

Excavations at Sissi IV

Preliminary Report on the

2015-2016 Campaigns

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UCL PRESSES
UNIVERSITAIRES
 DE LOUVAIN

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Registration of copyright: D/2018/9964/12
ISBN: 978-2-87558-672-8
ISBN PDF version: 978-2-87558-673-5
Printed in Belgium by CIACO scrl – printer number 96601
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Graphic design: Marie-Hélène Grégoire
Photograph: MM II Kamares sherd from Zone 7 at Sissi (©EBSA; C. Papanikolopoulos)
Volume set in Adobe InDesign CS6 by Nicolas Kress

Distribution: www.i6doc.com, on-line university publishers
Available on order from bookshops or at

Diffusion universitaire CIACO (University Distributors)
Grand-Rue, 2/14
1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium
Tel: +32 10 47 33 78
Fax: +32 10 45 73 50
duc@ciaco.com

Distributor in France:
Librairie Wallonie-Bruxelles
46 rue Quincampoix
75004 Paris, France
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Jo Cutler (1962-2018)
(Photo by Rosemarie McGuire)

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1. Excavations at Sissi, 2015-2016

Jan Driessen

A second, 5-year excavation program on the *Bouphos* or *Kephali tou Agiou Antoniou* at Sissi under the auspices of the Belgian School at Athens was initiated in 2015. This volume presents some of the preliminary results¹ of the two campaigns (the 6th and the 7th) that took place between June 29th and August 7th, 2015, and between June 27th and August 5th, 2016. It is always my pleasure to thank the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports as well as Mrs. C. Sophianou, Mrs. V. Zographaki and Mrs. K. Zervaki of the Archaeological Service of East Crete (EFALAS – *nomos Lasithiou*) for their help and assistance. We also thank Mrs. V. Sitiakaki of the Archaeological Service of Central Crete (*nomos Irakliou*) for allowing us to do post-excavation processing at the French School at Malia in 2015 and for facilitating the move of our finds in 2016 to our new storage hub near Agios Nikolaos. During the 2015 campaign, the premises and personnel (Mrs. E. Kivernitaki, who also worked for us in 2016) of the French School at Malia as well as coring equipment were graciously put at our disposition by its director, Prof. Alexandre Farnoux, for which we are very grateful. INSTAPEC and its director, Dr. Tom Brogan, were as usual helpful in many ways and kindly sent us Chronis Papanikoloupoulos to photograph the finds at the end of both seasons. Mr. Nikos Thanos represented the Greek Archaeological Service during both campaigns and provided much assistance as did our EBSA secretary Dr. Panos Iossif, the Schools' lawyer, Me. Nikos Natsoulis, and the School's accountant, Mr. Andreas Papadakis.

Funding for fieldwork during 2015 and 2016 was generously provided by the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, the ARC-UCLouvain 'A World in Crisis?', the Belgian FNRS, the Direction Recherche of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, and the Belgian School at Athens. Additional help was given by car rental company Motorplan (Mr. D. Dineris, Mr. M. Dineris), Mrs. A.-M. Avramut, Mrs. L. Stergiou, Mr. J.-M. Vander Hoeven, Mr. B. Bakker, Mr. V. Prineas, and anonymous private donors. Mr. K. Karevelakis and Mr. C. Mameloukos helped us to get water for flotation on site. We were fortunate to receive a grant from the Gilles Hondius Foundation and the 2016 Andante Archaeology Travel Award which helped to carry the costs for the geophysical work under the direction of Dr. A. Sarris (Rethymnon, FORTH). We also thank the local population of Sissi and Vrachasi for their goodwill.

During the summer of 2016, the EBSA also received the old school of Vrachasi in lease for a period of 30 years. We hope to convert this building into a study and cultural centre if funds are forthcoming. We thank the mayor of Agios Nikolaos, Mr. A. Zervos, and the *dimos*' lawyer, Me. G. Makrakis as well as the EBSA's lawyer, Me. Nikos Natsoulis, for their help.

We received many visitors again this summer (see our Facebook page 'Sissi Excavations') and were part of several documentaries, including one by the Travel Channel (with Josh Gates) and one which we organised ourselves by H. Michel-Béchet and M. Bertrand. More information can also be found on the project's website: www.sarpedon.be which has been entirely updated and embellished by Mr. Giannis Giannopoulos.

Our team each season almost comprised 100 people. Area supervisors during these two seasons were Dr. Aurore Schmitt (CNRS, U. of Marseilles) (Zone 9, Cemetery), Dr. Quentin Letesson (Marie Curie Fellow-UCL) (Zones 4 & 13, Summit), Dr. Maud Devolder (Humboldt Fellow, U. of Berlin) (Zone 6, Central Court), Dr. Simon Jusseret (FNRS, UCL, now U. of Texas, Zone 10, West Wing), Dr. Sylviane Déderix (UCL) (Zone 11, Northwest Wing), Thérèse Claeys (FRESH-UCL) (Zones 8 & 10, West Wing), Ophélie Mouthuy (FNRS-UCL) (Zone 15, Southeast Wing), while Dr. Maria Anastasiadou (U. of Heidelberg) conducted a few tests within Building CD. Nicolas Kress (UCL) was drone pilot and topographer, assisted by Emeline Chiliade (2016) whereas Eleftheria Zografou served as site architect, assisted by Marilena Pateraki and Christos Koutsaftis. Our workforce primarily consisted of people from the village of Vrachasi and Sissi and included

¹ As the title of this (and the previous) volume indicates, it is a preliminary publication. Nothing should be cited or reproduced without the prior written consent of the director of the excavations and the Belgian School at Athens.

