

Schliemann's Mycenae excavations through the eyes of Stamatakis

David A. Traill

As evidence accumulates that Schliemann's archaeological reports are not as reliable as was once believed, the need for the testimony of independent eyewitnesses has increased accordingly.¹ The largely unpublished reports of Panagiotis Stamatakis provide us with invaluable insight into the day-to-day running of Schliemann's excavation of Mycenae in 1876. Stamatakis was the official representative of the Greek Archaeological Service at the excavation and he sent regular reports back to the General Ephoria in Athens. However, he was also representing the Archaeological Society at Athens, for it was to the Society, not directly to Schliemann himself that the permit to excavate Mycenae had been granted; Schliemann was, in effect, conducting the excavations, at his own expense, on behalf of the Society.² There are accordingly also reports written by Stamatakis to members of the Council of the Archaeological Society. The late Professor Mylonas kindly provided me with copies of Stamatakis' reports to both the Ephoria and the Society. My paper will be devoted principally to extensive quotation from these reports. They provide us with fascinating pictures of the activities of that summer and fall in 1876 that were to have such an enormous influence on subsequent Aegean archaeology. The paper will begin with a brief summary of the salient points in Stamatakis' career and close with a summary of what these reports contribute to our understanding of his achievement at Mycenae.

Panagiotis Stamatakis was born in Varvitsa in Laconia, in the mid-nineteenth century. The year of his birth is unclear, but probably it was around 1840.

He had no formal university education. In 1866 he became an assistant to the Ephor General of Antiquities. His first task was to establish an inventory of the antiquities in private possession. In 1871 he became an itinerant ephor. In 1884, just a year before his premature death from malaria, he became Ephor General. His work took him all over Greece: Attica, Boeotia, Phthiotis, the Peloponnese, Delos and Delphi. His most important work before 1876 was in Boeotia, where his excavations and careful arrangement of the finds did much to build up the important collections at Thebes, Chaeroneia, and Tanagra. Information on the life and work of Stamatakis is not easy to come by and I am indebted for the information given here to the invaluable history of the Archaeological Society at Athens recently published by Basileios Petrakos.³ Petrakos draws attention to the painstaking accuracy of Stamatakis' work and calls him the last and greatest of the self-educated Greek archaeologists.⁴

To avoid needless confusion I have changed all dates in the following reports to the Gregorian calendar.

The first report from Stamatakis is dated 16 August 1876, that is to say, nine days after the start of Schliemann's excavations. It was sent to Euthymios Kastorches, a member of the Council of the Archaeological Society. After summarizing the finds of the first few days Stamatakis continues:⁵

"The finds are classified by me according to type of material: metal, stone and pottery. This system has been accepted by Mr. Schliemann. We have come across no inscription or piece of sculpture so far. At a depth of 4 metres beside the wall of the

1. On the unreliability of Schliemann's archaeological reporting, see in particular: Traill 1984a, 95-115; Traill 1984b, 295-316; Traill 1986, 91-98.
2. The text of the permit issued by the Ministry to the Archaeological Society at Athens has now been published by Petrakos 1987a, 99-100.
3. Petrakos 1987b, 80 and 279-282.

4. *Ibid.* 282.

5. I am grateful to B. Petrakos, Secretary-General of the Archaeological Society at Athens, for kind permission to publish this and the following excerpts from Stamatakis' reports. Petrakos has published Stamatakis' letter to Kastorches in full in the original Greek (see Petrakos 1987a, 101-104).

acropolis there was uncovered the skeleton of a child, almost complete.”

There are two points of interest here: 1) Stamatakis appears to have taken the leading role in determining the system of classification to be used in ordering the finds. 2) The child’s skeleton found close to the perimeter wall is not mentioned either in Schliemann’s *Mycenae* or in his diary.⁶

Stamatakis then goes on to describe how work is proceeding at the Lion Gate. He points out that the process of removing the fallen stones from the gateway cannot be completed until it has been determined that the gate itself is in no danger of collapsing:

“It is absolutely essential that the Council of the Society request the appropriate Ministry that a competent architect be sent as soon as possible to Mycenae to determine what steps must be taken to ensure the complete protection of the sculpture and to estimate the cost, which, assuredly, will fall to the Society. Mr Schliemann has made it clear to me that he does not wish to pay for the repair. Now that the excavations are underway, if no thought is taken for the protection of the sculpture, the repair in the future will be most difficult and expensive.”

