

Trinity University Digital Commons @ Trinity

Classical Studies Faculty Research

Classical Studies Department

2007

Joan du Plat Taylor: The Road to Apliki

Nicolle E. Hirschfeld

Trinity University, nhirschf@trinity.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/class_faculty

Part of the [Classics Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Hirschfeld, N. (2007). Joan du Plat Taylor: The road to Apliki. In B. Kling & J. D. Muhly (Vol. Eds.), *Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology: Vol. 134. Joan Du Plat Taylor's excavations at the Late Bronze Age mining settlement at Apliki Karamallos, Cyprus* (pp. 3-6). Sävedalen, Sweden: Paul Åströms Förlag.

This Contribution to Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Classical Studies Department at Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Classical Studies Faculty Research by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact jcostanz@trinity.edu.

Chapter One

Joan du Plat Taylor: The Road to Apliki

NICOLLE HIRSCHFELD

Thirty-two-year-old Joan du Plat Taylor and her friend Judith Dobell [Stylianou] must have created a stir when they arrived at the field offices of the Cyprus Mining Corporation in 1938. For one thing, Joan probably drove, and the sight of an English-woman driving would have been cause enough for comment among the villagers. The few photographs of Joan's cars which survive depict vehicles overflowing with the accoutrements of field excavation, large bundles tied to the roof and hanging off the rear of the wagon. And always dogs perched among the piles of baggage. The road up the Marathasa Valley was not paved, and women and dogs and bumping bundles must have presented a dusty, raucous show as they lurched their way through small villages on the way to the mines.

The Bronze Age site had been discovered by a mining engineer in the course of opening up a new area for the corporation. Contact between the business and administrative communities on the island was close, and the officers of the mining company not only invited the archaeologists but also contributed to the costs of the excavation and provided lodging. And so it was that Joan and Judith set up headquarters in the company clubhouse.

Joan had first come to Cyprus a decade before. Her father had been gassed in the the first World War and the family (Joan was the only child) decided to spend winters in the relatively moderate climate of the island. Within a couple years they built a house on the outskirts of Nicosia and set up permanent residence. Her companions of those early years recall a lifestyle of polo matches, dancing clubs, and charity events:

Joan was brought up by her parents in the way that most girls were brought up in those days: life was not exactly narrow but we were expected to join in with our parents' view; to play bridge, to attend functions, to go to dances and parties, etc. etc. particularly tennis parties, and to take our part in running things such as committees and help orphans and less well off people.... She was allowed to do what she liked within limits. She was an enthusiastic member of the Scottish dancing club. How I loathed that!... Joan

played tennis and golf and was an expert horsewoman. She, like my sister ... was horse-mad. They encouraged other girls to ride: there were only about six other English girls in Nicosia at that time including me.... Eventually, Joan and my sister taught us to play polo. There was already a men's team, one of whose members was her father. We, the girls, were taught by a neighbour of ours, a Colonel Gallagher, who had retired from India and who used to be head of the Police in Cyprus. Now, he was long past riding but used to balance himself on a chair waving his polo stick around to show us the right strokes. One of the girls had to hold him up, very dangerous for her, to avoid being struck. Needless to say, we never won a match but had a certain advantage over the men as our ponies were small and could run in and out between their much bigger horses.¹

The round of social activities introduced Joan to the charismatic archaeologists of the Swedish Cyprus Expedition. In her handwritten notes for a public lecture presented in Nicosia in 1979, Joan du Plat Taylor remembered Einer Gjerstad: "We were fortunate ... that our first visits coincided with Prof. Gjerstad[']s years of work in Cyprus and to a complete novice, he and his team were most kind in showing us there[sic] excavations, and I got my first introduction to real archaeological work and methods from him and his colleagues."² At about the same time, Rupert Gunnis, the British governor's aide-de-camp, issued a plea for volunteers to help in the running of the nascent archaeological museum. Joan responded and worked in the museum souvenir shop and also acted as a guide for the tourists who arrived in caravans of taxis organized by the cruise ships docked at Larnaca. One of Joan's friends remembered that Joan's growing interest in archaeology was not exactly encouraged by her family: "It was in 1933-4 that Joan started to take an interest in archaeology. She had met Professor Gjerstad and had, against her mother's wishes, volunteered to help in the museum. It was largely due to Mr. Dikheos[sic], who was at that time employed by the museum."³ Porphyrios Dikaïos

