

# Exploring a *Terra* *Incognita* on Crete

Recent Research on Bronze Age Habitation in  
the Southern Ierapetra Isthmus



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Edited by Konstantinos Chalikias and Emilia Oddo



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Front cover: view of the western slope of the site of Vainia Stavromenos in the foreground, from the northwest. Visible are the modern hilltop chapel (at upper left) and the remains of the Venetian tower below it. In the distance are the southern coast of Crete and the Libyan Sea. Photo K. Chalikias.

Back cover: view of the valley of Ierapetra with the village of Kentri, from the west. Photo K. Chalikias.

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# Preface

This volume comprises a compilation of papers that were presented on January 8th, 2016, during the colloquium “Exploring a *Terra Incognita*: Recent Research on Bronze Age Habitation in the Southern Ierapetra Isthmus” at the annual meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America held in San Francisco, CA. We would like to thank the colloquium participants and authors of this volume for sharing their research. We are particularly grateful to the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP) Academic Press and Susan Ferrence (Director of Publications) for the publication of the proceedings and to the peer reviewers for their suggestions.

The topic was largely inspired by our work and by the many on-going archaeological projects that are starting to bring light to the southern Ierapetra Isthmus (e.g., Aphrodite’s Kephali [Betancourt 2013]). With this in mind the colloquium aimed to bring together colleagues with common interests in the study of the area while highlighting the potential for future research in southeastern Crete. The scholarly contributions presented in this volume represent the first effort to examine the settlement history and material culture of the Ierapetra area.

Defining the study area was a challenge because the Ierapetra Isthmus was a very vibrant corridor of exchange and interaction during the Bronze

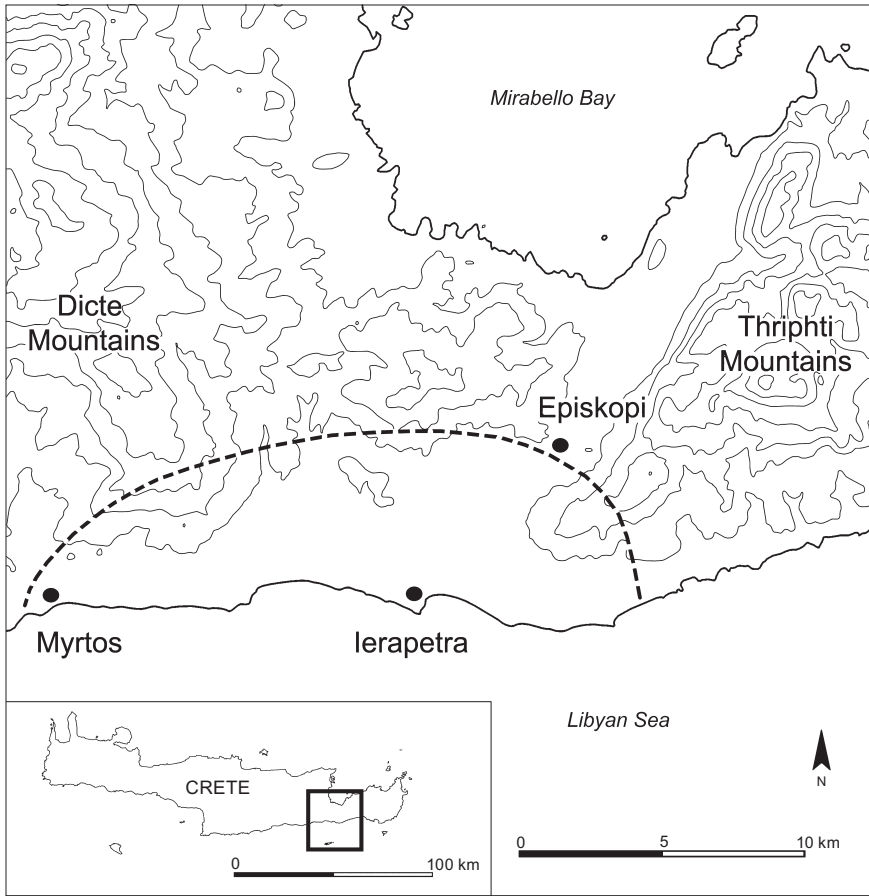


Figure i. Map of the Ierapetra Isthmus with the area of study marked by a dashed line.

