

Sissi Archaeological Project

NEWSLETTER

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 Sissi Excavations

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THE 2017 FIELDWORK

The 8th excavation campaign at Sissi took place between June 26 and August 4, 2017 with conservation ending early December only, when both Pepi Saridaki (in the apothiki) and the team of Manolis Kassotakis (on site) started a well-deserved winter break.

Our work on the Bouffo at Sissi takes place through the courtesy of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, locally represented by EFALAS – the Archaeological Service of Lassithi or East Crete. Their staff – Mrs. C. Sofianou, Mrs. V. Zografaki, Mrs. A. Papadea, Mrs. K. Zervaki – help us in every way possible and their continuous friendship is much appreciated, as is that of Mr. N. Thanos, our epoptis.

Apart from a geophysical and archaeological survey, excavation during 2017 continued in the cemetery, on the Middle Terrace, on the top of the hill and in the ceremonial building.

The site saw a larger than ever team with, apart from a bunch of Belgian students primarily from the University of Louvain but also of Ghent and Liège, a large crowd of students from Ioannina, Thessaloniki, Rethymnon and Kalamata, and students from many other countries and institutions. This year's team photo session, as always the work of our local photographer/ handyman/ archaeologist Gavin McGuire, misses about 20 people who participated for shorter terms.



CEMETERY WORK

Aurore Schmitt and Sylviane Déderix continued the exploration of the area around the House Tomb in Zone 9, finding more primary and secondary burials as well as a large funerary feasting deposit outside of the burial structures. Some of the inhumations happened in pithoi but most are secondary bone depositions, the excavation of which ask for much time and energy. Surface layer removal succeeded in outlining the plan of yet another house tomb. A small test to the west of the cemetery also revealed the existence of a large, probably Neopalatial construction with a residential function.

MIDDLE TERRACE

The west part of the Middle Terrace is occupied by several Neopalatial structures that seem to combine residential functions and domestic industries. East of these, the GPR survey indicated the presence of more architecture so we decided to open a series of trenches under the direction of Tia Sager. Here we came upon a construction surrounded by open areas, with remains of pebble floors and Neopalatial pottery depositions. Within the construction, which seems to have suffered from earthquake damage, we found several primary pottery deposits but also several human bone depositions. Excavation has not advanced sufficiently to be certain but it is not unlikely that we have here another House Tomb but dating to the Neopalatial period. The nearness of this structure to the residences further west but also its mere existence are surprising.

SUMMIT

Moving up, the north terrace of the summit of the hill had been geophysically investigated in 2016 and produced a clear outline of walls. Here, Thérèse Claeys continued her excavation of a large building which should pre-date the construction of Postpalatial Building CD, located south and partly on top of it. Thus far, evidence from various periods has indeed been found, including a LM IIIA context, a potential LM IB/LM II residential complex with good floor deposits, but also what may be a MM IIB funerary context formed by several inverted cooking pots with neonates. Close by are extensive MM IA/MM IB fills that still need explanation since nearby, quite surprisingly, was the complete, articulated skeleton of a calf.

A DOCUMENTARY ABOUT MINOAN

► During the first days we received a film crew working on a documentary on Minoan society for Arte, in the series *Enquêtes archéologiques/ Abenteuer Archäologie*, hosted by Peter Eeckhout, himself professor of archaeology at the University of Brussels. It was a great experience and we are looking forward to the show which will be diffused in spring 2018.