Giannis Milathaniakis (2015, 2016), Michalis Tzannakis (2015), Manolis Tzannakis (2015, 2016), Dimitris Tzannakis (2016), Dimitris Kivernitakis (2015, 2016), Nikos Kivernitakis (2015), Kristiaan Jacobsen (2015, 2016), Michalis Vlassis (2015, 2016), Dimitris Papandonakis (2015, 2016), Kostas Avgoustakis (2016), Giorgos Souladakis (2016); we were also joined by Andreas Vrachnakis (2015) from Vangelies and Giannis Milidakis (2015, 2016) from Angathia.

Dr. Charlotte Langohr (FNRS-UCL) was in charge of the apothiki, assisted by Dr. Ilaria Caloi (U. of Venice), Jenny Tsafofou (EBSA), Dr. Margarita Nazou, Laura Mary, Roxane Dubois, Benoit Fourneau (all UCL), Katarina Savvidou (U. Thessaloniki) and Antonella Coco (U. of Catania). Jenny Tsafofou completed the admirable task of moving all our finds into the new apothiki. Dr. Rena Veropoulidou (Ephoria Thessaloniki) studied the shells, Dr. Alex Livarda (U. of Nottingham) the botanical material. Object conservation took place by Pepi Saridaki (Iraklion) assisted by Constantina Hadjivasili (Larnaca) and Vaso Frangiadaki (Iraklion). Maria Vlachaki, Eleanna Nikolaidou, Aria Kopadaki (all U. of Crete), Vaso Holeva (U. of Ioanina) and Ale Kriti (U. of Sheffield) were in charge of environmental processing. Dr. Hannah Joris did the drawing in 2015 and Birgit Konnemann in 2016, whereas site conservation, under the general direction of Dr. Steffie Chlouveraki, was executed in the field by Nikos Liberopoulos in 2015 and in 2016 by an able team under direction of Manolis Kassotakis of Kavousi, graciously sent by Prof. Donald Haggis. The team also included Stavros Pitharakis, Vangelis Grammatikakis and Manolis Poulis. Photography was the work, as usual, of Chronis Papanikolopoulos (INSTAPEEC), the director and area supervisors. Site artists were Rosemarie McGuire and Gavin McGuire who also lent much day-to-day assistance. Giancarlo Cataldo took care of kollatzo in 2015, the director in 2016.

Other participating students and volunteers came from the Université Catholique de Louvain (T. Terrana, A. Attout, A. Meulemeester, J. Simons, C. Figueroa, M.-L. Bourgoïn, J. Genevois, H. Bouillon, C. Heering, A. Melin, P. Versteegen, B. Tresca, R. Boulanger, E. Fontaine, M. André, S. Kalogeras, H. Deligne, E. Chiliade, K. Regnier), the Universities of Antwerp (A. Aertssen), Ghent (S. Leemans, S. Barbier, C. Van Huffel, E. Van Brabant), Brussels (E. Marcelis, V. Bizonzi), Namur (J. Pacco), Aix-Marseille (E. Spérandio, A. Meffray, B. Santucci), Paris I (G. Guillaume), Paris IV (M. Vannet), Strasbourg (A. Légendart), Ecole du Louvre (L. Clos), Montpellier (L. Dautais), Crete (E. Padiaditi), Thessaloniki (S. Avramidou), Catania (R. Riciputo, J. Zitelli, P. Mendola, F. Genovese, P. d'Angelo, S. Pasanissi), Ioannina (S. Kontiza, S. Karafola, P. Kaplanis, C. Soulele, A. Koutsiofyti, M. Kontogianni), Oxford (T. Sager), Heidelberg (Dr. M. Anastasiadou, S. Müller), Bochum (L. Neumann), Toronto (S. Lund, I. Kritikopoulos), University College London (E. Hayter), Nottingham (T. Mumelter, P. Rawlinson), Melbourne (S. Staub, J. Heywood, M. Harris-Schober), Madrid (P. Gutteriez, E. Fernandez), Vienna (N. Petritsch, S. Schlapansky), Texas Tech (H. Johnson), Stanford (G. Erny) and D. Skoulikari (Neapolis).

