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From skalistiri to mastarin : Sissi and the shaping of my Aegeanist side

Louis Dautais

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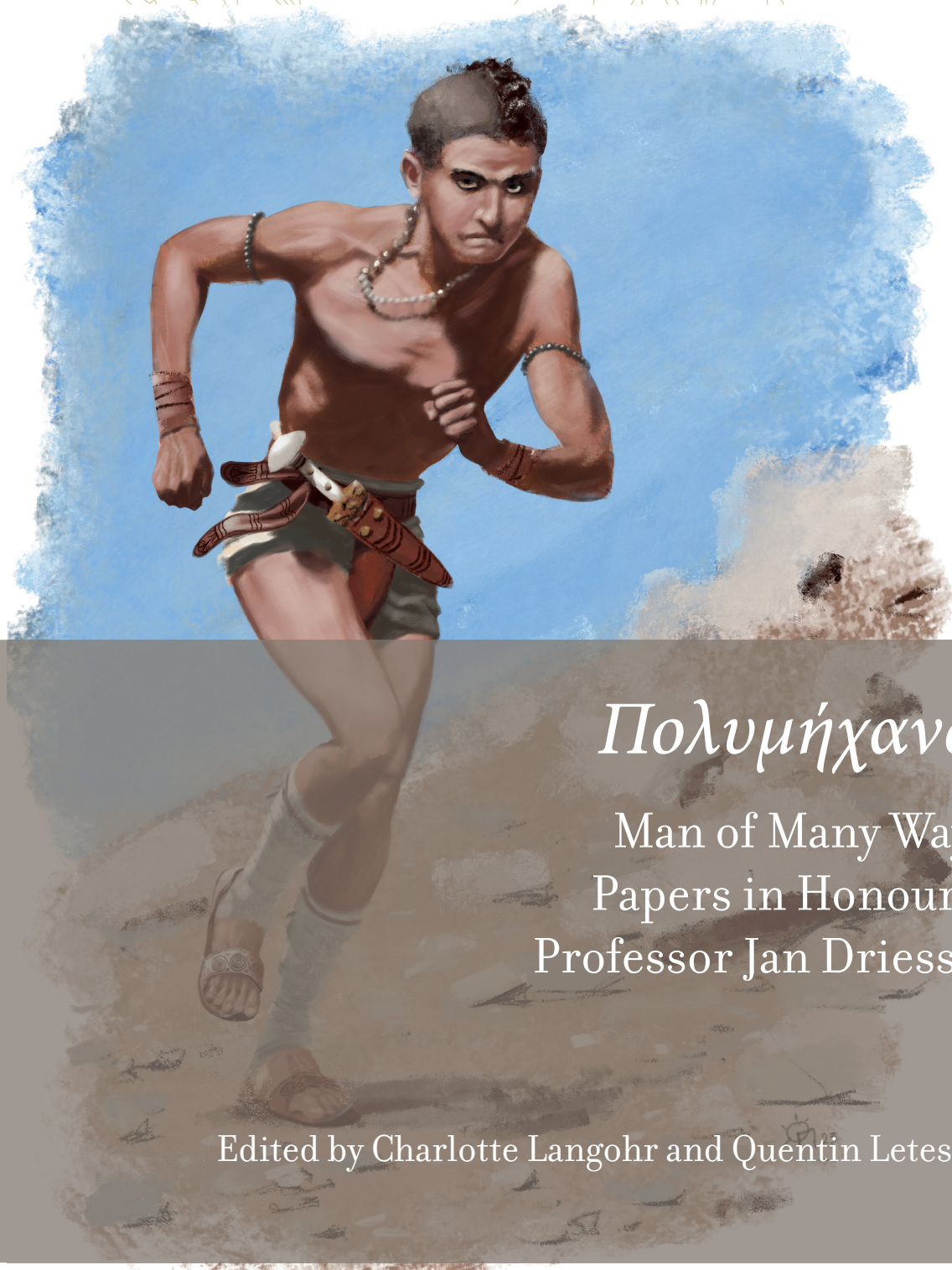