came to work in the museum in 1929 and was appointed curator two years later. Also in 1931 Joan's family built a permanent residence in Nicosia and Joan's interest in archaeology turned serious. The family continued to spend some months in England every year, and Joan spent that time working with Tessa and Mortimer Wheeler at Verulanium (1931 & 1932) and Maiden Castle (1935 & 1936), the premier archaeological digs in England at that time, and in the laboratory of the British Museum, "learning methods ... and to do useful work."⁴ She put these skills and experience into action when she returned to Cyprus, where she spent the greater part of each year helping Dikaios in the museum or directing rescue excavations. Her own words vividly illustrate the cadence of those days:

We spent many hours, Dr. Dikaios describing and marking the objects; myself at a little table typing the cards at his dictation.... Then word would come in that a tomb had been found and [we] would drop everything to rush out with George or Lazarius (museum foreman) to inspect it and recover the finds, excavation taking anything from a day to a week in any part of the island. I was keen on riding and kept ponies, so I often rode to work and tied the pony outside the museum, or if the excavation was near at hand, would ride across country. But also had a succession of open Baby Austin 7hp cars, admirable for going across country or up narrow tracks, for their lightness, good clearance and size....⁵

Joan's increasing involvement in the affairs of the museum was soon formally recognized. In April 1932 the Cyprus Museum Committee appointed her Assistant Curator of the Museum, an honorary position. A few months later, the committee added the post of acting Inspector of Antiquities, a salaried position, to her official responsibilities.⁶ From then on, Joan was paid (albeit modestly) for her archaeological work on Cyprus.

When Dikaios commenced his first major excavation campaign at the Aceramic Neolithic site of Khirokitia in the summer of 1934, Joan and two of her girlfriends somehow convinced their parents to allow them to participate. At first they drove the hour-long route from Nicosia to the excavations every day (villagers along the way used to stand and wave at the extraordinary sight of a woman driving), but eventually they persuaded their families to allow them to stay at the site. They lived "in rough conditions" in the farmhouse of a Greek Cypriot family, subsided on a diet of

melons, bread, and cheese, and in their "old clothes" presented a stark contrast to the impeccably dressed Dikaios.⁷ Joan's companions were Judith Dobell [Stylianou] and Margaret Beazley [Walker-Brash]. Judith had been stricken with polio in India and sent to recuperate in the moderate climate of Cyprus. Judith's mother learned of her daughter's activities from afar and was rather distressed at her new interest, but Judith, by all accounts an independent spirit, ignored the distant pleadings. She would later marry one of the Cypriot workmen who worked with the excavation team at Ayios Philon and then Apliki, Andreas Stylianou. She continued to live in Cyprus and be an active presence in the archaeology of the island for the rest of her life. Margaret had a gift for drawing, and her illustrations appear in the final publications of the site. She is the only one of the women mentioned in this article who eventually had children and left archaeology in order to fulfill family responsibilities. The summer of freedom and archaeology ended, and, in Margaret's words, with winter the women were re-enfolded in the family and "had to behave" themselves. All the same, they did manage to visit the museum in the mornings in order to process the summer's work: Judith washing, Margaret drawing, and Joan cataloguing the finds.

Joan had gained a great deal of experience at Khirokitia. She kept the field diary and it was Dikaios' habit to discuss the day's work with Joan every morning. In her capacity as Inspector of Antiquities, she had also had opportunity to supervise several minor excavations: a medieval cemetery and a Roman tomb complex (Vasa). The summer after Khirokitia, she turned to a larger project. She and her friends undertook excavation of a 4th-century AD Christian basilica and baptistry. The church of Ayios Philon is located on the northern shore of the Karpass peninsula, which juts northeastward from the mass of Cyprus to within eyesight of Asia Minor. Local plans to develop the area for tourism were halted with the discovery of a patterned marble floor during clean-up operations at the church, and Joan, as representative of the Department of Antiquities, commenced the first of three seasons of excavations in 1935. One wonders how she managed to convince her mother to allow it, especially after Joan's father died in 1936. A grainy photograph shows a sedan filled to bursting with luggage and half again its volume in parcels strapped in an unwieldy mound at the back of the vehicle:

When we were at Philon, she drove her father's car, a Singer I think it was.... It

took Joan and Blos [Veronica Seton-Williams] in the front and her two dogs, and my two dogs and Judith [Stylianou] and me [Margaret Walker-Brash] in the back plus one of the museum's Cypriot workmen as well as his digging equipment and all sorts of parcels were tucked into the outside of the car. I wonder how it ever managed to move at all, especially over the rough roads in the Northern part of the island....⁸

Eve Stewart was at Ayios Philon during the final season (1938) and recalls their accommodation:

We lived in an empty, 2-storey house, which was let out in the summer to people who wanted a holiday by the sea. We took our camp beds, and a few chairs and tables for the downstairs rooms. There was an outside 'convenience' and for baths the cook (male) brought a large tin tub and some cans of hot water up to our bedrooms. The ceiling was not solid, only matting, full of assorted small creatures, so a centipede or a spider *might* drop on you during the night.⁹

Social order reasserted itself in the winters between excavation seasons, although even then archaeology had its slot in the calendar. Eve Stewart spent much of the winter of 1936/7 with Joan and her mother and remembers their days in this way:

Joan and I used to ride every morning before breakfast.... After breakfast we drove to the Museum or, occasionally, there might be an emergency 'rescue' dig. There were three of us volunteers (unpaid) at that time: Judith Dobell [Stylianou], Rowena de Marchemund and me; we checked photos, recorded stone tools or did any other job that was needed. We were a closely knit group and at first were a bit suspicious of the new Director of Antiquities (Peter Megaw), but he soon settled in with us. Once a week we went to the [English] Club, taking a gramophone and Country Dance records; about a dozen people used to turn up, some officials and some civilians. There were occasional, small dinner parties, and once there was a fancy dress ball....¹⁰

It was, then, in Joan's official capacities as Inspector of Antiquities and Assistant Curator that she organized excavation of the recent discoveries at Apliki-Karamallos. There were two seasons of work: a short season of reconnaissance in 1938 and a longer excavation season in 1939. Judith Dobell

accompanied Joan in the first season. The following year, Mrs. du Plat Taylor and Veronica Seton Williams joined Joan and Judith. Veronica was to become one of Joan's closest friends and colleagues. The two women had first met at Maiden Castle when training with the Wheelers. Veronica had gone on to work with Sir Flinders Petrie in the Sinai, with John Garstang at Jericho, Tell Keisan, and the Cilician plain, and with Starkey at Tell ed-Duweir (Lachish). She took a break from work in Turkey in December 1936 and visited Joan in Cyprus; they celebrated a memorable Christmas together, seeing the sites. The next year, Veronica met Joan and her mother in Vienna, and the three traveled down the Danube, to Istanbul, Athens, and Cyprus. Joan and Veronica took the opportunity to spend a week's lay-over in Athens to travel through the Peloponnese and visit Delphi. Veronica's account of the trip mentions especially the mules (a major feature of the transportation network) and the excitement of becoming part of a growing fellowship of archaeologists.¹¹ Stopovers in Cyprus became a regular habit for Veronica, on the way to and from various excavation projects, and she spent weeks and sometimes months with Joan, working in the museum, examining reports of discoveries, conducting small rescue excavations, and scouting for new projects. In the course of their lives they would collaborate in projects and surveys in Turkey, Syria, Egypt, and Italy as well as several projects in Cyprus.

In the spring of 1939, in between the first and second seasons at Apliki, the two friends and John Waechter (later, Lecturer in the Paleolithic at the Institute of Archaeology, London) conducted a survey in the plain of Jabbul (Syria). The trio cobbled together the resources for the expedition — an aunt of Seton-Williams donated money, the Lachish excavation lent a pick-up truck, and the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem donated a well-used bus — and set up base in Aleppo. Palestine was in rebellion, riots and strikes against the French disrupted Aleppo, the bus broke down, and its engine was replaced backwards, resulting in three reverse gears and one forward! But the three archaeologists persisted. They photographed, made notes, and gathered surface collections from 109 sites in this region of trade routes and borderlands between Aleppo and the Euphrates river. The information which they collected is published in a detailed, co-authored report.¹² Based on the results of their survey, they made plans to excavate one site in the following year, but the onset of war dashed their hopes. After the survey, the three friends and their

Palestinian driver nursed the old bus on a sight-seeing expedition to the Euphrates river, Dura Europos, and Baghdad, and then back through the desert to Damascus, and finally to Beirut. Joan and Veronica proceeded by Romanian cargo ship to Cyprus, where Joan directed the second season of excavations at Apliki.