Although the aim of the 2015 season was primarily to conduct selected tests in the buildings exposed during the 2007-2011 campaigns and uncover more of the potential Court-Centred Building (henceforth CCB) hypothetically identified at the very end of the 2011 campaign (*Sissi III*: 22, 152-153), both in 2015 and 2016, Dr. Apostolos Sarris of the Laboratory of Geophysical- Satellite Remote Sensing & Archaeo-environment (Rethymnon, FORTH) conducted a geophysical survey, helped by Meropi Manataki (FORTH) and Dr. Sylviane Déderix (UCL). By using a combination of three non-destructive surveying techniques – GPR, resistivity and magnetism – a good idea was formed of the type of remains to expect. This is discussed further on in this volume (see §2). To prepare for this survey, we removed – by hand and bobcat – several of the earth dumps that were created during the first 5-year programme. In 2015, the geophysical survey concentrated on the area of the potential CCB, while in 2016, the top of the hill and the terraces north of Building CD were explored. This survey produced unexpected clear signals that guided excavation during both campaigns (**figs 1.1 & 2.12**). In the case of the potential CCB, it suggested the presence of a large northeast-southwest oriented court as well as a separate east-west oriented rectangular construction south-west of this court (here called Building K). In both cases, this was confirmed by excavation. The signals produced by the remains north of Building CD were interpreted as reflecting the presence of a single structure of sizeable dimensions and complex internal plan. Excavation has just started here (Zone 8) and it is too early to discuss its results in detail. The signals obtained by GPR on the summit of the hill (Zones 13 & 14) – southeast of Building CD, where most of our earth dump was located –, were not promising enough to ask for immediate exploration. The 2016 excavation campaign at Sissi was complemented by a geomorphological survey undertaken in the valleys exiting east and west of

the *Kephali* Hill. This survey was carried out by Dr. Simon Jusseret (UCL & U. of Austin, Tx) and Prof. Mark Maclin (then Aberystwyth University, UK) between the 4th and the 8th of July 2016. In addition to surface reconnaissance of the valley landforms, two cores were taken in the valley to the southwest of the hill (see §8).

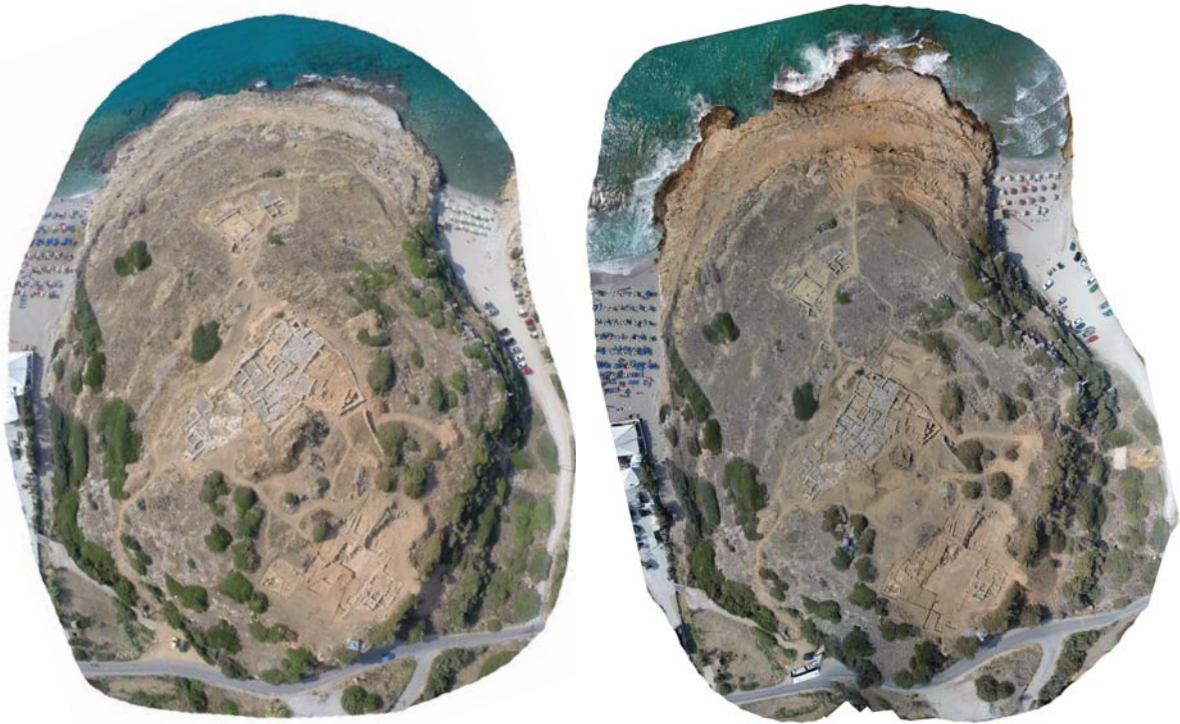


FIG. 1.1 ORTHOPHOTOS OF THE *KEPHALI* AT SISSI, RESPECTIVELY AT THE END OF THE 2015 AND 2016 CAMPAIGNS. NORTH AT TOP (©EBSA; N. KRESS)

Excavation in 2015 simultaneously took place in two Zones – 4 and 6 – while in 2016 we continued the exploration of Zone 6, that of the summit (Zones 4, 8 and 13) and of the west part of the cemetery (Zone 9) (fig. 1.2)². Soil and phytolith samples were taken for each archaeological unit and the first were processed at the French School at Malia in 2015 and at *Avlaki*, at the foot of the site, in 2016. We also took a series of selected micromorphological samples, especially in the court. Wall consolidation started early during each campaign and continued afterwards.