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Πολυμήχανος

*Man of Many Ways.
Papers in Honour of
Professor Jan Driessen*

Edited by Charlotte Langohr and Quentin Letesson

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The Sissi excavations

24. The Sissi Archaeological Project

A mosaic of histories

Maria Anastasiadou, Ilaria Caloi, Thérèse Claeys, Louis Dautais, Roxane Dubois, Florence Gaignerot-Driessen, Hannah Joris, Simon Jusseret, Nicolas Kress, Charlotte Langohr, Quentin Letesson, Iro Mathioudaki, Ophélie Mouthuy, Killian Regnier, Tia Sager, Pepi Saridaki, Evgenia Tsafou, Christina Tsoraki, Diana Wolf

This final chapter, written by several members of the **Sissi team**, is intended as a tribute to the innumerable opportunities Jan gave so generously to members of the project, fostering new research agendas and paving the way for the future of Minoan archaeology. The mosaic-like character of the text is deliberate and opens a series of peepholes on the small histories behind the Sissi archaeological excavation and international scientific project. Each of these personal stories is at once a facet of this major collective archaeological endeavour and a testimony to Jan's leadership, many qualities and vision. The chapter is also a celebration of the diversity and complementarity of the Sissi team comprising specialists of Minoan material culture, field archaeologists, conservators, drafts-persons, students from all over the world, and local workmen who, by working together under Jan's guidance, have generated and published an astounding amount of new data on Minoan civilisation.

“So forget any ideas you've got about lost cities, exotic travel, and digging up the world. We do not follow maps to buried treasure, and “X” never, ever marks the spot”. Indiana Jones



FIG. 24.X SISSI TREASURE MAP (IMAGE NICOLAS KRESS)

The Kephali hill still has much to offer from an archaeological perspective, nevertheless the most urgent challenge probably lies in its sustainable preservation. To achieve this goal, it is now widely acknowledged that empowering and engaging the local community in the decision-making process and management of their own heritage is key. There is no doubt that this sustainability will be achieved thanks to Jan's constant dialogue with local stakeholders whether they be authorities, workforce or inhabitants. This core value is another essential lesson Jan has taught me throughout this last decade and that I try to apply in my own PhD research. To conclude this contribution that I hope will be understood as a symbolic token of my gratitude to Jan, I venture to express the following wish: to stay actively involved in the Sissi Archaeological Project I grew up with professionally and personally. This commitment to the sustainable future of the Kephali hill from both an archaeological and conservation perspective would be but a small reciprocation for a huge scholarly and human debt I owe to Jan.

4. From *skalistiri* to *mastarin*: Sissi and the shaping of my Aegeanist side

Louis Dautais⁶

July 2016. Sissi, Crete: it is sweltering hot on the Kephali hill. Under Maud Devolder's guidance, Manolis, Linnéa, Richard, Arnaud, Jacob, Alizée and I have been gradually uncovering the central courtyard of the 'palatial' complex for weeks. This was my first dig outside France and, above all, my first steps in Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology: a dream come true, thanks to Jan. Indeed, a few months earlier, while I was a young undergraduate in archaeology at Montpellier, I had submitted my volunteer application to join the Sarpedon-Sissi Archaeological Project and, with his usual bonhomie, Jan accepted.

Sissi is truly a human adventure, during which you meet dozens of students from Europe, North America and Australia; in other words, it's a cultural melting pot that has given me linguistic freedom, confronting my fears as a French boy juggling bad English and a few shaky sentences in Greek which I had just learnt from my new Cretan friends.

