PHILISTOR

Studies in Honor of Costis Davaras

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Eleni Mantzourani and Philip P. Betancourt

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In Greek the word φιλίστωρ (philistor*) means the lover of learning, of history, the person who constantly seeks new knowledge.*

The characterization of philistor *fits the personality of Costis Davaras because he has always tried to expand his knowledge horizons and has never limited himself solely to his fields of specialization. His entire life is full of diverse activities, philosophical self-reflection, and sociopolitical interests.*

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Biography of Costis Davaras

Eleni Mantzourani

Costis Davaras was born in Athens on the 19th of March in 1933. He grew up in a highly intellectual environment. His mother, Julia, came from an old family of Cephallonia and was awarded the Ouranis Prize for Literature. Costis graduated from the high school of Plaka, located just below the Acropolis. The window of his room overlooked Hadrian's Gate. He studied Archaeology at the Universities of Vienna, Munich, and mainly Athens, from which he received his first degree in 1956. His professors of archaeology, indeed all of them outstanding scholars, were Ernst Buschor in Munich and Spyridon Marinatos, Georgios Mylonas, Nikolaos Kontoleon, and Anastasios Orlandos in Athens.

During his undergraduate years, he took a degree at the Palmer Technical School in Athens as a wireless operator of the Merchant Marine in order to be able to travel, which he actually did for a short time, visiting various countries. This, among other features of his character, shows his inquisitive spirit.

He continued his postgraduate studies as a bursar of the German State in Munich. His Professors were Ernst Homann-Wedeking for Archaeology and Hans Wolfgang Müller for Egyptology. He served in the Greek Army as an interpreter and translator for several NATO languages.

Before entering the Greek Archaeological Service he served, for a short time, as an assistant to the Ephor Markellos Mitsos in the Epigraphical Museum in Athens and Ioannis Threpsiades in the excavations at Athens and the Temple of Artemis at Aulis in Boeotia. Davaras entered the Archaeological Service in 1960 after examinations, which, unfortunately, were later abolished for some decades, indeed a heavy blow in meritocracy. His first position as Epimeletes was in Herakleion under Nikolaos Platon and later under Stylianos Alexiou, both well-known scholars and excellent tutors. At that time, those three men were the only archaeologists serving on Crete.

He was an assistant to Platon in several of his excavations all over Crete, including the peak sanctuary at Kophinas and the palace of Zakros. He also conducted his own excavations, including tholos tomb II at Apesokari and the important caves of Skoteino near Knossos and Eileithyia at Inatos. A second campaign, in collaboration with Nikolaos Platon, was undertaken at Eileithyia. He also brought to light several Minoan chamber tombs and a Geometric tomb at Knossos.

In 1964 he was transferred to Athens as Epimeletes of Attica and Boeotia. There he excavated the Geometric cemetery of Anavyssos and the Thesmophorion of Eretria, later turned over for publication to Ingrid Metzger of the Swiss School of Archaeology in Greece. During this period he was the first Greek archaeologist to be trained by the Navy in underwater archaeology. He even directed a research team below the temple of Poseidon at Sounion in order to locate fallen blocks and part of its sculpture.

At his own insistence he was re-posted to Crete in 1965, this time as Head of the Archaeological Service for West Crete (Chania–Rethymnon) with Yiannis Tzedakis as his assistant.

Davaras's excavations in the region included the tholos tomb at Maleme, a tholos tomb at Apodoulou, and the rich peak sanctuary of Vrysinas overlooking the Rethymnon area. His main care in this new post was the legal protection of the numerous archaeological sites of West Crete, which, until then, were not officially listed as such and thus "ignored" by the State. It should be noted that the "Palace of Minos" at Knossos and a narrow zone around it, under the auspices of the British School at Athens, was the only legally defined archaeological site on Crete before that time. By specific order of the Ministry he also tried, alas in vain, to protect the Venetian–Ottoman old towns of Chania and Rethymnon and even received serious threats on his life in his office by a furious fishmonger. It was during this period that he married his beloved Dione, a Baroque harpsichordist and his life companion ever since. In 1968 he went to the Sorbonne University in Paris for his Ph.D. under the supervision of Pierre Demargne, Henri van Effenterre, and Jean Deshayes. His two-volume typewritten dissertation was a study on the Minoan-Mycenaean Double Axe, including a corpus of all then-extant axes *in corpore*—the functional ones, the votives, and the representations in painting. The subject was examined mainly from a religious point of view. Davaras managed to show that the functional double axe was definitely a tool and not a weapon, as even today many scholars continue to believe it was a weapon. The dissertation was not published, as this was not required by the French Law, pending the collection of photographs for publication in the German Series *Prähistorische Bronzefunde*, a work that would, by agreement with H. Müller-Karpe, also include the pottery. However, the future reserved much adversity for him and his family.

