

Sissi Archaeological Project

NEWSLETTER

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 Sissi Excavations

Jan Driessen

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A DIFFERENT YEAR

2023 was a different year – mainly because obtaining the necessary funding to continue excavation, consolidation, conservation, documentation, studies and publication remains a persisting concern. One of the consequences was that we were only able to work with a small team this summer. But what a team it was! Apart from senior members – Driessen, Langohr, Kress, Saridaki, Tsoraki & the McGuire's as well as our local excavators and site consolidators – we had a bunch of youngsters who really did a marvellous job, both in the field (Jules Debie, Molly Meyrick-Long, Jerome Coillie, Gesine Jaeger, Savas Lapidis, Mathieu Driessen, Dimitra Fotinopoulou) and the apothiki (Nikita Dauby, Vaso Barka, Angeliki Cheimonaki). A big thank you to all!

As before, we had Konstantina Kokolaki representing the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and we are very thankful to the Archaeological Service of East Crete (C. Sofianou, V. Zografaki, K. Zervaki) for a splendid cooperation. In Athens we were very lucky to count on the services of Dr. T. Kalantzopoulou (EBSA).



THE 2023 EXCAVATION FIELDWORK



• The 12th excavation campaign on the Kephali at Sissi concentrated on the further exploration of the Neopalatial Court Building, the monumental structure on the south part of the hill. Tests in the Central Court revealed a succession of four different floors: a first layer of so-called Sissi earth (made of marl) covers the bedrock. This was superimposed by a pebble floor on which later again a marl layer was placed and only in its last Neopalatial phase, a hard tarazza-cement floor was installed, which was at times repaired. The difference between the bedrock and top is barely 15 cm. Another test against Space 6.17 in the northwest angle of the court also illustrated a complex architectural history. Since the tarazza cement flooring stops about 50 cm east of the east wall of 6.17 but goes well with the ammoda steps and square platform on the south side of 6.17, we hypothesise that ammoda steps originally also existed to the east of 6.17, which would therefore have been an open-air paved platform. In a second phase, a square, higher platform would have been constructed against the southwest side of this paved platform. This happened before the tarazza cement floor of the court was installed. In a last phase, side walls would have been constructed, turning 6.17 into a closed room while a new staircase, running east-west, would have been added to its south side, on top of the tarazza floor, leading to the higher platform.

• We also investigated the fine stone and terracotta drain that originated in the north-east corner of the Central Court. Since Late Minoan IIIB sherds were found within it, it must have remained open till a late stage.



• But the most surprising discovery was a well-preserved plastered cistern, immediately south of the west entrance passage. It has a diameter of almost 5 m and is up to 2 m deep. Its floor is irregular with the plaster closely following the bedrock. The earliest pottery encountered seems to be Middle Minoan IB, a date also confirmed by other tests in the southwest wing of the Court Building. The cistern originally had a roofing in tarazza and probably a manhole, covered by a terracotta slab. Soon after its initial use, a partition wall had to be incorporated to support the ceiling. Several complete vases, mostly MM II, were found in the cistern, but also stone vase fragments, a fine sealstone, and other objects. Its roof seems to have collapsed, perhaps during the MM IIIA earthquake for which evidence exists elsewhere on



the site. MM IIIA is, in any case, the latest pottery attested. Afterwards the cistern was filled-in and the room was given a new floor in MM IIIB. The cistern should be seen in connection to the earlier evidence found for infrastructures related to water collection in the Court Building. Although more tests are needed, it also becomes more likely that at least the southwest wing of the Court Building dates back to the very beginning of the Protopalatial period, a phase that was hitherto underrepresented at Sissi.

• We also continued the exploration of the Prepalatial settlement (Early Minoan IIA, c. 2600 BCE), immediately northwest of the Court Building. In previous campaigns, a multi-roomed structure with its contents in place had been excavated and this season another structure north of the previous one was cleared. In contrast, this building had been abandoned earlier and very little material was left in place. A test showed an earlier phase in one of the rooms. Detailed ceramic analysis still needs to take place but there is a good possibility that different, successive phases in the Prepalatial period are attested. Moreover, the north wall of the North House was perhaps even a fortification wall.



• At the same time, we continued the emergency consolidation of the site, this season concentrating on the east wing of the Court Building. We hope that we can finish at least the wall consolidation by the end of next year. Helped by Dr. Steffie Chlouveraki and Theodoros Marinis, assisted by Nikolia Kartalou, Nicolas Kress and Thérèse Claeys, we also managed to complete the Master Plan of the site, which will form the basis for the further (tourist) development plan of the site.

OUTREACH

• In December 2022, the Belgian Committee for Archaeological Research in Greece honoured Prof. Driessen with a special day of lectures. This included also a lecture by Dr. Quentin Letesson on the Prepalatial Settlement at Sissi. Letesson also gave an online talk for the Mycenaean Seminar of London University on this topic and he and Prof. Ilaria Caloi did a webinar for the Friends of the Institute for Aegean Prehistory. Jan Driessen and Thérèse Claeys talked about the excavations and consolidation at Sissi at Edinburgh University while Driessen discussed the Court Building at the University of Venice. At the Chronos workshop, Dr. Iro Mathioudaki and Dr. Tiziano Fantuzzi co-authored a paper on the use of Correspondance Analysis at Sissi. In March, Jenny

Tsafou – apothiki manager and ceramic specialist of the Sissi project – successfully defended her PhD at the UCLouvain, directed by Prof. Charlotte Langohr. Jenny examined i.a. Sissi cooking pots both macroscopically and through various scientific analyses (use-wear, organic residues) obtaining fascinating new insights in Minoan cooking recipes and practices. In April 2023, Driessen led a group of 25 students, doctoral candidates and postdocs around Crete, visiting more than 35 sites and museums in a week, a marvellous experience. Several colleagues graciously presented their sites. In June 2023, Langohr and Tsafou presented their collaborative work on cooking pot assemblages from Sissi at the Capacities Workshop organised at the EfA.



Pottery and bones conservation © Driessen

COMMANDER IN THE ORDER OF THE CROWN

The Sissi Archaeological Project's director Jan Driessen was made Commander in the Order of the Crown by HM the King of Belgium at a ceremony held in the residence of HE Mme F. Gustin, ambassador of Belgium, attended by many friends.

• In the framework of a project supported by the Research and Creation Fund of UCLouvain, visual artist Eva l'Hoest worked within the Sissi Project. She immersed herself in archaeological research, spending time with the members of the Sissi team, on the site and within the research lab, to draw inspiration and develop video images, using CGI. Some of these images have been projected on a large screen at BOZAR, Brussels, in December 2022, at the occasion of a collaboration with the Belgian National Orchestra for which they created a show that poetically reflects on the long-term consequences of nuclear actions, using four 20th c. musical pieces.



THE 2023 EXCAVATION · STUDY

- The Sissi apothiki – our storeroom and research lab – was also buzzing with activity this summer. It started in July with a study campaign coordinated by Charlotte Langohr (FNRS-UCLouvain) and Jenny Tsafou (INICAL-UCLouvain) which included a lot of logistical and database recording tasks, in view of forthcoming studies and publications, but also important conservation work on ceramic assemblages entrusted to the expert hands of Pepi Saridaki (chief conservator), assisted by Angeliki Cheimonaki.
- In parallel, the apothiki team (Charlotte Langohr, Jenny Tsafou, Nikita Dauby & Vasso Barka) continued the painstaking sifting and analyses of the pottery retrieved from numerous contexts excavated in Building CD, the multi-roomed Late Minoan IIIB (1300-1190 BCE) complex on the summit of the hill. In particular, these contexts have provided an important proportion of small and large transport containers, some of which are clearly imports from different regions of Crete, but also most possibly from outside the island (Greek mainland, East Aegean).
- In addition, Dr. Christina Tsoraki (University of Leicester) continued her study of the Sissi ground stone assemblage and stone vessels. In August, Nikita Dauby and Vasso Barka masterfully managed the day-to-day processing of finds from the 2023 excavation campaign, with an energy, enthusiasm and efficiency that will certainly permeate the walls of our apothiki for many years to come!

THANKS

We sincerely thank this year's sponsors for their financial support: the FNRS, the Communauté française/ Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, INSTAPEC, the ARC TALOS as well as M. Jean-Martin Van Der Hoeven, M. Cédric de Monceau, M. Dimitri Nakassis, Mrs Loukia Stergiou, Mrs Elizabeth Winter, Mrs Katinka Soetens, Mrs Eddie Marcelis, Mrs Fabienne Stoffels, Mrs Susanne Gotwald.

Next year, some important conservation and documentation works on the findings from Building CDE, mainly ceramics, will be facilitated by a new grant obtained for the Sissi Archaeological Project by Charlotte Langohr from the Fonds Spéciaux de Recherches of UCLouvain.



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