After describing attempts to find the entrance of the tholos tomb (the Tomb of Clytemnestra), he speaks in more general terms about the excavations:

“Mr Schliemann visits the excavations from Charvati in the morning and evening, the rest of the day he stays in Charvati studying and writing so that all the work devolves on me, and there is too much for me to handle alone. I need two workmen or supervisors to help me in the supervision and in the reception and arrangement of the finds.”

He then asks Kastorches to persuade the Society to put these assistants on the payroll. He further asks for a bonus for his guard, who

“is compelled to remain all day long in my lodgings, where the finds are kept, because Mr Schliemann goes to see them at any hour of the day on his own and with the frequent visitors.

In addition we need a tent at the excavation site in which to rest for our siesta, to shelter when it rains and to store our finds and write up our records, because we do not have time for this in

the evening. The Council of the Society can request the tent from the Ministry of Defence, or if this is impossible, the Council can allow the expenditure of 40 or 50 dr for the construction of a wooden hut. Mr Schliemann will not put up a tent for us. As a result, all day long we stand in the unendurable heat.

In addition I request permission for the construction of simple boxes for the arrangement of the finds, because up till now we have been putting them in a pile.

Mr Schliemann has the practice of giving a bonus of 5 lepta to any workman who finds a significant antiquity. He has forced me willy-nilly to pay 2 or 3 dr every day on such bonuses. It is impossible for one, two or three overseers to gather all the smallest antiquities. With Mr Schliemann’s method, nothing can escape the workmen’s eyes, when they are looking for a bonus. It is a small expense but the gain in antiquities is immense.”

On 27 August Stamatakis sent his report to the General Ephoria of Antiquities. By this time relations between Schliemann and Stamatakis had deteriorated considerably. There were several issues that troubled Stamatakis: 1) Instead of paying the men by the hour or day Schliemann was now paying them according to the amount of earth they moved - by the cubic metre. This encouraged them to work faster and with less care. 2) On 21 August Schliemann had increased his workmen from 30 to 70 and started excavating the area south of the grave circle. There had been no discussion with Stamatakis about this new undertaking. 3) On 24 August Schliemann had resumed excavating at the Tomb of Clytemnestra. Earlier Stamatakis had allowed exploratory digging there when they were still trying to locate the entrance. Once the entrance had been found, however, he had stopped further excavation on the grounds that there was insufficient staff to supervise excavations here as well as on the acropolis.

When Stamatakis found that excavation had resumed at the Tomb of Clytemnestra in contravention of his orders, he was understandably furious. The resulting scenes have been made famous by Ludwig, who incorporated them, rather freely translated, in his biography.⁷ They are worth repeating here:

6. Schliemann’s *Mycenae* diary has been published in Calder III and Traill (eds) 1986, 142-248.

7. Ludwig 1931, 202-203.

“On the morning of Thursday 24th August, when I came to the site I saw the excavations at the underground chamber. I said to Mr. Schliemann that I could not supervise this new undertaking and that consequently I would not permit it. He replied in a hostile manner, as is his custom, that he was going to clean out the entrance to the underground chamber and that if I was not equal to the task, the Ministry would send more officials. I replied that the Ministry had granted permission for an excavation with 50-60 workmen, not with 90 workmen, and not with workmen paid by the cubic metre. He answered that he had permission to have as many excavations as he wished and under whatever terms he wished and that my only task was to receive the finds. I pointed out that my mission was not merely to receive the finds but also to have general supervision over all the work at Mycenae and to prevent any contravention of the law or of the Ministry's instructions. I added that since he had such an opinion of my mission, he should communicate this to the General Ephoria of Antiquities and if it approved the work undertaken, then that was fine. Otherwise, the excavation sites would be reduced to one so that the gathering of the finds could proceed in a proper manner and the workmen could be carefully supervised to prevent them from stealing objects, as it was rumored a few days ago in Argos they were doing, and so that the finds could be properly recorded every day.

