

### PHAISTOS PROJECT

The primary objective of the “Christos Effendi” project was a systematic study of the Christos Effendi hill, the highest acropolis of Phaistos, and its historical contextualization in the urban territory from Minoan to Hellenistic times. Despite the fact that the ancient site, especially in Minoan and Hellenistic times, extended as far as the Agios Ioannis village and the Christos Effendi hill, in the 1900s archaeological research was initially almost completely concentrated on the Kastri hill, where the Palace stood.

The *Western Mesara Field Project*, directed from 1984 to 1987 by Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou, expanded knowledge of the Phaistos area. Nowadays, however, the relationship between the Palace and its territory remains totally undefined. In order to fill this archaeological gap, beginning in 2007 new surveys have been planned and are being conducted by an Italian-Greek *synergasia*. The survey-based PHAISTOS PROJECT is conducted by a team of the University of Salerno and by the Ephoria of Iraklion, under the supervision of Maria Bredaki and Fausto Longo, and directed by the Director of the Italian Archaeological School of Athens, Prof. Emanuele Greco.

### THE 2010 CAMPAIGN

In 2010, a team directed by A. De Guio (a faculty member of the Department of Archaeology of the University of Padua) and A. Greco (a faculty member of the Department of Studi Greco-Latini, Italiani e Scenico-Musicali of the University of Rome “La Sapienza”), took part in the Phaistos Project with a specific target: studying and surveying Christos Effendi, the highest hill of the city of Phaistos. The main objective of the first exploration campaign was a preliminary study of the hill and a study of a long exposed section found along the Phaistos-Matala road. This section, about 30 meters long, was exposed during the construction of the Phaistos-Matala road. The sherds retrieved during the cleaning of the section are representative of the whole repertoire of the Protopalatial age. We also found fragments of white and red plaster, still in good state. The material seems to corroborate the hypothesis that at the foot of the hill there was a Protopalatial inhabited area of significant size.

### THE 2011-2012 SURVEY

In 2011 and 2012, a team directed by A. Greco and financed by the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (ISTAP), the University of Roma “La Sapienza”, and a private sponsor (Lucio Andrioli and the association “Gli Amici di Minosse e Radamante”, [www.festos.eu](http://www.festos.eu)) started a survey of Christos Effendi. We overlaid the whole hill with a datum grid and created survey units accordingly. The grid was georeferenced in 2011 by the team of the Laboratorio di Rilevamento e Geomatica of the University of Padua (directed by V. Achilli), while a photogrammetric and 3D image of the hill was taken in 2012 by a team of the Zeta Esse Service with a micro-helicopter.

The survey confirmed the presence of ancient and pre-modern terraces, both buried and collapsing, and of significant ceramic clusters, especially on the northern and western slopes of the hill (mostly dating from the Pre- and Protopalatial periods). Important findings bear witness to continuous settlement of the hill even during the post Minoan phases (Protogeometric, Geometric, Classic and Hellenistic). The discovery of a small Early Geometric clay horse, of a group of three perfectly preserved geometric cups, and of a fragment of votive terracotta with the inscription [a]thana (probably to be dated between archaic and classical phases) is particularly important. We also found ancient architectural structures and exposed sections at the foot of the hill, in front of the Church of H. Gheorgios in Falandra, on the south-western slope of the hill and along the Phaistos-Haghia Triada road. We also made another important discovery: a new stretch of the Hellenic town walls.

### THE 2013 EXCAVATION CAMPAIGN

During 2013, we finally dug two stratigraphic trial pits at the top of the hill, one on its eastern slope (Trial Pit 7, excavated by Fausto Longo and Amedeo Rossi, University of Salerno), the other on its west side (Trial Pit 8, excavated by Alessandro Greco, University of Roma, and Andrea Betto, ArcSAT). Trial Pit 7 was dug to bring to light a rectangular building located during the 2012 survey campaign. Trial Pit 8 was a reopening of the old excavation conducted in 1909 by the Italian archaeologist Minto, who found, under the Hellenic wall, an H-shaped building which he attributed to the Middle-Late Minoan Era.

Trial Pit 7 was opened along the southeastern part of the uppermost terrace of the Hill, an area inside the fortification wall. Under some thin superficial layers, we soon found two buildings, which we labeled A and B. The former is rectangular, and more recent. Its south, east and north walls are built of dry ashlar masonry, while its western face leans directly on the natural rock. Pottery finds date it between Byzantine and Venetian times. The building lies directly on top of a thick filling of big stones, which covers, in its turn, an impressive collapse of tiles,



Fig. 1. Christos Effendi hill view from the Palace



Fig. 2. The Phaistos Project' area of Survey till 2012



Fig. 3. The exposed section along the foot of Christos Effendi



Fig. 4. Votive terracotta inscribed



Fig. 5. Geometric cup



Fig. 6. Early Geometric clay horse

stones and ashlar. This layer is the destruction level of another building (B).

We explored its entrance, a bench just inside the threshold and a tall collapsed portion of the inner western wall. Outside the building, part of a lintel and an inscribed ashlar were found. The inscription probably stood on the outer face of the building. It is a list of personal names in four lines. The scholars who conducted the first epigraphic survey of the area told us that this may be a list of important personalities in the town of Phaistos, whose function was either administrative or religious, and is not yet completely understood. By its epigraphic characteristics, the inscription could date between the third and first century BC. New excavations will be needed to shed light on the specific functions of this building, but it is clear that we have finally discovered the first trace of the classical and Hellenistic acropolis of the town of Phaistos.

In Trial Pit 8, two thick dumps of stone debris were found. They covered up a floor of limestone fragments associated with a structure bound by stones. The structure contained two post holes, which could be interpreted as holes for a cargo winch. Our final interpretation of the floor and the structure was that they were the building site for the fortification wall, and can be dated to the late classical age.

The fortification wall itself was partially set on a structure composed of ashlar. This structure is associated with a threshold and a vertical stone, probably for a pivot. Eastward, under the structure, we found a primary collapse. The destruction level sealed a *piithos*, 1.2 m tall, in its original housing, which had been broken on the spot. The ware and shape type of the *piithos* dated the whole complex, including the ashlar wall, the threshold, the pivot stone, and the *piithos* itself to the Geometric period.

This discovery throws new light the structure excavated by Minto in 1909. The two walls interpreted by the archaeologists pertaining to a Minoan H-shaped building actually appear to pertain to two different Geometric structures: uphill, the western outer wall of the house of the *piithos*, which extended eastwards, and, slightly downhill, a coeval terracing wall which supported an external paved walkway right in front of the entrance to the house. We ascertained that the terracing wall covered another structure, which may date from the Protopalatial period.

During the American surveys of the hill in the Eighties, Watrous found a Karfi-like little terracotta idol on the hill. During the 2010-2012 surveys, besides a huge amount of Minoan pottery, we found a small Early Geometric clay horse and two inscribed shards dedicated to Athena from the Late Classical period. Our 2013 excavation revealed an important administrative or religious building dating from the Hellenistic Period (Trial Pit 7). These elements suggest the existence of an important religious centre at the top of the hill. On the other side, besides significant quantities of Protogeometric and Geometric pottery found during the surveys, the presence of pottery pertaining to Protogeometric tombs and the discovery of the Geometric house (Trial Pit 8) suggest that the hill was not only an administrative or religious area, but also an inhabited one. Could this be the lost Acropolis of post-Minoan Phaistos? Only further research will be able to answer this question.



Fig. 7. The Building B



Fig. 8. The Geometric house