

FOREWORD

I cannot match Lin Foxhall when she wrote of her research on olive cultivation in ancient Greece that it “has grown and matured nearly as slowly as the olive trees which are its subject”. I can say, however, that working on this book was not unlike pressing the oil itself: time-consuming and yet pressed for time, “pressing” the information gathered over the years for every last drop of knowledge that could be of use for the readers, separated from irrelevant information, just as oil is separated from water and all kinds of impurities in the process of being refined and clarified.

The book stems from long stays in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria and is a natural consequence of my participation in numerous archaeological projects in Khirbet el-Dharih, Chhîm, Jiyeh (Porphyreon) and Palmyra, as well as surveys in Jordan, where the inevitable olive press would always crop up (apart from Byzantine churches with mosaic floors which are my other research interest). Soon I realized that I had in hand research material that could at least to some extent fill a significant gap in our knowledge of an important part of ancient Near Eastern agriculture.

My interest in olives and olive oil production was born of beautiful encounters with the fascinating people, landscape and history of this Mediterranean region. The book, however, is the effect of the assistance and encouragement of my friends and well-wishers, whom I have now the great pleasure to thank.

I benefitted greatly from the knowledge, time and trust of the directors of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw, Prof. Piotr Bieliński and Prof. Michał Gawlikowski, and was assisted in every way by the staff members of this active and distinguished institution. They enabled my work in Lebanon. I could also always count upon the help and understanding of my superiors and colleagues from the Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw, especially Prof. Kazimierz Lewartowski and Prof. Wojciech Nowakowski, as well as Prof. Jolanta Młynarczyk and Prof. Barbara Kaim.

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