The following day at the excavations outside the underground chamber there appeared a line of walling of squared bricks and beside this another wall at a greater depth. In my absence, Schliemann instructed the workmen to destroy both these walls. When I got there later and learned this, I told the workmen not to destroy the walls before they were carefully examined and if they appeared insignificant, then they would be destroyed, but if they were important, they should be preserved. While Mr Schliemann was absent, the workmen followed my instructions. The next day, however, Saturday, Mr Schliemann came to the site very early, bringing his wife along with him. He instructed the workmen to destroy the walls, which they had struck against. In case I should try, when I arrived later, to prevent further destruction, he left his wife in charge of the

workmen as guardian of his instructions, while he proceeded to the acropolis. When I arrived a little later, I asked the workmen why they were destroying the walls, when they were prohibited from doing so. Schliemann's wife answered that I had no right to give such instructions, that her husband was a scholar, that the walls were Roman, and that it was appropriate to destroy them because they were impeding the workmen, that I had no idea about such matters, and that I ought not to trouble Mr Schliemann with such instructions because he was easily provoked and might break off the excavations. I replied that Mr Schliemann was not entirely free to do as he wished with the ancient objects, as he had done at Troy, and that he had been given a permit to conduct excavations at Mycenae in conformance with the law. Then I went up to the acropolis, where I told Mr Schliemann only that I had sent the two telegrams to the Ephoria about what was happening.

Mr Schliemann, from the very beginning of the excavations, has shown a tendency to destroy, against my wishes, everything Greek or Roman in order that only what he identifies as Pelasgian houses and tombs remain and be preserved. Whenever pottery sherds of the Greek and Roman period are uncovered, he treats them with disgust. If in the course of the work they fall into his hands, he throws them away. We, however, collect everything – what he calls Pelasgian, and Greek and Roman pieces.”

Stamatakis goes on to describe walls near the Lion Gate which Schliemann considered Pelasgian but which had mortar in their upper sections. Schliemann removed the upper section, leaving only the lower section that did not have mortar. Stamatakis prohibited further excavation of these walls where they ran close to the Lion Gate until the structural soundness of the Lion Gate itself was determined. Because of this he had to take from Schliemann what he calls ‘many improper expressions’.

Conflict had also arisen over the sculpted slabs or tombstones that had appeared in the grave circle:

“The sculpted tombstones he considers Pelasgian tombs and he has been anxious, from the day of their discovery, for us to remove them and bring them to Charvati. I, however, oppose their removal because the lower parts of the slabs have not yet been uncovered; they will allow us to see on

what soil the slabs are fixed and what relationship they have with the other similar slabs – some sculpted, some fallen, some forming rectangular cisterns, which Schliemann also considers to be Pelasgian tombs – or whether they have been placed there later, taken from buildings of an earlier period. He adduces security as an argument for their removal. However, from the day of their discovery a guard placed there for this purpose carefully guards them at night and on holidays. This justified resistance of mine Mr Schliemann considers barbaric and uncivilized. I telegraphed the Ephoria on Saturday concerning his insistence that the slabs be removed. In communicating the above to the Ephoria, I request that it take the necessary steps to ensure that the excavations proceed in accordance with the law and the instructions of the Ministry. Otherwise, I cannot remain in Mycenae, if the excavations proceed as they have under Mr Schliemann, because I bear great responsibility both in respect of the Ministry and the Ephoria. I request that the Ephoria ask the Ministry for my recall or my dismissal from the service.”

