

PHAISTOS PROJECT

The Archaic Period: New Data

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INTRODUCTION

The survey of the urban area of Phaistos has involved a large area, investigated by several annual campaigns in the period 2008-2012 (see Figure 1). The main aim of this project is to define the size and the spatial organization of urban area of Phaistos during all its phases, focussing in particular on the Greek Polis whose development is still obscure.

A fundamental issue of this research project obviously concerns the study of the material found during the survey, a task posing non trivial methodological challenges. The material found spans indeed a range of several thousands years, from the Minoan Age to the Modern periods, and it has been thus carried out by a specifically tailored research team, formed by several specialists of the the different chronological phases of Phaistos and of the Mesara.

It has then been necessary to define an ideal map of the main ‘indicators’, chronological and functional, to be used to interpret the outcome of the survey. The functionality of any finding is assessed by a careful comparison with contemporary contexts studied in the Mesara. The relative ‘diffusion’ of a given family of material is assessed by comparing ‘equivalent’ areas, i.e. with similar geo-morphological features and similar degree of visibility/accessibility.

The large quantity of material (both ceramic and lithic) found during the survey has allowed only a preliminary study, aimed to the obtain a general, rough, interpretative framework to be used to guide the survey activity, whereas an in-depth study of the material is in progress. The main information gathered until now concerns the identification of the main classes of material, the assessment of their state of conservation, and of their relative frequency, by counting the number of individuals – on the ground of the fragments morphologically recognizable.

In this contribution we shall concisely report the main findings of the previous campaigns, focussing almost exclusively on the Greek Phases of Phaistos.

OVERVIEW OF THE CERAMIC MATERIAL FOUND

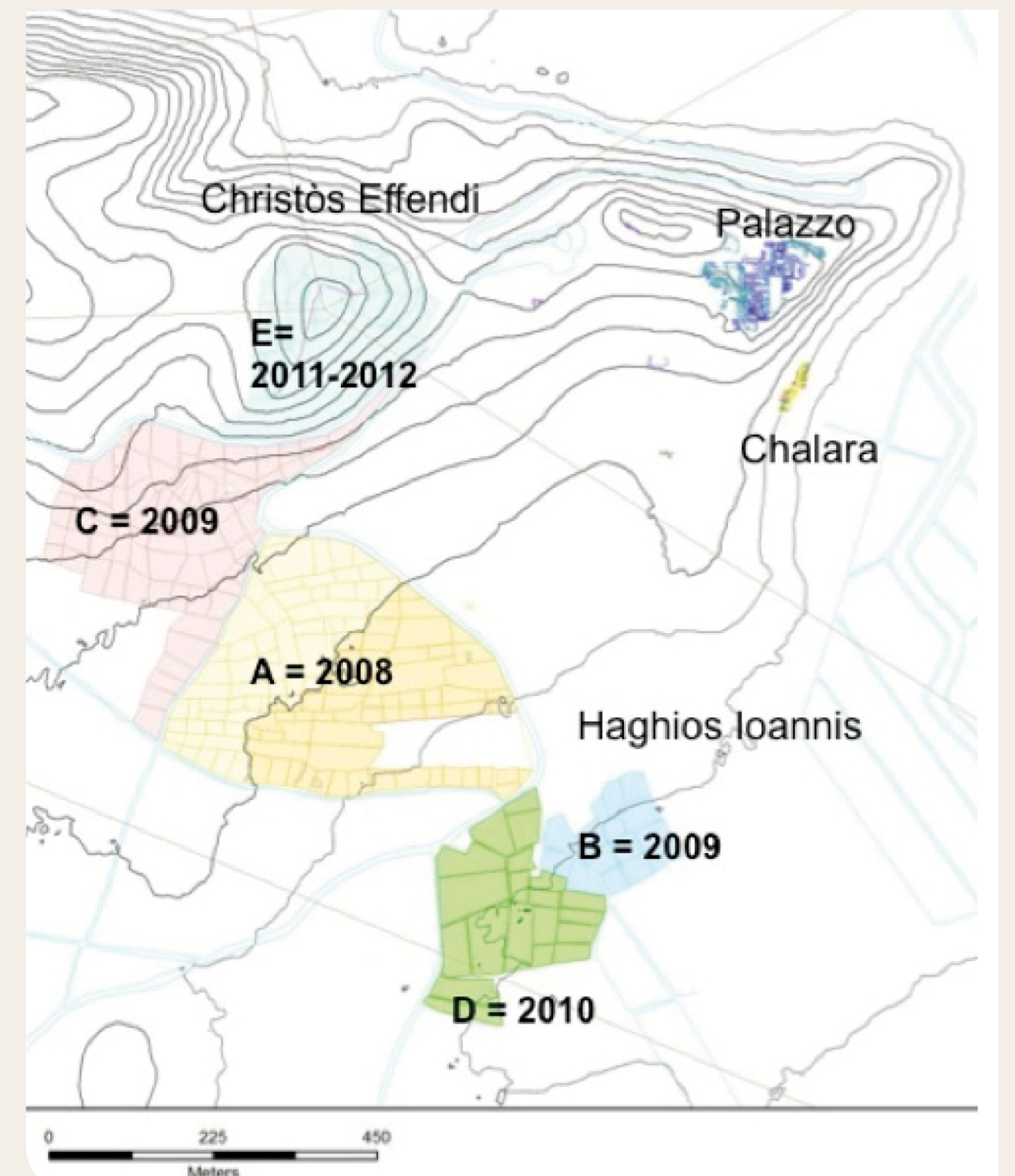
Ceramic material that can be related, generically, to the Minoan Phase of the town has been found in a fair quantity, often in a fairly good state of conservation, in almost all the areas of the survey, with the largest density in the Zone C and the smallest one in Zone B.

