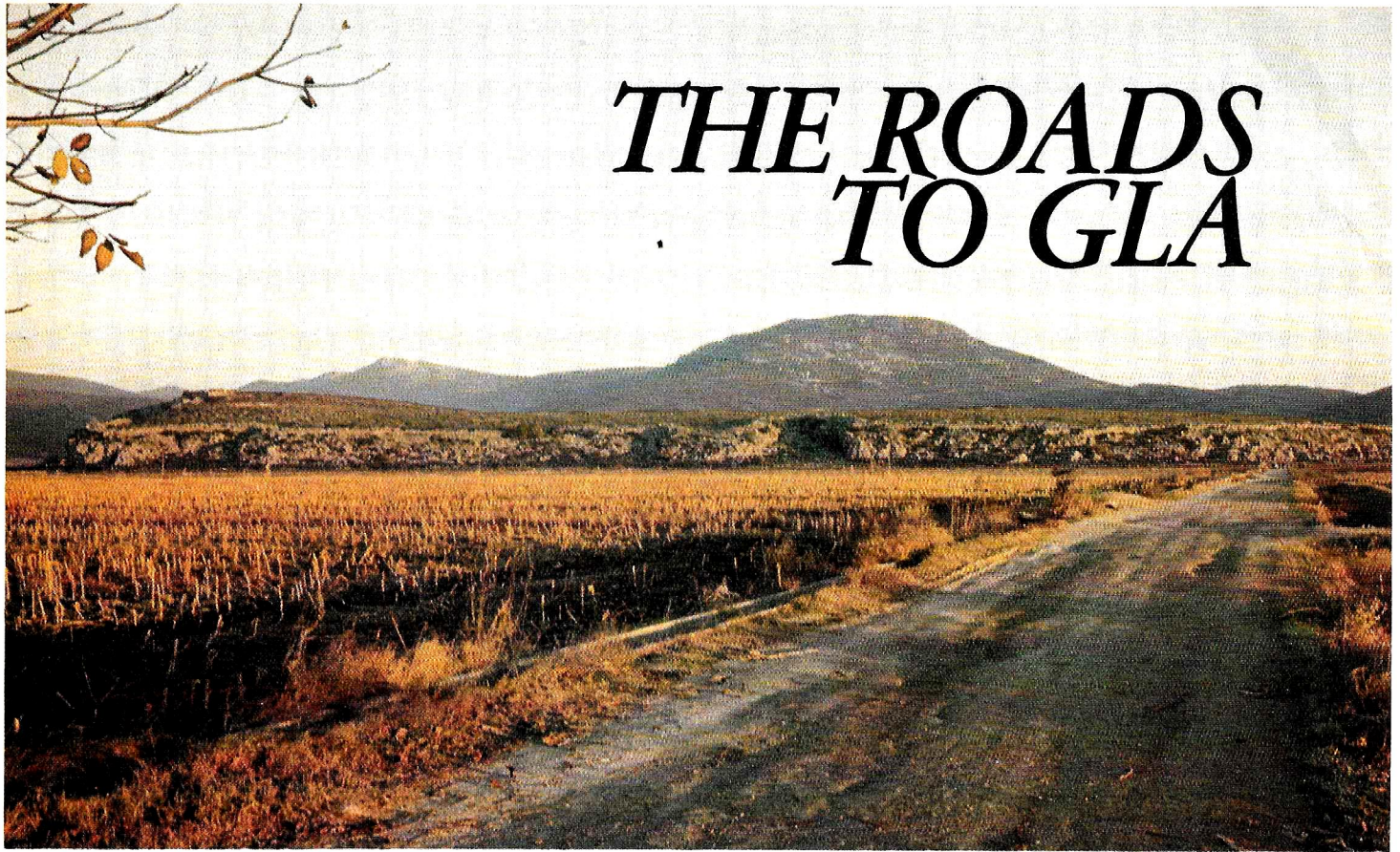


THE ROADS TO GLA

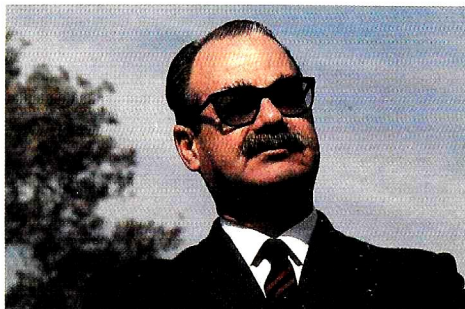


ON A DUSTY PLATEAU IN THE BOEOTIAN PLAIN, A STUDENT TEAM LED BY PENN'S SPYROS IAKOVIDIS IS UNEARTHING THE STORY OF THE LARGEST AND MOST MYSTERIOUS MYCENAEAN CITADEL.

