

# Sissi Archaeological Project

## NEWSLETTER

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 Sissi Excavations

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## BUZZING WITH ACTIVITY

The summer of 2024 saw both the site and the apothiki buzzing with activity.

The 13<sup>th</sup> excavation campaign on the Kephali at Sissi was almost entirely devoted to testing the Court Building – some would probably prefer to call it a little ‘palace’ – and producing more chronological evidence to reconstruct its history.

As before, we cherish our good relations with the local archaeological service headed by Mrs C. Sofianou and her team (V. Zografaki, K. Zervaki).

On site, the archaeological service was represented by Mrs H. Senn-Kassotaki.

They are here warmly thanked as is the Belgian School at Athens and its deputy director T. Kalantzopoulou.





# THE 2024 EXCAVATION FIELDWORK



- Our topographer/drone master Nicolas Kress came over to set up the topographical station and logistics while Prof. Seb Hirsch continued to work on the virtual reconstructions of the site. In 2024, we worked with five small teams. A first team with Eleni Adam, Hugo Lambert and Dimitris Tzannakis, completed some work in the Prepalatial houses dating to ca. 2600 BCE, finding some more characteristic pottery deposits. Both houses are now excavated and consolidated. They are a rare example of early architecture since Early Bronze Age remains are still poorly attested on the island. The team then tested parts of the West Wing where they again mostly encountered Prepalatial layers, confirming our earlier ideas that the core of the West Wing already existed then and that in the Neopalatial period, ca. a thousand years later, an ashlar screen wall had been placed against existing ruins.



- A second team, with Molly Meyrick-Long and Arkadi Woytyla, made a test in Zone 2, the Neopalatial houses on the northwest terrace of the hill to check whether there could have been

a lustral basin in one of the sunken rooms. They went down to bedrock but no specific evidence to confirm this hypothesis was retrieved. The team then further explored the northeast part of the Court Building, the area of the drain, where Middle Minoan IIIA layers were encountered suggestive for the construction date of this part of the complex.

- A third team with Jules Debie, Guillaume Storder and Manolis Tzannakis, completed several tests in the southwest part of the Court Building. They finished excavating the west part of the large cistern. This west part was separated by a partition wall from the east part that had partly been explored in 2023. It again yielded lots of Protopalatial sherds but no complete vases. It very much looks like this western part of the cistern had already been filled in before the cistern's roof collapsed.



- A fourth team comprising Kilian Regnier, Emily Tees and Nastassya Cools first completed the excavation of the black layer in the southeast part of the court and retrieved valuable stratigraphical evidence from this test as well as from a test in the East Wing. They also sounded the large room 15.4 in the East Wing, coming upon a fire destruction layer with plenty of Neopalatial vases.

- The fifth and final team with Dr Diana Wolf, Siebe Goossens, Anis Aghezzaf, and Alexandre Simon explored the South Wing of the Court Building, the part that considerably slopes down. They unexpectedly came upon several original destruction deposits. A first deposit was found in the very eastern part of the South Wing and revealed what may have been a potter's workshop, with a potter's wheel, a large ceramic disc as well as a stone trough in which the axle of the wheel seems to have turned, all almost in their original position.

The context seems to suggest an earthquake destruction and a first analysis suggests this happened in Middle Minoan IIIA, the same phase that had yielded destruction deposits during earlier campaigns. This also suggests that the earlier predecessor of the Court Building did comprise a production function, something absent from the later complex. Moreover, lower down the slope, and to the very west, an earlier building with a different orientation was found, as can be seen from the aerial photo. We only had time to check two small compartments here, but both had destruction deposits, probably also caused by earthquake. The pottery here, however, seems to be somewhat earlier, Middle Minoan IIB and may comprise some Messara imports. Did Sissi then suffer two successive destructions, a first one around 1750 BCE, and another one a generation later? We hope to continue these tests the next season.



- Dr. Laura Magno also came over from Pylos to take a series of micromorphological samples while Dr. Nikolia Kartalou of Edinburgh University, our site architect, continued the stone-by-stone planning of the remains, aided by N. Kress.

- The Azoria consolidation team directed by Manolis Kassotakis also continued their work on the emergency consolidation of the Prepalatial Hamlet and the West Wing of the Court Building, under the able supervision of E. Adam, a student in conservation at the West-Attica University.





## OUTREACH

- The Sissi excavations were at the core of a new documentary provisionally called 'The Mother of the Minotaur', an Austrian production directed by Iris Fegerl and meant for Arte. It is to be diffused in Spring 2025.
- But as before we received quite a few visitors, including some of our sponsors such as Prof. D. Nakassis, Mr J.-M. Van der Hoeven, Mr P. Kardoulakis, Mr P. Saidah and Mrs K. Schoetens. Photos can be found in our Facebook group. Perhaps a special mention of a group of the Belgian University Foundation guided by the UCLouvain's honorary chancellor Bernard Coulie and another group of Waouw Travel (La Libre). Both adored their visit to the Sissi site.
- The Aegis research team is also delighted to celebrate two of its members who have completed their doctoral research. Daniele Vendramin successfully defended his PhD at the UCLouvain on September 26th, directed by Prof. Jan Driessen. Daniele examined kinship groups and social organisation in Prepalatial Crete from

the perspective of the settlement of Myrtos Fournou Korifi and the circular tomb cemeteries of Lebena, in Southern Crete. Louis Dautais defended his PhD on the 19th of December, entitled "Egypt and the Aegean World (18th-mid. 14th c. BCE): From the lamentations of Ipouour to the fall of Knossos" and directed by Prof. Marc Gabolde and Prof. Charlotte Langohr. In addition, new projects have been launched within the Aegis group, as we have recently welcomed three new members. Nikita Dauby has started a FSR-funded doctoral thesis, assessing pottery production, consumption practices and ceramics supply in the Sissi-Malia region (1700-1200 BCE); Anastasia Solomou's FNRS funded PhD will explore the status of children in Minoan society from an archaeological and anthropological perspectives. while Paul Bacoup will conduct FSR-funded postdoctoral research on the technical aspects of wood use in the built environment of Bronze Age Aegean communities. All these projects are firmly rooted in the study of materials from Sissi.

## FÉLIX NEUBERGH AWARD UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

The Sissi Archaeological Project's director Jan Driessen was awarded the 2024 Félix Neubergh award at the University in Gothenburg where he gave a lecture in which the results of the Sissi excavations received plenty of attention.



## THE 2024 EXCAVATION · STUDY

- Study and conservation of Sissi material evidently also continued at a high pace. Dr Charlotte Langohr coordinated a team of nine people including Dr E. Tsafoi, N. Dauby, A. Davis, V. Barka, Dr D. Vendramin, N. Cools and K. Fabrikatzi, with the help of our able conservator P. Saridaki and draughtswoman B. Konnemann, continued the study for final publication of Building CD, the large Mycenaean complex excavated between 2007 and 2011.
- V. Barka and K. Fabrikatzi as well as P. Saridaki were of immense value also during the excavation, coordinating the processing of all the archaeological material, from washing to strewing to inventory and subsequent storage.
- Prof. Ilaria Caloi (Ca'Foscari Venice), assisted by A. Sanavia, D. Aquini and G. Salvadori, considerably advanced the study of the ceramics from the Prepalatial houses.
- Christina Tsoraki, Agata Ulanowska and Maria Anastasiadou, our experts of ground stone tools and stone vases, textile implements, and seals also came over and worked in the apothiki.
- Our local friends, including our resident artists Gavin and Rosemarie McGuire helped in many ways and Gavin's photographs can also be admired via our Facebook group.





# THANKS

This year we received financial aid from different official and less official sides. As before the FNRS, INSTAPEC, the ARC TALOS and the EBSA contributed substantially, as did the FSR-UCLouvain and INCAL.

But among our private sponsors we are especially grateful to Mr J.-M. Van der Hoeven, Mrs E. Winter, Prof. D. Nakassis, Prof. R. Laffineur, Mrs G. Driessen, Mrs K. Schoetens, Prof. F. Gaignerot-Driessen, Mrs Kress-Stoffels & Mr P. Saidah. We also thank Mr and Mrs Cunningham for letting us lodge students in their Vrachasi house.

## AEGIS SERIES

Last but not least, several new volumes have been published in our Aegis Series during the last year, including proceedings of international workshops and conferences, a Festschrift, and a monograph dedicated to the casts of the Lion Gate at Mycenae, all initiatives from Aegis members and collaborators.



## 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> or via  
[don.minoan-aegis.net/en](https://don.minoan-aegis.net/en)  
which also provides tax exemption declarations.

**US-based benefactors** can donate via the King Baudouin Foundation using the following link

<https://www.every.org/universite-catholique-de-louvain-uclouvain-be>

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

