

Sissi Archaeological Project

NEWSLETTER

January 2019

N° 4

Check out online:

www.sarpedon.be

 Sissi Excavations

Jan Driessen

CONTENTS

The Excavation	2
Site consolidation	2
Outreach	3
Survey	3
Fieldschool	3
Thanks	4
Sissi V	4



THE 2018 FIELDWORK

The 9th fieldwork campaign on the Kephali tou Agiou Antoniou or Buffos at Sissi took place between 25 June and 4 August 2018.

While we work under the auspices of the Belgian School at Athens, our work is primarily carried out by researchers associated with the UCLouvain, in collaboration with scholars from several European universities and research institutes.

The 2018 team was even larger than before, with more than 120 people participating in what is in every sense a great human adventure. Apart from Belgian students (UCLouvain but also Ghent, Liège and Namur) and our French anthropological team (from Aix-Marseilles University), we have scholars and student volunteers from the universities of Thessaloniki, Ioannina, Athens, Crete, Heidelberg, Strasbourg, Copenhagen, etc. and our loyal local force from the villages of Vrachasi and Sissi, helped by some extra's from the Kavousi area and Palaikastro.

It has become a Sissi tradition that each team is photographed at the end of the season and this newsletter shows some of these pictures – some even went viral! It is always a pleasure to acknowledge the help of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and the Archaeological Service of East Crete – EFALAS – and especially Mrs. C. Sophianou, Mrs. V. Zographaki, Mrs. A. Papadea and Mrs. K. Zervaki, and their site representative, Mr. N. Thanos.



THE EXCAVATION

Imagine walking down a beautifully paved alley that nobody has set foot on for 3500 years... and to walk out onto a brightly plastered court... The excitement of suddenly realising that, after having found a fine western entrance passage leading directly to the court during the 2017 campaign, a year later we uncover an even finer and wider passage that arrived to the court from the north. This unique find makes us wonder whether the two paved passages may once have been linked with the road on top of the hill, flanking Building CD, forming a loop on the plateau. The discovery of this Northern Entrance to the Court Centred Building has also led to a better understanding of the complex itself when we realised there had been another original access from the east. Moreover, yet another access also exists from the south. Our Court Centre, when originally constructed, was very permeable, allowing non-residents to get to the court quickly. During the 2018 campaign, we finally, after more than five years of digging, finished the excavation of the court. It is supported to the south by a massive terrace wall and this must mean we reached the end of the building. We largely finished work in the other Wings with interesting results but they need some further testing next year in what will be our final excavation season. We also finished the massive Prepalatial (4000+) obsidian deposit in the West Wing. To the same phase belong the architectural remains

located on the plateau to the west. To our surprise, these share one wall with a finely plastered Neopalatial room with stone benches. The room should still form part of the Court Centre but is oriented differently. From here, one has a fine view over the Court Centred Building and the impressive landscape.

We also made good progress in the cemetery, where we almost reached the end of the excavation of the massive bone deposit in Burial Building 9A. It is a wearisome task: anthropologists are forced to lie flat on their bellies for hours ... In addition, they excavated several more pithos burials, probably all Middle Minoan II. They represent intrusions, pits dug into the ruined house tombs. Following the GPR survey, we have been excavating since 2017 in the terrace above the east part of the cemetery. Here there seems to be an isolated building – less than 10 by 10m. We are now relatively confident in thinking that this small building, despite its Neopalatial date, is also a funerary structure, thus far something very rare on the island. The building has two wings of which one seems to have been organised for rituals and the other for primary and secondary depositions. The building is surrounded by open yards that show a succession of pebble floors, in each case with Neopalatial pottery deposits on them, often quite broken, perhaps the remains of funerary meals, as was the case in the Prepalatial and Protopalatial cemetery. In the rocky



area south of the building, we also came upon a small secondary bone deposit associated with a series of miniature vases of Late Minoan IIIA date and again this is the first sign for a funerary use for this period found on site.

We also made good progress on the middle terrace. The odd thing here is that the occupation on the terrace is diverse, both in chronology and type of construction. To the west, a solid structure was inserted within existing remains in Late Minoan II-III A. The middle part preserves some Protopalatial spaces with plenty of pottery. On top of these ruins, and probably when Building CD was constructed, a calf may have been sacrificed and four inverted cooking pots were placed, each with an infant. The east part of the terrace is again entirely different and preserves the remains of a Neopalatial residence with good pottery deposits and interesting architectural details. The pottery seems really late within the Late Minoan IB period.

SITE CONSOLIDATION

Our site consolidation team under the direction of Manolis Kassotakis was again instrumental in rapid and safely consolidating standing remains. Their work concentrated on Zone 2, the Neopalatial Quarter, and the different walls in the Court-Centred Building. Some water evacuation barriers were installed in the cemetery. During earlier seasons, we had come across fallen ashlar blocks along the east façade of the West Wing in the main complex. Despite our efforts, we did not manage to relocate the blocks and have removed them. The advantage is that the façade is now entirely visible, affording a fine view of the west



CONSERVATION

wing and especially the small ceremonial room in the northwest corner. Gradually, the site is looking more and more presentable and, despite the harsh winter conditions – the cemetery constantly receives a sea spray – the walls are resisting marvellously. In the apothiki, Pepi Saridaki, assisted by Athina Kritikou and Ioanna Kanavaki, made immense progress in the conservation of moveable finds. An extra plaster grant from INSTAP also allowed our plaster specialist Nikki Pareja to advance considerably and many painted fragments were identified.

OUTREACH

Amongst many family members, friends and colleagues who went into great effort to attend, I was lucky to celebrate my 60th birthday in the village of Vrachasi last summer, a great moment of joy. 130 people joined us for an evening of Cretan dancing, music and food – the 'oza' graciously given by our shepherd friends. This was soon after repeated by an end-of-dig party during which our topographer/pilot/do-everything Nicolas Kress (aka Leo) received the honorary golden double axe (and a bottle of his favourite whiskey) (photo). We closed the season with a Kera-bar street party in Sissi, graciously offered by the local football team. Many local friends participated in these events... Apart from some Kriti-TV coverage and attention given to us by the local press (Anatoli), we organised a weekly hour of open-site on Wednesdays, thanks to the collaboration with EFALAS. Locals and tourists alike came in great numbers to see archaeologists at work and our local photographer/handyman/archaeologist Gavin McGuire expertly informed those who wanted to know what we were doing and finding.

Within the frame of the cultural activities of the Vrachasi Sillogos, an exhibition with the photographic work of Gavin McGuire was also held in the Old School at Vrachasi.

The Arte documentary 'Myth of the Labyrinth' in which Sissi features has received two prizes: one at the Arkhaios Film Festival in the USA

and one at Rassegna Archeologica in Licodia Eubea, Italy, while Gavin McGuire was again very successful in getting his archaeology photographs voted the best for the AIA 2019 calendar and some of his Sissi pictures also adorned the German travel magazine 'ADAC Reisemagazin'. The UCLouvain's chancellor V. Blondel also made a small video of his Sissi visit which was greatly appreciated. Our long-term sponsor and founding father of INSTAP, Dr. Malcolm Wiener, also honoured us with his first-time visit (photo).

But the summer also brought great sorrow...especially for families in Attica, devastated by great fires. Together with the Anavlochos team, we organised a collection of money and contributed 500€. A special thought for Jo Cutler, our Sissi textile specialist, who passed away in January 2018....She is deeply missed.



SURVEY

► The intrepid survey 2018 team covered considerable ground and found interesting evidence illustrating the long-lasting occupation of the Sissi basin in a variety of forms. This could be humble concentrations of obsidian flakes, a deserted sanctuary or a World War II hideout. Thanks to Motorplan's pick-up, they were able to go where no man had ever gone before. First, they covered Kremasma, the plateau west of the site, where earlier explorations had found some cultic evidence. Then they concentrated on the area south of the hill, finding Minoan and later evidence at a dozen of spots. Slowly, slowly we are learning more about the diachronic settlement of the area. Our hill was never an isolated village but always formed part of a diverse landscape with hamlets, farms, cemeteries and shrines and this throughout the centuries.

FIELDSCHOOL

Since it is very difficult to say 'no' when a student writes us to participate in the Sissi excavations, we do our best to instruct them as much as possible into good practices in archaeology. Over the years, we have composed a field manual or protocol of almost a 100 pages in which our system is explained. Students need to know this manual by heart! Nevertheless, the large number of students available makes it impossible to occupy them all day long – our apothiki is just not big enough. Since last summer, we have organised a program of site presentations or afternoon lectures during which one of the experts of the team instructs the students and interested public on various aspects that relate to our work. This can be site visits (Sissi, Malia, Anavlochos) or teaching to plan, the basics of topography or photography but they were given

lectures on Minoan administration, groundstone tools, sealstones or the funerary landscape. The students receive certificates of attendance and, in this way, they take home, besides the practical knowledge, some basic information on what it is all about. The local cultural association of Sissi kindly made their dance hall and projector available for this.

Our apothiki queens, Charlotte Langohr, Ilaria Caloi and Iro Mathioudaki, also started the organisation of a hands-on Minoan pottery seminar in the Sissi apothiki, in which a dozen specialists from all over the islands exchanged views of pottery styles and phasing. Worth repeating...

THANKS

Excavation, study and publication are only possible if you have a great team to rely on – which we definitely have – but also continuing support from our home institution and other sponsors. Pride of place goes to the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP) that has, since the inception of the Sissi project, been generous. For the last years, we also benefitted considerably from the Loeb Classical Library grant and the ARC 'A World in Crisis' besides the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles and the FNRS. We also thank the Rust Family Foundation for financial help as well as the Henri and Belle Davis family, the Belgian School at Athens (and especially P. Iossif and A. Papadakis) as well as Mr. J.-M. Van der Hoeven, who not only helped financially, but is also a great advocate for the project.

We again received much appreciated help from Motorplan rental cars. Mr. K. Bagordakis (Phaistos Supermarket), Mr. & Mrs. G. McGuire, Mr. Y. Zervos (Fronimakis-Peugeot Garage), Mr. C. Mameloukos, the D. Dineris Family, the staff of Kera Bar, Coba Bar and Beach Bar, and our many local friends from the villages of Sissi and Vrachasi, including the local Cultural Associations. 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 up with us – not always an easy task!



DONATE

- ▶ European donors can send gifts to the account of the Fondation Louvain
IBAN : BE29 2710 3664 0164
BIC : GEBABEBB
- ▶ Or through the Belgian School at Athens
IBAN: GR05 0140 1280 1280 0200 2003 193
BIC: CRBAGRAA
- ▶ 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

Finally, it is worth repeating that our fourth preliminary volume on the excavations was published as Aegis 13 in 2018. The volume (353 pages) details the findings of the 2015 and 2016 campaigns... At the moment of writing, we are busy putting together Sissi V. As usual, the volume can be ordered via i6doc... A brief presentation on the Sissi ceremonial building can be found online, at www.12ICCS.Proceedings.GR.

Don't forget to check out our Facebook group 'Sissi Excavations' with its more than 1300 members to stay informed or our website www.sarpedon.be that now also has been translated in Greek thanks to Danaï Theodoraki.

Lectures on Sissi were given at the Brussels Museum (December 2018), in Athens and Lamia (May 2018), Louvain-la-Neuve (March 2018), Charleroi (February 2018), Boston and Vienna (January 2018).