By Michael H. Levin

THE ROAD to Gla was paved with good intentions, but little else. My rented white Fiat clanged and shuddered through potholes on an endless tertiary path between Malessine and Theologos at the northern edge of Greece's broiling Boeotian plain. From the cramped back seat, Danny, 7, roared with glee at the illusion of racing and urged greater speed, while Jeremy, 10, complained that the jolts disrupted his reading of the *Iliad*. My wife the navigator, having chosen this short-cut from her clutch of maps, stretched back beside me and gazed neutrally at the simmering landscape, trying not to giggle at the absurdity of the third

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Spyros Iakovidis: *intellectual hunter*

potential disaster in as many hours. I was sweating, not just from the heat. Having found Spyros Iakovidis at the site and postponed discussion until this evening's meeting, would we miss him completely—and the chance to participate vicariously in a dig, too? The odds of a miss seemed excellent, since we had not written down the name of his inn in Theologos. Was it the *Psaralounou* or the *Psonaloauro*? The *Psarris*? The *Psa-na-na*? The road kept unwinding over minor precipices. The sun kept going down.

It had not begun this way, of course. It began as the dream of every student who ever thrilled at the picture of Schliemann bringing Agamemnon's gold from the silent earth or shivered with awareness that those huge Greek myths of fate, terror, and justice emerging from the blood-feud were partly real. Agamemnon and Achilles were Mycenaean, local kings of the first Greek civilization which burst on the world 3,500 years ago to conquer Minoan Crete, then reconquered the world last century when its fabulous leavings began to be retrieved. Now here was Gla—one of the last Mycenaean citadels, according to the University Museum, different from all others, with a new excavation about to begin under Spyros Iakovidis of Penn's Department of Classical Archaeology. Iakovidis's directions over the long-

continued

WE CROSS THE PLAIN LIKE BEAGLES AFTER A LOST SCENT, SEEKING A SIGN.

distance line were deceptively simple: "It is two hours from Delphi. Drive to Kastro beyond Orchomenos and ask. I will be on the rock until 2:00." And the omens were good: as we started from Delphi that Friday, three buff-bellied eagles soared above us, dipping serenely down the long valley of the Sacred Way in the clear light of a Mediterranean morning.

That was before the gear shift came off in my hand like a Keystone Kops parody as we swerved through the narrow streets of Orchomenos. Try flapping your hands and explaining *that* problem with the clock ticking and no one speaking English and the phrasebook falling apart as it's passed between four frantic pairs of hands. (We can still imitate driving because the car's locked in second.) We are led to a dark shed on a dusty back street. Out bubbles Kostas Kakoyannis, master auto *mechanimaton*, according to his battered sign, balding and barechested in paunchy gray overalls, covered with grease and a four-day beard. His broad face crinkles with humor; he roars a hello, flings out his thick arms as though welcoming us to a wedding, pats us consolingly while his shrewd dark eyes assess the car's undercarriage, the gearshift limp as a noodle, our distress. Commands are barked; assistants scurry; we are served orangeade and Turkish coffee; the children are given a pile of bolts for play.

It is nearly noon. The guilty gearshaft has been surgically removed in two pieces and is being welded; Kakoyannis invites us behind the *garaz* and proudly discloses his second business, a full-fledged partridge hatchery. By the time the boys have finished feeding the chicks, the car is made whole—for a bill of under \$10, not including coffee, *orangeades*, or a cover charge. Kakoyannis declines payment for the refreshments, refuses a tip. I'm beginning to develop Blanche DuBois's faith in the kindness of strangers. I already believe in Greek hospitality.

