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The Stronghold: Four Seasons in the White Mountains of Crete

Xan Fielding

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"A splendid new edition."—James Campbell, *Times Literary Supplement*

"Xan Fielding was a gifted, many-sided, courageous and romantic figure, at the same time civilized and Bohemian, and his thoughtful cast of mind was leavened by humour, spontaneous gaiety, and a dash of recklessness. Almost any stretch of his life might be described as a picaresque interlude."—Patrick Leigh Fermor

During the Second World War, Xan Fielding served for two years as an officer in the British Special Operations Executive on German-occupied Crete, where he ran an intelligence network in cooperation with the Cretan resistance movement.

Seven years later, Fielding returned to Crete to spend a year traveling in the island's White Mountains (the "stronghold" of the title), revisiting sites of his wartime exploits and seeking out former comrades who had returned to their peacetime lives. His sojourn resulted in this remarkable memoir, a documentary-like record of days spent among Cretan peasants blended with history and literature—a travelogue like no other.

The Stronghold is a blending of "history and culture with experience, but one wedded to fidelity. Fielding never arrives; there is no great journey of self. There is just a question answered about the war and youth…he can't shake Crete, as no man can shake the formative experience of his youth."—from the new foreword by Robert Messenger

"This book of mine does not claim to be a serious sociological work; it is simply the account of a more or less carefree year spent among people who seem to fit so perfectly into their startling surroundings that at times I imagined it was not the landscape that conditioned their lives but their personalities that had conditioned the landscape."—Xan Fielding

Xan Fielding (1918–1991) was a British writer and traveler, and a lifelong friend of Patrick Leigh Fermor, who served with him in Crete during World War II. (The introduction to Fermor's *A Time of Gifts* is written as a "Letter to Xan Fielding.") Fielding also translated many novels from French, most notably, *The Bridge on the River Kwai* and *The Planet of the Apes*.

Robert Messenger is the books editor of the *Wall Street Journal*.

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