Age as evidenced by commonalities in material culture and settlement patterns with vague, maybe even non-existent territorial boundaries. Since the northern part of the isthmus (bounded by the Mirabello Bay) had been extensively explored, studied, and published in the past few decades, it was our goal to focus primarily on the lesser known, barely acknowledged, and largely unexplored southern side of the isthmus. Our geographical area of investigation was the coastal plain of Ierapetra—bounded to the north by the low hills near the modern villages of Episkopi and Kato Chorio, to the east and southeast by the Thripti Mountains, to the west by the southeastern outskirts of the Dicte Mountains, and to the south by the Libyan Sea (Fig. i). Though some might question the incorporation of sites such as Gaidourophas, Myrtos Pyrgos, or Chryssi Island

as peripheral to the study area, the contributions to this volume show that these sites were not only tightly interconnected with the southern Ierapetra Isthmus, but that they also reflect the regional sociopolitical developments that shaped the area during the Bronze Age.

The archaeological interest in this part of Crete has been scattered and infrequent, frustrated by finds that appear sparser than in other parts of the island (a circumstance that prompted us to refer to this area as *terra incognita*). Perhaps as a consequence, the history of the scholarly engagement in the southeast, and especially around Ierapetra, has been limited since at least the early 1900s. Arthur Evans had visited the area of Ierapetra in the late 1890s and had acquired Minoan finds from the villages of Kentri and Kalamaphka without showing any interest in excavating the Roman ruins in and around the small harbor town of Ierapetra. In Kalamaphka, Evans documented what he considered to be a large Mycenaean citadel, most likely in the vicinity of modern-day Kastelos (Brown, ed., 2001, 215, 229–230, 261, 270, 326, 331–332). From there he ascended westward into the mountains following a path that led him to the site of Gaidourophas, which he briefly described in his notebook (Brown, ed., 2001, 342). Harriet Boyd Hawes, who was advised to explore the eastern part of the island by Evans, bypassed the Ierapetra area due to the lack of visible Bronze Age sites and continued toward the northern part of the isthmus where she discovered a number of sites around Kavousi and Gournia (Hawes et al. 1908). The site of Hagia Photia, located approximately 12 km east of Ierapetra, marks the only exception—her team discovered there a partially disturbed Early Minoan (EM) burial context in a rock shelter (Betancourt 2000). The only other site in close proximity to Ierapetra that was excavated in the early 1900s was a Late Minoan (LM) cemetery at the village of Episkopi. There, Richard Seager, and later Stephanos Xanthoudides, were actively involved in excavating several rock-cut LM III tombs (Seager 1907, 111; Xanthoudides 1920–1921). To this day there has not been a detailed publication regarding this extensive Postpalatial cemetery nor has there been an attempt to locate and properly record the excavated tombs. It was not until the early 1960s that archaeologists organized an effort to document Bronze Age sites in the area of Ierapetra, leading to the detailed excavation and publication of Myrtos Phournou Koriphi and later Myrtos Pyrgos (Hood, Warren, and Cadogan 1964; Warren 1972; Cadogan 1977–1978).

The late 2000s brought new vigor to the research with a series of excavation projects (e.g., Aphrodite's Kephali, Chryssi Island, Bramiana, Gaidourophas, and Stavromenos), which were largely collaborative

efforts between the Greek Archaeological Service and various institutions (the Department of History and Archaeology of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Temple University, INSTAP, the INSTAP Study Center for East Crete). Three of the sites were excavated within the last nine years, and they are now in the process of study and publication (Chryssi Island, Bramiana, and Gaidourophas). Survey projects have sought to answer more specific questions, such as the Final Neolithic (FN)/EM I transition (Nowicki 2002). New abundant settlement evidence from Chryssi has allowed discussion on regional and intraregional maritime trade networks (Chalikias 2013).

