

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### ARCHAEOLOGY IN GREECE 2022–2023

# 4 The past 15 years of archaeological work on Roman and Byzantine Crete

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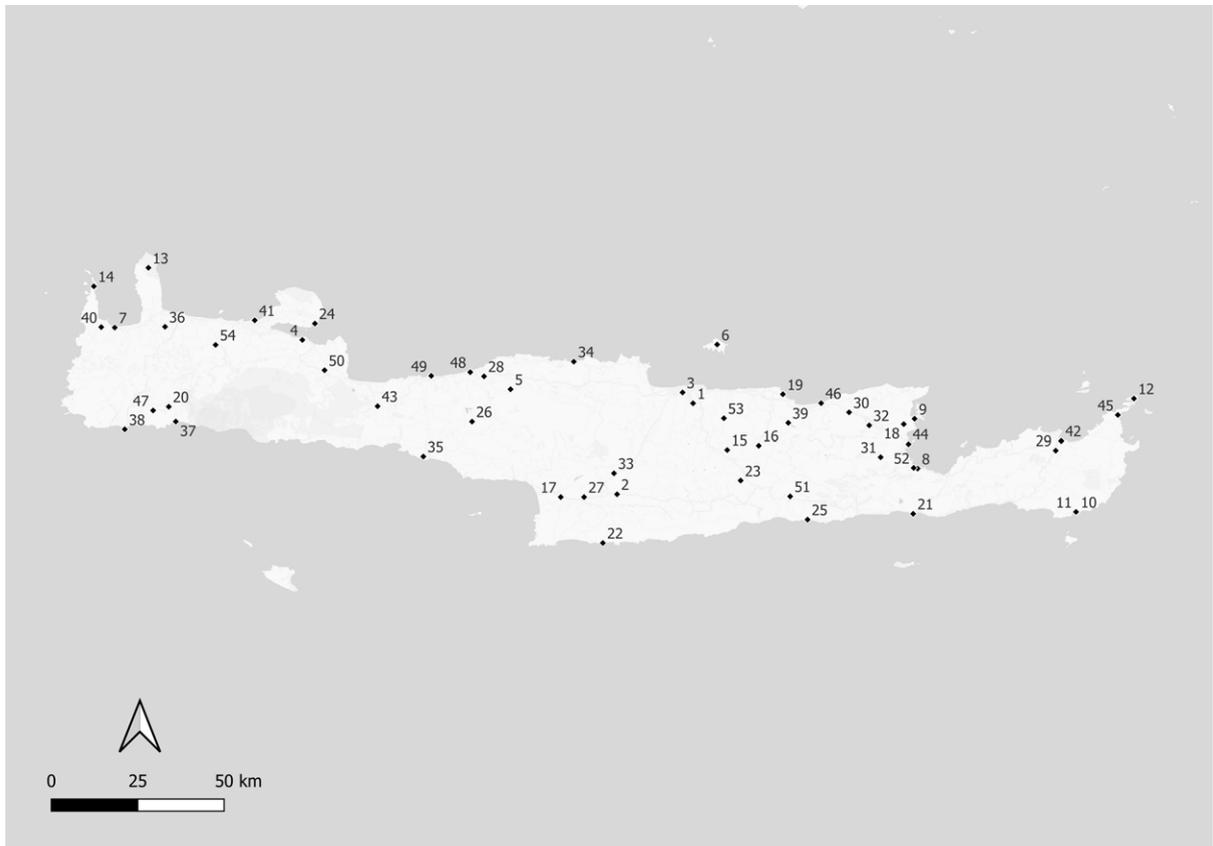
*This article aims to overview the last 15 years of archaeological work on Crete (2007–2022) for the Roman and Byzantine periods. It is a resource that can provide the first step in the research process for those looking to investigate these time periods in Crete. It not only communicates recent discoveries and research, but also directs scholars to earlier key publications – which this article follows on from – and to an extensive bibliography of recently published research. After covering the main publications of the last 15 years and the workshops, congresses, and conferences that have taken place, it organizes the recent archaeological discoveries by site type. It begins by covering surveys of both the landscape and those conducted underwater that have been extensive across and around Crete. It then covers public buildings and infrastructure, domestic architecture, production and craft, and cemeteries. While it is not a complete listing of all finds, it summarizes the key discoveries, publications, and events in order to demonstrate the major developments for study of these time periods in Crete.*

## Introduction

The last time *AR* covered Roman Crete was in a broader article on Roman Greece (Sweetman 2012) and in reports on Crete from Prehistoric to Roman times (Bennet 2011; 2012). There was also a gazetteer of Roman and Late Antique archaeological discoveries on Crete since 1980 published by Rebecca Sweetman (2013) that continues from Ian Sanders' earlier gazetteer in *Roman Crete* (Sanders 1982). Sweetman's gazetteer records all new discoveries up to within a few years of that date (the latest reference is to *AR* 2008–2009), due to the time-lag in the publication of *ADelt*, which in turn informed the entries in *AR*. This article aims to give an overview of the past 15 years of archaeological work on Crete (2007–2022) for the Roman and Byzantine periods (Map 4.1), organized by site type. It does not contain a comprehensive list of all finds and previous scholarship.

The information for this article has been sourced from *AGOnline*, the most recently published *ADelt*, and other congresses and publications as outlined below. The Cretan periodicals *Kritika Chronika* (Κρητικά Χρονικά) and *Kritiki Estia* (Κρητική Εστία) continue to be published but, where in the past the former in particular had some overlap with the *ADelt* in reporting the past year's archaeological activities, these now contain more historically focused research articles, still occasionally including those on Roman and Byzantine topics (e.g. Gigourtakis 2013; Papadaki and Milidakis 2013). Worth noting for those in search of information from past excavations is that, due to updates on their website by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, the addresses beginning [www.yppo.gr](http://www.yppo.gr) quoted in many past *AR*, *AGOnline*, and elsewhere across other publications and the internet (in library catalogues and blogs such as The Ancient World Online <http://ancientworldonline.blogspot.com/2012/04/archaeological-work-of-ephorias-on.html>) are now dead links. The reports of Ephoreia excavations 2000–2010 can now be found at <https://www.culture.gov.gr/anaskafes/index2.html>. Changes in the structure of the Ephoreias on Crete have occurred, with the two Byzantine Ephoreias (13th and 28th Ephorates of Byzantine Antiquities) being incorporated into the regional units for all time periods since 2014 (Tzigounaki 2020a).

