

NOTES FROM AND UNFINISHED DIARY: A TASTE OF THE COORDINATORS' FEELINGS FOR THE ROMIRI PROJECT 2011

Laura-Melpomeni Tapini

Conservator of Antiquities and Historical Buildings, GREECE
lmt@diadrasis.org

Lucía Gómez-Robles

Architect & Art Historian, SPAIN
luciagomezrobles@gmail.com

It is almost three o'clock in the morning and everything is finally quiet and ready. In the peace of the night no one could ever imagine what feverishness ruled over these very places these last days. Operation code name: 'transform this house into a multifunctional area for a workshop' i.e.: combine lectures' and computers' room, make a kitchen functional for at least ten persons a day, arrange the sleeping areas but at the same time organize the material for the worksite and much, much more. When you are unpacking and it seems there is no end to what you have to do... when you cross check your final to-do list you suddenly realize that instead of deleting accomplished things you end up adding more, down to the bottom of the page... and when your watch sounds as if banging the seconds for a final countdown, it becomes hard to believe that such a divine moment may ever come when everything is finished and all you have to do is relax and simply put your thoughts on paper...

At this very moment we should plainly be exhausted and utterly unable to even whisper one word... But things are not that way at all! More than tired we surely are so excited because we finally stand before the moment of truth... Who knows how this dream will come true ... Tomorrow by this time the eight participants will arrive from all corners of the world giving our idea an identity... Real flesh and bone. Yet we keep exchanging more personal feelings and yes, some worries still linger

in our minds. Will it work? Did we predict and plan everything? Are we going to meet their expectations? Will the group match and bond? Doubts could pop up forever, so better go and get some rest to collect ourselves for the coming weeks. One last look from the window to the chapel that as of tomorrow will never be the same, and we smile! This is it; we are here and ready to see where this first ambitious DIADRASIS project is taking us to.

What you've read so far are the very first pages of an unfinished diary. Of course it remained incomplete, as during the 31 exciting days of the Romiri project in the summer of 2011 there was definitely no single free moment to grab a pen and write; such optimism the first night to think that we would have managed it! So, willing to pay our debt to the blank pages of the diary for never filling them, we decided to make its first page public and kind of complete it for this article. There are different perspectives within any group of people experiencing the same events. We, the coordinators, surely have a peculiar one, as we are the ones who had seen the idea being born, growing up, changing again and again, taking shape, and suddenly finalized. We can by no means be objective, but only strongly emotional about it. Having already published official articles and reports, we cherish the idea of sharing our *retrogusto*¹ through our journal. In the following lines

¹Italian gastronomy expression for the feeling left after tasting food or drink



Fig. 1. Sketch drawing by Somi Chatterjee on concrete in historical buildings.

you will read nothing about educational outcomes, larger scopes, interdisciplinary activities and values...

Let us take this memory trip together. Sometimes there are signs which assure you that everything will be fine! For us it was the very first moment of meeting everyone at the bus station. You could read the sparkle of expectation in the tired faces of our eight participants. Many of them took long-haul flights, followed by the exotic experience of four hours journey in a bus and an hour-and-a half's boat trip. But Romiri was about to begin and we all knew that it would be a month to remember.

We could tell hundreds of stories from this one month in the isolated rural area of Romiri in the Island of Zakynthos and still forget some. So many days, all these amazing participants that contributed with their personalities in making this workshop unique, the things that went wrong and proved that a good group can handle and overcome any difficulty. We are sure that if for example you asked anyone of them about

the survey week, he would shiver and say *t r i a n g u i a t i o n*! They all detested it at the moment, proudly announcing at the end of the week that they were happy and feeling autonomous to use it at any time: yeah, traditional methods vs. technology 1-0!

And how many stories up on our scaffoldings... We surely formed a strong team that hated concrete, as you can see in the beautiful sketch in figure 1. What was really touching, was the involvement of the group in feeling the responsibility of having the works completed on time. However, the weather decided to complicate things: after weeks of infinite sunshine, just when we needed to push and complete the work, Zakynthos got one of the worst rain storms of the last decades. Even so, nothing could stop the amazing Romirians. A temporary shelter was invented and we kept working non-stop, until the daylight decided to abandon us telling us all to go and get some rest!

We will never stop saying how strongly good spirit helps a group to cope with anything. This episode

was the proof: even though after the incredibly long and exhausting day on the worksite we all dreamed of a hot shower, we had calculated it wrong. Both electricity and water went out for many hours that night due to the thunderstorm. But the funniest part of it was that, as we had arranged for a celebration outing that night, we had asked our amazing taverna guy, who always kept bringing us huge amounts of food, not to bring dinner!!! So here we were, stuck in the middle of nowhere, dirty, exhausted and hungry on top of it Well, we can assure you we had one of the most incredible nights, by candlelight, playing games and sharing funny stories. Somewhere in the kitchen breadsticks were discovered, to complete our happiness. And if you still have doubts you can check the participants' video for that night and for other memorable anecdotes of the Romiri month².

Participants were only one part of the human resources worth credits for the successful results of this endeavour. But what can we say about the lecturers' team! Colleagues, that stood by us from the very beginning, who believed in our dream. Some of them have long curricula and experience and greatly honored us by accepting our invitation. Some others, without even knowing us, simply took a risk dedicating time and energy to be with us just following their friends' suggestion and recommendation. Younger or older, renowned or still at the beginning of their careers, they all had this one thing in common: every minute they offered their love and a deep involvement, making the best out of this cohabitation for everyone. Other than their great lectures we all enjoyed their great company!

Our gratitude goes also to all the invisible heroes of this workshop, without the help of whom its realization would not have been possible. Nikos who warmly opened his house to our dream, hosting us and entrusting the safeguarding of his family chapel to an unknown newly formed team; Tasos, who created this amazing website introducing us to the world; Anthony who was our secret support with multiple duties, from the technical software support to practically carrying our boxes around; Fifi and Susanna who generously acted like personal drivers, concealing the lack of good public transport communication of the Greek capital; David who helped us find a generous amount



Fig. 1. ...enjoying the 'dirty work'.

of sponsor money that allowed our participants to get in contact with Greek traditions through excursions and side activities and also supported one participant from Cyprus; and finally the York Alumni Association-Center for Conservation Studies which supported the participation of an MA student from the University of York.

A small rural chapel that marked our lives forever! Somi, Heather, Gaby, Yoli, Pedro, Cynthia, Hilly, Kiki, thank you for making this first workshop such a success, encouraging us to keep going. You know that we will keep you in our hearts and memories and miss you deeply in every new endeavour! Even if we were a little scared thinking of Kavafis' verses³ that the journey is more important than the destination, you all gave us the best gift one could ever dream of: you transformed this destination in an exciting journey...

² Romiri participants' video. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDoTo2v6bVg&feature=youtu.be>

³ 'As you set out for Ithaca pray the voyage will be a long one, full of adventure, full of discovery' Kavafis, K. 'Ithaca', Poems, IKAROS, Athens, 1984