 May - 4 June  Sand clearing with heavy equipment on the land expropriated.
8 June - 15 June  Small scale excavation of the MM I
II dump in trench (1976)
2A. 1977 trenches to be called 8 in this area.
15 June - 5 August  Full scale excavation
5 August - 15 August  Clean-up and consoli-dation.

Personnel for the work, aside from the twenty or so workmen, most of them with experience from last year, will be:

JWS, director
Maria C. Shaw
Phillip Betancourt
Vance Watrous
Blanca Nixon
Betty Comstock
Giuliana Bianco
John McEvance
William Cox
Harriet Blitzter

Except for the last two, all of the above were with us during the past summer, our first season. George Beladeris, who proved in his trial year to be an efficient and even temper foreman, will continue in the same role.
Aside from the workmen in the field, present plans are for:

2 potwashers, women with experience from T2
2 coos
1 potmender, probably an import from the mainland (Nauplia)

I have also arranged for a number of visiting experts to come this year. To initiate a new sieving technique as well as flotation, Steve Diamant of the ASCSA will come in early June. He will help, along with the Eroxe, Watroos, and Comstock, in the initial study of the LM I-II material in the first week (see schedule, above). We will also have a geomorphologist, John Gifford, to begin an initial study of the Kommos area. Professor N. Yassoglou will come in early for a short time to study the soil with the aim of assessing the determination of the date of the initiation of the sand build-up on the site. Chip Vincent, a photographer with experience in Afghanistan, Cyprus, England and elsewhere will be with us for a month (July-Aug.) to photograph small objects. Miss Helen Besse will help make the profiles. There will be others, too, who will contribute aspects of their expertise.

During the fall, after our first season of excavation, I spent a great deal of time clarifying the records, compiling those aspects of notebooks and French reports that were still not complete or, if complete, not formalized. The financial records, left in an incompleteness although certainly not chaotic state, had to be kept up as well. The death of Zbigniew Dziecielewicz, from a heart attack shortly after his arrival in Canada, necessitated the completion of his summer's accounts by myself. He wanted and present summer's accounts will be kept by me as well, although I do not have
During the fall I also prepared our report for the first season. Originally there was to be a combined season I-II report, but the substantial nature of the Minoan settlement at Kommos, along with the amount of plans and actual finds made, justified a report of some length. This report, submitted in early January, will appear in the October issue of Hesperia. (The Canadian periodical Phoenix, mainly philologically inclined, did not express a real interest). It is expected that we will attempt a yearly report in Hesperia after each season, the ms submitted by about 1 January, with the proof being read in the summer at the site and the publication emerging in October.

The original scheduling of five years of excavation and two or so of study and cleaning seem wholly justified by the extent and richness of the Kommos site.

Various small reports have appeared in the Archaeological Newsletten of the Royal Ontario Museum, the newsletter of the American Institute of Nautical Archaeology, and various articles have appeared in The New York Times (Dec. 5, 1976) and the Christian Science Monitor (Feb. 28, 1977) and the March-April edition of Harvard Magazine. Although I have not yet seen it, there is apparently one in the Classical News and Views of the Canadian Classical Society, and a report is also to be published shortly (it has probably already emerged) in the Journal of Field Archaeology, of which I am an editor.
A great deal of work preparatory to the second season has been done. Aside from contacting old and new staff, fund applications and material were needed. Regarding the former, we are most fortunate that the Canada Council will be continuing its most necessary support. Indeed, we have been granted an extended Canada Council grant that will cover both seasons II and III. The Royal Ontario Museum will once again help; the SCM Corporation has once again contributed; Mrs. Alfred Shaw and Mr. Leon Domencic have made contributions through the American Institute of Nautical Archaeology. We have certain funds still in escrow for publication, and my present policy is to continue this build-up until the final publication in mind.

Our preoccupation was the preparation of the new extension of the apothecary in Pitschach. Not only was the upper floor of the old apothecary roofed, but the large unwalled room had both to be finished and roofed. The plastering, lighting, and installation of a small steam must be arranged by the owner and payment of advance rentals was to make this possible. At this point the return of the room is essentially complete, a very large room that will form the nucleus for storage and work on the pottery during the summer. Details remain in complete; moreover, the old apothecary extension needs more work, but I feel probably able to do this with our own workmen, if money will pay. Arranging anything of this type is most difficult because of the somewhat sluggish attitude toward work in the area.

