

Archaeological investigation in the Eastern Crete by the Institute for Mediterranean Studies

Konstantinos Roussos

The study of settlements and material culture dated to the Early Byzantine period (mid-4th – early 9th c. A.D.) in Crete is an intriguing and promising field of research. The period was marked by the transformation of the economy and society, and the shift to a rather different medieval world. From the 7th c. onwards, Crete became a border region of the Empire within the vastness of the Mediterranean as a result of the Arab-Byzantine struggle for maritime supremacy. Most of the insular world appeared to enter a period of crisis with fundamental changes in settlement pattern, material culture and everyday life. The Arab conquest of Crete, sometime between 824 and 828, was a turning point in the history of the southern Aegean.

In recent years, the research activity of the Institute for Mediterranean Studies through several systematic and new-generation archaeological survey projects focuses on this fascinating period of island's history. In this context, a systematic surface survey is conducted by the Institute for Mediterranean Studies in collaboration with the Ephorate of Antiquities of Lassithi at the Mount Oxa, a fortified site south of Elounda (ancient Olous) on the western side of the Mirabello bay. A research team of specialists seeks to shed more light on the function, form and character of this fortified space, using a range of innovative interdisciplinary approaches in the light of the most recent advances in Landscape Archaeology and Digital Humanities. The systematic methodology of the *Oros Oxa* Project includes archaeological and historical approaches, combined with the advantages offered by the application of cutting-edge technologies in archaeological research. This paper aims to present the methodology, the objectives and the preliminary results of the project, as well as its future perspectives.



Konstantinos Roussos is a doctor of Late Antique and Byzantine Archaeology. His thesis was published in 2017 as a monograph in the series Archaeological Studies Leiden University (ASLU), under the title “Reconstructing the Settled Landscape of the Cyclades: The islands of Paros and Naxos during the Late Antique and Early Byzantine centuries”. Apart from his personal research in the Cyclades, he has been involved in a number of field and research projects in Greece, Turkey and Cyprus. He has participated for many years in the systematic excavation of the University of Crete at the ancient city of Eleutherna, Crete (directed by Dr. Ch. Tsigonaki). He has also been involved in the archaeological Field Project of the University of Cyprus “Settled and Sacred Landscapes of Cyprus” (directed by Dr. A. Vionis). In 2014-2015 he worked as Ph.D. Research Fellow in the archaeological project “Recapturing the Dynamics of the Early Byzantine Settlements in Crete: Old problems - New Interpretations through an Interdisciplinary Approach” hosted at the IMS/FORTH and directed by Dr. Ch. Tsigonaki. He is also involved as Research Fellow in the “Amorium Urban Archaeology Project” conducted by the IMS/FORTH as part of the greater “Amorium Excavations Project” of Anadolu University (Eskisehir, Turkey). In 2018 he worked as postdoctoral researcher at the IMS/FORTH in the framework of the research programme: “In Times of Crisis: Fortified spaces in Crete (7th - 9th c.)”, which is part of the project “METOPO - Mediterranean Cultural Landscapes”. He is currently holds a postdoctoral position at the IMS/FORTH in the framework of the research programme: “Spatial Dynamics and Settlement Patterns in Eastern Crete from the Classical to the Venetian Period”, directed by Dr. N. Coutsinas. He has been studying the Late Roman, Byzantine, Medieval and Post-Medieval ceramic assemblages from excavations in Greece: Parikia (Paros, the Cyclades), Voroi (Heraklion, Crete), Monemvasia (Lakonia, the Peloponnese).