After his return to Greece in 1970, and during the dictatorship of the Colonels, he was not allowed to go back to Crete, his second home and place of archaeological interests. Instead, he was transferred to Sparta, in Laconia, as well as to Mystras, as an "acting" Epimeletes of Byzantine Antiquities. There he managed to officially establish and define the ancient town of Sparta for the first time as an archaeological site. Additionally, he organized, again for the first time, the extensive archives of Mystras. It also should be noted that Davaras protected with strict rules the Medieval town of Monemvasia. A year later he was again transferred, this time to Patras for six months, under the Ephor Photios Petsas, who was also in disfavor.

At his insistence, he managed to return to Crete. This time he was appointed as a newly promoted Ephor in East Crete (Nomos Lasithiou and Malia). By necessity, East Crete had also been "promoted" to an Ephorate, the now well-known 24th Ephorate of Antiquities. This is the only reason why Crete has three Ephorates, and not two or four.

As a matter of fact Davaras was the first and last Ephor of this Ephorate, for the title of "Ephor of Antiquities," the oldest title in Greece (since 1830), was later abolished by the newly elected administration that advocated "the equality of all civil servants" with titles such as "Director of Antiquities" and so forth. However, the title of Ephoreia paradoxically remained. Characteristically, all administrations that followed until today did not reinstate the title of the Ephor, as archaeologists have obviously been "the black sheep" of the state apparatus, above pressures and other concomitant evils.

When Costis Davaras became the head of the new Ephorate in Hagios Nikolaos, its state was

embryonic, with the telephone on the floor. He had to organize everything *ex nihilo*. He considered it his duty to begin the legal protection of the numerous and highly important archaeological sites of East Crete, as he had done in West Crete. This was, indeed, an onerous and difficult task, as the protected areas (Zones A and B) had to be accurately defined on the map. At the same time this was a very delicate enterprise as these areas were not supposed to be excessively large and beyond the rule of "pan metron Ariston." The trouble was that these new measures went hand-in-hand with the beginning of the touristic development of the island. Thus, a reaction to this novel legality was to be expected.

For instance, Davaras managed to stop the demolition of the Venetian fortress of Spinalonga (albeit outside his official jurisdiction), the spolia of which were being taken and imbedded as decoration in the "grand hotels" then under construction. Unfortunately, he did not manage to bring about the conviction in court of a serious perpetrator of bulldozing part of the Minoan town of Palaikastro, who was actually a school teacher! Again regarding Spinalonga, Davaras managed, despite the serious threats he received, to avert the construction there of a base for torpedo boats, which the administration of the Colonels wished to build. Fortunately, finally they realized the enormity of it and constructed the base near Cavo Sidero. Some years later, after the Colonels were gone, the dismal fate of another small island was also averted: the Air Force wished to make the beautiful, subtropical Chryssi to the south of Ierapetra a target area for bombing. Fortunately, the Ministry of Defense gave up this enterprise, persuaded by Davaras's personal arguments.

After some time he was again transferred to Komotini in Thrace, but he never went there as he was then suspended from his duties. He was reinstated after the happy end of an adventure in a court of justice.

As an Ephor in Hagios Nikolaos Davaras installed a new provisional exhibition at the Museum, and he conducted many rescue excavations under very difficult conditions, some of which, alas, came too late. In any case, the volume of new material collected was so enormous that it would take several archaeological lives to be properly published. Perhaps the most important of these excavations was the exploration of part of the Early Minoan I Cycladic cemetery at Hagia Photia, near Siteia, with no assistants, architects, photographers, or other assistants, but with armed workers watching it at night. This excavation is now partly published in collaboration with his close friend Prof. Philip Betancourt.

Among Davaras's other important excavations were those of several Minoan peak sanctuaries in various stages of plundering, including Traostalos, Petsophas (re-excavated), Prinias Zou, Modi, and others. The re-excavation of the oval house at Chamaizi was also crucial, as he was able to clarify its function. It was neither a peak sanctuary, as usually believed, nor oval because of lack of space. The early burial cave of Hagios Charalambos Gerontomouri on the plateau of Lasithi, with its rich finds—especially seals and a great number of human skulls, some of them showing signs of trepanation, the earliest in Greece—is also included among Davaras's field work. This excavation was later continued with Phil Betancourt as co-director. Other less important excavations include Minoan and later tombs and cemeteries (especially the one at Krya in Siteia) as well as a number of Hellenistic and later houses at Hagios Nikolaos and Ierapetra.