The results of the two campaigns are discussed in more detail in this volume, as far as their preliminary analysis has proceeded, but here some general comments are made for the different zones, starting at the north foot of the hill and ending with the Neopalatial monumental building.

² To give an idea of the size of the operation : in 2015, we removed 200 m³ of earth: 66,295 l from Zone 6 itself, 86,600 l from Zone 10, and 34,994 l from Zone 11, the equivalent of 3757 wheel barrows.

1. Excavations at Sissi, 2015-2016

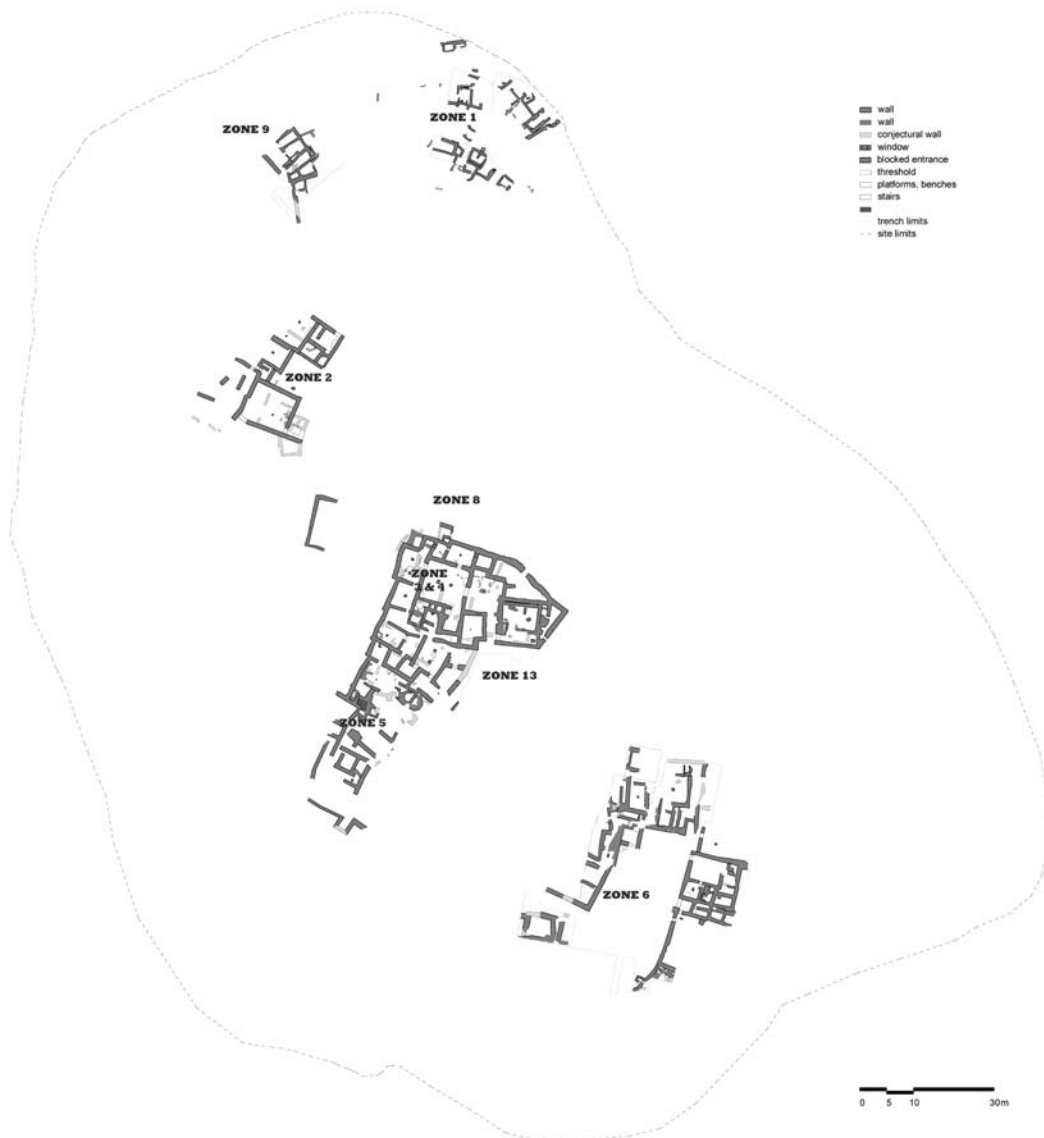


FIG. 1.2 GENERAL OUTLINE PLAN OF THE SITE AT THE END OF THE 2016 CAMPAIGN (©EBSA; E. ZOGRAFOU)