The first large-scale international gathering that focused on these time periods in Crete, *Creta Romana e Protobizantina*, was organized by the SAIA in Heraklion in 2000. In addition to the *International Congress of Cretan Studies* (ICCS – Διεθνές Κρητολογικό Συνέδριο), which has taken place every five years since 1961, since 2008 the *Archaeological Work in Crete* conferences (AEK) also now take place every two to



Map 4.1. 1. Knossos; 2. Gortyn; 3. Heraklion; 4. Aptera; 5. Eleutherna; 6. Dia; 7. Kissamos; 8. Istron; 9. Elounda/Olous; 10. Livari; 11. Skiadi; 12. Kavos Sidero; 13. Rodhopos; 14. Gramvousa; 15. Galatas; 16. Padiadha; 17. Phaistos; 18. Oros Oxa; 19. Chersonisos; 20. Elyros; 21. Ierapetra/Hierapytna; 22. Lentas/Lebena; 23. Ini; 24. Marathiou; 25. Arvi; 26. Potamoi; 27. Moires; 28. Viran Episkopi; 29. Kato Episkopi Sitias; 30. Vrahasi; 31. Kamari Kritsa; 32. Vryses Merabello; 33. Apomarma; 34. Kalo Chorafi; 35. Preveli; 36. Vouves Platania; 37. Sougia; 38. Palaiochora; 39. Aposelemes dam; 40. Fournados; 41. Chania; 42. Petras; 43. Argyroupolis/Lappa; 44. Agios Nikolaos; 45. Itanos; 46. Malia; 47. Hyrtakina; 48. Sfakaki; 49. Rethymno; 50. Kephala Krionerides; 51. Loutra, in Ano Viannos; 52. Priniatikos Pyrgos; 53. Episkopi; 54. Alikianos.

three years. These more regular gatherings and the online publication of their proceedings have provided platforms for a great deal more scientific dialogue and scrutiny for the archaeology of Crete in general. This gives these time periods, which have traditionally been neglected, a greater forum within which they can grow and develop. Notably, at *AEK* 4, Pavlina Karanastasi (2020) summarized the old data and future prospects for Roman Crete and mentioned many of the key research articles published in recent years. To name just some of these, along with more recent additions here, there are articles by Martha Baldwin Bowsky (2007; 2009; 2011; 2014), Nadia Coutsinas (Coutsinas, Guy and Kelly 2016), Jane Francis (2014; 2017), Scott Gallimore (2017; 2018; 2019), Amanda Kelly (2013; Kelly and O'Neill 2023), Stavroula Markoulaki (2009), Anna Moles (Moles *et al.* 2022; Moles 2023b), Katja Sporn (2012), and Rebecca Sweetman (2007; 2011a; 2011b). The growing interest in these time periods has resulted in an increased number of research projects, workshops, congresses, and publications over the last 15 years. While the Roman, Late Antique/Protobyzantine, and Early Byzantine periods have been receiving greater attention for some time now, and it is predominantly these earlier phases that this article will report on, it is only in the last five years that the transitional periods from Byzantine to Islamic to Venetian Crete have begun to receive more archaeological attention (Randazzo 2019; 2020; Coutsinas *et al.* 2022).

There have been several conferences and workshops in recent years dedicated specifically to Roman and Byzantine Crete that have brought together international groups of scholars to develop the research of these time periods on the island. Many of these gatherings have resulted in published proceedings in edited

volumes. In 2016 there was the publication of the volume *Roman Crete: New Perspectives* (Francis and Kouremenos 2016), which has been reviewed in the *AJA* (Sweetman 2017). The articles in this volume worked towards countering old biases about Roman Crete and highlighting the importance of the island in this time period using a variety of approaches. The same year also saw the *1st International Conference of the Colloquium on Roman Crete*, which was held at the University of Nottingham, and the proceedings of this conference, with some supplementary papers, has recently been published with a wider timeframe as *Change and Transition on Crete: Interpreting the Evidence from the Hellenistic through to the Early Byzantine Period* (Francis and Curtis 2023). Like the *New Perspectives* volume, and alongside the aforementioned articles, this book continues to present new studies on varied aspects of Cretan archaeology that enrich the data available and add to the growing wealth of knowledge about the island in these periods. In the volume, *What's New in Roman Greece? Recent Work on the Greek Mainland and the Islands in the Roman Period: Proceedings of a Conference Held in Athens, 8–10 October 2015* (Napoli et al. 2018), only East Crete is represented (Coutsinas 2018). This leaves Crete somewhat out of an important discussion of how the neighbouring provinces of Achaia, Epirus, and Macedonia interacted with and differed from each other. However, all these studies give the opportunity for an enriched discussion that integrates the available evidence for an understanding of Crete within the Empire and the eastern provinces, the internal dynamics of the island, and the identity and lifeways of the inhabitants in more focused ways.

There have also been conferences dedicated to the study of Byzantine Crete organized by the University of Crete and the Institute for Mediterranean Studies – *Foundation of Research & Technology* (IMSFORTH). Held in **Rethymno**, the conference *The Byzantine Cities (8th–15th c.): Perspectives of the Research and New Approaches of Interpretation* took place in 2009 (Kiousopoulou 2012). The Byzantine cities of Crete, particularly **Gortyn** and **Eleutherna**, were presented in the context of the broader geographical region. This allowed for the comparison of a wide range of aspects – from the topography to the political life of cities – to be compared with other sites and regions across Greece. It also enabled more attention to be given to the Middle and Late Byzantine city, which is an area of scholarship that has not seen the same advances as that of the Early Byzantine city. Following on from this conference, the workshop *Recapturing the Dynamics of Early Byzantine Settlements in Crete: Old Problems – New Interpretations Through an Interdisciplinary Approach* took place in 2015. This was organized in association with the project directed by Christina Tsigonaki of the University of Crete and IMSFORTH (Tsigonaki and Sarris 2014). This project takes an interdisciplinary approach that combines archaeological and historical evidence. Using new technologies for spatial analysis, it tracks the developments of cities from the fourth to early ninth centuries in Crete.

