

Sissi Archaeological Project

Newsletter

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 Sissi Excavations

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The 2016 fieldwork

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From June 25 to August 5, 2016, the 7th Sissi campaign took place and, altogether, more than 85 participants from many different countries composed this year's team. Our fieldwork again was undertaken under the auspices of the Belgian School at Athens and is especially carried out by people from the UCL-the University of Louvain. Our project is made possible thanks to the backing of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, the Archaeological Service of East Crete as well as a series of institutions and people who helped us financially: the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, the ARC-A World in Crisis? (Uclouvain), the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (Ministry of Research), the Belgian FNRS, the Belgian School at Athens, the Gilles Hondius Foundation, the Andante Travel Archaeology Award, The French School at Athens, Mrs. Loukia Stergiou, Mr. Jean-Martin Van der Hoeven, Ms Anne-Marie Avramut and Car rental Motorplan. We are very grateful for their relentless support. Moreover, our friends from Sissi and Vrachasi remain solid supporters which is very rewarding.

Excavation during the summer took place in three different zones: in the cemetery, on the summit of the hill and in the ceremonial centre.

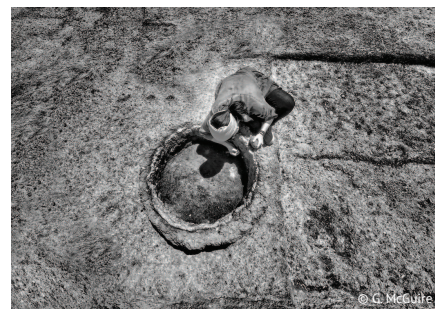
Cemetery Work

In the cemetery work was directed by Dr. Aurore Schmitt, a physical anthropologist of the CNRS, specialised in the excavation of commingled and collective burials which is what we mostly encounter in the Sissi cemetery. Hence, a single deposit of more than 700 tiny bones was meticulously recorded and excavated but also several articulated burials in storage jars or pithoi dating to the Middle Bronze Age (c. 1800 BC), as the one which adorns the front of this newsletter. We came upon more evidence for different phases of use as well as a variety of burial rites. These, together with the ongoing DNA and stable isotope analyses, will greatly help our understanding of the social structure of the Minoans during the time the cemetery was in use, between ca. 2600 and 1750 BC.

Labyrinthine Architecture

Dr. Quentin Letesson continued his exploration of the labyrinthine architecture that preceded the laying out of the east court of the Postpalatial building CD on the summit of the hill. Although this area was not built on during the 14th-13th c. BC (Late Minoan IIIA-B period), it shows a complex sequence of phases, starting already in the Early Bronze Age. This, as well as some scattered evidence from the earlier excavations in zone 5 and the new impressive evidence in zones 6 & 11, demonstrates that the entire summit of the Kefali at Sissi carried a thriving Prepalatial settlement of the 3rd millennium BC to which the cemetery belonged. But this year's tests in the court of CD were especially rewarding in preserving a large deposit of Middle Minoan IIIA pottery, a phase which had hitherto been rather elusive at Sissi. The full study of this deposit will allow a detailed comparison with evidence from other parts on the hill but

also from nearby Malia and hence clarify to what degree Sissi was (or wasn't) closely following practices of its impressive (or oppressive) neighbour. Likewise, more evidence was found for a large fire destruction in the area, probably to be dated to Late Minoan IB (c. 1450 BC), a time when the entire island suffered.



Meanwhile at the apothiki...

Thanks to our new apothiki manager, Jenny Tsafou, we successfully moved into a new storeroom on the highway close to Agios Nikolaos. This was a Titan's work since more than 2000 crates, filled with sherds, stone tools, environmental residu, small finds and other stuff from the 2007-2015 campaigns – that previously had been stored either in an unpleasant storeroom in a difficult accessible alley of Agios Nikolaos or in the dighouse of the French School at Malia – had to be inventoried first and re-boxed before they were trucked to the new apothiki where they had to be organised again. Moreover, Jenny made sure, with the help of Dimitris Kivernitakis, that all was ready when the



excavation campaign started with wash basins, drying racks, tables etc. After so many years, we finally have our own working and study area which will greatly speed up the publications. It also includes a conservation corner in which our conservator Pepi Saridaki, assisted by Constantina Hadjivasiliou and also this year by Evangelia Fragkiadaki, could work properly, as did the INSTAP photographer Chronis Papanikolopoulos. Pottery processing too, by Dr. Charlotte Langohr and Dr. Ilaria Caloi, but also the study of the numerous archaeological artefacts in general, is and will be greatly helped by these new facilities. We are sharing this work space with the Priniatikos Pyrgos team.