In the western part (**Zone 9**) of the cemetery, we continued the exploration of the large Middle Minoan I-II house tomb (9A) of which five compartments had been partially cleared in 2011. The specific aim in 2016 was to determine the contours of this tomb and to proceed in its detailed excavation. It was seen that both to the east and to the south, more burial activities could be identified, some dating back to the late Prepalatial period (9.9 & 9.10). To the south especially, a homogenous level comprising sherds, stones and pebbles within a red matrix covered both the walls and the spaces of more burial compartments. This 0.10 m thick layer comprised a few modern objects in its uppermost part but the Minoan sherds are quite homogenous: MM I and MM II. This layer also covered a dense pottery deposit more to the west and seems to have been installed intentionally to seal off earlier activities. The different orientation of the wall lines found underneath the matrix suggests that we have here at least one other burial structure. In general and, as in previous years, we came across both primary inhumations and secondary deposits of disarticulated bones but also several pithos burials, the

latter often inserted in pits within the abandoned buildings in the mature Protopalatial period. These usually contained primary, articulated burials of adults but bones of perinatals and infants were also recovered. Within the different spaces, detailed stratigraphical recording allows for the recognition of successive episodes of deposition. Within one space (9.5) for example, three different pebble floor levels could be identified: on the highest level there was a single human bone as well as fragments of handled cups and jars while on top of the second level an inverted lamp and ditto handled cup had been placed, one next to the other, alongside the west wall. The earliest floor had two inverted handled cups, body sherds and a fragmentary bird's nest bowl, the first stone vase (16-09-4119-OB001) to be found in the Sissi cemetery (**fig. 1.3**).



FIG. 1.3 STONE VASE (16-09-4119-OB001) FROM SPACE 9.5 IN THE CEMETERY (©EBSA; C. PAPANIKOLOPOULOS)

North of Building CD, in **Zone 8**, some wall alignments were visible from the start of the excavation and a test in 2008 had suggested a Protopalatial date for these remains (*Sissi II*: 139-140). The GPR survey by A. Sarris in 2016 resulted in a clear plan of architectural features (*cf. fig. 2.2*). Large rooms, smaller spaces and corridors can be identified and, seen as a whole, the complex compares well with similarly dated complexes at nearby Malia if its Protopalatial date can be confirmed as well as the possibility that all walls belong to a single architectural phase. We have started to explore this area, which slopes down over two terraces. The contiguity of this area to Building CD as well as the already apparent circumstance that some of the walls are either cut through by CD's façade or, on the contrary, follow the same alignment, suggests that some of the earlier constructions located on this northern terrace were partially incorporated within the Neopalatial and Postpalatial rebuildings of Building CD. Excavation has not progressed sufficiently enough but at the end of the 2016 campaign seven different spaces were identified which correspond well with the plan suggested by the GPR survey. Some of these spaces, however, were clearly occupied during the final Neopalatial or Final Palatial/early Postpalatial period³.

During 2015 and 2016, we also conducted a few tests inside Building CD (**Zone 3**)⁴. We had noticed that the badly preserved pebble floor of Room 3.11, in which we found a column base with next to it a large basin in 2011 (*Sissi III*: 74-75), was located about 0.20 m higher than those of the surrounding rooms. We decided to test it and came upon an earlier floor, again only partly preserved, but associated with several objects including a lid, a painted figurine (15-03-0504-OB003), a terracotta spool and part of a painted conical rhyton (15-03-0505-OB002) (**fig. 1.4**), all seemingly LM IIIA2 in date. Again, large quantities of pumice were collected as in the higher levels. It implies that Building CD's history started already in the 14th c. BC. The pottery here, however, seems more advanced than that encountered in Zone 8 to the north.

³ These tests, directed by Thérèse Claeys, will be reported on in our next report.

⁴ These tests, directed by Maria Anastasiadou, will be discussed in the final publication of Building CD.



FIG. 1.4 BUILDING CD: TEST IN ROOM 3.11: LID *IN SITU*; PAINTED FIGURINE AND CONICAL RHYTON (©EBSA; J. DRIESSEN & C. PAPANIKOLOPOULOS)

Most attention went, however, to the east part of Building CD, **Zone 4**, where excavation had started in 2007 (*Sissi I*: 130-131). The area was then interpreted as an outside courtyard in front of the large threshold leading into Hall 3.1, dating to the Postpalatial period. Since no real floor level of this period was preserved in this courtyard, we were able to conduct a series of tests which revealed the top of some earlier walls, delimiting spaces 4.1 to 4.3 while a basement room, 4.19, with a massive Neopalatial fire destruction had been identified and partly excavated in a basement room against the eastern, obtuse façade (*Sissi II*: 103-105; *III*: 99-102). This basement room (4.19) remains thus far our best site example of what is probably a LM IB fire destruction, comprising a very large number of conical, tall convex and S-profile cups, horizontal-handled bowls, large melon-shaped loomweights and much charred vegetal material. It also produced a lentoid sealstone with agrimi (see the contribution by Maria Anastasiadou §7). This destruction deposit continues into the room west of it (4.22), which was probably a *sottoscala*. It produced an alabastron and a firebox besides the usual cups. More evidence for a Neopalatial fire destruction was also found in a spacious room, 4.4., immediately east of the Postpalatial threshold into Hall 3.1, and this comprised a tripod conical bowl, an incense burner, parts of a painted rhyton, a cup rhyton, conical cups, small plates, and medium-sized piriform jugs (fig. 1.5). These two deposits clearly illustrate an LM I occupation of the summit of the hill and, presumably, an early phase of Building CD, but we are at present unable to present a reliable reconstruction of this phase. Erosion (and, quite possibly, ploughing) drastically affected archaeological levels down to earlier phases.