Purchase of materials is essentially complete. While in England I bought for the excavation an excellent second-hand projector (Kodak) and an electronic flash as well as two lenses for the excavations. New, this year, we will
attempt developing our own films as well, so equipment for that and development of simple contact prints is on hand.

Aside from ordinary renewal purchases, the architect now has a large sliding-back drawer, all brought us a unit from Athens, for storage of the site drawings. These drawings can be found easily and they can also be protected.

During the late fall tourists broke into the excavation area and burned up a number of our fence posts. We were requested to provide better protection with guard personnel and also to build the excavation house originally projected for the site. The former was partly arranged by paying our foreman a monthly extra to go to the site; the Phaistos guard have been going as well. A new guard appointed to Hatale will eventually have the Hatale-Kamos area as his responsibility.

Regarding the excavation house, various considerations persuaded us not to have it built, even though we had permission to do so and the plans were completed. Instead, I had built in Heracleion a guard house based on the plan furnished by the archaeological service. A fine job was done by our Heracleion carpenter and only after some trouble, the guard house was set on its permanent base in March. It was brought down in pieces and then assembled where it can now be seen. It was well fastened to its cement base; otherwise, a strong 10 B.C. wind would have simply blown it down the hill.

Shortly I will begin purchasing the
necessary shelving, tables for our new apothecary.

I should also mention here that long-term rentals have been arranged for 'Georges House' on the shore as well as the apothecary itself. All of this has been made possible by a continuing positive attitude of the inhabitants toward the excavation and, in particular, toward the director.

Which much still remains to be done before we can begin, the essential skeleton of work is well laid out and our financial base is a secure one, at least at the present time.

The various deep soundings through the sand (Trenches 1A, 2A, 6A of 1976) proved the existence of extensive antiquities below, so we are well justified to remove the sand layers above them on the slope of the hill.

This removal begins tomorrow, being arranged with some consideration through a local Archeologist M., who is providing a topographer for the job. I estimate three weeks work, as far as we can see the upper sand layers, of post-Roman date, in steep sand and with no antiquities. This remains to be seen, however, most of the work will be supervised by John McEvoy, and will be reported in Notebook 8. This book will provide only a commentary on any general archaeological aspects. It is clear, for instance, that the contours of ground level and sand level are different. There will be a considerable change in the local landscape when the majority of the sand has been removed. The record of the latter appearance is preserved not only by photographs (both aerial and telephoto, plus close-ups), but we leave the original plans made by
Bardekin in 1975. I have been assured by various "experts" that we will not be removing valuable ecological evidence from the essentially sterile sand layer.

The aim of the excavation remains essentially unchanged from the original conception, as articulated by myself before the excavation began. Realization on my part of the expanding possibilities of trying to recover more about the life style of the people, however, has brought about a few changes in the technical approach. As originally phrased in grant applications and on p. 1 of notebook 1 for 1976, the non-partial character of the settlement in clear. This was my original analysis of the situation. The EH III - EM III character is also known now. Current expansion of trenches in existing areas, plus new soundings made soon to be possible in areas once covered by deep sand, will be the general theme during the coming summer. As I think of it now, this coming long season, which will tax all of us, will be the most intensive one that we will have during the five or six years of investigation at Kommos. Seasons III, IV, V, will be on a smaller scale and to a large extent will be dedicated to consolidating investigations made during the first two seasons. It may prove to be possible to do a certain amount of trial trenching on the southern (EM) hill also; but the legal complications make this, at least at the present moment, more of a wish than a genuine expectation.

The prospect of Season II, now before us, is a most exciting one indeed.
16 May 1977

Build-dozing operations began today with a top lift, timed after much investigation and negotiation, now by the son of the present operator of the franchise at The Stakla periphery. At 700 shovelfuls per hour, with a projected length of work of about three weeks, the project of sand removal is a large scale task.