Several monographs have also published research that has been conducted either at individual sites or across the island for these time periods. The topics are diverse, including on mosaics in their wider archaeological context (Sweetman 2013), the fortifications and defensive architecture (Coutsinas 2013), the pottery from **Hierapytna** and the economy of Crete (Gallimore 2015), and bioarchaeological approaches to human health at both **Knossos** (Moles 2023a) and at various sites in the Byzantine period (Bourbou 2010a). As well as the regular volumes in the Gortyn excavations series, most recently *Gortina IX* (Bonetto, Francisci and Mazzocchin 2019), di Vita (2010) published an impressive overview volume on 15 centuries of urban occupation of the site. A similar volume has been produced for the historic periods of Heraklion, with attention given to the Roman and Byzantine periods of both Heraklion and neighbouring Knossos (Karetso 2008).

The temporary exhibition at the Museum of Cycladic Art in 2018–2019, *Crete: Emerging Cities*, showcased **Aptera**, Eleutherna, and Knossos from their earliest existence as cities through to the Early Byzantine period. The catalogue of the exhibition enables one to see many features and finds from these sites, and it illustrates the long-term context and development of centres important in the overall landscape of Roman and Byzantine Crete (Stampolidis et al. 2019).

### The landscape through surveys

A large number of new survey projects have taken place across the island, giving better insight into the regional topography and settlement distribution in these time periods as well as the longer-term diachronic

perspective. Projects in central Crete, including the *Galatas Survey* (ID266, ID1816) (Watrous *et al.* 2017), the *Pediadha Survey* (ID787), and the *Phaistos Survey* (ID1820, ID1917) (Bredaki and Longo 2018), produced evidence for Roman and Byzantine occupation in the region. At Knossos, the *Knossos Urban Landscape Project* (KULP) (ID263, ID783), *Knossos Roman Geophysics* (ID5568, ID6047, ID6543, ID6630), and *Aqueducts of the Greater Iraklio Area Project (AGIA)* (ID8142, ID18034) have all contributed new knowledge to the Roman and Early Byzantine periods at the site.

Several surface surveys and underwater investigations have been carried out on the island of **Dia** (ID262, ID2897, ID8656) (Theodoulou *et al.* 2015; Koukouraki, Kladou and Kopaka 2019). As well as the discovery of a Byzantine naval stronghold, several shipwrecks of Roman and Byzantine date have been identified. Of those investigated jointly by the EUA in collaboration with the American Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, two were carrying first- to second-century AD amphorae, one had Late Roman (fifth–seventh century AD) amphorae, and another two shipwrecks held Byzantine (eighth–ninth century AD) amphorae (ID8656). The same institutions have also collaborated on the *Western Crete Project*, which conducted an underwater geoarchaeological survey in the gulf of **Kissamos** and the promontories of **Rodhopos** and **Gramvousa** in 2013 (Theodoulou, Foley and Tourtas 2016; 2018). Underwater and coastal survey work continues in other regions of Crete, including a collaboration with IMS-FORTH in the **Agioi Theodoroi**, **Istron**, and **Elounda** areas (Theodoulou 2015; 2019; 2020).

In 2014 a surface survey was carried out by the Ephorate of Antiquities of Lasithi, undertaken with the assistance of students from the University of Athens, to identify and map sites in the **Livari** area of the municipality of Sitea. The findings included the discovery of a Roman settlement at **Skiadi** (Sofianou 2020: 8). The survey of the **Kavo Sidero** peninsula at the northeastern point of Crete in 2018 reported an increase of new sites in the Roman period (Sofianou *et al.* 2019), as has been observed by other surveys for other regions of Crete in the past (Sanders 1982: 30; Hayden 2005: 333).

The **Oros Oxa** survey is yet to have much published about it, but it is the first archaeological investigation in this mountainous area near Elounda. It is a naturally defensive site with a potential Classical or Hellenistic fortification, but the majority of the archaeological remains at the top of the mountain, consisting of a fragmentary fortified circuit wall, water towers, cisterns, and other buildings, appear to date to the end of the Early Byzantine period (Moschovi and Tsigonaki 2019).

Advances have also been made in exploring and documenting the archaeological landscape and monuments with digital techniques, such as photogrammetry and 3D laser scanning, carried out by the GeoSat ReSeArch Lab of FORTH. This has included the modelling of Early Byzantine settlements, the 3D reconstruction of the Roman theatres of Crete, analysis of high-resolution satellite images to understand the urban planning of Gortyn, and the reconstruction of the submerged settlement at Olous (Elounda) (Sarris 2020; Sarris *et al.* 2020).

### Public buildings and infrastructure

Evidence has continued to come to light on how the urban character of centres developed on Crete in the Roman period, with a great deal of investment in urban infrastructure and public architecture. Michalis Karambinis' (2022) recent article provides an overview of cities of Crete (first–third century AD) in the context of increased connectivity and the changes in the economy of Crete in the Roman period. Gortyn has been the most intensively investigated site on Crete for the Roman and Byzantine periods, with various parts of the site being investigated under the auspices of the SAIA. The study of the layout of the city has enabled an understanding of the ancient urban planning of Gortyn (Riccardi 2020). Eleutherna, which has been excavated by the University of Crete since 1986, has also produced a wealth of evidence in recent years for both public and religious architecture, particularly for the Early Byzantine period, including evidence for an Early Byzantine fortification wall (Tsigonaki 2015; 2020).

During Enzo Lippolis' investigations of a Hellenistic temple at Gortyn (ID780, ID1807) in the area to the north of the gymnasium of the *praetorium*, the team uncovered evidence of Imperial Roman occupation



4.1. The theatre at Aptera. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture: Ephorate of Antiquities of Chania (Niniou-Kindeli and Tzanakaki 2019: 36–37).