FIG. 1.5 BUILDING CD, SPACE 4.4: LM I DESTRUCTION DEPOSIT (@EBSA; J. DRIESSEN)

The absence of later levels in some of the rooms allowed deeper testing even if rising bedrock made a clear picture impossible. In many of the cavities or larger depressions therein, however, Protopalatial sherds and deposits were excavated. One of these deposits, probably MM IIIA in date, is quite substantial and will help us to understand the ceramic sequence at Sissi and compare it with regional developments (fig. 1.6) (see the report by C. Langohr *et al.* §6.2).



FIG. 1.6 MM IIIA DEPOSIT IN TRENCH 1 NE/S OF BUILDING CD (@EBSA; J. DRIESSEN)

The courtyard area east of the threshold into room 3.1. was, however, already occupied during the Prepalatial period since we came upon EM II-III sherds associated with a floor of red burnt clay, very similar to a Prepalatial deposit found in Zone 6 the same season (see §5.4).

We also made a start exploring the area southeast of Building CD, on the other side of the paved road that runs up the slope, long the building and then proceeds alongside the Postpalatial occupation of Zone 5 to the south (*cf.* fig. 1.1). When we started our excavations in 2007, this area was occupied by an immense pile of stones to which we added both stones and excavation earth during the first five seasons. After its painful removal and the dismantling of the stone pile, the badly preserved remains of a kerb or a façade became visible, probably Neopalatial (**Zone 13**).

This kerb or façade is longing the street, but the inside of the structure east of it seems entirely destroyed.

Most attention during the 2015-2016 went to Zone 6, the area west of Building F where, during the last week of the 2011 campaign, evidence was found to suggest the presence of a more monumental complex organised around a Central Court (*Sissi III*: 152-153). This hypothesis proved correct as is discussed in detail by the reports of S. Jusseret, M. Devolder, S. Déderix, T. Claeys and O. Mouthuy further in this volume (see §5). The entire CCB seems to have been inserted into a large depression of the limestone bedrock and it is very possible that the rock ledge which forms the western border of this depression once carried the west façade of the building. For excavation purposes, the area was organised in three zones in 2015 with first of all an eastern zone comprising the court area proper as well as the area north of it which was at the same level. For this we maintained the label 'Zone 6'. A southwestern area was called Zone 10 and this occupies the area west of the sandstone ashlar wall identified in 2011, south of the north wall of the court. The area northwest of the north wall of the court, about 2 to 2.50 m higher than Zone 6, was called Zone 11. In 2016, we inaugurated a new Zone, 15, southeast of the court.

The Central Court itself is undoubtedly the most remarkable feature of the building in this area. From the bench with hollows found during the 2011 campaign which forms its northern border (*Sissi III*: 148, fig. 6.18), we have been able to trace it southwards for a distance of more than 20 m during the 2015-2016 campaigns, but it certainly continues even more southwards for at least another 10 m (fig. 1.7). From an initial width of ca. 9.60 m to the north, at the bench with hollows, it suddenly increases its width to about 15.40 m, resulting in a rather odd trapezoidal shape. The court itself is made of a mixture of lime and pebbles, called *tarazza* in Minoan studies, and was plastered over. This probably white finish was, however, only preserved in discrete patches. Here and there, where the top layer was damaged, we found evidence for earlier layers of plaster but whether this means that there is an entire earlier plaster floor beneath the final one or that occasional repairs were made, awaits to be seen. On present evidence, the court is Neopalatial but early Protopalatial (EM III/MM I) sherds were found beneath it in one small test. In general, a layer, varying between 0.05 and 0.20 m, of silt (*nerochoma*) was found on top of the court and it is mostly on this layer that the blocks which once formed part of the façades around it fell. About 25 m south of the north wall and located in the very centre of the court is an odd circular feature, consisting of a burnt clay mantle, about 0.05 m thick and preserved for a height of about 0.30 m. Its internal diameter is about 0.83 m. It was found full of burnt earth, ash and stones but nothing else. Its function remains obscure (hearth?, lighting device?, oven?) but 2 m to the east, a large patch of burnt earth was preserved on the court and this comprised several dozens of miniature goblets that once seem to have formed a composite vessel. Since they are sometimes pushed into the court's floor, they are likely to be Neopalatial and can be compared to fragmentary kernoi with similar miniature goblets found in the peak sanctuary of Vrysinas (Tsachili 2016: *eik.* 4; Flevari 2016: 178-180, *pin.* 57).



FIG. 1.7 VIEW OF NORTH PART OF COURT AT THE END OF THE 2015 CAMPAIGN; NORTH TO THE TOP LEFT (©EBSA; M. DEVOLDER)

After the collapse of the western façade, however, the top of the destruction layer in front of it seems to have attracted the dumping of stones, perhaps some actually deriving from the clearing of the court area proper. The rest of the court, however, and despite incremental sediment deposition, seems to have remained open in later times. While there is no doubt about the Neopalatial date of the original court's use, the date of this later open area remains unknown but Postminoan sherds and objects, dating from LM IIIB to the 19th c. AD, were encountered. This included some figurines, including that of a bull and of a human head, which add to the figurines already found in 2011 in the northwest angle of the court (*Sissi III*: 145, fig. 6.13; 148, fig. 6.17).