Ceremonial Centre

Most of our attention this last summer, however, went to the ceremonial centre of which the excavation had started in 2015 and where the GPR had also provided a very clear signal as to the existence of a very large court. Work here was directed by Dr. Maud Devolder, Thérèse Claeys and Ophélie Mouthuy who each attacked a different area of the building or its court. Suffice to say that, at the end of the 2016, we had cleared a court of more than 450 m² and still hadn't reached its southern edge! Although not as regular as the central courts of the palaces or other important buildings, its size exceeds that of the courts in the palaces of Petras (78 m²) and Zakros (360 m²) and more or less equals that of the palace at Galatas (525 m²), which is extraordinary in view of

the nearness of the Malia palace court. Excavation in the west wing came upon an Early Bronze Age obsidian workshop – we collected already more than 700 pieces – but what is perhaps more important is that outside this wing we came upon an extensive layer of large ceramic sherds associated with tephra, Santorini volcanic ash, as confirmed by Dr. Christine Lane (University of Cambridge). It is tentative to hypothesise whether the eruption – variously dated around 1600 or 1520 BC – caused the abandonment of the ceremonial centre at Sissi, but more exploration is needed. In addition to excavation, hundreds of soil samples were taken and processed under the direction of Maria Vlahaki and Vasso Holeva, whereas Dr. Simon Jusseret and Prof. M. Macklin (Lincoln University)

conducted a geomorphological analysis in the Sissi valley, also doing some coring in the hinterland of our hill.

Survey

► In 2016 we again called in the expertise of Dr. Apostolos Sarris of the Institute of Mediterranean Studies in Rethymnon to conduct a GPR or ground-penetrating radar survey of some targeted areas of the Sissi hill. One of these surveys produced a particularly clear signal to the north of Building CD in an area where an earlier test had revealed the existence of Protopalatial remains (18th c. BC). Excavation next year will show whether this is another Quartier Mu!



...The Vrachasi Research Centre



Two great moments deserve to be mentioned in our attempts to make the old school at Vrachasi live again: on August 4th (and after 5 years of negotiations), the dimos of Agios Nikolaos and its mayor, Mr. Adonis Zervakis, officially transferred the Arenagogio to the Belgian School at Athens. We can now start the work for which we have contacted the building company Europlan in Agios Nikolaos but we need all the financial help we can get! A few weeks later, on August 18th, the old school hosted its very first exhibition by the Sissi excavations' resident artist Rosemarie McGuire while, in the courtyard, the Stelios Petrakis Quartet entertained an enchanted audience. It was a marvellous success, undoubtedly to be followed by other events in the future.

After the summer

From the 21st to the 25th of September, the 12th International Congress of Cretan Studies took place in Iraklion. Amidst the more than 300 lectures, Jan's presentation of the discovery of the new Sissi ceremonial centre was highly appreciated. In addition, Ilaria Caloi presented some of the Early Minoan material of the 2015 campaign while Florence Gaignerot discussed the French School's survey on the Anavlochos, the mountain which lingers above the Sissi basin. Likewise, the Archaeological Work of Crete conference at the end of November was another occasion to present work.

During and after the summer, the Sissi project was at the centre of attention of a series of documentaries and articles. We first had the visit of Josh Gates of the Travel Channel as well as of several journalists and documentary makers from Greece, Belgium and Germany. The project too figured prominently in the University of Louvain's 2016-2017 'Savanturier' project (www.uclouvain.be/772242.html).



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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](#)

Among the many visitors this summer we note several people from Sissi and Vrachasi which we always enjoy since it shows the local interest in our work! Other visitors included Mr Jean-Martin Vanderhoeven, Ms Anne-Marie Avramut, the Tim & Delia Cunningham Family, Colin Macdonald, Stelios Pediaditis, Papamichalis, Krzysztof Nowicki, the Laurent Olivier Family, the Anavlochos team, Elisabeth Völling's group, Jean-François Remacle, Stéphanie Landrain & kids, Nikos Papadimitriou, Nathalie Buche, Barry Molloy, Sandra Flamen, Jan & Stephen Fisher, Mr & Mrs Mandrillon, Anne Chapin, the Dautais Family, Philip Vanpeer & daughters, David Vanderburgh & family, Rod Fitzsimons, Tod Whitelaw and the KULP-team, the Barbaix family, Dimitris Nakassis, Ann Aertssen & friends, and so many others...