Beginnings at shortly after 6, the machine moved with great skill and significant success, the entire mound of soil, now covered sand, between trenches 1 and 18 of 1976. The two trenches are now separated by a surprisingly small gap - the walls around had seemed like such a relatively long one before. Now, one can see the two trenches from the other. The remainder is, this morning, was spent removing sand from around to 4 and 6A. The operator, George, in very skillful and clean almost all the sand from above the ancient flat eroded ground level. No ancient remains were found in this fourth sand aside from an oval opaline, block a two by three plot.

While it was clear from soundings made last year that the ancient mound and modern sand levels had differing contours, this is even clearer now at this early stage of work. There is a definite drop in the former, falling north-south, and about mid-way between the north-south property lines. This is perhaps two meters in depth and represents at least in part the results of simple erosion by water. To what extent it can be said to represent as well a part of the original ancient ground level remains to be seen.
I write this while sitting in the guard house, set in the rear corner of the expropriated area and facing southwest. The northern window, the floor's central window, the open southern door, give a wide view of the excavation area. At present Trench 2A is hardly visible, but when the sand level has been lowered the walls should be quite clear from where I sit. The small room is cool, comfortable, and well lit. It will also be most useful during the summer for storing small things necessary for the excavation. Surveying instruments, cameras, can be kept here as well as as soon as a night guard has been hired.

The changes in the landscape so drastically in a disturbing manner for me personally since the sand, weedy, bush covered site is that which I found and knew for so many years. Now it is becoming smooth, barren, and except for the trees which I am trying to leave in whatever possession, to some extent returning back to the meaning of its more immediate Toponym, Ioú Eivánnó 1a megálía.
Continuation of sand clearing on the site. the highest part of the hill is now clean — i.e. all but the lower 5 cm, so has been cleared of sand. Any new trench we begin, therefore, will commence with a clearing operation, but one miniscule in comparison with that which was done for every trench last year. George Manousoudakis is an excellent worker, careful and seemingly enthralling. We have now cleared to down below trench 6A of 1976, although the line of clearing is roughly NE-SSW, a diagonal in effect beginning at the north of 6A ending just south of our new guard house. The deepest sand encountered so far is southwest of 6A — that it is over two meters deep, which makes me suspect that the sand west of 2A may be the deepest that we will encounter: as a guess, 2.5 - 3 meters. I also suspect that the sand along our southern property line will not be as deep as some expect. Our one trench (1A) in that area (1A) was 1.8 m. deep, from top of sand level to top of tile-stonewall. This c. 2m. to depth, I expect, will probably remain constant in that area, which is windswept unlike that east of 2A.

The sand from the top of the hill was dumped over the cliff between 4A and 1B. The dump for the immediately down area on the south is just below the cedar tree, between 4A and 2A on the cliffside. Both dumps now cover the hillside and extend some distance out onto the beach. The latter has covered up that part of the "shed" slope that originally in past led me to excavate this site, which was not already covered by the artificial embankment which I had built in 1976. There is a good photographic record, as well as the topographical plan from 1975, which record all of the essential features of the site as it was before we began in 1976. We should maintain an active interest in recording all such features and changes as we go along.
On May 17 no unusual archaeological features were noted. A few shards (the handle of a Mycenaean amphora, a handle of what was probably a Hellenistic amphora) appeared, no doubt from the upper soil layer which has been scratched here and there. The depression on the side of the hill continues to indicate a small north south "marine" or an increasingly sloping hillside.

On May 18 a trial run to the well was made. To the sketch and stones an indication, the antechambers continue south of the well in a line approximately even with the N-S side of Trench 2A of 1976.

Sand SW of Trench 6A (1976) is about 2.2m. deep. Photographs were taken of work in progress.

On May 19, 20, excavation of the sand continued. No small finds, no walls. The sand continues a uniform 1 - 2.2m. and I doubt it will get much deeper to the south.
May 21, 1977

In mid-afternoon I switched the machine from the slope of the hill to the southern part of the property. I did this for two reasons. The first is that if the mines removed to be in the sand levels there are to be found, I want to find them and get rid of them as soon as possible. Who knows what problems they might cause, thus impeding our progress? The second reason was that George Spharacitis has been so insistent about the existence of a large building in the sand there, from which blocks were removed for use in building the monastery at Prorokia, that I wanted to confirm or deny its presence; it, too, might have to be taken care of in some way before excavation in that area could begin.

