1871–1945

HARRIET BOYD HAWES

JUST LIKE A Volcano

In her book *Born to Rebel: The Life of Harriet Boyd Hawes*, the author, Boyd Hawes's daughter, Mary, recalls a strange scene. They were traveling together on a small cruise ship and had arrived at the island of Santorini in Greece. Her famous mother still asleep, Mary walked onto the boat's deck to find that the engines had been turned off and that the world had been unexpectedly transformed into a "wonderland." They were afloat "inside the crater of a vast volcano." From within, "its huge black and coloured walls rose straight up, in places a thousand feet, from the bluest waters . . . Every eight or ten minutes great clouds of smoke or vapour coiled upwards from the cone, called the New Furnace; and a rumble or roar would break from the volcano."[1] The year was 1926, Harriet was fifty-five years old (her daughter sixteen), and it seemed perfectly apt that the woman who lived her life with explosive power should casually journey into the heart of an active volcano. Afterwards,

mother and daughter scaled the sheer sides of the rock face and zigzagged to the top on donkeyback, just to see a beautiful old monastery and its ruins.

To compare Harriet Boyd Hawes to a volcano is no overstatement. Her tiny frame of just over five feet packed the power of a giant, and she exerted a decisive and active will always bent on achieving the things she believed in. Her life's work included Greek archaeology—and lots of it—as well as nursing for the Red Cross in the direst of war conditions, teaching, lecturing, and being a wife and a mother. She also had a tireless commitment to politics and justice that brought her into private conversations with illustrious figures such as Queen Olga of Greece and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Deliberately seeking Boyd Hawes out, the U.S. president's wife took her by the hand and said, "I want so much to hear what you have to say."[2] Everyone did, and even if they didn't, Boyd Hawes typically made herself heard anyway. She was, as her daughter described, "super-charged."

She was also an American, one of the few female archaeologists of the period who didn't come from European soil. That didn't mean she wouldn't make her way across the Atlantic, though. Undecided about what to pursue in life, Boyd Hawes was traveling through Europe on a "grand tour" in 1896 in the company of other young women and under vigilant chaperone. She knew she wanted advanced learning in either history or the classics, which she loved, and she was pondering over where to study when an acquaintance asked, "Why go to England and study Homer and Plato under dull, grey skies, when Greece is there to teach you more than you can ever learn in books?"[3]

It seems that was all she needed. Turning her back on the ivy-walled libraries of her East Coast youth, Boyd Hawes moved to Greece in 1896 to attend the American School of Classical Studies

at Athens. At twenty-five, riding a bicycle, skirts blown back in the city breezes, threading her way down Athenian streets, lost in the shadowy wonders of the Acropolis, she was ready to devote herself to archaeology, though first she had to convince the school that no, she really did *not* want to be a librarian.

In time Boyd Hawes revolutionized understandings of local archaeology and chronology on Crete, single-handedly directed excavations for multiple seasons with crews of one hundred men, and made legendary contributions to the emerging science—then more precise and respected than ever—of archaeology.

UNLIKE OTHER WOMEN in this book, who were raised by mothers who encouraged, to some degree, their daughters' independence, Boyd Hawes grew up exclusively in the company of boys. Just a baby when her mother died, Boyd Hawes was raised by her father along with four brothers. She was the youngest, born on October 11, 1871. Her days were filled with playing army soldiers beside her brother Alex; she hardly ever played with dolls or teacups. Alex, the third-youngest sibling, was eleven years her senior and, in the absence of her mother, became a kind of parental figure to Boyd Hawes.

She was a tomboy in skirts. Her hair had been chopped short during a bout of scarlet fever, and as her daughter, Mary, would later recall in her book, Boyd Hawes's "father tried hard to 'rouse domestic tastes' and induce womanliness in his small daughter by having a fine doll's-house built. She secretly liked it with its pretty sets of furniture, but under her brother Allen's martial influence it became a fortress."[4] The dollhouse was occupied by military coup. Happily immersed in games of imaginary war and political intrigue, Boyd Hawes would scramble around and "scout" for the boys. Firefighting was another favorite interest. The whole

family loved the fire department—some were even in the business—and they'd delight in going to pyrotechnic shows for fun. A fire alarm would sound through the house, alerting relatives who worked as firemen that they were needed at the station, noise ricocheting off walls, making the five children wild. To match that chaos, the fourth floor of the house was filled with a type of zoo where the children kept a collection of tame pet squirrels that would leap from the tops of doors onto Boyd Hawes's extended arms. Sports and parades, accidents and roughhousing injuries—the Boyd household was a rowdy, happy scene and it was through all this commotion that Boyd Hawes tumbled out a confident, if unconventional, little lady.