Stamatakis then describes the favors he has done for Mr Schliemann. For instance, he points out that he disciplined and trained the workmen for him. Of particular interest, however, is his description of the day-to-day handling of the finds:

“We receive the finds, cleaning and arranging them at the site as a favor to Mr Schliemann, so that when he comes to the site in the evening he may find them set out in order and he can make his notes. We remain at the excavation from 6 a.m. till 6 p.m., supervising and gathering the finds. Mr Schliemann, on the other hand, visits twice a day, in the morning and evening. When each day’s finds have been viewed by Mr Schliemann, we transfer them to Charvati, to our lodgings, in which we arrange them by type, putting numbered labels on them, on which is also recorded the depth at which they were found, and entering them in our daybook. Then we place each find in its proper place. This work of arranging and recording continues each day from 9 p.m. till 1 or 2 a.m., to the no small detriment of our health and for the convenience of Mr Schliemann. Mr Schliemann visits the objects arranged in our lodgings and studies them freely. We never impose the

slightest obstacle. We enthusiastically assist him, often leaving our own work to facilitate his. Whenever he asks to take home one or more objects for further study, he has full freedom to do so. From the day when the painter he hired from Argos came to Charvati, Mr Schliemann has continued to take freely from our lodgings all the objects he chooses to depict. We eagerly humor him in these matters, asking from him only the number of the objects taken and their return after they have been drawn.”

Following the crisis described in this report, the excavations were halted for three days (28, 29 and 30 August) and then resumed on 31 August. From Stamatakis’ next report to the General Ephoria it is apparent that the situation has not improved:

“The work proceeds in utter confusion. After the resumption of excavation, things went smoothly for three days. But after the arrival of Mr Phinticles, the Vice-President of the Archaeological Society, the confusion returned. The workmen were suddenly increased from 80 to 130. The sites being excavated were increased from three to four, with a total of seven subgroups, so that the supervision and proper recording of the finds is exceedingly difficult. I have often spoken about this lack of order to Mr Schliemann but he does not listen to me at all. Mr Schliemann conducts the excavations as he wishes, paying no regard either to the law or to the instructions of the Ministry or to any official. Everywhere and at all times he prefers to look to his own advantage.”

Schliemann was still trying to excavate the area immediately within the Lion Gate, which Stamatakis had put off limits for fear that the side walls might collapse and damage the gate itself.

“Twice in my absence he started on this work and twice was prevented with considerable unpleasantness. He is rushing to finish the excavations. This is the source of the great confusion and the daily squabbles and differences with me.

Last Wednesday at 10 a.m. a door-sill appeared in the course of excavation and beside it a small column-base. As soon as it appeared, I told the workmen and the supervisor that the stone was not to be removed from its place until we had excavated down to its depth and its emplacement could be examined and recorded. At 3 o’ clock Mr Schliemann instructed the workmen, contrary to

my view, to remove the door-sill before it was completely uncovered and to take it in the cart and throw it outside the wall. Seeing from a distance that it was being carried off, I hurried up and reproached the workmen for removing it when it was forbidden to do so. Mr Schliemann, who happened to be there, began to insult me coarsely. Unable to control my temper, I replied with similar insults. Later his wife came up and began to abuse me in front of the workers, saying that I was illiterate and fit only to conduct animals and not archaeological excavations. She added that I had been sent simply to supervise and to receive the finds and that I had no right to make criticisms and to trouble her husband. She said that they had absolute permission from the Archaeological Society to conduct the excavations as they wanted. I made no reply to her intolerable abuse.

I request that the Ephoria send the above along with the enclosed daybook to the Council of the Athenian Archaeological Society, to which the permit was granted to excavate in Mycenae at Mr Schliemann's expense, and to request it to instruct Mr Schliemann to stay within the law, to reduce the workmen to 80 and the sites being excavated to one and to place the work on an orderly basis so that the scrutiny of the sites being excavated can be conducted in an appropriate fashion. The Council should also prohibit him from destroying later buildings without consultation with the ephor, from crushing other objects in the removal of rubble and earth, and, in general, they should clarify the rights of excavation to which his permit entitles him. In addition, it should be made known to him what the duties of the ephor are. Otherwise, the Ephoria is requested to ask the Ministry for my recall from Mycenae."

