

# Sissi Archaeological Project

## NEWSLETTER

January 2023

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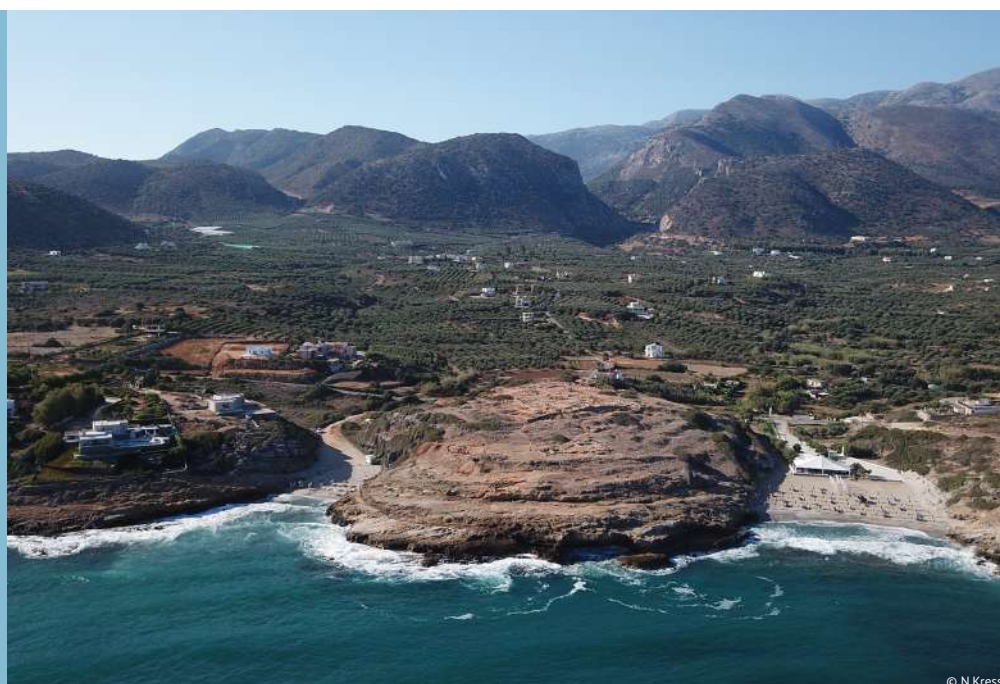
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 Sissi Excavations

Jan Driessen

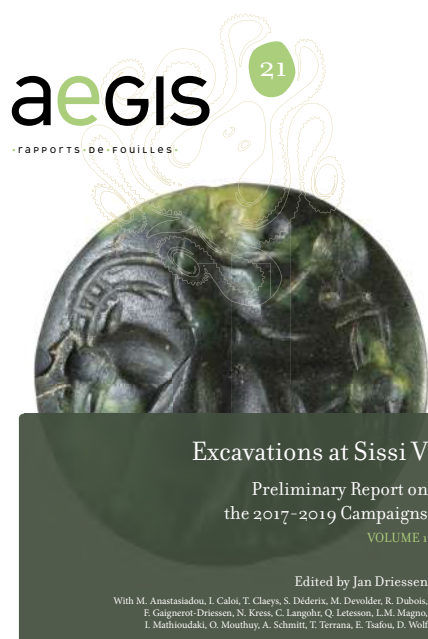
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## A THIRD FIVE-YEAR PROGRAMME



With the beginning of our third five-year programme at the archaeological site of *Kephali Agiou Antoniou* in Sissi we opted for a new logo. While the previous one paid homage to our ceramic experts, the new logo, designed by Maria Anastasiadou with the help of Nicolas Kress, sends a flower to our seal experts. It depicts a fine Neopalatial sealstone found in our main building CD during the excavations. But another even more exquisite sealstone, in lapis lacedaemonius, was recently published by Diana Wolf in the prestigious American journal *Hesperia*. We also placed it on the cover of the preliminary report on the 2017-2019 excavations published in 2022 as *Sissi V*. Let us know if you want to acquire this!

The good news is that we were given another five-year permit by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture for which we are grateful, the bad news is that some of our long-time funding bodies, including the Institute for Aegean Prehistory and the Communauté française, have altogether stopped funding archaeological projects. Since together these two were responsible for half our yearly budget, we are desperately looking for new sponsors – information on this can be found at the end of this newsletter.

Our plan for the next five years (2022-2026) is to invest considerably in the study of the excavated material for final publication and in site consolidation so that the excavations can be made accessible to the wider public. In parallel, some outstanding archaeological problems remain, which we like to tackle, and in some areas excavation is unfinished.

# THE PREPALATIAL VILLAGE

## THE 2022 EXCAVATION



Defining the nature and extent of the Prepalatial or Early Bronze Age (c. 2600 BCE) village that is located immediately west of, but at higher level than, the Court Building formed one of the outstanding issues. As far as we can tell, the first permanent occupation of the Sissi hill goes back to around 2700 BCE, a period we call Early Minoan IIA when at least three houses, each comprising half a dozen rooms, were built on top of the hill, but at a somewhat protected spot, not visible from the sea. During the 2018 campaign already, Quentin Letesson's team had come across the first remains and these were further explored in 2019 and in 2022. To our great surprise, later intrusions are rare despite the nearness of the house foundations to the present surface and the later Court Building, and we recovered perfect house plans and room contexts of a period that remains badly known on Crete. Open areas near the houses show holes, drilled into the bedrock, perhaps for posts to fix a fence for an animal pen or a hut in perishable materials. There are also several fixed installations the function of which remains to be determined. The rooms comprised a lot of pottery but also much imported obsidian and, in some cases, many goat horn cores associated with feasting. This year's field team was again directed by Q. Letesson, assisted by O. Mouthuy and UCLouvain students D. Vendramin, N. Dauby, N. Cools and E. Ramlot, and our drone pilot/topographer Nicolas Kress ('Leo') as well as Thessaloniki student S. Lapidis and I. Sandei (U. of Venice). Both L. Magno and C.

Tsoraki also briefly participated in the excavation as well as our local workers G. Tzannakis, M. Vlassis, A. Woytyla, D. Kivernitakis and occasional volunteers M. Zervakis, K. Avgoustakis, M. Tzannakis and C. Sfakaniakis while K. Kokolaki represented the eforia. All the material recovered was directly treated and registered in our apothiki by D. Machaira and V. Barka, and I. Caloi proceeded to the preliminary analysis of the pottery assemblages. N. Kartalou who took over the job as site architect from E. Zografou continued her work of the detailed stone-by-stone drawing of the site.



## STUDY SEASON 2022

The 2022 study season at our apothiki was very intense with, besides the Anavlochos team, more than 30 scholars and students present. We were fortunate to count on the incredible organizational talents of Dimitra Machaira who, together with our able conservator Pepi Saridaki and during August also Vaso Barka, managed to find even the slightest sherd or bone within our 400 m<sup>2</sup>

storage facility, and among our 15.312 objects and 50.081 samples (ceramic, charcoal, shells, bones, flots, plasters, mudbricks, etc.).

We had suffered some delay in the analysis of environmental remains and so we were happy that, under the general direction of Dr. Valasia Isaakidou, a considerable effort was made in the processing of the residues from the water flotation of the soil samples made during the excavation. This was the work of Nasia Makarouna, Theoni Baniou and Dafni Androulaki while Rena Veropoulidou continued her study of shells.

In addition, Christina Tsoraki studied ground stone tools and stone vases, Tristan Carter obsidian, Agata Ulanowska textile implements, Maria Anastasiadou seals, Borja Legarra Herrero and Carlos Martín-Torres the gold necklace. Our anthropologists, Aurore Schmitt, Anais Delliste and Chloé Girardi continued their study of the human remains from the different burial buildings.

But as before, much attention went to the material that forms 90% of all material retrieved from the site: pottery. Hence, Ilaria Caloi (assisted by Davide Aquini and Alessandro Sanavia, draughtsperson) studied the Pre-and-Protopalatial pottery from the cemetery, while Roxane Dubois continued her analysis of Middle Bronze Age contexts from the settlement in the frame of her FNRS-funded PhD. Iro Mathioudaki also returned to finish work on the Neopalatial contexts of Building BC in Zone 2. Charlotte Langohr, assisted by Jenny Tsafoú and Birgit Konnemann, draughtsperson, continued the analysis of the pottery from Building CD, the important Late Minoan IIIB (13<sup>th</sup> c. BCE) complex on top of the hill and managed to obtain a better distinction between the two main occupation phases of the complex.





## OUTREACH

- At the UCLouvain, two Aegis Days – the 5th and 6th already – were organised respectively on April 20, 2021 (remotely) and on May 18, 2022 (hybrid); among the presentations were a lecture by L. Magno on the micromorphology done at Sissi, by I. Caloi on the EM IIA phase and by V. Isaakidou on zooarchaeological results.

- J. Driessen gave lectures on Sissi at the University of Venice (30/10/2019), at the AEK conference in Rethymnon (24/11/2019), at the Cycladic Museum (9/12/2019), for the NKV in Leuven (10/9/2019), and at the University of Goteborg (30/1/2019) before COVID19 interrupted all in-person scientific activities. A full Sissi session – Between the Mountains and the Sea – was organised at the 102<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America with lectures by J. Driessen, I. Caloi, A. Schmitt, M. Devolder, T. Sager, C. Girardi, L. Magno, M.N. Pareja & T. Claeys. Since then, a lecture was given for the NKV in Gent (16/2/2022), R. Dubois presented the Protopalatial phase at Sissi at the Middle Bronze Age workshop at Pachyammos in June 11-13, 2022 while Quentin Letesson discussed the excavations of 2022 at the Belgian Day of Research in Greece at the Brussels museum on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2022.

- During the state visit by the King and Queen of Belgium to Greece in May 2022, a meet & greet was organised in which the different Belgian archaeological projects in



Greece were put in the spotlight. J. Driessen entertained the royals on 'We, the People of Sissi' in which brief presentations were given on DNA, residue and isotopic analyses carried out by members of the Sissi project. On this occasion, the reconstruction of the 'Sissi lady' by Céline Piret was also shown for the first time. Céline prepared this drawing in close collaboration with the archaeologists and anthropologists of the project.

- In October 2022, the 13<sup>th</sup> Cretological Congress took place in Agios Nikolaos and Sissi was evidently well-represented with lectures by several team members including C. Langohr, D. Wolf, R. Dubois, J. Tsafo, V. Isaakidou, S. Déderix, A. Schmitt, I. Caloi, T. Terrana, I. Mathioudaki, M. Devolder, M. Anastasiadou and J. Driessen, who also gave one of the five keynotes of the congress, often referring to Sissi.

## PUBLICATIONS

► *Sissi V* with reports on the excavations between 2017 and 2019 but also a detailed account on the survey conducted in the hinterland of the site is quite monumental in size, comprising two volumes, more than 700 pages, and hundreds of colour illustrations. Some researchers involved in the project were also active. Hence, Jenny Tsafo (in collaboration with J.J. García-Granero, in the *Journal of Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences*) published the results of the starch analysis of different types of cooking pots from Neopalatial and Postpalatial Sissi, which notably identified for the first time the use of cumin in the recipes of the Minoans (a condiment not yet documented in the archaeobotanical materials from other Minoan settlements), and Diana Wolf's publication of the Sissi Genius lentoid was already mentioned. Collaborative work on isotope analysis by A. Nafplioti with A. Schmitt, I. Crevecoeur & J. Driessen appeared in the *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* and a paper co-authored by A. Sarris & J. Driessen on the results of the geophysical exploration at Sissi was published in the *Journal of Field Archaeology*. A paper on the function of the Sissi Court-Centred Building by J. Driessen appeared in *Antiquity*. Do not hesitate to get in touch if you like to read these publications.

## SITE CONSOLIDATION



Consolidating the walls revealed during the excavation remains a major concern of the project and whoever has witnessed a winter on Crete knows that rain can be abundant and destructive. The nearness of the sea makes our site also vulnerable to saltwater sprays. Reasons enough to invest heavily in site maintenance and consolidation. Maintenance is usually the work of Manolis Tzannakis and Michalis Vlassis while we were lucky to count on the Kavousi team as they are known because their boss, Manolis Kassotakis, comes from this village. They have earned their spurs at Azoria, the Archaic site excavated by D.C. Haggis for the ASCSA. Kassotakis, assisted by Stelios Pitharoulis, Manolis Poulis and Alekos Davoutakis, worked for five weeks on the consolidation of the south and southwest side of the Court Building. The result is quite stunning and also revealed several unexpected architectural details. Eleni Adam – one-time student participant in the Sissi excavations and now studying in the Conservation School in Attica, where Dr. S. Chlouveraki teaches – assured the follow-up of the work. Dr. Chlouveraki and T. Marinis, moreover, came over and were busy analysing the site for the conservation master plan, on which works continues throughout the winter.



# THANKS

As before thanks are due to the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports and locally the Archaeological Service of Lasithi (EFALAS) and esp. Mrs. C. Sofianou, Mrs. V. Zografaki & Mrs. K. Zervaki. Mrs. K. Kokolaki represented EFALAS on site during the 2022 campaign while, since the departure of Dr. P. Iossif, we were greatly helped by Dr. Tina Kalantzopoulou of the EBSA, who could also count on the help of Mr. Papadakis and Mtre Natsoulis. Financial aid for the 2022 campaign came as before from the Institute of Aegean Prehistory, the FNRS, the EBSA, the ARC TALOS, as well as private sponsors including Mr. H. Davis, Mr. J.-M. Van Der Hoeven, Mrs E. Winter, Mr. R. Vandenberghe, Mr. P. Ruet, M. J.-P. Saida, and Mrs. H. Long.



## DONATE

**More than ever, we need your financial support**

The running costs of the project – the rent of storage rooms with alarm and insurance – are considerable but conservation and consolidation, drawing and study all cost.

All help is welcome, preferably via the **online forum of the UCLouvain**  
<https://getinvolved.uclouvain.be/sissi/~mon-don>  
which also provides tax exemption declarations.

**US-based benefactors** can send a cheque to the King Baudouin Foundation via  
<https://kbfus.networkforgood.com/projects/13729-u-kbfus-funds-universit-catholique-de-louvain-uclouvain-be>

More information: [sarpedon.be/donate](https://sarpedon.be/donate)

