

IIHSA Travel Bursary 2009-10 Report

I set off from Dublin airport on the 8th of January and despite the bad weather conditions, I luckily managed to get through Heathrow and then Athens on my way to Heraklion in Crete. I spent the night in Heraklion and the next day hired a car and set off down the north coastal plain towards Palaikastro. On the way I stopped off at Istron, a small town just to the east of Agios Nikolaos, a place I know well, having spent the last three summers working with the IIHSA sponsored Priniatikos Pyrgos excavation. The weather was unseasonably warm and I was struck by the greenness and bounty of the land, a stark contrast to the parched soils of the Cretan summer. I arrived at Palaikastro in the afternoon with the skies beginning to cloud over obscuring the peak of Petsofa to the south. In fact Petsofa is not really a true peak at all. It is the northern edge of plateau that extends towards Zakros to the south and its mountain appearance is somewhat of an illusion.

The next day I set out on the trail, bringing along my camera and notebook, ready to record the environment at the site. Again the change in the landscape was instantly apparent. The wind had also changed. In the summer it had driven in across the plain from the north and had attained almost gale-like proportions up at Petsofa. Now it had shifted, as it does in winter, to the south-west and so my ascent up the north flank was sheltered. I braced myself for the tempest that would enshroud me once I cleared the protection of the ridge but this never arrived – my experience of Petsofa in the winter was one of a gentle stillness, pockets of phosphorescence dotted about the red earth, swallows passing by on their way to or from Africa. The new conditions affected the way that I saw and interpreted the site. I spent a long day on the peak and got a lot of good photographing, sketching and recording done.

The next day, on the way back to Heraklion, I stopped by the sites of Agios Fotia (EM) and Hellenistic Tripitos. Having driven in vain up a very narrow dirt road outside the town of Kavousi, I gave up on my search for the geometric cemetery of Xerambela.

The following day I headed towards the outskirts of Heraklion in search of Knossos and found it cold, rainy and deserted. I spent some time noting the architecture, trying to tease away the Minoan material from the 20th century reconstructions. I had a few hours to kill before my flight left and so I decided to pay Mount Jouktas, the chief peak sanctuary, a visit. I was told by the people at Knossos that I could drive up it. I found that you can but it should probably be avoided during heavy January rainstorms. Still, the views from the top were probably worth the fraught ascent.

I arrived in to Athens that night and was settled into the IIHSA by Tom, the ever-helpful assistant director. The next day I spent at the BSA, trawling through the 1902 Palaikastro notebooks for any mention of J. Myres or his exploits on Petsofa. I did find a summarised account taken from the main project notebook and probably written by the project's director, R. Bosanquet. Unfortunately I did not find anything that I could recognise to be of the hand of Myres. Despite this, it was fascinating to read the notebooks, full of accounts of great finds and mutton purchases for the workmen. The staff at the BSA were incredibly friendly, especially the archivist, Amalia Kakissis, who showed me original excavation photographs, helped me locate library articles and pointed me towards other collections that might contain further Myres material.

For the few days that remained, I visited the new Acropolis museum which despite its many detractors, I found to be a worthy future home for the completed Parthenon frieze. I also paid a visit to Sandy MacGillivray, with whom I had a very interesting discussion about Petsofa, particularly in relation to its parent settlement of Palaikastro, of which MacGillivray is director.

I hope that this report shows how useful the trip was for my research into the role of representation in archaeology. While my work looks explicitly at the case of Petsofa, I was also constantly reminded of the many ways in which archaeology chooses to represent its data, whether that be in the National Museum of Athens or on the menu of a Knossos restaurant. I am very grateful to the IIHSA and its sponsors for making this investigation possible.

Yours,

Frank Lynam