

[free trial issue](#)[subscribe](#)[back issues](#)

Athena Review, Vol.3, no.3: Minoan Crete

Harriet Boyd and the Excavation of Gournia

Harriet Boyd Hawes, the discoverer of Gournia, was the first American to excavate a Minoan site in Crete. Born in Boston, Massachusetts on October 11, 1871, she attended Smith College and, upon graduating in 1892, taught in various secondary schools until 1896. By that point, she had obtained a fellowship to begin graduate work at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, Greece. Though eager to participate in the school's archaeological expeditions, she was declined the privilege by her professors, who encouraged her instead to become a librarian.

However, after serving as a volunteer nurse on the Thessalian front during the Greco-Turkish War, Boyd, despite her disappointing experience at the American School, set her sights on travelling to Crete to fulfill her dream of performing archaeological fieldwork. Her decision was timely, since the Greco-Turkish War had liberated Crete from Turkish control, resulting in a more stable political climate which, if still somewhat unsettled, was no longer the site of ground warfare.

In the spring of 1900, Boyd visited Knossos and met [Arthur Evans](#), already in his first season of excavating the palace. Evans, who had already scoured the island in search of important sites, encouraged her to look for one in particular - an early Iron Age site located at Kavousi on the Isthmus of Ierapetra (a post-Mycenaean occupation from ca. 1100-800 BC). By 1901, Boyd had begun excavating Kavousi, on which she would write her master's thesis at Smith College.



Boyd's most significant contribution to archaeology, however, is her investigation of the Minoan settlement at Gournia, located in east-central Crete (fig.1). Visible ruins, including stone basins ("gournes" in Greek) preserved in the area, led to the site's name. First shown the location by a local peasant, she excavated at Gournia between 1901 and 1905, periodically taking leave when she ran out of funding or to

uphold her duties as a teacher at her alma mater, Smith College, where she taught Greek Archaeology, the Modern Greek language, and Epigraphy. Finally, in 1905 she completed her investigations at Gournia, a site determined by Boyd and her dedicated team of investigators to date from the Bronze Age. Funded by the University of Pennsylvania, Boyd was the first woman to supervise a large field crew of 100 workers, which consisted of local workmen and North American assistants. In the process, the University of Pennsylvania became the first North

American university to sponsor the excavation and publication of Cretan antiquities.

[**Fig.1:** Middle Minoan III-Late Minoan IA houses at Gournia (*photo: M. Miller*).]

Boyd first described her discoveries on a national lecture tour in 1902, and was the first American woman to speak in front of the Archaeological Institute of America. Shortly thereafter, she married Charles H. Hawes, an anthropologist, and in 1909 they co-authored *Crete, the Forerunner of Greece*. The report of her findings was published in 1908 (under her married name, Hawes) by the American Exploration Society. She received an honorary doctorate from Smith College in 1910. Years later, Boyd turned to social and political interests. She supported the war effort of World War I by giving many fundraising lectures on behalf of the Smith College Relief Unit, as well as by taking supplies to the island of Corfu for wounded soldiers. From 1920 to 1936, the year in which she retired, Boyd lectured on pre-Christian art at Wellesley College in Wellesley, Massachusetts. Harriet Boyd Hawes died on March 31, 1945 in Washington, D.C. Her determination and pioneering accomplishments in excavating Gournia had created a high standard for both American, and specifically, women archaeologists .

(references: Shaw, J.W. 1990).

[Note: This article appears in the printed issue of Vol.3, no.3 of *Athena Review* (p.17).
Copyright 2003, Athena Publications, Inc.]

[Athena Review Image Archive™](#) | [Paleoanthropology in the News](#) | [Guide to Archaeology on the Internet](#) | [Free issue](#) | [Back issues](#)

[Main index of Athena Review](#) | [Subject Index](#) | [Travel Pages](#) | [Galleries and Museums](#) | [Ad rates](#) | [Current issue index](#) |

Copyright © 1996-2003 Athena Publications, Inc. (All Rights Reserved).