At Apliki, Joan was in complete charge. In addition to the core team, the expedition consisted of about a dozen workmen. Unfortunately, information beyond the published final report is scarce. The one feature which all participants mention was the walk to and from the site: It was impossible to drive all the way to the site, and so each day began and ended with a 1.5 mile steep trek up or down the hillside, leading donkeys laden with gear, food, and water. Late in her career, in her reminiscence of her work on Cyprus, Joan gave justifiable pride of place to the excavations at Apliki: the mundane buildings and ceramics, the broken hints of industry, the seeds and bones remained in her opinion "the most interesting" of her early projects on the island.

The hostilities of World War II broke out in 1939 and Joan and her mother returned to England. Joan would return to direct the excavations on Cyprus once more, at *Myrtou-Pigadhes* in the 1950s. But chance and opportunity mainly led her elsewhere: to the Levant, to Italy, and under water, to a leading role in the establishment of nautical archaeology as a recognized archaeological discipline.¹³

Joan's work at Apliki continues to hold great interest for the scientific community, and her meticulous excavation and recording allows meaningful re-analysis of the old material. Few records of the human dimension of work at the site survive, but one letter written by one of the workmen at Apliki serves as fitting testament to the hard work and success of those excavations, on every level:

Miss J d P T was a personality with extraordinary ability and hard working.... She had a very high regard for diligent workers and used them as assistant[s] everywhere. I have been very honoured to work with her in the Museum and also at excavations. She was a very dedicated person to duty, and could be seen working tirelessly under the hot sun for hours.... Joan taught me how to conserve metallic objects at the Cyprus Museum Workshops, where a special 'Chemistry' room was maintained for the purpose. In 1958 I was awarded a scholarship at the Institute of Archaeology, where Joan was

the Librarian and lectured on Recording. She invited me home and during the weekend, together we went to her cottage at Old Gate. I worked with her for 25 years (1931-1956) and up until now, I am convinced that no one ever will be able to replace her.... I would like to thank you sincerely for the opportunity to reminiscence[*sic*] on a person who has rendered extraordinary services to the antiquities of Cyprus for many years and under not so particularly favourable conditions. May God bless her soul.¹⁴

¹ Personal communication, summer 1997, Margaret Beazley/Sessions/Walker-Brash = MWB.

² JdPT, unpublished lecture notes, Nicosia 1979. Kindness of Stuart Swiny & CAARI archives = JdPT.

³ MWB. The dates mentioned here are incorrect.

⁴ JdPT

⁵ JdPT.

⁶ Minutes of the Cyprus Museum Committee, with particular reference to 12 April 1932 and 9 November 1932. I am grateful to R.S. Merrillees, former Director of the Cyprus American Archaeological Research Institute (CAARI), who kindly brought this material to my attention.

⁷ MWB.

⁸ MWB.

⁹ Personal communication, Eve Stewart, 7 April 1997.

¹⁰ Personal communication, Eve Stewart, 7 April 1997.

¹¹ M.V. Seton-Williams, *The Road to El-Aquzein*. London & New York: Kegan Paul International, 1988.

¹² J. du Plat Taylor, R. Maxwell Hyslop, M.V. Seton-Williams, and J.D.'A. Waechter, "An archaeological survey of the plain of Jabbul, 1939," *PEQ* 74 (1942) 8-40.

¹³ A full account of Joan du Plat Taylor's subsequent accomplishments can be found at http://www.brown.edu/Research/Breaking_Ground/introduction.php. Search "du Plat Taylor, Joan".

¹⁴ Personal communication, Chrysostomos Paraskeva, summer 1997. Mr. Paraskeva, workman at Apliki, retired many decades later, a distinguished member of the staff of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus.