

Caring for the Kommos Site: Present and Future

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During Excavation

At Kommos, first pointed out in 1924 by Arthur Evans, discoverer of Minoan Knossos, only scraps of Minoan pottery on the hillside suggested to us ancient occupation. Sand removal and the subsequent years of excavation, beginning in 1976, however, revealed a Minoan town on the hilltop and hillside and, to the south, civic, religious, and harbor side buildings on and behind the foreshore bordering the Aegean Sea.

During excavation care was taken to expose and, then strengthen wall and surface remains in such a way that they would not be badly damaged by the sun and by wind and water erosion. During the thirty years of our excavation it had become clear that the Greek temple was important historically, but, especially, the Minoan harbor side facilities and imported artifacts identified the site as the earliest known excavated seaport in the Mediterranean. Clearly the site was the epinion, the harbor town of Hagia Triada and Phaistos, which are extensive inland settlements excavated by our Italian archaeological colleagues since early in the Twentieth Century, open to the public and administered by the Greek Archaeological Service.

After Excavation, and the Future of the Kommos Site

Full-time excavation at Kommos ceased in 1995, after which there was a hiatus dedicated mainly to the preparation of the publication of excavation results in a series of volumes (**see attached, below, #1**). Already, under the contractual agreement with Princeton University Press, Volumes II (1987) and III (1988) had appeared, and Volumes I A (1992) and B (1995) were underway. After this point, the House X volumes (2008 and 2017) were published under the aegis of INSTAP Academic Press. Those final volumes completed the Kommos series, all carried out within the lifetimes of a staff that had initiated excavation in 1976.

In 1995, although there still were unexcavated Minoan houses and civic buildings that could be explored profitably, it was decided to terminate excavation, although future excavation by another, future group was always considered a possibility. For instance, portions of the monumental Minoan shipsheds still remain unexcavated. In the meantime, yearly summer work to maintain the site would continue. This was particularly true in the southern part of the site, at the bottom of the hill slope next to the seashore. There, pursuing the lower slopes of ancient use, we had created scarps three or four meters high, often separating later Greek from the earlier, lower Minoan levels of occupation. Sometimes the scarps could be strengthened with simple applications of cement and steel mesh, but they could also be propped up from the side by new cemented rubble walls that could be masked with

cement and earth so as not to appear ancient. All of the site conservation work was carried out by University of Toronto hired personnel.

Left as it was then, it was clear that, like so many untended and closed ancient sites in Greece, that the fenced and unguarded Kommos site would become overgrown with weeds and trees while exposed walls would be eroded and collapse. With the site's cultural and historical importance in mind, therefore, a new initiative was launched in 2018 to begin the process of consolidating and improving the site in ways that would make possible to open it to the public. There would be no lack of possible visitors, for already over the years the beach bordering the site had become famous. Moreover, there is ample room alongside the access road and next to the shore where many dozens of cars can park, and beach facilities have been provided for visitors by the local Pitsidia community. There are restaurants further down the beach. A recent *Forbes* article starred the area as "the coolest beach in the world" (April 10, 2018).

To conform to Greek Antiquities laws, which are stringent, the first phase of what will be a long and costly process was initiated. We first hired a professional architect/engineer with archaeological experience to make new site plans (see attached, below, and draw up a detailed Master Plan for the site's future development (**see attached, below, #s 2, 3**). The Master Plan has now been approved by the Minister of Culture. It subscribes to the Ministry's standards, which in turn conform to those recommended by ICCROM, ICOMOS, and UNESCO, which is required by EU funding mechanisms under the protocols of the Council of Europe. It contains (1) a detailed inventory of the existing remains, (2) a plan for interventions to preserve them, (3) a ranked assessment of need, (4) a plan for visitors' paths linked to a plan for explaining the remains and their importance, 5) a vegetation plan based on the use of local vegetation, and (6) a conceptual plan for access, traffic, and parking.

Ongoing now are two technical studies by the professional firm KASTOR in Athens. One is a geotechnical study including coring to determine the geological nature of the underlying rock, to inform us how best to construct the massive sea-wall to protect the ancient harbor area installations as well as to build up massive terraces against the eastern side of the exposed area (some five meters between original and current ground levels). Second is a hydrological investigation necessary for determining how to manage surface water drainage across the whole site and to measure and control ground water seepage, as well as the installation of a partial underground system of drains to control water (especially brackish water) that gathers around the base of standing walls in the Civic Center where the monumental buildings of the original Minoan harbor installations are located. This work is scheduled for November through March 2019-2020.

We are especially fortunate to have acquired a new Associate Director, James Wright, who, as a student, excavated at Kommos, and recently retired as Director of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. His invaluable help will continue to affect our approach to funding, personnel, and procedure. Concurrently, the new Kommos initiative will be combined with other regional Cretan interests to make the Western Mesara Plain a focus for archaeological and heritage tourism. To that end we have engaged with Dimitris Michelogiannis, who has been working closely in support of cultural heritage programs of the Governor of Crete. He and other Greek members of our team (an architect, a

landscape architect, a materials scientist specializing in mortars) will continue in 2020 to develop an information program for the public, bringing together public officials, touristic business interests, and the public itself to plan a sustainable program promoting Kommos to the public and linking it to its corresponding resources at Hagia Triada, Phaistos and the new archaeological museum at Gortyn.

Catalogues

1. The major publications in the Kommos series
2. Kommos Master Plan Text and Site Plans by architect/engineer Giorgos Ninos (in Greek)
3. Kommos supplementary plans by Giuliana Bianco (1976-).