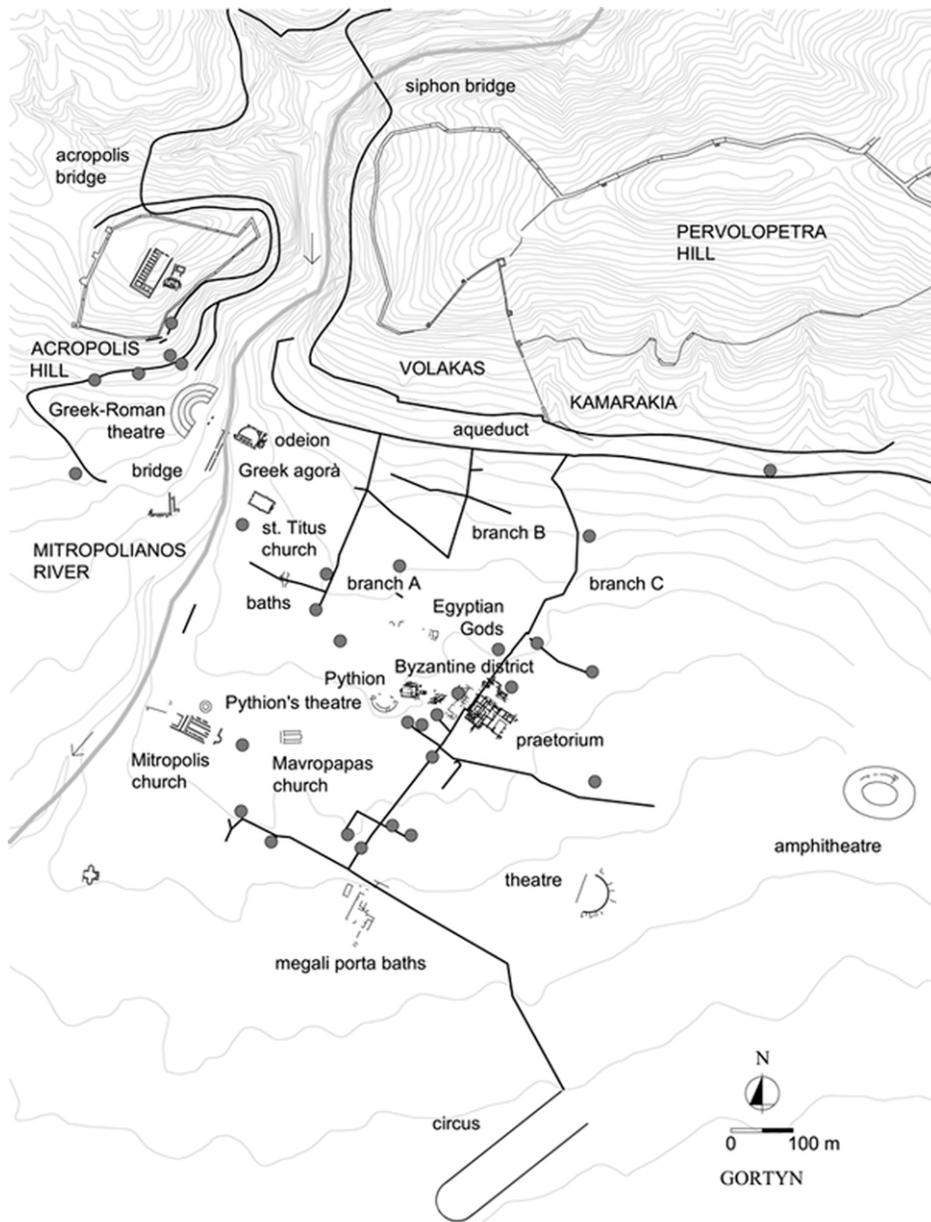
between the temple and the Nymphaeum in the form of a monumental hall, likely constructed at the end of the first century AD, as well as a later fourth-century public building constructed on top of the temple.

Excavations around the theatre of the Python by Francesca Ghedini and Jacopo Bonetto of the University of Padua (ID780, ID1915, ID2818; Bonetto, Bertelli and Colla 2015; Bonetto *et al.* 2020) have been ongoing since 2001, with the latest campaign in the sanctuary area reported for 2016–2019 (Bonetto *et al.* 2021). Investigations have confirmed a date in the first half of the second century for the theatre's construction, though the sanctuary has its origins in the early Archaic period. A group of 34 bronze coins above a threshold in the *skene* indicate a destruction date that likely coincides with the AD 365 earthquake. These excavations of the Roman theatre and the subsequent study have been conducted to understand the connection between the theatre and the Apollo sanctuary (Bonetto *et al.* 2017; Manzetti 2019).

Though known since it was written about by 16<sup>th</sup>-century travel writers, the Great Theatre of Gortyn was systematically excavated between 2011 and 2015 (Kanta *et al.* 2020). Excavations and restoration works have also been carried out on the theatres at both Aptera (ID18158; Tzanakaki 2020) (Fig. 4.1) and Chersonisos (ID8575), and a Roman theatre has been discovered during excavations at Elyros (ID2801). Excavations at Chersonisos were able to demonstrate a first century AD date for the theatre there, and that there was reuse of the area for ceramic workshops in the fifth–sixth century (Mandalaki 2015). Excavations started in 2013 on a small Roman theatre on the western edge of modern Ierapetra. It is thought that this is likely an odeion, as early travellers reported that there was a large theatre to the east of the ancient city.

Baths are commonly found in archaeological contexts of these dates, suggesting that they were integral to society on Crete. At Gortyn, Giorgio Bejor excavated thermal baths in the area south of the *praetorium* (ID267, ID1807, ID1915), which appear to have been first constructed in the fourth century with evidence for rebuilding in the fifth and sixth centuries. The baths included a *frigidarium*, a *caldarium*, *tepidaria*, *prae-furnia*, an *apodyterium*, mosaic floors, the head of a statue of Hygeia, and a lime kiln. This area was reoccupied with houses built in the seventh century. This bath and other findings have enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the water systems at Gortyn (Fig. 4.2).

Baths have also been discovered in recent years throughout the ancient town of Kissamos, including on the Sampakis-Andreou plot (ID15185). During the Kissamos wastewater collection and transport project