Her beloved brother Alex was a formative presence in her life. He introduced her to the study of classics, cheered her along as she entered womanhood, supported her unconditionally, and teased her affectionately about her messy hair and impatient manners. Unfortunately, Alex fell ill and died when he was still a young man. He left Boyd Hawes all of his estate, which she used to finance future endeavors, including college and travel. She was in her last year at Smith College when he died and, deeply grieved by the loss, felt her "heart was not in it [her studies]."[5] Still, she finished her B.A. in classics (emphasis on Greek) and then had to decide what to do next. She wanted to help those in need and so was torn between teaching and nursing.

Nursing was a recurring interest in Boyd Hawes's life, and sometimes it consumed her whole. Other times, it hovered in the background waiting only to be summoned to return front and center. When her passions were stirred she'd drop everything (her schooling, even her family) to join a war effort. This was not work undertaken down the street, with coffee breaks and a hot

bath at night, but work that involved gaining passage on military ships, lying flat on one's back, forbidden to light a match for fear of enemy strike, and traveling great distances to be dropped on the outskirts of a raging battle.

Boyd Hawes never shied from harm's way. She threw herself into her work with the Red Cross and other organizations and devoted her time and superhuman energy to caring for injured and diseased soldiers in the Greco-Turkish War of 1897, the Spanish-American War of 1898, and World War 1. She assigned herself selflessly to "death tents,"—where men who had no chance of recovery were taken. There she spoon-fed them milk and arrowroot and changed the dirty straw that served as their mattresses.[6] She was ferociously good at transforming an empty field or abandoned building into an orderly hospital and sorting out the details of receiving medical supplies, delegating staff, and so on. The accolades from government officials and the heartfelt thanks from her patients and their families leave one wondering, a century later, how one could ever do equal good. It's been noted in several accounts of Boyd Hawes's life that her work as a nurse helped her to excel as a field archaeologist. As director of excavations, just as when she was a life-saving nurse, she could transform chaos into order and command the respect of men.

With her instinct for compassion, Boyd Hawes also tried a brief stint of teaching at an impoverished boarding school in North Carolina's "Black Belt," where as a white woman she was in the minority, and not because of her sex. In sharp contrast, her next teaching gig was at a finishing school, where well-to-do girls were groomed for their entrance exams to university.[7] She eventually wearied of teaching pre-college students and decided to pursue her own advanced studies.

Embarking on a grand tour of Europe, in the company of other girls her age, she met the man who tempted her with the open skies of Greece: the place that could "teach you more than you can ever learn in books." When she left for Athens to join the nearly all-male ranks at the American School of Classical Studies on fellowship, she traveled without a chaperone—highly unusual in her day and age. It was almost shocking.

AS AN UNDERGRADUATE student at Smith College, Boyd Hawes had heard Amelia Edwards's lecture *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile*, which was a sensation. Harriet was bitten by the archaeology bug, and now she hoped to pursue active field investigations, which Edwards had described so vividly. There was only one snag in Boyd Hawes's plans: the director of the American School in Athens, through power or influence, kept the women from excavating. Some male professors felt that women shouldn't even be allowed to join class field trips to the country's notable archaeology sites. The physical demands of wielding a pickaxe, even a hand trowel, were seen as not just unladylike but also as strenuously impossible. Ladies just didn't belong in the dirt.

Boyd Hawes was undeterred and fixed on finding a way to put her own shovel in the ground. She'd already concluded that research and libraries were not her destiny. Studying books was tedious, an effort that didn't come easily to her or provide much satisfaction. Although women doing graduate work in archaeology were expected to become librarians, curatorial assistants, or a whole host of other jobs that kept a dress clean and a lady's complexion untouched by a full day's labor in scorching sun, Boyd Hawes knew her "fit" was in the field. A lady who felt best using her hands, busy at work, she liked to see the product of her effort at the end of the day, whether it was soldiers carefully

LEFT: Large vases inscribed with geometric patterns, used in funereal ceremonies
RIGHT: Bracelets, ring, and finely crafted ceramic containers

bandaged and resting in bed or old stonewalls and intact clay pots etched with vines and octopi lined up in the sun.

ONE SUNDAY MORNING in April 1900, Boyd Hawes awoke and "lay in bed in one of those delicious dreamy moods when everything seems possible."[8] Why not try to go to Crete, where few had ever done any archaeological work? She could make a real contribution, and she could avoid the pitfalls of trying to win permission to excavate near Athens (an area already much claimed by the male faculty at her school). If all went well, she could make a full expedition. A real chance to dig. She referred to her plans for expedition as a "campaign," and with luck she would find a site all her own. This campaign would become the first of many.

She used all the connections she had, then sought and received the many permissions required. With some financial backing from the Archaeological Institute of America and her own

fellowship money, a good deal of support, and a bit of fire in the belly, Boyd Hawes set sail to the Cretan city of Herakleion in the spring of 1900. Her passage was made in a dinghy boat, skipping south across the wine-dark sea to the land fabled in Homer's *Odyssey* to contain ninety ancient cities.[9]

Archaeology in Greece contains layers of history: not just Greek and Roman but a mix of all the diverse strands of cultural influence that comprised the ancient Mediterranean world for thousands of years. Underfoot rests the evidence of lives stretching from Neolithic times to the Early Iron Age and through the Dark Ages. It's a sequence made of broken cups, bones, crushed mosaics, and coins. Harriet wanted to focus on what was then referred to as the pre-Mycenean phase, later to be renamed the Minoan, in large part thanks to her discoveries. It was an early period that dated from 3000 BC to 1450 BC and had originated on Crete.

Boyd Hawes traveled the countryside in search of a site that warranted use of her excavation permit (it could only be used in *one area*, so she had to choose wisely). She traveled by mule and she poked around caves; accommodations were always sorted on the fly. From village to village she inquired about what artifacts the locals might have found while plowing their land. One day, Boyd Hawes's travel companion, a man named Pappadhias, who wore traditional costume made of yards of fabric wrapped around his waist as a skirt, rode on ahead. He always made a fantastic impression, tall and regal, a walking celebration of Cretan pride. When Boyd Hawes arrived she noted, "an altogether exaggerated opinion of our importance had spread throughout the village . . . Ladies attended by a man in this garb must be great indeed! Soon sealstones, fragments of pottery and bronze would be brought to us quietly, and men would offer to show the fields where these had been unearthed."[10]

She eventually settled on an area recommended to her: the Kavousi region. In need of laborers, she invited men from the nearby village to interview for her workforce. Based on their apparent muscle mass and pleasant demeanor, she selected ten favorites, and with the exception of one, they would remain with her as senior crew for the rest of her archaeological seasons in Greece.[11] Boyd Hawes conducted light excavations at ten sites. By the power of her wheelbarrows, spades, buckets, rope, and workmen's energy, the work was productive. They found a museum's worth of artifacts and could list bronze arrowheads and jewelry, gold leaf, glass, iron swords, vases, spearheads, and a "thin bronze plate engraved with sphinxes, griffins, lions, and human figures" as their inventory.[12] In one location she found an untouched tomb dating to the Iron Age and containing "four skeletons, iron weapons, and over forty vases."[13] No grand palaces or major surprises were unearthed, but the expedition was a steady-handed success. When it was over, Boyd Hawes, proud and proven, returned to the States to lecture and publicize her work.

After hearing Boyd Hawes present her findings from Kavousi at the general meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America in 1900, the secretary of the society, Mrs. Cornelius Stevenson, who held a similar passion for Cretan archaeology,[14] drummed up financial support on behalf of the institute to continue Boyd Hawes's quest (the funding was eventually compromised by bureaucracy, however). She also helped provide the first flicker of international support, as well as an institution on which Boyd Hawes could now depend instead of on her school and fickle fellowships, and most of all, credibility in the eyes of science. Boyd Hawes's career was taking shape.

Impatient for the nickels and dimes to fall into place, Boyd Hawes embarked on her second campaign in the early new year

of 1901. She brought a friend, Blanche Wheeler, with her. A former classmate from Smith, Blanche had a background in classical languages and art. The two women made their way to Crete on a ship that "not only pitched and rolled but 'wriggled,'" and they were forced to survive "the stormy seas on a strange, though successful, diet of raw oysters and ice cream."[15] Their journey was three weeks long.

Upon arrival (and likely after a meal that included some solid bread and other non-slippery fare), Boyd Hawes began to comb the landscape once more for the site or sites she would excavate. She was looking for something more substantial than a scattering of tombs, more cohesive than the ten separate sites in Kavousi. She was after a Bronze Age site and ideally a settlement of some kind. The going was not easy. Weather was rough—"thirty-six hours of incessant rain that caused serious floods"—and they were camped in modest little stone huts. These conditions would have been endurable if the archaeology had been good, but that too was looking grim. Every so often Boyd Hawes would stop the donkeys and dismount to examine potsherds littered beneath their hooves. She described their attempts to start minor excavations at sites with a little promise as "meager." And then even her eyes started to play a trickery when

> On holidays and on days when the ground was too wet for digging we rode up and down Kavousi plain and the neighboring coast hill seeking for the bronze-age settlement, which I was convinced lay in the lowlands somewhere near the sea. It was discouraging work for my eyes soon came to see walls and the tops of beehive tombs in every chance grouping of stones and we went to many a rise of ground

> which at a distance looked a perfect Mycenean hill, but proved to be all rock."[16]

Nothing worse than day after day of searching for something as small as a buried town in a place as big and open as the sun-baked countryside. Especially on a schedule and budget. Yet she kept at it, hopeful that she would make the great discovery she felt certain was out there.

Rumor of the ladies and their search had circulated around the villages. George Perakis, a local "peasant antiquarian" from the town of Vasiliki, knew of a promising seaside hill where he had collected bits of pottery and seen old walls. As proof, he sent along a nice stone seal from the spot. Boyd Hawes found his story "too interesting to pass unheeded." Wasting no time in visiting the place, they kicked their donkeys to a trot.

She definitely had her site. Surface pottery revealed the curvilinear patterns she knew signified a Bronze Age occupation. Harriet summoned her original crew from the previous campaign and had them bring in more help. Assuming that they could begin a day's work without her, and that all would be slow going as archaeology normally is, Boyd Hawes and Wheeler journeyed to a nearby town so that they could catch up on writing letters. When she returned,

> Men were scattered all over the hillside excitedly clamouring to show their finds—many fragments of vases, a bronze knife, a spear point, house walls and, best of all, a well-paved road with a threshold and a gutter. The workers swelled with pride as, wielding picks and shovels, they amassed basket-loads of history. This was clearly something big and, judging from the pottery, it was of Bronze Age, or Minoan.

> The evidence was so promising that Harriet went back to Kavousi and hired fifteen new hands. There was no difficulty in getting them; few could resist the appeal of unknown treasure.[17]

The famous archaeological site of Gournia had been found. The preservation of everyday life was so great that the site was nicknamed "Minoan Pompeii." It was a goldmine, not so much in wealth and treasure as in valuable information. Here was a full settlement where the daily lives of people who farmed and fished, made shoes, wove blankets, made pottery, hammered bronze, carved stone, and looked out to the sea for trade boats and news, could be uncovered and understood. It was a new and critical link in the chronology of Mediterranean archaeology. As the site's significance became increasingly clear, Boyd Hawes rushed to send a telegram to the American Exploration Society. It read: "Discovered Gournia—Mycenaean site, street, houses, pottery, bronzes, stone jars."[18] This was the Eureka moment, her dreams come true.

Gournia eventually encompassed a full three seasons of excavation (1901, 1903, and 1904).[19] Each year Boyd Hawes returned to Crete with her crew of one hundred or more men—and nearly a dozen young girls who helped to wash the potsherds—she worked to piece the architecture and artifacts of the ancient town into a semblance of understanding. She directed the men from morning until night; handled the complicated logistics of digging, mapping, and recording; and oversaw matters such as payroll and means of dissuading the workers from looting. She had reason to be concerned that when her watchful eye was elsewhere, they might pocket and sell off unique finds for a high price. All in all it was a massive effort, one that Boyd Hawes adored while

ABOVE: Hawes in the field in Crete with her assistants and dog

living with her friend Blanche in two rooms near the site, tucked up "over a storehouse at the coastguard station of Pachyammos, which they shared with a colony of rats."[20] Rats didn't matter when you each day were uncovering treasures underfoot.

Boyd Hawes operated on the same principle as Flinders Petrie, whom she visited later in Egypt and who had been so steadfastly supported by Amelia Edwards. Like Petrie, who recognized worth not just in the golden trophy finds but also in the nuts and bolts of more humble sites, Boyd Hawes operated on the principle that history is made by small acts. Yes, the palaces and thrones of antiquity are mighty and beautiful, but the little decorations on potsherds and their changes over time can illuminate the style of a whole society, from rich to poor. The presence or absence of certain types of stone or fishhook styles and the influence of architecture can reveal much more about old trade networks and spheres of influence than a single cache of ruby jewels ever could. In Boyd Hawes's own words, "As of most subjects which deserve

any investigation, the more we know the more we want to know. Palaces and tombs are not sufficient; we want also the homes of the people, for without an insight into the life of 'the many' we can not rightly judge the civilization of any period."[21] Boyd Hawes embodied archaeology's turn away from treasure seeking and toward data gathering.

With her finds stacking high, Boyd Hawes was all the more remarkable as an archaeologist because she did two things: first, published her discoveries in timely and thorough fashion, and second, became the first woman invited to lecture for the Archaeological Institute of America. This was major. It announced her stature as a true scientist in a field of men. Her talks were not in the engaging and popular style of Amelia Edwards; they were sharp and technical. Likewise, Boyd Hawes's story of archaeology wasn't told through a lens of emotion. It was more a tale of perseverance and character. The *Philadelphia Public Ledger* of March 5, 1902, reported on Boyd's success at Gournia:

> A woman has shattered another tradition and successfully entered unaided a field hitherto occupied almost exclusively by men, namely archaeological exploration . . . The results of Miss Boyd's work must be considered remarkable, not only because of their character, but because she achieved them alone. Other women have made names in the fields of archaeological research, but these have done so in company with their husbands, who shared glory with them. But Miss Boyd's work is entirely her own.[22]

In a similar vein, Mrs. Stevenson commented: "So few women have achieved distinction as field archaeologists that Miss Boyd's success must be greeted with peculiar pride by Americans . . . it was reserved to an American woman to undertake

ABOVE: The field crew at Gournia, including Boyd Hawes and Blanche Wheeler (second row from the front, first and second from the right)

singlehandedly the business responsibility and scientific conduct of an expedition."[23]

They missed mention of Zelia Nuttall, but she was so rooted in Mexico, and her childhood such a patchwork of European cities, that her American story was diluted. Boyd Hawes's work energized U.S. patriotism. And while not altogether accurate to say an American was the first woman to conduct an archaeological expedition—Gertrude Bell, a Brit, did that by herself too—Boyd Hawes was the first to lead a full-scale excavation alone, without an archaeologist spouse by her side or a team of other trained archaeologists. Her position as a true pioneer in the field was applauded. The accolades kept coming. Her publications were highly regarded. Would she remain a bright and historic star in the canons of archaeological history and its scholars, or not?

Throughout her excavations at Gournia, Boyd Hawes brought in assistants and provided them with some of the best in field excavation training. Two of those colleagues were Richard Berry

ABOVE: Diggers at Gournia, where a tremendous number of artifacts and archaeological features were uncovered

Seager and Edith Hall, another Smith graduate who would soon make a name for herself in archaeology. Some later publications would, outrageously, credit the young man Seager with the discovery and excavation of Gournia. Others would describe the work as a joint collaboration between Boyd Hawes and Seager. With the passage of time, Boyd Hawes's breakthrough accomplishments were clouded, erased in places, and slighted. She would one day reflect on "having learned how easily women's acts are ascribed to men or completely wiped out."[24] Boyd Hawes didn't hesitate to point out the facts very, very clearly. She had found the buried city. The excavation permit was in her name. Gournia was, as archaeology sites go, all hers.

"HUNT DEAD CITIES AND FIND LOVE."[25] That's what one of the newspaper headlines shouted when Boyd Hawes announced her engagement to British anthropologist Charles Henry Hawes in 1905. He had come to visit Gournia while touring the region

to measure people's heads in hopes of determining the origins of races. Harriet and Henry's first meeting on site was uneventful (she gave him a quick tour), but later they found each other again on a boat headed to Greece. Their daughter notes that though this meeting was a crucial turning point, "they did not speak of marriage, except the 'captive' variety, and then strictly in anthropological terms."[26] Boyd Hawes was thirty-four years old, and Henry wanted to marry her. She liked him too.

They wed in a small ceremony at an Episcopal church on March 3, 1906. Nine months later, Alexander Boyd was born, and four years after that daughter Mary (future author of her mother's biography) joined the family. Out of the dusty field, Boyd Hawes was now very much in the kitchen. She had two young children to look after, a husband, meals to make, a house to tend—and a massive publication on her archaeological excavations at Gournia to complete and publish. She pulled this off before Alex could walk, but it was taxing and she had to adjust to juggling her professional passions with the domestic duties she had signed on for. Her daughter would note that "the role of housewife was totally out of character for Harriet" and that "stories of her domestic efforts became legendary." She forgot her babies in their carriages while she shopped, cooked ambitious menus with unfortunate results, and found housework to be almost offensive, not because a person shouldn't be clean and make their home a pleasant place, but because men were not asked or expected to do the same. Boyd Hawes had skillfully dealt with large-scale wartime nursing efforts and complex cultural stratigraphy, but a "domestic goddess" she was not.

In spite of the trials (and surely the triumphs too) that Boyd Hawes faced in this next chapter of her life, she reminds us that *she* made the choices for herself; society did not. At the age of

thirty-five, she had already passed the normal marrying age; between 1900 and 1910 the average age of the American bride was just shy of twenty-two.[27] A nonconformist, Boyd Hawes had a successful career and the means to support herself. Her marriage to Henry didn't provide materials comforts, as he was a struggling anthropologist and university lecturer who had much to offer by way of intellectual stimulation but much less in the way of financial support. They struggled to make ends meet. Boyd Hawes had married for love and because she wanted a family. She believed that women's work should be viewed not as duty or humdrum routine, but as art. It was, as she called it, "the art of living," and even when dinner was burning black, she became an active advocate for the worth of a woman's work in all its variations.[28]

YEARS LATER, IN 1925, BOYD HAWES meditated more deeply on the choice women face between career and motherhood. If "choice" is not quite the word—at least for the majority of women at the turn of the twentieth century—then it could be simply called the shared predicament. Can a woman be a pioneer—a convention-crushing rebel who succeeds in a man's world against all odds—and still sing lullabies to her children at night? The question is as old as an archaeological site.

Boyd Hawes summarized her thoughts about this question: "A woman should expect her intellectual life to be interrupted, i.e., she should prepare to give the first 10 years after marriage . . . to her family interests . . . Perhaps she can keep alive her intellectual interests and return to them with new zest and judgment after the ten years."[29]

Perhaps? It's as though a sigh escapes between the lines. After her marriage, Boyd Hawes's fieldwork in Greece did stop, though

she continued to publish. She and Henry co-authored a famous little book called *Crete the Forerunner of Greece;* it received rave reviews and was heralded as "a milestone in the progress of popular acquaintance with results of archaeological research."[30] So while her intellectual interests persisted and found an outlet through the pen, she relinquished her days of digging. One has to wonder how much she missed them.

Forever a volcano, Boyd Hawes eventually threw herself into social issues and politics with the same gusto she had brought to archaeology. She nursed overseas again, leaving her children in the care of a nanny when necessary. And she became more and more devoted to cause of justice and international peace. She never lost her burning urgency to act, and although archaeology was a major chapter, it was truly just one of the many remarkable chapters that made up the story of her life.

Boyd Hawes concluded her thoughts on the decision to be a wife and mother by saying that a woman's "happiness in accepting this interruption will depend largely on her having anticipated it as part of the Good Life."[31] An "interruption" it may have been, but Harriet Boyd Hawes embraced as much living as any person, man or woman, ever could. Never a second wasted, her life was a good one. She died in March 1945, recipient of the first honorary doctorate for her work at Gournia, awarded by her alma mater Smith College, and hero to the multitude of women archaeologists who would follow in her rumbling wake.

ABOVE: Agatha Christie, famous mystery novel writer, circa 1925