The most surprising room thus far encountered within the CCB is located in the northwest corner of the court, the same place where the *Loggia* of the West Wing of the Palace at Malia is located and, of course, the Throne Room at Knossos. But also at Phaistos and Zakros, the northwest corner of the Central Court is where special rooms are situated and I suspect that the function of all these rooms was somehow related. At Sissi, the room (6.17) and an installation next to it (to the south) were built against an impressive terrace wall, made of very large boulders. The presence of Prepalatial deposits behind this wall to the west, about 1.50 m higher, may imply that this construction goes back to Early Minoan II, when the area behind knew intensive occupation (Zones 10 & 11, see §5.3 and 5.4, the report by S. Jusseret and S. Déderix below). Room 6.17 was in fact simply placed against this terrace wall. The court façade of room 6.17 consists of a fine, roughly dressed but regular limestone course on which there is a 0.42 m high course of sandstone ashlar blocks. Although the limestone and sandstone blocks are of good quality, it is clear that at least some were covered with a whitish plaster since a small patch of plaster is still visible on one of the limestone blocks, and many decomposed fragments of plaster were found amongst the tumbled blocks in front of this façade (**fig. 1.8**). Room 6.17 itself is beautifully paved with blue-black 'iron' limestone slabs, bordering a large yellow limestone slab of very impressive dimensions, and with plaster in the interstices. The walls were also entirely plastered (at least with yellow and red) and against the west and north walls are low, red-plastered benches. There are traces of different phases within the room. In the southwest angle of the room is a plastered bin with what appear to have been two smaller plastered compartments. The room seems to have been cleared out, however, and the thick sterile silt layer found within suggests that it was abandoned for some time before its surrounding walls collapsed.



FIG. 1.8 PAVED ROOM 6.17 AND COLLAPSED MONUMENTAL STAIRCASE OR STEPPED PLATFORM 10.1. PREPALATIAL TERRACE WALL TO LEFT (©EBSA; S. JUSSERET)

Just south of 6.17, and immediately accessible from it, we found a collapsed structure consisting of several finely cut ashlar blocks, some with one side plastered, and some blocks having odd semicircular depressions. Pending investigation, we interpret this as the remains of a monumental structure with steps leading up to a *ca.* 1 x 1 m square landing or platform (10.1) built against the presumed Prepalatial terrace wall to the west. For the moment we are at loss to explain its function: the steps undoubtedly provided an access from or to the court to or from

room 6.17 but whether something was originally standing on the platform or whether this was some kind of seating installation to watch events in the court remains to be seen.

The exploration of the higher area to the west of the massive terrace wall rather unexpectedly provided evidence for a series of spaces occupied during the Prepalatial period and this occupation was also identified more to the north, in Zone 11. In space 10.10, for example, our investigations provided evidence for eight, closely superimposed floor levels dated to EM II some of which were burnt, mirroring floor sequences at Kalo Chorio and Priniatikos Pyrgos (Haggis 1996; Molloy *et al.* 2014b). The zone southwest of the terrace wall (fig. 1.9) consists of relatively badly preserved internal rooms located behind an ashlar façade that is similar to that facing 6.17, but while the façade of 6.17 has an almost north-south orientation, this façade is set back more than 3 m and runs in a more northeast-southwesterly direction. We assume that the need to preserve the monumental terrace wall was largely responsible for this situation although it is also possible that room 6.17 was a later addition. Only space 10.12 preserved part of its plaster floor and on it were a ledge-rim bowl and a conical cup suggestive for an early Neopalatial date for the abandonment of this room. Within one of the spaces behind (10.18), we came upon a very dense deposit of more than 700 obsidian flakes (see the discussion by T. Claeys further in this volume §5.5). These may suggest that a Prepalatial workshop existed nearby.



FIG. 1.9 VIEW ON THE WEST WING FROM EAST, WITH THE ASHLAR TUMBLE STILL IN POSITION (©EBSA; N. KRESS)

During the 2015 campaign, we also opened a 10 by 6 m test more to the southwest of the alleged court and this test was specifically guided by the results of the geophysical surveys since these suggested the presence of a rectangular building (called Building K) oriented along an almost E-W axis (in contrast to the NE-SW axis of the court). Excavations revealed the presence of a sunken room (10.5), in all likelihood taking advantage of a pre-existing bedrock depression, filled with many fine sandstone ashlars, rubble and mudbrick. Whilst the original function of this sunken room remains uncertain since excavation is unfinished, it is not impossible that it was used as a kind of water storage facility, similar to the carefully constructed cisterns at Zakros or Archanes. North of Building K, our investigations revealed a line of carefully cut limestone and sandstone blocks (originally plastered on their southern, visible face) meeting the north-south façade wall at right angle. It is now clear that this façade represents the return west of the façade facing the court and the south façade of the West Wing of the Court-Centred Building. To our great surprise we can now confidently attribute the large, wedge-shaped, plastered *ammouda* ashlar block that was already identified in 1994 as originally belonging to this south façade: although not *in situ*, the block seems to have shifted immediately from the wall line (*Sissi I*: 41; *III*: 22, fig. 1.4). Between this south façade and Building K is an irregular-shaped open space in which we found Neopalatial pottery associated with Santorini ash lapilli, mixed with plaster and roofing clay. The identification as Santorini ash was confirmed by

Dr. Christine Lane of Cambridge University. This find represents the first attestation at Sissi, which makes the site the most western location in which more considerable ashfall can be identified (Molloy *et al.* 2014a).