4.2. Gortyn: water supply, Early Byzantine phase. © SAIA.

(2011–2014) baths were discovered in both the east of the city – on Giannoudovardi and Elafonissiou streets – and in the west of the city, in the area of the church of **Agios Nikolaos (ID15796)** (Paterakis 2020). The 2014/2015 excavations at **Ancient Lebena (Lentas)** unearthed a large complex of elaborate masonry of first- to fourth-century date, including a bath with evidence for repairs into the fifth century (Sythiakaki 2020: 29, fig. 8). Other baths have been excavated at **Ini**, discovered alongside aqueduct remains (ID778); a first- to second-century bath at **Marathiou (Chania)** (Papadopoulou 2020); a second-century bath at **Arvi (ID9642)**; a small Roman bath at Eleutherna that was destroyed in the 365 earthquake (ID271); another Roman bath at Eleutherna incorporated later into a Byzantine building (Tsigonaki 2015; 2020); a fourth-century bath at **Potamoi Rethymnou (ID2798)**; a Late Roman/Early Byzantine bath complex at **Moires (ID3650, ID2792)**; a Middle Byzantine bath that was later converted into a church at **Viran Episkopi**, previously reported by Giuseppe Gerola (ID1829); another Middle Byzantine elaborate

bath complex later converted into a church at **Kato Episkopi Sitias (ID1782)**; and four 14th-century baths in central Heraklion that incorporated spolia from earlier buildings (Aletras 2020). This demonstrates the sophisticated, widespread, and long-term water infrastructure on the island. With such rich evidence available, water management has become a popular topic of study for Roman and Byzantine Crete (Kelly 2006; 2013; 2018; Giorgi 2008; 2016; Angelakis, Christodoulakos and Tzanakakis 2021; Kelly and O'Neill 2023).

The discovery of Roman period religious structures and finds has been limited in recent years, though for later periods there are many early churches that have been discovered, investigated, and sometimes even restored. These early basilica churches are often on the sites of later churches and many examples of recent church excavations are mentioned below in the 'Cemeteries' section, due to their association with burials. For the Roman period, the sanctuary of Apollo Pythios at Gortyn, mentioned above for its theatre, continued to be used into the Roman period. The structure of the temple has been digitally surveyed (Bonetto *et al.* 2020). Patrizio Fileri (2020) has revisited the study of the nearby sanctuary of the Egyptian gods in Gortyn through the study of material from past excavations.

Conservation of the early Christian basilica B church at Chersonisos was completed in 2013 (Sythiakaki 2020). The three-aisled basilica was built in the second half of the fifth century on the foundations of a larger Roman building, which in turn was built over a Hellenistic temple. A seventh-century organized cemetery was also discovered on the site, some remains of which had already been cut out by mechanical diggers (Sythiakaki 2015). Similar maintenance and restoration has also been conducted at the Church of Agios Titos Gortynas (Sythiakaki 2020). Meanwhile, new research at the Basilica of Mitropolis started in 2012, to further our understanding of the Episcopal monumental complex in an eastern suburban district of Gortyn. Studies of the pottery, glass (window and vessels), metals, and wall mosaics suggest a seventh–eighth century use of the complex, while fragments of water pipes show evidence for an earlier aqueduct and water system in the area (Baldini *et al.* 2015).

Restoration works or conservation of frescos has also been carried out at Agios Georgios in **Vrahasi** and Afendi Christou in **Kamari Kritsa** (both in Lasithi), at Timios Stavros at **Vryses Merabello**, Panayia Galaktoussa at **Apomarma** (Heraklion), 318 Theoforon Pateron at **Kalo Chorafi** (Rethymno), **Preveli Monastery** (Rethymno), Agios Vasilios at **Vouves Platania**, Agios Demetrios and Nestora at **Kerameia** (Chania), and the church of the Archangel Michael in the Diocese of Kissamos (Papadopoulou 2020; Sofianou 2020; Sythiakaki 2020; Tzigounaki 2020b).

### Domestic architecture

Alongside new discoveries relating to the public life of the cities, there have also been important finds that help to illuminate aspects of private life in the cities of Roman Crete. Some rural domestic installations were also production sites and are included in the following section on industry and craft. Several excavations at Kissamos have informed us about the severity of the AD 365 earthquake and its destructive impact on domestic structures and on the lives of those caught in the collapsing buildings. These excavations include the discovery of very large and elaborate Roman houses. One of these urban villas was excavated by Stavroula Markoulaki on the Stimadoraki plot in 2007 (**ID274**, **ID13062**), with two others on the Papadaki plot in 2008 (**ID14602**), and more recently on the Metzidaki plot in 2017 (Paterakis 2023). Many of these discoveries of Roman villas have also produced evidence for a fourth-century destruction date coinciding with the AD 365 earthquake, including at the so-called Pheidias House (**ID3597**), on the Sampsakis-Andreou plot (**ID15861**; Paterakis 2015). Meanwhile, there is evidence of socio-economic diversity from the discovery of smaller and less elaborate houses, such as the third-century house on the Mpatistaki plot at the south end of the ancient town, at a distance from the larger urban villas (**ID14811**). A reconstruction of one of the urban villas is the subject of one of the most impressive displays in the Archaeological Museum of Chania, newly opened in 2022 (<https://news.gtp.gr/2022/04/19/cretas-new-kania-archaeological-museum-opens-to-the-public/>). This house was dubbed the 'House of the Miser'



4.3. The museum display of the reconstruction of the 'House of the Miser' at Kissamos in the Archaeological Museum of Chania. Photo: Anna Moles © Hellenic Ministry of Culture: Ephorate of Antiquities of Chania.

(*Οικία του Φιλάργγου*) due to the discovery of the skeletal remains of two people within the collapsed structure. It appeared that they had dashed to the basement of the house to retrieve three coin hoards stored there and had been crushed in the collapsing building during the AD 365 earthquake (Fig. 4.3). Despite this major destruction horizon, there have been finds indicating continued occupation in the area into the Byzantine period (ID2784, ID15796). New research at **Sougia** and **Palaiochora** using scientific advances in geoarchaeology and microfaunal analysis have enabled a more sophisticated understanding of the impact of the AD 365 tsunami that followed the earthquake (Werner *et al.* 2018; Vött *et al.* 2020).

At Aptera, the excavation of a typical Roman urban house (Fig. 4.4) with peristyle courtyard similar to those known from Kissamos, Eleutherna, and Knossos uncovered bronze statuettes of Artemis and Apollo attached with lead ingots to a single base (Niniou-Kindeli 2020; Papadopoulou 2020: 129). It was constructed in the first century AD, but underwent significant modifications, such as the blocking of doorways, in the third century, before its final destruction in AD 365.



4.4. View of the Roman house with the Lefka Ori mountain range in the background. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture: Ephorate of Antiquities of Chania (Niniou-Kindeli and Tzanakaki 2019: 56–57).