No mines or traces of mines so far. We have, however, confirmed the presence of a large building in the sand, not far from where Trench IA was excavated in 1976 (we excavated about 5 meters to the east of the wall discovered). It was found in the side of an initial trench being dug by the backhoe, in a sandy fill littered with small blocks and fragments of blocks. Construction-wise the wall is composed of medium-sized slabs set in a mud mortar, the wall being about 0.70m. wide and of sound construction. At least 3 meters of its length have been exposed. The top of this 4.5's wall lies about 1 m. below the level of the surface sand. It is at least 3 courses high. [Diagram: a Noblesse trench alongside, but this will not be culled for some time since the area must be cleared first.]
I was told today that the father of Manolis Kadiannakis, as well as another old man in the village, recall the building's actually standing (presumably without the roof above the sand - or, rather, the walls standing above the sand). They recall being told that it was a church (?). Thus we seem to have a fairly recent (Turkish?) building abandoned and allowed to fall up at least partially with sand, the walls projecting up above the sand. Then the dismemberment comes, perhaps even when the sand was at its present level, with the monks (people who helped load up the ship) and the monks digging down alongside the walls and pulling up whatever they could get once the upper, visible structure had been done away with. This, for the present, seems to be the explanation.

The two coins were signed on today, too. The wife of Petros Kyprakis and Anastasia, who was helping out last year, I and MCC have some reservations about the first, but it is her house, we are indebted to both of them for their past help, and both Petros and she, especially she, are determined that they should have the job. I talked with her for some time today and there is no doubt that her intentions are excellent.
Continuation of sand-clearing the same 10
hour per day operation as from the beginning. Hours
6-12, 3-7 usually.

At intervals the machine continues clearing
from the deep, 2m. sand on the mid-hillside. No
unusual finds to report from there - the surface
of the ancient level continues to steep down,
sometimes precipitously, in stages. A phenomenon
not visible earlier on the lower sand level and
probably attributable to underlying walls as
well as the differences between water and wind
erosion and the process of the deposition of
sand by the wind.

At the lower level, just north of our
southern property line, I continue to direct
excavation down to so close as one can safely
approach the muddled mounds of the late structure
represented by the heavy wall found last week.
A significant area, but still perhaps only 1/10 of the
total here, has been cleared either down to the
soil level or the 'Tumble level.' The latter work
is difficult since the muddled blocks must be
pulled out of the sand by hand and one must
try not to go too deep so that anything lying
on the earth surface is preserved more or less
intact. To the east of the heavy wall there is
a great deal of stone, fragments of roof tiles,
much lat and usually undistinguished pottery
of late or post-Roman date. I do not understand
how so much material could 'percolate up,' but
there (as in 1A in the same area) is no evidence
for any habitation level (piumi) or walls
on the upper levels. The coarse ware is lotted
on the site, with about '1/4 being kept (repur-
septative samples).
Wednesday, 25 May 1977

The Devon shelving arrived today, and has been installed in the new apothecary wing. With the new tables, clean white walls and furniture, it is all most attractive, awaiting the work force that will soon arrive. The curtains are also complete, thanks to Manolis Kadianakis, who has also taken care of our garden in a splendid way. Aside from the wooden trays to be picked up in Heracleion, and the new sifting machine being handled by Steve Diamant, all of the equipment necessary is presently at hand.

The big project of sand removal continues. This morning a new series of walls was found east of the one already reported. In the late afternoon I worked in cooperation with George. The desire to clean away in front of another new wall. Very difficult but successful work, and there were some results, all in over two meters of sand!

The wall of the building on the east is burned, so burned that some of the stones of lime stone are so friable that they simply fall apart at the touch. There is also a layer of burned material on the exterior "court". There is a clean doorway, as marked in the sketch. It is all most interesting — obviously we are dealing with one structure shaped like a Τ or with two or more structures facing onto a court. The date still remains a problem — it is somewhere between post-Minoan and late Turkish. If Roman, it is very poor construction. My guess at the moment is very late Roman, partly because...
of the lack of glazed ware that might be found and is characteristic of Byzantine and Turkish periods. It would not be so unusual to find walls standing from the Roman period (e.g. Hierapolis). Thus the goods we have not found a Roman bath! (in have we). The pottery shapes and roof tiles, all coarse ware, are rough and poor quality. No stamps, no Roman coated ware, no building inscription to help out. A representative selection has been kept.