In the four Zones A-B-C-D material from the periods Late Minoan IIIC, Protogeometric, Geometric to Archaic are the less numerous, at least according our preliminary analysis, showing that material that can be related to a domestic use (in particular tripod jugs and pithoi) is almost absent.

On the other hand, in zone A some ‘high quality’ material from theses chronological phases, in a very good state of conservation, has been found (see below).

A large quantity of plain pottery has been found in most of the investigated areas, and it has not yet been studied in detail. At this stage of the research, we can hypothesize that, for some exemplars, we are in the presence of material from the Greek Phase, in particular from the Classic-Hellenistic periods, on the ground of its association with black glazed pottery. In other cases, these findings can be assigned to the Roman and Byzantine phases, and additional studies are already planned to clarify the precise chronology of this material.

The survey of Christos Effendi hill has provided a very different picture. We have found ceramic material, in a very good state of conservation, from almost all the phases of the Greek town (see the Poster devoted to the survey Christos Effendi)



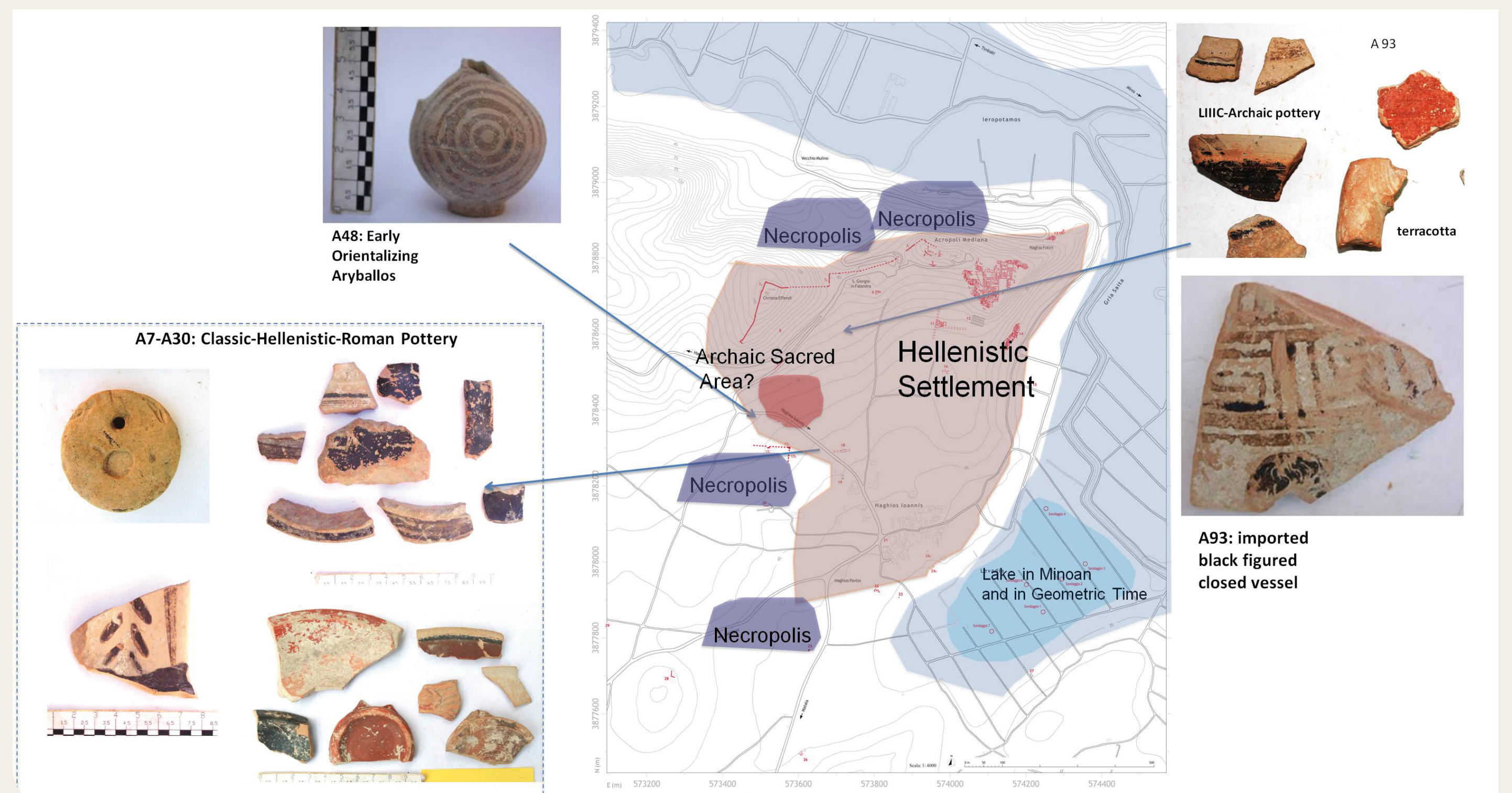
1. Survey Areas with the indication of the year for each campaign