At Gortyn, the Byzantine quarter of the Python continued to be investigated during the 2011–2015 and 2016–2021 excavation campaigns, with a view to understanding the transformation of the urban landscape of a large Mediterranean city in Late Antiquity and the Proto Byzantine period (*ca* fifth–eighth centuries AD) (Zanini 2016; Zanini *et al.* 2021). Roberto Perna’s team from the University of Macerata have also been excavating in this housing area, just to the south end of the Byzantine quarter, in the South Building, analysing the fourth–sixth century transformations of the city (Perna 2020). Although much of this area is made up of domestic structures, it is likely this building had a public function until a destructive event ended its use in the seventh century and the whole area was occupied by poor houses (Perna 2015).

On the Tryfon A.E. plot at Chersonisos, to the northwest of the ancient city, buildings and a paved road with evidence of use both before and after the AD 365 earthquake were identified. The three rooms west of the street that appeared to have been used for food preparation and consumption were destroyed by the earthquake. The two rooms to the east that were used in the sixth–seventh centuries appear to have had a similar purpose with evidence for storage and preparation of food (Sythiakaki 2020: 31).

In the excavations in the area of the newly constructed **Aposelemes dam**, several Roman and Late Roman farmhouse settlements have been discovered at **Leniko**, **Mavres Petres**, Agios Nikolaos, and **Souvianis Patema** between the villages of Avdou, Sfendyli and Potamies (Mavraki-Balanou *et al.* 2015). Their discovery adds to our understanding of the function of rural sites in the Roman period, with evidence for agriculture, wine and oil processing, and craft industry, but further research is still required to fully understand their relationship to the surrounding larger centres.

### Production and craft

With discoveries relating to industry, craft, and trade – such as kilns, workshops, presses, loom weights, and amphorae – our understanding of the economy of Crete in these time periods continues to grow.

Among the farmhouse sites around Aposelemes dam mentioned above was an extensive rural settlement that was occupied from the first century BC until the seventh century AD at Leniko. This consisted of a

building complex of 20 rooms with spaces for storage and production (**ID3645**). It produced evidence of a kiln, stone tools, a millstone, loom weights, and the remains of olives and carbonized barley. In the peripheral part of the building complex, burial structures were discovered; rural burials are unusual finds and this discovery aids our understanding of rural burial practices (Mavraki-Balanou *et al.* 2015). Another farming settlement, which may have been a Roman villa, was discovered in 2010 at **Fournados**, near Kissamos (**ID2796**, **ID9110**). Two wine presses were investigated as well as evidence for olive oil production.

In 2017 a pottery workshop with a kiln was discovered at Chania, including Roman pottery, charcoal, clay, and loom weights (Kataki and Preve 2023). Roman or Byzantine kilns have also been excavated in recent years at numerous sites, including Chania (**ID2852**), Gortyn (**ID1915**), Chersonisos (**ID8575**, **ID15868**), Kissamos (**ID1861**), and Arvi (**ID9642**). A section of Roman irrigation pipe and a Byzantine oil or wine vat discovered at **Petras** in East Crete produced new evidence for the nature of the occupation in these time periods at the site (**ID5522**).

An Early Byzantine glass workshop was excavated at **Ancient Lappa (Argyroupolis, Rethymno)**, consisting of five rooms around an open space with over 1,500 fragments of glass vessels and glass refuse (Fiolitaki 2020). Glass vessels and evidence for glassworking in the Early Byzantine period at Eleutherna has also been investigated (Coutsinas 2020).

At Chersonisos, a large craft workshop dating to the third or fourth century, but severely damaged in 365 AD, was excavated; remains of the structure were found on both sides of a paved road. However, the site appeared to remain in use as a workshop until a final destruction by an earthquake in the seventh century (Sythiakaki 2020: 30).

## Cemeteries

Major excavations of the **Venezelio Hospital** at Knossos unveiled a vast number of tombs from the Early Roman period, as well as a smaller number of Hellenistic graves. Their discovery adds to previous knowledge of the North Cemetery and the wider mortuary landscape of Roman Knossos (Catling *et al.* 1976; Catling 1979; Carington Smith 1982; Grigoropoulos 2004; Sweetman and Becker 2005; Sweetman and Grigoropoulos 2010; Moles 2023a). Though the majority of the material from these excavations is yet to be studied, an overview of the excavations and a selection of the tombs have been presented at the *ICCS 12*, *AEK 4*, and published (Rousaki *et al.* 2016; 2019a; 2019b; Rousaki, Triantafyllidi and Brokalakis 2020). The publication of the excavation by Maria Rousaki is one of only two articles representing Crete in the vast three-volume publication *Ta Nekrotapeia* (Kountouri and Gkadolou 2019) on the spatial organization, burial customs, and rituals in cemeteries from rescue excavations across all regions of Greece. The other article documents tombs and cemeteries in Crete excavated during the Ephorate of Nikolaos Platon, 1938–1962 (Salichou 2019).

The discovery of new mausolea at Gortyn provides the earliest evidence on the island for the transition to communal burial practices in more elaborate tomb structures. Prior to the dating of one of these mausolea to the second half of the first century BC, these built tombs of various construction types had appeared to date to around the mid-first century AD (Lippolis *et al.* 2015: 540; Sassu and Vannucci forthcoming). The appearance of built tombs in the mid-first century AD was concurrent with a dramatic increase of rock-cut chamber tombs, also for collective burials (Moles 2023a; forthcoming). However, it is possible that this monumental tomb at Gortyn is directly influenced in architectural style by the grand mausolea of the ruling elites in Hellenistic Asia Minor rather than part of the wider trend that developed on Crete in the first century AD.

An extensive Roman (second–third century) cemetery was excavated in 2010 at **Loutres**, to the west of Ierapetra (**ID2790**), adding to the dataset on the mortuary landscape of Roman Hierapytna where a wealth of Roman tombs has previously been excavated (Apostolakou 1997; 2011; Senn 2020). These 56 tombs included 12 elaborate built-chamber tombs with vaulted roofs, alongside simpler pit and tile graves. Roman tombs had already been excavated in this area in 2006 (**ID187**) as well as at nearby sites in

Ierapetra, at Almyros (Dialektakis plot) in 2001 ([ID3569](#)), 2005 ([ID4540](#), [ID5541](#)), 2006 ([ID5549](#)), and 2007 ([ID5517](#)), **Paramythas** (Lyceum area) in 1997 ([ID9811](#), [ID10203](#)), 1998 (*ADelt* 54 [1998] *Chr.*, 879–80), and 2001 ([ID3569](#)), and at **Viglia** in 1995 ([ID11867](#)) and 1999 ([ID186](#)).