Since then, Sissi has become – by extension – a second home: in addition to the friendships I have made over the years, and the fine-handling of the *skalistiri* in a very compact sediment, I have also taken part in some fruitful collaborations thanks to my integration in the AegIS team (e.g. a poster with Roxane Dubois on '10 years of excavations at Sissi' at the INCAL research days; the organisation of the Scapecon conference at UCLouvain with Thérèse, Jenny, Roxane, Diana, Killian and Daniele). Not to mention starting my PhD thesis under Charlotte Langohr's co-supervision. All this under the watchful eye of Jan, who has always encouraged me to write articles and even reviews (*Sea Peoples Up To Date!*), to give talks internationally, to travel to new fieldwork, to put forward new ideas and intellectual theses and, above all, to live life to the fullest!

It was mainly at Sissi that my PhD project matured, in particular thanks to fruitful discussions with Jan, Charlotte, Maud and Aurore. The materiality of this doctoral research, focusing on the interactions between Egypt and the Aegean world in the Late Bronze Age, found its way to another excavation site in which I am involved – on the other side of the Eastern Mediterranean – at Kom el-Nogous/Plinthine in Egypt (dir. B. Redon, Ifao/CNRS), located on the rocky ridge separating the Lake Mareotis from the Mediterranean Sea. In June 2022, we unearthed more than twenty sherds of a fragmented Aegean transport stirrup jar in a Ramesside rubbish dump (Redon *et al.* 2023: 19). The unpublished preliminary analysis that I have carried out on this vessel would indicate a Cretan origin (Late Minoan IIIB, *i.e.* 13th c. BCE)⁷. This discovery further underlines the fertile crossroads between my PhD research and my own fieldwork, between Egypt and Crete. The same *Κρήτη* about which Jan tells us so many stories, and which he allowed us to rediscover to our greatest pleasure, and without tiring of it, as part of what he himself called his 'Final Seminar Tour' last April (**Fig. 24.5**).

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⁷ Only petrographic analyses (in progress at the Ifao, collab. E. Nodarou - INSTAP) will enable us to pinpoint the manufacture region of this large vessel, which bears witness to the trade in oil and/or wine between the island of Crete and North-west Egypt in the 13th c. BCE.



FIG. 24.5 WITH ‘THE BOSS’ AT KNOSSOS DURING THE ‘FINAL SEMINAR TOUR’, APRIL 2023 (PHOTO N. DAUBY)

5. In search of the ‘lost’ Protopalatial

Roxane Dubois⁸

The Protopalatial is what has linked my professional journey to one of Jan’s many research interests – a topic that he developed in one article in particular (“A Matriloccal House Society in Pre- and Protopalatial Crete?” : Driessen 2012a). I am very proud today to offer some memories on how his passion for Minoans put me on the right track!

I joined the Sissi project in 2015, the year I started my Master’s degree at UCLouvain. I remember it took me no more than one of Jan’s classes on Minoan Archaeology – as a complete newbie in the field – to be convinced that I had found my way with Crete and Minoans, thanks to him! For my Master’s thesis, he therefore proposed that I work on a Protopalatial topic, with a functional study of Quartier Mu at Malia (under the supervision of Charlotte Langohr and Maud Devolder). The Protopalatial period was not well explored yet at Sissi at that time, outside of the cemetery, but he offered that I join the excavations and focus on material and pottery to acquire some ‘hands-on’ experience. Whether by steering me towards this precise thesis subject or by inviting me to join Charlotte’s ‘sherd nerds’ team at the apothiki, Jan clearly fostered my growing fascination for sherds and the brilliant Protopalatial period.

A few days after the start of the excavations in Crete, that same year, it happened that GPR soundings on the north terrace at the summit of the hill – Zone 8 – had just provided good results of what Jan enthusiastically described to me as ‘a possible Quartier Mu at Sissi’. Needless to say, I was ecstatic about this possibility, despite being in the early days of my discovery of this complex period and of the pottery in general; still annoyingly

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This title combines two things that, to me, characterise Jan: his creativity in entitling his papers (and namely here in reference to ‘*Chercher la femme*’ published in 2012); and his favourite ‘kindred spirit’ whatever he says – Indiana Jones (reference to ‘The Raiders of the Lost Ark’).