THE GREEK PHASES

A significant clustering of material related to the Greek phases (Classic/Hellenistic) is recorded particularly in the southern area, between UR A7-A30 and the area D (see figure 2). It has mainly a ‘domestic’ character: cooking pottery, almost absent in other areas of the survey, storage pottery (pithoi, some of them decorated), table ceramics, loom weights, amphorae and tiles (between them also some of Corinthian type as those found in the settlement of Chalara). It is likely that also northbound we could find a similar clustering of material, as testified by the findings in A63-64.

In the area between A1 and A6, A2-41, A44-45 we found very little material, mainly plain pottery, not easy to be identified, and some fragments, in a bad state of conservation, from the Minoan and Greek phases. In this belt we have found an aryballos almost integer (lacking only of the neck), typical of the late geometric cretan production, and another one in pieces, likely more ancient, from UR A48.

We found some relevant pieces in Area A93: a fragment of closed vase with black figures, very rare at Crete, with the head of a young man framed within a meander, likely of East Greek production, of high archaic age and a LMIIC kylix of fine craftsmanship. These findings, both for the extraordinary craftsmanship and for the very good state of conservation seem to come from contexts with funerary or cultic character.



2. The Survey areas: Hypothesis of functional distinction of the areas in the Greek period on the basis of the pottery findings

CONCLUSIONS

On the ground of the available data it is not possible to reach unambiguous conclusions but only to formulate some working hypothesis, to be tested by our future researches.

The scarcity of material that can be dated to the period between the end of the II millennium and the Classic-Hellenistic Age in the Zones A,B,C,D suggests that this areas was not designed for a settlement in the Phases between the end of the Bronze Age and the Classic Age (see figure 3).

On the other hand, in A48 two aryballoi have been found; one is almost intact, likely coming from a Funeral pyre – as attested by the traces of fire on the surface and by the presence of some fragments of small bones inside the neck.

These findings suggests the this area was designed for Funeral activities in the High Archaic Age (VIII-VI century B.C.).