In the report from the Ephorate of Antiquities of Lasithi at *AEK* 5 (2016), work at the Hellenistic/Roman cemetery at Agios Nikolaos, on the ‘Stavros’ site for roadworks, was ongoing. Though many of the 39 graves had been disturbed, ceramic vessels and figurines were discovered as grave goods accompanying the burials, and there was one particularly noteworthy burial of a young woman that contained 800 faunal astragalus bones – such bones are often thought to be included in graves due to their use in games of ‘knuckle bones’ (Sofianou 2020: 4). Another excavation, conducted in 2014 for the widening of the river at Agios Nikolaos, produced nine tile graves containing 13 adults and a child dating from Hellenistic to Early Roman times (Sofianou 2020: 5).

The Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman cemetery at Ancient Olous (Elounda) has continued to be investigated. Excavations have produced a diversity of tomb types for the Roman period that are not seen on Crete in the preceding time periods. There is a similar range of Roman tomb types known elsewhere on the island (Guyon 2008; Moles [forthcoming](#)), with pit and tile graves as well as the more elaborate built cist graves and vaulted built tombs ([ID5524](#), [ID5505](#), [ID5540](#)). However, none of the distinctive rock-cut chamber tombs were found at Olous, as the local geology and topography (lacking hillsides of soft rock) does not facilitate the carving of tombs.

Excavations have resumed at the necropolis of Itanos in eastern Crete with a new 2021–2025 campaign led by Athena Tsingarida and Didier Viviers (Université libre de Bruxelles/EBSA) ([ID18152](#)). Though this cemetery was used predominantly in earlier periods (seventh–first century BC), the first season of this new campaign unearthed six later graves, with the latest tomb being dated to the first–second century AD.

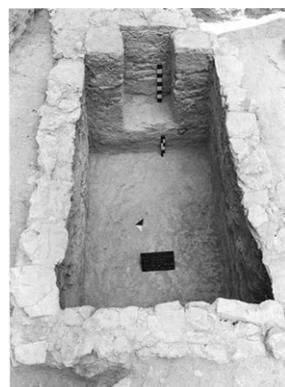
At Chersonisos, a Late Roman cemetery was uncovered during excavations along the road between the port and Ano Chersonisos ([ID11789](#)). A total of 42 graves were excavated, all of which consisted of large rectangular cuttings into the soft bedrock. About half of the graves were lined with built stone walls ([Fig. 4.5a–d](#)), while the others were less elaborate and had no side walls, only stone cover slabs. Within one rectangular opening were large tiles covering the burial. Few grave goods were found, but those that were discovered within the graves included mainly Late Roman jugs and bronze jewellery, indicating a third- to fourth-century date for the graves.

Roman and Byzantine burials also continue to come to light at Kissamos in West Crete ([ID1861](#), [ID2784](#), [ID15186](#), [ID15796](#)). A Roman vaulted built-chamber tomb was excavated during the construction works for the wastewater pipelines between 2007 and 2013 (Skordou 2016). A further discovery of another such tomb was reported in 2017 (Skordou 2023). This was also thought to have been a barrel-vaulted roof, but this classification is uncertain because the upper courses and roof were destroyed; the grave contained burial compartments. These are similar to the vaulted built tombs (of varied building quality) known from earlier excavations at Kissamos (Pologiorgi 1985), as well as at Knossos (Hood 1962; Fraser 1969; Catling 1979; Hood and Smyth 1981, <https://digital.bsa.ac.uk/hood.php>; Vasilakis 1988; 2004), Gortyn (Taramelli 1902; Platon 1957; Serpetsidaki 1991), Hierapytna (Apostolakou 2011), Apta (Andreadaki-Vlaziaki 1988; Niniou-Kindeli 1992; 2004), and **Malia** (van Effenterre 1976). A rock-cut chamber tomb, of the type commonly found across the island, was also discovered during these extensive excavations (Skordou 2020). New discoveries of such chamber tombs also came to light in 2015 near Rethymno during excavations for the construction of the ring road at **Episkopi** ([ID18108](#), [ID18109](#)).

Although in use since the fourth century BC, the cemetery of **Ancient Hyrtakina** at Kastelo Baripetros (Municipality of Kandanos-Selinos) shows continued usage into the Early Roman period, with tile and cist graves (Papadopoulou 2020: 129). A similar Hellenistic-Roman cemetery (third century BC–first century AD) was excavated in 2010 at **Sfakaki** near Rethymno ([ID2803](#); Tsatsaki and Flevari 2015). This included 15 tile graves ([Fig. 4.6](#)), 25 simple cists, seven more elaborate cists, and one pit grave. The tombs



4.5a. Part of the cemetery. Property of E. Panigiri, Chersonisos. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture: Ephorate of Antiquities of Heraklion.



4.5b. Built grave. Property of E. Panigiri, Chersonisos. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture: Ephorate of Antiquities of Heraklion.



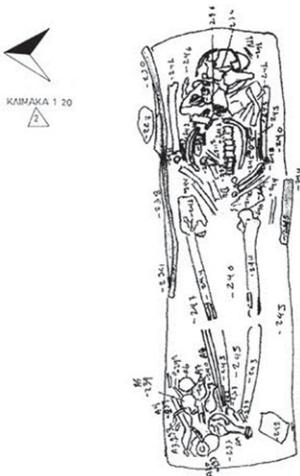
4.5c. Secondary burials (anatomies) in the interior of a grave. Property of E. Panigiri, Chersonisos. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture: Ephorate of Antiquities of Heraklion.



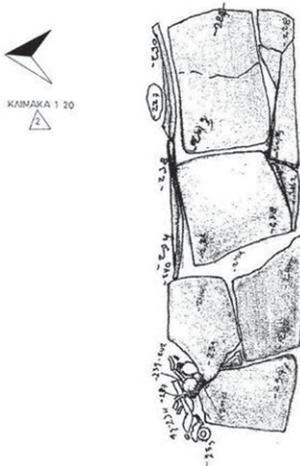
4.5d. Roof-tiled grave inside a rectangular opening. Property of E. Panigiri, Chersonisos. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture: Ephorate of Antiquities of Heraklion.