Last but not least in his long list of fieldwork comes the important excavation of the Late Minoan I "cult villa" at Makrygialos on the southern coast. According to his view, this building is unique insofar that it closely imitates the Minoan palaces on a very small scale. He gave the edifice this strange name because of its rich religious elements, although he later thought that it should rather be named a "mini palace," as it is actually a real miniature of a Minoan palace in several of its architectural features. In fact, its central court has the dimensions and orientation of the palace at Petras on the opposite north coast. He does not consider it as a simple "country mansion" aping its superiors. Instead, he believes that, exactly because of its close resemblance, its functions would have been similar to those of the palaces, especially regarding religion. Hence, it was initially dubbed a "cult villa." He has raised the question whether the edifice at Makrygialos could perhaps help us better understand the main function of the palaces, which it so closely mirrors.

It is true that Davaras is very happy and proud that he had the opportunity to re-open East Crete

to the excavations of American archaeologists. This was done under the form of a *synergasia* as a co-director. These excavations took place at Pseira and Mochlos for several campaigns, in collaboration with his eminent colleagues and friends Phil Betancourt and Jeffrey Soles.

These excavations, with extraordinary results, funded with grants from several sources, including the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP) founded by Malcolm Wiener, the great benefactor of this branch of archaeology, are being published by the INSTAP Academic Press in a rhythm and perfection unthinkable for Greece. Thus, Davaras is quite proud of his official archaeological contribution to these projects. Many eminent scholars involved in Minoan archaeology have, on different occasions, praised his role in these projects.

It should be mentioned that the very last official paper out of several thousands Davaras signed as an Ephor was the one that founded, from the Greek side, the INSTAP Study Center for East Crete at Pacheia Ammos, a center that astounds and dazzles every visiting Greek archaeologist.

He has always been happy and proud that he has been the instigator of the new British excavations at Palaikastro, a site that was then seriously endangered by developers, both local and foreign. The new excavations have not only been extremely successful, but they stopped pending threats—at least for the time being. The Cavo Sidero area, property of the Toplou monastery north of Palaikastro, seemed at this time to be safe, and so no special measures were taken.

Another side of Davaras's character may be traced through an interesting event. In an unusual way he was able to contribute financially to the great Greek excavations of Zakros. He refused the offer of a Mexican millionaire to re-open the excavation of the famous Diktaian Cave, which must certainly still contain many treasures in its bowels. Instead, he persuaded the gentleman to support the Palace of Zakros project.

As tourism developed by leaps and bounds at the shores of Crete, it was unavoidable that woes were yet to come. In 1985, as he continued to press to save archaeological sites in the face of mounting pressure from building, Davaras was once more suspended from his duties as an Ephor for East Crete for five long years. He was ordered to go to Herakleion to the "Archaeological Institute of Crete," which until then did not exist. He has confessed that he was personally grateful to the Minister of Culture Melina Merkouri, who graciously allowed him to stay in the Hagios Nikolaos Museum in "suspended animation," as he humorously states. As a measure of clemency he stayed there to supervise its exhibition and cleanliness.

In 1990, under the new "Coalition Administration," Davaras was re-instated in his duties as an Ephor, but as he says, "he had lost his mood" for the Archaeological Service and turned to a new challenge, the University of Athens. In 1993 he was elected Associate Professor of Minoan Archaeology and later Full Professor. There he concentrated on his new duties, a real heaven in comparison to the past, as he usually says. He retired as Professor Emeritus in 2000. To quote his own words, "now I have more time for carefree, less stressful research."

Now his ardent wish and vision is to see in the European Union commission a new member: a Commissioner for Cultural Heritage who would cover a most important area, until now sadly unprotected and badly needed for Greece.

Davaras has received many academic and other distinctions. He is Member for Life of the Archaeological Society at Athens; Honorary Member of the Historical and Archaeological Society of Crete in Chania; Honorary Citizen of the Municipality of Ierapetra; Korrespondierendes Mitglied des Deutsches Archäologischen Instituts, Berlin; Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et Lettres de la République Française; Member of the Editorial Board of the periodical *Kadmos*, Berlin; and General Editor of the periodical *Cretan Studies*, Amsterdam. Finally, he has received an Honorary Diploma from the University of Tehran for the protection of the endangered remaining mosques on Crete.

Indicative of Costis's vividness, creativity, and overall devotion to a better future for Greece is his very recent participation in the newly formed party of Greek Ecologists, of which he is an active member. Costis is one of the last noblemen in the Greek and international archaeological family and will always remain "young at heart." From the depth of my heart, I wish him all the best in every aspect of his life. He still has much to offer us.

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