STUDY &

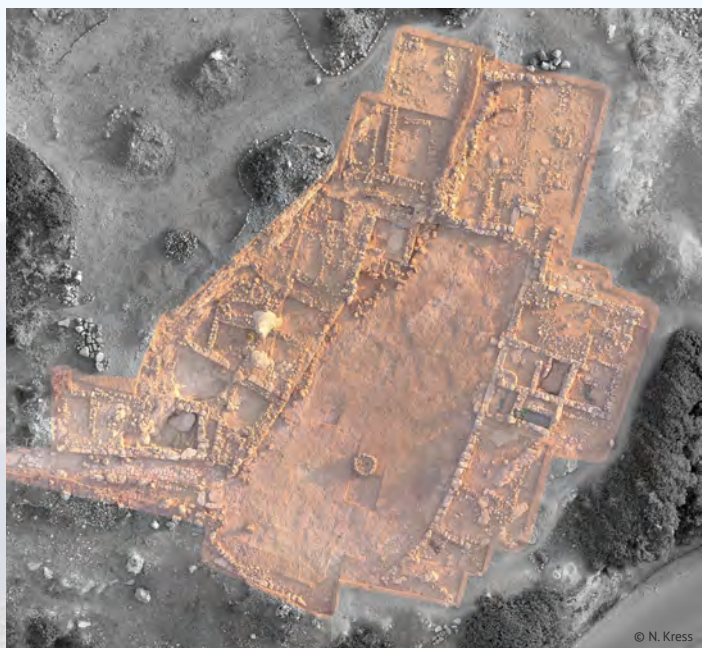
For 6 months Mrs. Pepi Saridaki continued the conservation of moveable objects from the excavation, primarily giving first-aid to objects that turn up during the field campaign and in addition going through each unit one by one looking for restorable vases, in close connection with our ceramic specialists. Other specialists who passed by the apothiki were Maria Kayafa (metals), Marie Nicole Pareja (plaster, assisted by Athina Kritikou), Valasia Isaakidou and Vasso Holeva (animal bone), Iro Mathioudaki (pottery) while Laura Magno prepared micromorphology samples. Our apothiki near Agios Nikolaos is now fully functioning, also hosting the Anavlochos and Priniatikos Pyrgos teams.



CONSERVATION

From early August until early December, Manolis Kassotakis and his team (Stelios Pitharakis, Manolis Poulis, Vangelis Grammatikakis) undertook site consolidation, concentrating on the summit of the hill (zones 3-4-5), under the responsibility of Dr. S. Chlouveraki. This part of the site is now entirely conserved and should require only minor annual interventions. All walls were first cleaned and then injected with a mixture of local sieved earth, cement and sand. Floors were covered with geotextile, gravel and the same mixture, easily removable in case more tests need to be made. We will continue this work so that, by the end of the second 5-year programme, the entire site is protected.

CEREMONIAL CENTRE



As is to be expected, most attention went again to the excavation of the court-centre complex. Three teams, under the direction of Ophélie Mouthuy, Emilie Hayter and Theo Terrana, continued the exploration of respectively the east wing, central court and west wing of this ceremonial building. Started in 2015, we almost achieved the clearance of the plastered central court, which is seen to have a maximum size of 16.50 by 33 m. Part of its south wall was found on the very last day of the season! The court remains the most spectacular feature of the entire complex, lined as it is by ashlar facades. Several ritual installations are found on and along this court, including potential monumental horns of consecration and a sacrificial stone. The horns and stone stand on either side of the arrival of a finely paved corridor with ashlar walls. This corridor seems, for the moment, to form the only direct access from the outside of the complex, leading straight to the court. The excavation further revealed large parts of the East and West wings of

the complex and more evidence for different chronological phases. Longing the West Wing to the south is a large rock-cut and plaster circular water-collecting basin which is associated with a large subterranean cistern. The cistern later served as a dump for large ashlar blocks but the basin seems to have been episodically filled with early Neopalatial pottery, especially drinking vessels, and then plastered over. More Santorini tephra was found suggesting that this eruption was close in time to the abandonment of the Neopalatial complex, late in the 16th c. BC. We are still left with some important questions: what was the relationship of the complex with the nearby palace at Malia? Why was it abandoned?