Excavation also proceeded north of the court where a modern north-south terrace wall divides the area in a higher (Zone 11) and a lower terrace (Zone 6), with a difference of almost 2 m in height. Excavation on the higher, western terrace, came upon several undisturbed Prepalatial deposits along its western edge (fig. 1.10), while Neopalatial remains have started to appear along its eastern edge. This seems to indicate that most remains of the Neopalatial occupation of the western upper terrace have eroded away and that this occupation took place on top or against Prepalatial structures and deposits, perhaps partly reusing ancient wall remains that still need to be defined. As reported by S. Déderix further in this volume (§5.3), it is very likely that these Prepalatial deposits form the continuation of those found more to the southwest, in Zone 10. Some of the pottery from this area is presented separately in this volume by I. Caloi (see §6.1).



FIG. 1.10 PREPALATIAL DEPOSIT IN SPACE 11.1 (©EBSA; S. DÉDERIX)

On the lower terrace, however, the remains are badly eroded and only close to the terrace wall which separates Zones 6 and 11 were floors and deposits somewhat better preserved. The most striking feature here is the massive presence of wall plaster, with some fragments apparently painted in bright colours, all concentrated along the foot of the terrace wall. Some additional features such as a large column base and a floor panel made of at least seven terracotta slabs are the sole witnesses of what may have been originally quite fancy apartments. As reported further in this volume by M. Devolder (§5.2), similar terracotta slabs forming central panels were also found at Malia and in two rooms of the Zakros Palace (XLIII, IX). A wide corridor, originally perhaps paved, may have divided this lower North Wing into an eastern and a western part and a potential staircase probably provided access to the upper floor and/or the western, higher terrace.

We also started to excavate the south part of the East Wing, south of Building F and several internal spaces have already been revealed but more excavation is needed. The most interesting find from the inside area is a Neopalatial askos with spiral motif, not unlike examples found in the volcanic destruction of Akrotiri at Santorini but with also MM IIIB parallels on Crete itself. This is reported further in this volume by O. Mouthuy (§5.6).

The results of these last two campaigns make it clear that, less than 4 km east of Malia where a large palatial complex was in existence from *ca.* 1900 BC to 1450 BC, another sizeable monumental building with Central Court was in existence during the (early?) Neopalatial period. Building F, which during the Postpalatial period seems to have been a private residence, appears to have originally formed part of the East Wing of this structure (*Sissi I*: 157-161; *II*, 163-170; *III*, 135-154). That the Sissi CCB was given up at the time of the Santorini eruption has now

become a serious historical possibility. How close in time both events were, remains to be seen but the preliminary analysis presented in this volume (§6.2) by C. Langohr, I. Caloi and I. Matthioudaki does not leave much passage of time.

On present evidence, the court seems to have opened large to the south, providing a panoramic view on the Selena Mountains and its top. The awkward shape of the court and wings, with different orientations for the East, North, Northwest and Southwest Wings, may have been influenced by the purposeful incorporation of a Prepalatial terrace but perhaps also by the presence of the rising bedrock or perhaps the progressive enlargement of an existing core. All this resulted in a court with a trapezoidal shape, something which seems, at first glance, not to agree with standard conceptions of Minoan Central Courts (**fig. 1.11**). However, trapezoidal courts are in fact rather common. The best parallel is the Public Court south of the Palace of Gournia – or, according to Soles (2001), part of the Palace. Both the shape and size of the Gournia court (*ca.* 15 by 35 m) incidentally compare quite well with what can be observed at Sissi. Moreover, the attention given to the paved room and stepped platform at Sissi (6.17) finds a good parallel in the so-called sacrificial room at Gournia which is also accessible via steps (Soles 1991).

The 2015 and 2016 excavation campaigns have added certain elements that allow us to attribute first of all a mainly ceremonial and ritual function to the monumental complex. Apart from the court and the ashlar façades facing it, such a function is also alluded at by the presence of the *kernos* (*Sissi III*: 148), the north bench with hollows, the feasting deposit in the East Wing dated to MM III-LM IA early (*Sissi III*: 138), the paved room with stepped platform and the finds made in the court, especially the figurines, the circular fire pit and the composite vessel made of miniature goblets. So far, little or no evidence has been collected that allows an economic function to be identified since neither storage, production or administration are attested. Efforts during the following campaigns will concentrate on the full clearance of the Central Court and the further exploration of the different wings.

When this volume was about to be send off to press, we heard of the untimely death of our textile specialist, Dr. Jo Cutler. This volume is dedicated to her.



FIG. 1.11 (A-B) SISSI COURT-CENTRED BUILDING AT THE END OF THE 2015 CAMPAIGN (LEFT) AND 2016 (RIGHT) (©EBSA; N. KRESS)