With a surge of new archaeological evidence, the time is ripe for a first assessment of old and new data. The contributions published in this volume form a representative sample of recent scholarship in the area. Overall, there seems to be a consensus about the possibility of a large administrative center in the coastal plain of Ierapetra, based on the several excavated villa-type buildings on the periphery of the region (Myrtos Pyrgos, Makrygialos, and the newly discovered one at Gaidourophas). The excavation of the specialized settlement on Chryssi Island provides further insight into the “marginal” landscapes on the edge of the Ierapetra zone. Furthermore, the reevaluation and integration of old and new excavation data suggest new trajectories regarding local ceramic production and cultural identity.

Two contributions focus on early (Neolithic and Prepalatial) evidence. Philip Betancourt presents a compelling argument regarding the installation of watchtowers as early as the EM I period to secure territorial control of an area or defend the territorial integrity of Early Bronze Age communities. A study by Krzysztof Nowicki presents a more complex picture of territorial conflicts during FN/EM I and suggests that the sites in the Ierapetra area fit within a wider pattern of population movement, settlement expansion, and intensive exploitation of natural resources in southeastern Crete.

The majority of contributions deal with sites dating to the Neopalatial period, a particularly active time for the southern Ierapetra Isthmus. The island of Chryssi provides a fascinating insight into Bronze Age aquaculture, while evidence from the mountains north of the modern village of Anatoli suggests that the Minoans were tapping into mountain resources in an attempt to diversify their economy. Comparative stylistic analysis of the Neopalatial (LM IA) pottery from different contexts at Myrtos Pyrgos presents the intertwining of two very distinct ceramic traditions at the same site. The first comprehensive study of the LM IA style from the



site offers important insights into the variability of local ceramic production, triggering new questions about stylistic consumption. While Myrto Pyrgos is a representative sample of a regional Neopalatial economic center, Bramiana provides an insight into the material culture of a rural site in the isthmus, one that could afford, however, palatial-style pottery in its repertoire. Interestingly, the majority of Bronze Age material from the Ierapetra Isthmus prior to the more recent projects came from the rich LM III cemetery at Episkopi mentioned above. Rescue excavations of a partially destroyed LM III cemetery at Arapi Skala in the modern town of Gra Lygia allowed a more detailed study of Postpalatial culture in the Ierapetra area. R. Angus Smith's paper attempts to compare the material from Arapi Skala to finds from LM III cemeteries along the northern coast of the isthmus, examining potential differences and/or variations in burial practices and material culture.

We view the colloquium and this publication as the first steps toward a better understanding of Bronze Age culture in the Ierapetra region; the surge in archaeological projects over the last few years forced us to look at the Ierapetra area and the broader southeast of Crete not as a territory on the fringes of Minoan archaeology but as a vibrant region, equally promising as its famous counterpart along the northern part of the isthmus and the southern Mirabello Bay.

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# Abbreviations

Abbreviations for periodicals in the references of individual chapters follow the conventions of the *American Journal of Archaeology*.

cm	centimeter(s)	LCh	Late Chalcolithic
d.	diameter	LM	Late Minoan
EM	Early Minoan	LN	Late Neolithic
EN	Early Neolithic	m	meter(s)
FN	Final Neolithic	m asl	meters above sea level
ht.	height	MM	Middle Minoan
INSTAP	Institute for Aegean	MNI	minimum number of
SCEC	Prehistory Study		individuals
	Center for East Crete	pers. comm.	personal communication
km	kilometer(s)	pers. obs.	personal observation
LAN	Late Aegean Neolithic	pres.	preserved