SURVEY

► The first week of the campaign Dr. A. Sarris continued his GPR exploration of the hill. The results were used to locate trenches on the Middle Terrace and to direct the excavation strategy in the cemetery. But we also started a surface reconnaissance of the east part of the Sissi valley to get a better idea of the region in which the Buffos settlement is located. This happened under the direction of O. Mouthuy. The work will continue during the following seasons but we already managed to locate a substantial Minoan sandstone quarry near the coast as well as a site that is characterised by the presence of hundreds of small obsidian chips, perhaps a production centre.

THE VRACHASI RESEARCH CENTRE



The past year we also signed a convention with the firm Europlan, specialised in the transformation of old buildings, for the work to be done on the Old School at Vrachasi.

Applications are now being submitted for different permits and studies to be executed. Dimitris Kremmydiotis, brother of our initial architect, Georgia, has been instrumental in the negotiations.

Let's hope we find sufficient funding to make this happen. So if you have a dime to spare? On the next page you will find the account where gifts can be sent, for which tax deductions can be obtained.

More information about the project can be obtained via the website www.sarpedon.be/vrachasi-school

THANKS

We were lucky this past year to receive substantial financial backing from various sides: foremost the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP) which pledged a 3-year annual contribution, next the ARC 'A World in Crisis?', through the UCLouvain, as well as the FNRS and the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. This year we were also given a Loeb Classical Library grant and our main sponsors, Mrs L. Stergiou and Mr. J.-M. Van der Hoeven, continued their support, as did car rental Motorplan, and, of course, the Belgian School at Athens, under the auspices of which our work at Sissi takes place. Thanks to Mr. Van der Hoeven, we also received gifts from Corinth Pipes and from Mr. Gabriele Perris Magnetto to equip our conservation lab and continue the work on the Old School at Vrachasi. We also received much appreciated help from Mr. K. Bagordakis (Phaistos Supermarket), Mr. & Mrs. G. McGuire, Mr. Y. Zervos (Fronimakis-Peugeot Garage), Mr. C. Mameloukos, the D. Dineris Family, Mr. B. Bakker, Mr. V. Prineas and our many local friends from the villages of Sissi and Vrachasi. The French School at Athens and its director, Prof. A. Farnoux, are thanked for putting Mrs. E. Kivernitaki at our disposition to feed the hungry mouths and Dr. T. Brogan of INSTAPEC for sending us their able photographer, Mr. C. Papanikolopoulos. Mr. V. Milathaniakis and Mr. N. Terzakis, owners of the local hotels the Marina Suite and the Mia Hara are also thanked for putting us up – not always an easy thing!



On a more personal note, the senior staff members surprised me with a 10-year Sissi party. The years have gone by, but the excitement stays.



DONATE

- ▶ European donors can send gifts to the account of the Fondation Louvain
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- ▶ Or through the Belgian School at Athens
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- ▶ American donors can send a check to Institute of Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP) (Dr. Karen Vellucci) www.aegeanprehistory.net

Please mention: **Sissi Project**

More information: sarpedon.be/donate

We again received many visitors including our good friend Manolis Kokkolakis aka Mavromanolis, an 86-year old shepherd who brought perhaps a little bit too much raki for the 10:30 break..., but also Fabienne Pigière, Dr. C.F. Macdonald, Dr. M. Relaki & family, Mr. R. Martin, Dr. I. Bradfer & Family, Prof. D. Haggis, Mr. J.-M. Van der Hoeven, Dr. L. Nixon, Dr. B. Molloy, Dr. R. Fitzsimons, Dr. G. Flouda, the Anavlochos team, etc. For those interested, there is always our website www.sarpedon.be which is regularly updated and to keep informed, the Facebook group 'Sissi Excavations' is a good help... which has, at the moment of writing, already 1058 members.

Sissi also features in an endwork made by students of a High School at Namur (<http://portfolio.acheljay.com/tfe-sarpedon-project/>) and in a video in the new Musée-L at Louvain-la-Neuve.