4.6a. Photograph of Tomb 18 with the tile cover (Tsatsaki and Flevvari 2015: εικ. 1).  
© Hellenic Ministry of Culture: Ephorate of Antiquities of Rethymnon.



4.6b. Drawing of Tomb 18 with the tile cover (Tsatsaki and Flevvari 2015: Σχέδιο 2).  
© Hellenic Ministry of Culture: Ephorate of Antiquities of Rethymnon.



4.6c. Drawing of Tomb 18, Skeleton 1, without tile covering (Tsatsaki and Flevvari 2015: Σχέδιο 3). © Hellenic Ministry of Culture: Ephorate of Antiquities of Rethymnon.

appeared to be largely undisturbed and contained a total of 233 ceramic vessels, 28 glass vessels, beads, gold jewellery, sundry items of metal, stone and bone, loom weights, and bronze coins.

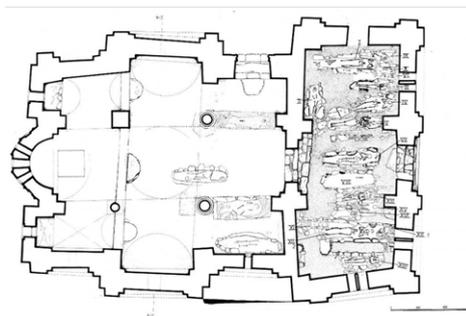
Byzantine graves have been excavated largely in and around basilica churches at a number of sites across the island, but have also been found in non-religious contexts, including two cist graves excavated at a farmstead at **Kephala Krionerides** in 2007 (**ID1856**). At **Agios Petros** in Heraklion, where Byzantine fortification were also revealed close to the coast, 31 graves were excavated. They were largely oriented east–west, with the exception of one grave which had the monogram of Saint Catherine of Sinai on its cover stone and was oriented north–south (**ID3646**). During excavations for the construction of offices for the 23rd Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities and Heraklion Museum, graves were discovered alongside much of the east part of the monastery of Agios Frangiskos (**ID2764**). Those with cover slabs that made up the central nave of the 14th-century church are thought likely to be the graves of monks and included votive plaques and candle holders.

During the restoration of the Byzantine church of Panagia Galaktousa, at **Apomarma** in south central Crete, excavation works uncovered six slab-covered graves, likely dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (**ID16738**). Similarly, at the ruins of the church of Agioi Saranda at **Loutra**, in **Ano Viannos**, six Early Byzantine graves were excavated alongside a cruciform baptistry in the central aisle (**ID2789**). Tomb 1 had a vaulted roof, while the others appeared to have stone slab or ceramic covers, and Tombs 1 and 3 appeared to be ossuaries (Andreadaki-Vlazaki 2012: 333). Such ossuaries, or *osteothekes* as they have been termed at Knossos (Catling *et al.* 1976; Sweetman and Becker 2005), are known from across the island, and a similar ossuary of Byzantine date was excavated in 2008 at **Priniatikos Pyrgos** (**ID773**). Further Byzantine graves were found during 2010 excavations at the site (**ID2003**).

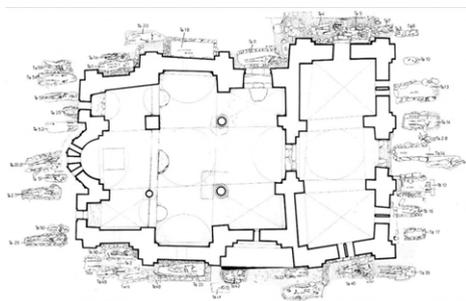
Excavations conducted in 2015 at **Agias Minas**, Episkopi, in the municipality of Chersonisos, unveiled a Byzantine (*ca* 700–1200 AD) cemetery where a church (12<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> century) was later also constructed (Katsalis and Kokkini 2020).

At the three-aisled Church of Zoodochos Pigi, at **Alikianos** southwest of Chania, 77 Middle Byzantine (11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> century) tombs were excavated (**ID1850**) (**Fig. 4.7a–e**), including 21 inside the church. These were largely cist graves, but eight were tile graves and 11 were pit graves. The majority were single

4.7a. Ground plan of excavation (narthex), Church of Zoodochos Pigi, Alkianos. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture: Ephorate of Antiquities of Chania.



4.7b. Ground plan of the excavation (exterior), Church of Zoodochos Pigi, Alkianos. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture: Ephorate of Antiquities of Chania.





4.7c. Cist grave (Tomb 27), Church of Zoodochos Pigi, Alkianos. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture: Ephorate of Antiquities of Chania.



4.7d. In situ skeleton and interments (Tomb 23), Church of Zoodochos Pigi, Alkianos. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture: Ephorate of Antiquities of Chania.



4.7e. Stones among the skull of the dead (Tomb 26a), Church of Zoodochos Pigi, Alkianos. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture: Ephorate of Antiquities of Chania.

burials, but 23 were collective burials and one was likely an ossuary. As well as the publication of the excavations, the bioarchaeological study of the human skeletal remains was conducted (Bourbou 2010b; 2012; 2014).

### Closing remarks

Some of the finds from excavations reported here have already made it into the new museums that opened over the past 10 years on Crete. The Archaeological Museum of Heraklion reopened in 2014 (Rethemiotakis 2020); the new Archaeological Museum of Chania opened in 2022; the Museum of Ancient Eleutherna opened in 2016 (Tzigounaki 2020a: 117); and most recently work has been finalized on the Archaeological Museum of the Mesara and the Archaeological Museum at Agios Nikolaos for their openings in 2023 (Sofianou 2020; Sythiakaki 2020).

A complete listing of findings is not possible, especially due to the fact that the more recent discoveries have not yet been reported or published. However, this article has tried to include the major discoveries of the last 15 years for the Roman and Byzantine periods as well as expressing both the quantity and diversity of finds, and the major developments for the archaeology of these time periods on Crete.

A great deal of work is being done and new discoveries are constantly coming to light that both enrich our knowledge and better inform us about the nature of life and society on Crete in the Roman and Byzantine periods, from aspects of identity, culture, and religion to connectivity networks and the economy. However, there are still few studies that really synthesize evidence of past lifeways, society, and identity. Further studies that incorporate modern methodological and theoretical developments are required. Collaborations that aim towards this goal are also needed to fully study and interpret the wealth of legacy material from rescue excavations that often cannot be studied in detail immediately following the excavation.

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