

Phaistos Project

Italo-Greek archaeological surveys in the city and territory of Phaistos



23th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities



Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Atene



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- **University of Salerno / Department of Cultural Heritage Sciences** – Fausto Longo (assistant professor and project director), Amedeo Rossi (research assistant), Simone Foresta (PhD scholar), Emanuela Santaniello (PhD scholar), Vincenzo Amato (geomorphologist), Alessandra D'Amico (architect), Alfonso Santoriello (assistant professor), Francesca Luongo (graduate student), Felice Perciante (archaeology specialization school student), Roberto Musio (archaeology specialization school graduate), Alessandro Terribile (archaeology master's scholar), Alessandro Castaldo (undergraduate student of archaeology), Cinzia Morlando (draughtswoman);
 - **University of Pisa** – Mario Benzi (ordinary professor), Giampaolo Graziadio (associate professor), Valeria Lenuzza (PhD scholar), Filippo Virgilio (PhD scholar), Elisabetta Pezzi (PhD scholar);
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 - **University of Rome "La Sapienza"** – Alessandro Greco (assistant professor);
 - **University of Naples "Federico II" / Department of Earth Sciences** – Rosa Di Maio (associate professor); Mauro Lamanna (geophysicist), Maria Grazia Soldovieri (geophysicist), Bartolomeo Garofalo (geophysicist), Antonella Criscuolo (student), Maria Criscuolo (student).

Funding 2007-2011:

- **SAIA** – Italian Archaeological School in Athens;
- **INSTAP** – Institute for Aegean Prehistory;
- **DBC** – Department of Cultural Heritage of the University of Salerno (presently renamed DISPAC – Department of Cultural Heritage Sciences);
- **University of Salerno** – ex 60% university funds for Longo, Festos Project;
- **University of Padua** – University project;
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The Site

Phaistos was inhabited ever since the late Neolithic period and later became an important administrative center of the Minoan age. It controlled a vast and fertile area in central Crete. Between the tenth and seventh century BC, Phaistos gave itself the structure of a *polis*, as we know, among other things, from Homer's mention of the city in the *Iliad*. The archaeology of the historical city is still little known. It extended over the whole plain immediately south of the Palace hill and was surrounded with walls. It had hostile relations with the neighboring town of Gortyna, which destroyed Phaistos around the middle of the second century BC and incorporated its territory. (Strabo 10.479; 10,14,1). In the following centuries Phaistos gradually lost its importance. In Roman and proto-Byzantine times it was a mere small village in the area of the present town of Agios Ioannis. It was eventually abandoned for the countryside.

Archaeological investigations of the site, first undertaken at the beginning of the last century by the Italian archaeologists F. Halbherr and L. Pernier (see Pernier 1902), indicate that the site had a long life, from the late Neolithic until late antiquity. Research on the site, however, has so far exclusively focused on the Minoan period and has been limited to the palace hill.

The Project

The need to extend knowledge of the settlement area of the city through a diachronic investigation of settlement patterns and urban development prompted the Italian Archaeological School in Athens to undertake an Italian-Greek *synergasia* in the summer of 2007, in the awareness that a systematic study of Phaistos and the surrounding area could only be achieved through an exchange of information and close and effective scientific collaboration with the local ephoria. The purpose was to create a new program based on surface investigations, archive research and material study, concomitantly with the study and publication of old excavations. The implementation of the project, by request of the Italian Archaeological School in Athens, has been entrusted to a team coordinated by the University of Salerno and the Eforia of Hraklion, respectively directed by Fausto **Longo** and Maria **Bredaki**.

The program, outlined in 2006 and started the following year, has the objective of studying part of the western Messara, with a special focus on the area around the hills of Phaistos. Here the intention is to investigate the forms and modes of evolution of the site, from major administrative center in the Bronze Age to city and, after its destruction by neighboring Gortyna, to a small village and finally a rural landscape. For this purpose the coordinators of the project have formed an interdisciplinary team composed of researchers and scholars of different universities and Italian and Greek institutions, also open to other international collaborations (for example with the CEREGE of Aix-en-Provence). The team is made up of a variety of specialists, including archaeologists with experience in ancient topography, materials, and photointerpretation, topographers, cartographers, geologists and geophysicists.

Results achieved to date

During the first five years, the research group has set up a topographical grid and georeferenced the archaeological structures of the settlement and the area. This allowed the creation of a totally new map of the area, and of a GIS. The integration of the work of the archaeologists (surveys and digs) with that of the geologists and geophysicists has provided a more accurate picture of the extension of the Minoan settlement, especially in the Protopalatial age. The limits of the walls of the city in historical times have been recognized in a corner of the city walls on the western versant of the *plateau*. The team has also detected at least three differently oriented sections in the city plan. A study of aerial photographs and the first geological investigations also enabled the team to put forward some preliminary hypotheses regarding landscape features in ancient times, while waiting for the first results of the core samples taken in 2011 by the CEREGE of Aix-en-Provence (DIKIDA Project).

