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MAURA HIGH

## An Archaeology of Now and Then

### *EARLY MORNING*

Little rabbit jawbone, three teeth,  
where are your other bones?  
Crumbled and dispersed under the shadow  
of the olive tree in the shadow  
of the hill, before the sun has crept  
over the trenches and tumbled stones,  
where the dirt is still cool and secret  
and the battered wheelbarrows wait  
alongside the tools and rubber buckets,  
before the trucks have unsettled  
the dust and broken the silence  
which is not silence but the shrill  
of crickets and the rustle and scrape  
of grass stalks, leaves, blown against each other.  
What will the stones say today?  
Work, river, fire, wall . . .  
Will the curve of the rim of a clay cup  
remember the potter's thumb?

### *BEFORE NOON*

The pick hoe sings tok, tok, clang, thunk,  
knocking all day at the dry dirt,  
loosening earth, rock, potsherds, root and bone:  
who's there, who's there? Generations  
of weather and seasons, fire and abandonment,  
compacted like the leaves of a book  
one can read backward from the spoil tip:

dirt and stone fly up  
into the wheelbarrow, which jerks  
back to the trench; where panful  
by panful, soil is scattered and brushed and packed  
into place, each sherd and stone eased back  
where it will stay until the grass  
seeks water again under the wall.

*NOONTIME*

Here's water, and olive pits,  
and some crumbs from the plastic bag  
for the earth, the ants, whatever  
persists in this sun-scoured acropolis.  
Over among the trees in the narrow gully  
a couple of the Greek laborers  
drink their coffee. Here and there  
yawns and small talk in the scant shade.  
If the dead came upon us now, in the ruins  
of their burned village,  
we would have no defense, no refuge.

*AFTERNOON*

After the catastrophe, we fled.  
Had we failed to propitiate the gods?  
Or does a rubble of curses, the wail  
and howl of smashed pots and tiles  
please them more than music,  
more than the cries of a man and woman making love?  
If you want to know how far the sea is,  
ask the spear maker, ask the woman sorting greens;  
how wide, ask the importer of fine pots, the shopkeeper  
whose son left for America.  
The song of the cicadas washes over us



like surf. Our terraces of beans and squash  
have grown up to thistles and wild capers.  
Bee-browse only—the same bees, thirsty for nectar.

*BEAUTIFUL NIGHT*

Sherds that never dreamt of being whole, dream.  
First there was the order of clay:  
which for the olive jar, which for the cup?  
Then the matrix of dirt: each layer its own era.  
Then sieves, plastic bags, labels, boxes,  
a place on a shelf, in a bound book.  
The difference between looking and seeing,  
says the photographer, is memory:  
as the lizard who lurks between the stones,  
eyes half-open, remembers.  
We see all the stars tonight. We see you,  
asleep in your safe beds.

Azoria, Crete