The present plan in my mind is to continue cleaning the area but without settling down to floor (court) level. This part should be down by the workmen. The interior of the building can be excavated in the same way, once the outline of the wall is clear (we might excavate only a part of it if it proves to be very large). Its burned condition could well offer no finds that otherwise would not be found in a structure that had been deserted. Perhaps it is a commercial building rather than a private structure, as is suggested by the number of amphora fragments. A gabled roof is automatically suggested by the presence of roof tiles in various parts of the fill. The doorway is a rather hand-some one, there may well be an attractive threshold block, but no more digging should be done, down at least, until proper work covers are available.

Photographs will be taken today, showing the new structure mid-way through excavation and with the high sand scarp above. There is a good deal of drama, and I am learning much about, the recent developments.

Pay level this year should be 350 A.
Sand clearing is about 2/3 complete — by the end of the next week the great project will be complete.

The sand in the lower section continues to be removed — it is over 3 meters deep now in the SE section of the property, so much time is taken up by this.

We seem to have found the last of the late buildings — at least, the last on the property that has been expropriated. Now there are 4, one more having been found since the last report here, all set about a court. Apparently unfortified, suggesting a peaceful time when someone dared to build by the sea. The organized plan suggests work by an organized group with some social and economic power rather than a private individual. No doubt the room contents will provide much of the answer. One end (in any case, was probably a violent one. B (the "blurred" building) was certainly burnt; C seems to have been burnt, though enough of it has not yet been seen, I speak of another building, E, to the south, to bound out the rectangular court. D is a curious round structure but, since it has not yet been excavated on the interior, its function remains unclear — certainly it is unusual.

One of the main objectives in the clearing operation here is to remove as much sand from within and without of the buildings as possible (cont.)
This has not been easy work, especially without
workmen, as we are presently functioning. John
and I, helped by G. Beladakis, and aided
when possible by our excellent lift driver, George
Monasoudakis, have cleared a great deal
of sand and fallen slabs from around and
within the buildings. The two scholarly maps have
blisters to show on both hands! But we have
avoided in all cases clearing down to earth or
floor level — this will be done later when
we are working on a full-time excavation basis.

There should be a good deal of pottery, most
d of it course ware, and for dating let us hope
for a number of fine ware sherds and coins on
the floors and within the court. We need more
material on late (i.e. Roman-Byz.) pottery,
but there is precious little available in print.

A study of these buildings, with so much of
them cleared, will make an excellent summer
project for someone (W.C.?). Almost all the
architectural information on the unit should be
available by the end of the summer — it
could form a separate unit in the preliminary
report for Season II, well illustrated, or could
be held off for the final publication.

This afternoon, 28 May, our apothecary was
used for the first time. A visiting osteologist,
Pauline Sheppard, who happened to be passing
by, inspected our bone samples from RA-2 (dump)
and 5B (UNI) units. Shep/gold, pig, deer(?), cow
in that order apparently, with only a few typology
that would tend to tie in with what Hutchinson
reports concerning the Tylos bones.

Also this afternoon, during the lunch break,
the McCrornos and I went to Volvakas and found
about half way between the little harbor so of
it and the great boulder itself a great
deal of amphora fragments converted into the stone accumulations in 3 meters of water. Samples are brought back for our site collection. What Roman? John Hayes could be helpful in this matter.

I have completed a most interesting project, tape recording the personal memories of a number of old men here concerning the visit by Evans in 1924, the existence of the stone scatter (Ta' Tapraklita) and the removal of stone to Trenchi some 50 years ago, as well as a comparison of the harbour of Matala with that at Kommos. The separate interviews, made on a tape recorder I borrowed locally, are most worthwhile and informative. I will have it transcribed in Athens when I am there in a few days—by Maria Contoulakis, Angels' wife, Local ethnography, topography department.