What do we learn from these reports about Schliemann's excavations? Personally, what I found most striking as I read these documents was the picture of Stamatakis working at the site all day long, supervising, receiving, and recording the finds, while Schliemann appeared on the scene only twice a day. Somehow, from reading *Mycenae*, I had always envisaged Schliemann almost constantly at the site. It should be

remembered, however, that all these reports are from the earlier stages of the excavations. No doubt in late November, as the Shaft Graves began to reveal their contents, Schliemann was more consistently on the scene. Clearly, however, Stamatakis' role in the daily routine of the excavations was of far greater importance than he has ever been given credit for. Clearly too, it was Stamatakis' methodical daybook rather than Schliemann's impressionistic diary, which seems in any case to have been largely dependent on Stamatakis' work, that formed the essential record of the excavations. In writing up *Mycenae* Schliemann must have drawn heavily on Stamatakis' work. The fact that Stamatakis intended to publish his Mycenae daybook in the 1880s is evidence that he regarded Schliemann's *Mycenae* as in some way deficient.⁸ It is much to be regretted that he did not live to carry out his plan. It is a tragedy that this important work has now been lost.⁹ Stamatakis' meticulous recordkeeping earns him an honored place among archaeologists of this period.

Stamatakis shows a commendable inclination not to remove objects precipitously. He was well aware of the importance of the sculpted tombstones within the grave circle and of the difficulties of interpretation that they posed. While Schliemann was anxious to remove the tombstones in order to reach whatever burials might lie underneath, Stamatakis saw that important evidence was to be obtained from determining how the slabs had been fixed in the ground and from studying more closely the interrelationship of all the upright slabs. His speculation that the sculpted tombstones may derive from an early context but may have been set up at a much later period – a hypothesis he proposed to test by studying their emplacement – shows considerable sophistication.

Also admirable is Stamatakis' concern that all the antiquities at the site, including Roman and later Greek, be properly recorded, and not just the prehistoric remains that were the focus of Schliemann's interest. Here his experience at other classical sites stood him in good stead.

Stamatakis also deserves our admiration for his assumption of the responsibility for safeguarding for posterity the monuments uncovered, or, like the Lion Gate, possibly threatened, by the excavations. It is

8. On Stamatakis' plans to publish the Mycenae daybook, see Petrakos 1987b, 282.

9. G. Korres has since informed me that the Stamatakis daybook has been found.

only fair to point out that as the representative of the Greek government he was bound to be more concerned than Schliemann in this regard. However, not all government officials are conscientious about carrying out their duties. Petrakos, in speaking of Stamatakis' work in Boeotia, singles out for particular mention his concern for the proper conservation of antiquities.¹⁰ We see the same conscientiousness at Mycenae. Stamatakis' broad view of the archaeologist's responsibilities to society as a whole strikes a distinctly modern note. Like a lioness guarding her cubs,

he kept Schliemann's eager spade away from the Lion Gate until its safety was assured. For this we should all be grateful.

In conclusion I agree fully with Petrakos' view of Stamatakis as one of the great Greek archaeologists of the nineteenth century. His painstaking work at Mycenae under the most trying conditions, when, unfortunately, he met with little support from senior officials in the Archaeological Society, deserves our profound gratitude and enduring respect.

10. Petrakos 1987b, 279.

REFERENCES

- Calder W.M. III and Traill, D.A. (eds), 1986. *Myth, Scandal and History: the Heinrich Schliemann Controversy and a First Edition of the Mycenaean Diary*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Ludwig, E., 1931. *Schliemann of Troy, the Story of a Gold-seeker; with an Introduction by Sir Arthur Evans* (translated from the German by D.F. Tait), London: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Petrakos, B., 1987a. 'Ιδεογραφία της εν Αθήναις Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας', *AE* 126: 25-197.
- Petrakos, B., 1987b. *Η Εν Αθήναις Αρχαιολογική Εταιρεία. Η ιστορία των 150 χρόνων της 1837-1987*, Athens: Library of the Archaeological Society at Athens.
- Traill, D., 1984a. 'Schliemann's discovery of "Priam's treasure": a re-examination of the evidence', *JHS* 104: 95-115.
- Traill, D., 1984b. 'Further evidence of fraudulent reporting in Schliemann's archaeological works', *Boreas* 7: 295-316.
- Traill, D., 1986. 'Schliemann's mendacity: A question of methodology', *AnatSt* 36: 91-98.
- Traill, D. 1995. *Schliemann of Troy: Treasure and Deceit* (London: J. Murray): 141-176.