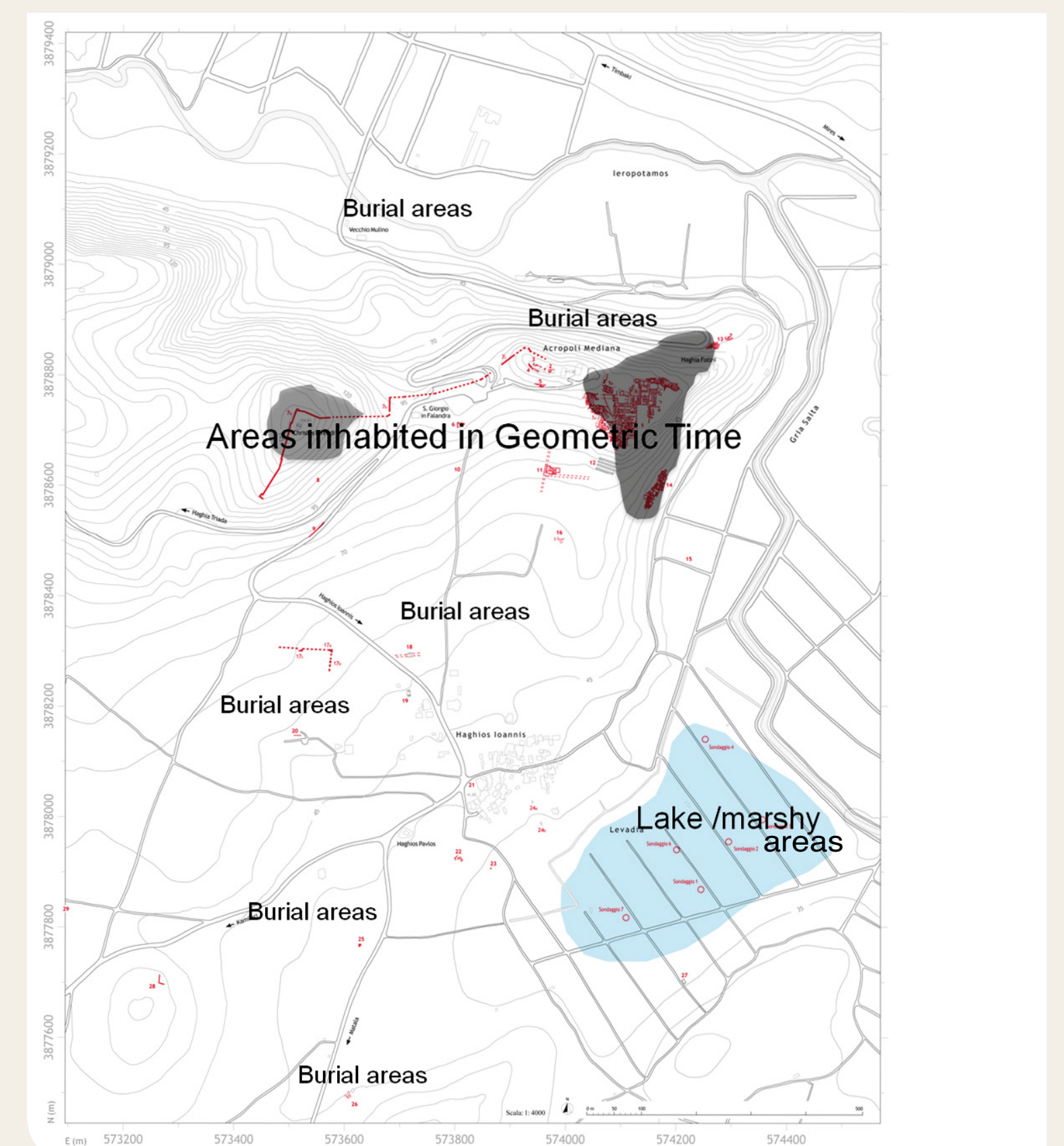
Our finding of a fragment of a black figure closed vase - imported - together with the presence in the same area of a fragment of figured terracottae and of other relevant fragments (e.g. kylix LMIIC) could suggest the presence of a Sacred Area. Additional studies are necessary to confirm this conclusion, and different explanations cannot be yet ruled out.

By taking into account the typology of the material found, their distribution in the area, their state of conservation it is possible to propose a first interpretative model. In the high archaic age the settlement areas are the Christos Effendi Hill, the area of the Palace and Chalara. We cannot ascertain if there was a single settlement but it is likely, for the proximity of these areas, that, at least starting from the IX century, these settlements was exploiting the same resources and using the same communication routes. It is along these routes towards other relevant centres (e.g. Kommos) that the funeral areas (see tholos, protogeometric tomb etc.) were positioned, following a pattern already found at Knossos (cfr. North Cemetery, Fortetsa). Only in a more recent period, in the Late Classic – Hellenistic Age, the settlements ‘approaches’ the Plain.

The on-going excavations on the Christos Effendi Hill (see the relative poster) supports this hypothesis and seems to testify the structuring of settlement during the IX century. This is a key phase in the Mesara and, more in general, at Crete, for what concerns the structuring of relevant settlements, as can testify the necropolis and the main sanctuaries in the island.

REFERENCES BIBLIOGRAPHY

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3. Phaistos: Hypothesis of functional distinction of the areas in the Early Greek periods