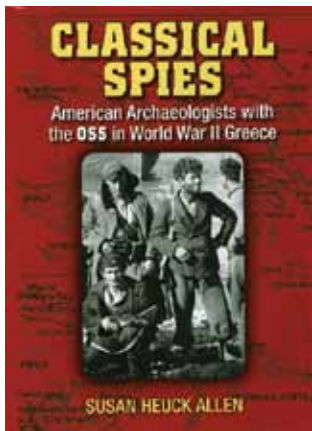


Rodney Young, his *noblesse oblige*, and the OSS in Greece

CLASSICAL SPIES: AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGISTS WITH THE OSS IN WORLD WAR II GREECE

by Susan Heuck Allen

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Archaeologists have long played a part in clandestine wartime adventures. Doubtless during the 1930s, the fellows of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens would have discussed the contribution of English archaeological spies like J.L. Myres, D.H. Hogarth, and, of course, T.E. Lawrence as the prospect of a new war in the central and eastern Mediterranean came ever closer. For the

Americans, steeped in the benign liberalism of FDR's era, the crusading prospect of confronting fascism or even, in some cases, communism must have been compelling. Greece, after all, in the 1930s was on the verge of fascism under Prime Minister Metaxas and profoundly suffering as a result. For the American fellows, the romantic notion of aiding Grecian democracy (and the Greeks) must have been a frequent topic of discussion, especially once WWII began. The Americans would not have been alone in this idealism. Their "cousins" in the British School at Athens, notwithstanding the imperial values of the British government, harbored crusading archaeologists whose names have lived on long after the end of the conflicts. Two stand out: the Olympian John Pendlebury, deputy to Sir Arthur Evans at Knossos, wounded then executed in defense of Crete in 1941; and Nicholas Hammond who narrowly escaped the Cretan debacle to become a pivotal player in

the British SOE missions to mainland Greece and Albania. By contrast, until now the part played by their American counterparts in the OSS has remained a history in search of a narrator. Susan Heuck Allen's book about these American spies ventures boldly to tell this story, mixing heroism with an uncomfortable litany of institutional compromises and missed opportunities.

Classical Spies is really two connected stories. The first is a sketchy but compelling biography of Rodney Young, the post-war Penn Museum Professor of Classical Archaeology who excavated Gordion and found what was believed to be the great tomb of Midas. He is the Hemingway-esque hero of this book, the archaeologist whose personality and daring capture the reader's commitment to the end. The second story tells the largely underwhelming history of OSS's Cairo desk, run by Young, with his hand-picked operatives largely from the world of American classical archaeology.

Young was the "coddled child of the gilded age," heir to the Ballantine Ale fortune, who had studied classical archaeology at Columbia and Princeton before he joined the American School. Allen speculates that it was his father's *noblesse oblige* as president of the New Jersey chapter of the American Red Cross which shaped Young's decision to pay for an ambulance, christened Iaso, and set out like Ernest Hemingway had 23 years earlier to support his adopted country against the invaders. The invaders, in this case, were the very Italians that Hemingway had joined and the battle with Greece, by the time Young arrived, was in the Korça basin—a fertile tract of southeast Albania that the Greeks still knew as Koritsa (its name before it was handed to Albania). Here, in desperate conditions Young's ambulance offered merciful assistance in a bitter winter conflict. Young was a people's person, as well as energetic to a fault. Little over two months later, close to the lakeside port of Pogradec, Young's ambulance was strafed by an Italian fighter-plane, leaving him unconscious with shrapnel in his abdomen and intestines. His companions feared the worst but this bull of a man, rather like Frederic Henry in *A*

Farewell to Arms, survived first a field hospital in Korça, then evacuation in the face of the German invasion via Ioannina to Athens. Months later in German-controlled Athens, he recuperated sufficiently to make the long journey back to the USA, where he helped engineer the creation of an OSS outfit to offer succor to Greece.

Young's two-year sojourn in Cairo as an OSS chief left him heartily sickened with desk work. So once the Germans set to leave in October 1944, Young made for the Greek mainland, and was one of the first Americans to enter Athens as it was liberated. This was no act of vanity, though: instead, from the autumn of 1944 until late 1945, he switched back to being a crusader, masterminding the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration efforts to bring assistance to a pitiful, crushed country on the brink of civil war. Again, he came close to perishing when in May 1945 the ship carrying him to the island of Syra capsized. Most on board drowned; Young was in the water for five hours before he was rescued. Young's indomitable spirit, however, was sorely tested by his Cairo years, the main subject of Allen's book.

Young assembled a small team to lead espionage missions throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Most were his peers from his days at the American School. These included John Franklin "Pete" Daniel, a Penn professor who later introduced Young to Turkey and, probably, Gordion. Daniel's tragic death in 1948 led to Young joining Penn soon afterwards. Another of his team was a Penn Museum benefactor, George H. McFadden, scion of a prominent Philadelphia family with longstanding University of Pennsylvania connections, who owned the yacht *Samothrace* that served Young's missions to Cyprus. McFadden, like Daniel, was to meet a tragic end, drowning off of Kourion in 1953. Better known members of Young's team were the Cincinnati professors who excavated at Troy—Carl Blegen and Jack Caskey. All labored in the shadow of the British who controlled the east Mediterranean theater and, according to Allen, believed that the British Empire and its values would endure forever.



Rodney Young, former curator in the Mediterranean Section, ran the OSS Cairo desk.

Under-resourced and hugely skeptical of British support for the Greek royalists, the everyday missions appear to have been few and frustrating. Nevertheless, with his excellent Greek connections, Young picked his Greek liaisons astutely and avoided any enduring post-war problems in Greece as a result. However, those missions entrusted by Young to Daniel and Caskey, emanating from Turkey to harass the Germans in the Dodecanese, were the most effective. Otherwise, the Cairo desk appears to have been a fig-leaf for an American diplomatic venture with few objectives at a time when communism posed a greater long-term menace to Greece.

One success, though, stands out.

The so-called Young Plan was to outlast the Cairo desk: this was a scheme for post-liberation intelligence-collecting in Greece as the country remained a bulwark (thanks to Churchill's personal intervention with Stalin) for western values in the Balkans. Initially skeptical, following the ferocious conflict between the royalists and the communists in late 1944, the State Department came to embrace the necessity of good intelligence as civil war became inevitable, but turned in 1945–46 to a new network of agents.

This is an important book, highlighting the role of American classicists, rather than the OSS, in a war where their role was lesser known than that of their British cousins. Rodney Young emerges as a zealous micro-manager who suffered from his good deeds and, better used, might have made a bigger impact. Nonetheless, his almost missionary support for Greece led inadvertently to a strong Penn involvement in the clandestine operations. The story presented here, of consuming frustrations, may account for the previous silence about the "classical spies," yet notwithstanding their zeal—and not withstanding their genuine New World idealism—they planted a seed in favor of American values in Greece that persists to this day.

Reviewed by Richard Hodges, Ph.D., President of the American University of Rome and former Williams Director of the Penn Museum.