Then it is past 1:00 and over 100° and we are barreling into Kastro—a

clump of forlorn houses perched on the inevitable hilltop like a wilted mushroom ring—asking for *Gla*. It is not so easy to ask for, or to find, either. For one thing, there are several small plateaus rising from the rich fields below us, each with formations that could be ruined walls, each a potential citadel. For another thing, we have misplaced the relevant phrase page, and our confidently remembered Greek turns out to be gibberish. In a mad version of "He went thataway," each local we ask points in a different direction. We crisscross the plain like beagles after a lost scent, slithering down irrigation tracks, rousing peasants taking siestas under parked tractors, startling magpies and goatherds, eyes riveted on each outcrop, seeking a Sign. Outside, all is cotton blossoms, bees, murmuring sun; inside, a black cloud of disappointment begins to spread. We know Iakovidis's team stops digging at 2:00 and does not work on weekends, that by Monday we must be hundreds of kilometers away. We have no idea where he is staying; if we miss him here, the connection, and a potentially fascinating experience, will be gone for good.

At 1:50, we turn down the last irrigation track. A miniature caravan of two nondescript vehicles filled with farm workers approaches through the mud-holes. I flag it down, run forward, poke my head through the driver's window, regressing to pidgin European from frustrated urgency. "*Où est Gla ancien?*" I pant. A carefully-groomed mustachioed face peers across the driver from behind dark glasses, gestures curtly over its shoulder: "Back there." "*Y Professor Iakovidis?*" Again, "back there."

A light begins to dawn as I realize who this must be in the middle of nowhere, with farmworkers wearing American T-shirts and some of them young women in shorts—impossible for a Greek farm crew. "Are you Professor Iakovidis?" I blurt in English, accusative tense.

The face smiles thinly, replies in a formal baritone modulated by years of lectures. "Mr. Levin," it says. "I am happy to meet you. We are finished for the day. I suggest you drive on and explore the site for yourself. We can discuss it this evening in Theologos, north of here, if you would like a nice place for a swim. You will find me at the Ps_____ can you remember that? I will see you at 6:00 at the Ps_____."

So now we have clambered around the site and tried to draw it (Danny's sketch like a pair of dental plates, mine no more accurate) and had our brains soufflé by the midday heat and pulled the nettles out of our shins and are grinding our way down the last hill overlooking the half-moon bay of Theologos with the sun settling toward the Gulf of

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Even the name is an artifact, for "Gla" is Albanian for "citadel," a relic of 15th-century invaders whose village descendants still spoke an Albanian dialect when de Ridder asked what the rock was called. It is an apt metaphor for those countless other paths which pass and recross each other into the present, streams through the time we foolishly think of as "ours."

We are sitting on the terrace of an inn with several students enjoying an impromptu happy hour after the grit of the day's dig—Jeff Streed, 23, of Pennsylvania, N.J., B.A. in Latin from Stanford; Lynn Ann LiDonnige, 25, of Manhattan and Hunter College; Reed Phythyon, 28, of Hiram, Ohio, and Penn State; Barbara Hayden, 27, of Des Moines and Drake; Peter Denault, 30, of Waterford, Conn.; Steve Stucynski, 31, Bear Lake, Minn.; Bob Koehl, 29, and Dimitri Haniotes, 24, the "trenchmasters" in charge of Spyros Iakovidis's two crews. All are enrolled in the Graduate Division of Arts and Sciences, except for Barbara Hayden, who received her Ph.D. from Penn this year. All are American but Haniotes, a Greek who went to the United States at 12, then to Roselle Park High School and Rutgers. Plus Michael Toumazou, 28, a Greek Cypriot from Bryn Mawr with degrees in physics, classics, and Greek architecture; he looks like Ilie Nastase.

It is a United Nations of experience and ethnic extractions, with specialties ranging from Bronze Age lamps to papyrology, past digs from Port Jervis to Israel. It is also suspicious. As a lawyer, I have been on one side of this fence, talking carefully to reporters about cases I knew they would mangle. Now I am on the other side, trying to penetrate that silent mistrust. It is the protective sense of craft, the respectful attitude of apprentice toward master they show Iakovidis, the unspoken belief that honesty will be made ridiculous because the hearer cannot understand. But lanky Streed is pining away for lack of a Frisbee, not exactly your common Greek consumer product. We donate one from our children's emergency pack. Then we contribute two airline bottles of vodka to the cause. By the time several of the students go off with the children for pizza somewhere, the ice has been broken; we are over the wall.

Spyros Iakovidis is reminiscing about choices. His great-grandfather was the first professor of archaeology at the University of Athens; his great-aunt married a Swiss archaeologist. There

ARCHAEOLOGISTS NEED QUICK HANDS AND A SHARP EYE

MICHAEL TOUMAZOU



On the site: 'Turning soil is like ripping a page from a book and burning it.'

was a "smell of archaeology in the house," at least until 4-year-old Spyros told his father, a successful insurance executive, that he wanted to be an archaeologist and nearly caused a stroke. "Fortunately," Iakovidis concludes dryly, "he died as I was entering university and did not live to see what a disgrace to the family I have become."

The dawn really is rosy-fingered, reaching across the harbor from the humpbacked island where Theologos's fishermen dive for oysters. We groan upward with it and are on the site by 8:00 a.m. It is already 90° and wisps of dust rise from the rectangular foundation where the trenchmasters' groups are rhythmically breaking squares of ground, one group inching along each side of a foot-high interior wall which splits the rectangle's length. On our first visit, we thought this building enormous, a ruined temple (not knowing the Mycenaeans did not build temples); now we can see it as a minor piece of a plan so large it does not even register on the untrained eye. Bob Koehl, clipboard in hand, leaves his crew to give us a quick tour of the site. He is tall, amiable, eager to please, a curly-haired New York version of Pat Boone; the clipboard is his official work diary, excavation property in which every development is methodically noted and described. After getting

hooked on archaeology at 12, Koehl trained at Pomona College and on expeditions in Komos, Paros, Israel. He is still high. As we reach the residence, he waxes eloquent about the processional nature of the site, its "Egyptian, almost Pharaonic monumentality." Suddenly he stops, gestures toward Iakovidis's distant white figure. "If you write that," he continues in lowered tones, "Make sure you say it's my theory, not his."

Lynn LiDonnici is hacking away at the packed dirt with her shovel and explaining why she came here—the need to get out of libraries, the chance to evaluate evidence. The conventional catalogue continues. Reed Phythyon trundles past with a 1,000-pound wheelbarrow in his self-styled role as "secondary material removal engineer," alias dumper of sifted dirt. They look at each other through the veils of grit which trickle down their faces. "Tell the real reason," he pants, taking in her rather ample form: "To lose weight."

Like birdwatching or skeetshooting, archaeology needs quick hands and a sharp eye. Once the goal was treasure. Now context is everything, for the soil can speak volumes and is gone forever once it is dug. "Turning soil is like ripping a page from a book and burn-

ing it," quotes Dimitri Haniotes, the other trenchmaster. "You had better read it well." Haniotes is big and quiet, with a faint resemblance to Richard Boone. He was hooked at 18 during his first year at Rutgers, has dug on the island of Paros, unearthed stone tools at a 35,000-year-old site in New Jersey, done underwater surveys at Pylos and off Crete. He also helped Iakovidis map Gla in 1979. Last night, over a supper of what appeared to be mastodon chops, he said quite simply that he hoped to learn from Iakovidis not to let theories outrun evidence. Now he's explaining his own evidence, showing the layers of fallen mudbrick, destruction ash, and red floor soil his crew has uncovered, pointing out the scorched pieces of what may once have been a leaden bowl. I can see what he means while he's talking. If I blink, it all looks like tan clay again.

In a burst of excitement at linking up, I am telling Iakovidis how I have always wanted to go on a dig. He looks at me and starts to laugh. "That's because you have never been on one." I watch the crew grunting, sweating, down in the yellow dust with hand mattocks and work gloves. I am beginning to see what he means.

Elizabeth Wise, '84 C, is a bright-eyed Navy brat who grew up all over the world before graduating from the Cathedral School in Washington, D.C. At 19, with her hair swept back like a sculpture from the Age of Pericles, she is also the expedition's mascot, unfailingly polite, blonde, and dear. "Oh, me?" she replies to the standard question. "I just came to learn how to dig." Without formal training, she got here on sheer charm and willpower, after volunteer stints cataloguing Mediterranean pieces in the Metropolitan's storeroom and helping computerize the University Museum's inventory. At the moment, she is chopping at a section of fallen mudbrick, unaware that her scenario is being replayed. A few yards away stands a small figure watching intently. It is my younger son, Danny, who has found an unused mattock and dangles it wistfully from one hand. Five minutes later, she is giving him newly discovered shards to bag and explaining how they are classified. He knows we are not supposed to participate in the excavation. He knows that the Greek Service allows only listed workers to dig. Still, he chops away beside her. The mascot has a mascot; the two squatting figures mirror each other, as Iakovidis cheers him on.

—MICHAEL H. LEVIN

Euboea. We are still not sure the connection will be made. The village's three dozen buildings stand at pink and blue attention on the dirt road fronting a harbor in which moored fishing boats rock. The scene is perfect, a mirage of Greece; but the only hotel which begins with a *Psi* has never heard of Iakovidis, and all three hotels are booked. Without a room for the night, we discard caution for a long swim in the shallows, leaving a hopeless message at the *Psi*.

On the way out of town, at the opposite side of the harbor, we pass a tiny inn called the Psaropoula, decide to spin the wheel one more time. It is a jackpot.

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, GLA REMAINS A LONELY ROCK OFF THE BEATEN PATH.

Iakovidis and his students are staying there; the inn even has rooms. (What if there are no toilet seats? At least the toilets work.) We pile out, register, collapse into wooden chairs on the *taratza* overlooking the water.

An incongruous figure in spotless white shirt, crisp white pants, and white shoes appears in the doorway amid squalling children and undershirted workmen taking their ease. He looks like Ahura Mazda parting the forces of darkness. "Yayy," says Danny, "There's the Puseffer."

"Aha," says Puseffer Iakovidis in a satisfied tone. "You have found me, and I understand that you are staying here. You could do worse."

Ten minutes later, we are devouring homemade olives and goat cheese with cold beer under a grape arbor roofing the best table on the terrace. Iakovidis is expertly sketching the site and deflating my enthusiasm. The geographical adventure is over. The true adventure has begun.

The rock of Gla rises like a flat-backed serpent 20 meters high and 900 meters long at the neck of the bottle-shaped Kopaic Plain. Once this plain was the Lake of Kopais, a marsh fed by springs draining through fissures in the surrounding mountains, the home of a Neolithic settlement and assorted diseases. About 1300 B.C., the Mycenaeans of Orchomenos drained it by construct-

ing a huge dam for hundreds of kilometers around the plain's circumference, converting the springs to irrigation waters and the swamp to a source of immense agricultural wealth. From the dam to the rock, they built two gigantic causeways. They circled the top of the rock with a fortification wall several meters high (made of massive uncut boulders), entered via three bastioned gates and a huge ramp leading to the fourth (main) gate, protected by two bastions. And in the interior space—an area several times as large as Mycenae—they built structures of symmetry and spaciousness wholly unlike the hodgepodge of other Mycenaean citadels: Two symmetrical guard towers flanking the entrance path from the main gate. Two rectangular buildings at right angles to the path beyond them, each a mirror image of the other. Two narrow buildings more than a hundred meters long, also mirror images, stretching away beyond these. At the highest point of the rock, the focal point of the space created by these structures, a large L-shaped building with wings possibly joined by a staircase, each wing so symmetrical it could be placed atop the other without an inch to spare.

Sixty years later, the whole construction is destroyed by enemy action. At about 1250 B.C., the great dams are filled, parts of the fortification wall pulled down. A roaring fire topples the mud-brick walls of the interior buildings, turns their timber to charcoal, melts the tops of their stone bases into lime. On the rock, only foundations are left, mute witnesses to birdsong and the sifting winds which soon cover them. The Plain of Kopais becomes a swamp again, and remains swampland until 1892, when a French company drains it, using modern hydraulic methods.

In 1893, a Frenchman, Antoine de Ridder, briefly excavates the rock but seems to misread the evidence. It is the first flush after Schliemann, when archaeology is a kind of privateers' race for the most glamorous treasure; de Ridder finds only pottery shards and throws them away. After 1955, John Threpsiades of the Greek Archaeological Service conducts a series of professional excavations, accurately maps the rock and part of its strata, but dies before he can publish his findings or a report interpreting his work.

Throughout recorded history, Gla remains forgotten, a lonely rock off the beaten path. It has no graves, no tombs, no gold, no myth-shrouded standing ruins like Mycenae, no picturesque water supply. Only one person, a sharp-eyed German architect writing before the turn of the century, connects the rock with the gigantic drainage works—until Iakovidis arrives with his Penn team of

a dozen students in the summer of 1981, determined to make sure it is not forgotten again.

These are the known facts. The interpretation is locked in Iakovidis's head, to be tested against what he finds now or later, since "No excavation is ever finished." He continues sardonically: "They are only discontinued for lack of people or funds or energy . . . or because they have reached a logical stopping point to support a theory. There is no limit, no way to predict what you may find."

For Spyros Iakovidis, 58, the "Puseffer"—professor of classical archaeology, curator of the University Museum's Mediterranean section, co-director of the excavations at Mycenae, Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Antiquaries at London—the road to Gla was as tortuous as ours, though more bureaucratic. It began not as a series of accidents *à la* Vonnegut, but as a series of tombs. Mycenaean tombs—to be exact, 219 of them, which he excavated at a huge Bronze Age cemetery for the first 11 years of his professional life before growing sick of them and becoming the leading international expert on Mycenaean fortifications. In 1971, he got interested in the shards by which Threpsiades had dated Gla, obtained Threpsiades's notebooks from his widow, unearthed de Ridder's reports and the engineers' articles, found there were many more questions to resolve.

"De Ridder called the L-shaped building a palace. But it is not a palace; it is too small, too modest, and has none of the characteristics. He called the area between these long buildings an *agora* ["meeting place"] but it is not a meeting place. There was no town, no houses, no population to meet. It was not a city, not self-sustaining. It was not really a fortress, because it had no protected water supply to withstand a siege. And there is space there for 10 times the space of Mycenae. So why did they build this small?" In short, what was the purpose of these strange symmetrical structures? What happened between their building and destruction? What would the likely answers to these questions imply? Iakovidis could use the archaeologist's time-honored dodge and call them ritual objects, meaning "We don't know." He could also try to find out.

The choice is made for him during a teaching year at Heidelberg. Waiting in the foyer of the Landes ("County") Museum one rainy Sunday in 1977, he gazes idly at a dim painting he has seen a hundred times before, suddenly realizes it is a picture of Gla as a marsh with the ruined rock rising above it. It was done in the 1830s by a Bavarian named Rottman, whose other works all hang in Munich. There is no reason Rottman should have painted Gla, no reason this

canvas should have found its way here. The darkened painting beckons; it is an invitation, a sign.

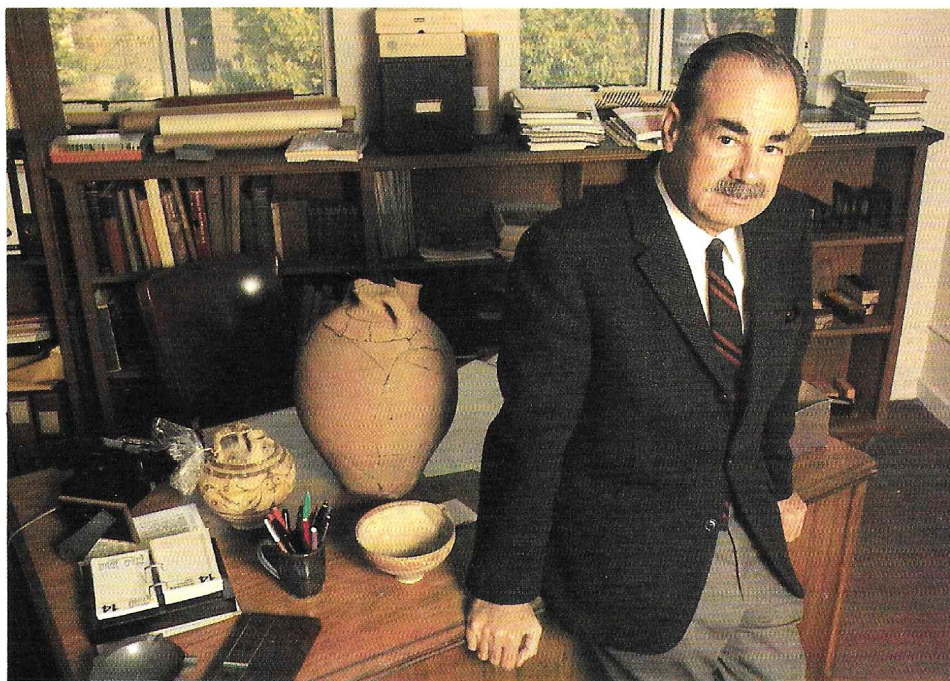
In 1977-78, during a year at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, he starts decoding Threpsiades's notes, dovetailing them into the rest of the evidence. In the fall of 1978, he comes to Penn, spends the next summer at Gla "going over every rock," correcting his predecessors' observations, building hypotheses. In 1980, he plays his hand: he applies to the government's Archaeological Service for a permit and to the private Archaeological Society of Athens for funds to dig. He also asks the University to provide living expenses for a student crew. Thanks to his reputation, funds are virtually assured.

But the permit application is still a gamble, for it must crawl through the entrails of the Archaeological Service, up to the Secretary General of the Interior Ministry, and out to the Service's local *ephor* ("county director") at Thebes. There is no way to predict when the permit will actually issue. It has not issued when he arrives in Greece in early June. A few weeks later, the students start arriving, having paid their own transportation. Faced with canceling or going forward, he sets the team's first meeting in Athens on Friday, June 26. Two days before this meeting, the authorization appears. The crew drives triumphantly to Thebes, personally hands the permit over to the *ephor*, collects necessary tools. They arrive at Gla scant days before we do and spend the interval clearing yard-high thistles from the site.

So why is Gla important? Why is he here? Iakovidis ruminates the last olive, hunches forward in the purpling dusk beneath the grape arbor: "First, to date Gla as closely as possible by the pottery in undisturbed strata, to show whether tradition was right and what happened . . . to establish it was part of a vast engineering scheme, not an independent citadel; the residence of two high Mycenaean officials of equal rank, probably depending from Orchomenos, one responsible for the drainage works, the other for crop storage and transport . . . to explain the political organization by which these small states, Orchomenos and probably some lesser neighboring kings, not more than townships really, came together and accomplished this task. . . . To shed light on the end of Mycenaean culture, or its continuation."

The answers are persuasive, professionally correct. But they are only partial. The full answer is suggested in this unexpected intensity, the figure no longer just courteous, but fully alive. It is the thrill of the intellectual hunter, the drive for deductive reasoning which

ROSEMARIE CERTO



Back at Penn, Spyros Iakovidis pauses in his office at the University Museum.

fires fictional detectives back to Dostoevsky, that endless fascinated sifting of evidence until the box is sealed and all the mysterious facts fit. Listen to this, for example: "These very long buildings have one entrance on each side. But although the thresholds are no higher than a foot from the ground, there is a ramp. Now what do you need a ramp for at this low level? Obviously, you have to drag over it objects which are very heavy or bulky, like a sack or jar. And Threpsiades found in this long building mainly pieces from jars . . . these long buildings were storehouses." Or this: "My original scheme was to cut a couple of trenches across the width of this building. But you always have to improvise because no excavation is exactly alike. When I saw that the surface inside is more or less level across the width, but from end to end the ground is not level, I have to provide an explanation. And to provide it, I have to dig lengthwise, because if you find a building which has a level accumulation, you may have one layer, two layers, 20 layers . . . and they will tell you much about the succession of levels and the dates. But they will not tell you anything about the *story* of the level, why it was deposited that way. So, why did accumulation come here and not there? One explanation is that [one] wall, when the building was destroyed, fell down on top of the other."

He stands abruptly. He is digging for Edmund Hillary's reason: because the unknown is there.

Other reasons for coming here emerge as I talk with the students (see box on

pp. 26-27). So here were three roads to Gla, I thought, sliding down the tumbled remains of the ramp for the last time. Ours, Iakovidis's, and the students'. Only later do I realize that these different roads may be the same. The week we left Boeotia, Israel bombed Beirut, riots erupted all over England, dire warnings to Russia were uttered, the usual scores of American summer murders occurred. How different, after all, was Gla's tale of alliance and rivalry, great accomplishment and violent ends? If Gla's builders were primitive, how far have we advanced? What theories will distant diggers test against plastic and girders, our shards?

In the end, the dead past is not dead. It is all around us, waiting to be dug up and given voice.

It says that all roads lead to Gla.

It says we are standing there now.

POSTSCRIPT: After five weeks of digging and more arduous weeks evaluating the results, Iakovidis and his crew pieced together their finds. In the two rooms they excavated, they had found piles of burnt wheat seeds, large earthenware jars (equally burnt), and thousands of shards providing good dating material. The rooms were storerooms for grain and some kind of liquid, probably olive oil, which would explain the intensity of the destroying fire. They were built around 1300 B.C. and destroyed about 1250 B.C., slightly before Thebes. The oral tradition was right. When Iakovidis returned, he would dig elsewhere to test a different strand of his theory. The first chapter was written; another detective story had begun.

END