

ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΚΡΗΤΗΣ – ΤΜΗΜΑ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ
ΥΠ.ΠΟ.Α. – ΕΦΟΡΕΙΑ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΤΗΤΩΝ ΡΕΘΥΜΝΟΥ

ΑΡΧΑΙΟ ΛΟΓΙΚΟ ΕΡΓΟ ΚΡΗΤΗΣ

Πρακτικά της 3ης Συνάντησης
Ρέθυμνο, 5-8 Δεκεμβρίου 2013

ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΟΝΙΚΗ ΕΠΙΜΕΛΕΙΑ
ΠΑΥΛΙΝΑ ΚΑΡΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΗ - ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΑ ΤΖΙΓΚΟΥΝΑΚΗ
ΧΡΙΣΤΙΝΑ ΤΣΙΓΩΝΑΚΗ

ΤΟΜΟΣ Α΄: ΕΙΣΗΓΗΣΕΙΣ ΦΟΡΕΩΝ - ΗΡΑΚΛΕΙΟ - ΓΕΝΙΚΑ ΘΕΜΑΤΑ



ΕΚΔΟΣΕΙΣ ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΚΗΣ ΣΧΟΛΗΣ ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟΥ ΚΡΗΤΗΣ
ΕΦΟΡΕΙΑ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΤΗΤΩΝ ΡΕΘΥΜΝΟΥ

ΡΕΘΥΜΝΟ 2015

ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΚΡΗΤΗΣ – ΤΜΗΜΑ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ
ΥΠ.ΠΟ.Α. – ΕΦΟΡΕΙΑ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΤΗΤΩΝ ΡΕΘΥΜΝΟΥ

ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΟ ΕΡΓΟ ΚΡΗΤΗΣ 3

*Πρακτικά της 3ης Συνάντησης
Ρέθυμνο, 5-8 Δεκεμβρίου 2013*

ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΟΝΙΚΗ ΕΠΙΜΕΛΕΙΑ
ΠΑΥΛΙΝΑ ΚΑΡΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΗ
ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΑ ΤΖΙΓΚΟΥΝΑΚΗ
ΧΡΙΣΤΙΝΑ ΤΣΙΓΩΝΑΚΗ

ΤΟΜΟΣ Α΄

**ΕΙΣΗΓΗΣΕΙΣ ΦΟΡΕΩΝ –
ΗΡΑΚΛΕΙΟ – ΓΕΝΙΚΑ ΘΕΜΑΤΑ**

ΕΚΔΟΣΕΙΣ ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΚΗΣ ΣΧΟΛΗΣ ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟΥ ΚΡΗΤΗΣ
ΕΦΟΡΕΙΑ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΤΗΤΩΝ ΡΕΘΥΜΝΟΥ

ΡΕΘΥΜΝΟ 2015

ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑΚΗ ΕΝΟΤΗΤΑ ΗΡΑΚΛΕΙΟΥ

REGIONAL UNIT OF HERAKLION

THE EXCAVATION OF THE EARLY BYZANTINE DISTRICT
NEAR THE *PYTHON* IN GORTYN (FIELD SEASONS
2011-2013): AN IMAGE OF THE END
OF THE MEDITERRANEAN CITY

ENRICO ZANINI, STEFANO COSTA,
ELISABETTA GIORGI & ELISA TRIOLO

The archaeological excavation in the so-called Early Byzantine District near the *Python* in Gortyn (or QGB, Gortina Quartiere Bizantino) has been carried out by the University of Siena in *synergasia* with the Italian Archaeological School in Athens (SAIA) since 2001.¹

The excavation area, a relatively small plot of about 2,000 m², is located at the monumental centre of the Roman and Early Byzantine capital of the island, which has been under investigation by Italian archaeologists for more than 130 years (Di Vita 2010). Notwithstanding its very central location in the urban topography – between the shrine of Pythian Apollo and the complex of the Praetorium –, the QGB area is not dominated by monumental evidence from previous periods and offers an uninterrupted sequence of changes from the Roman times until the 8th century. This situation makes the excavation of QGB a perfect case study for the transformation and the end of an Early Byzantine Mediterranean city.²

Even if the excavated area represents only a small part (0.12%) of the total physical extension of the ancient and Early Byzantine city, its original extension has increased through the years. It is now a very representative part of the district that was already partially dug in the 1980s and 1990s and is now under investigation by the Universities of Rome and Macerata (the so-called “Byzantine Houses near the Praetorium”, Di Vita 2010, 240-258).

From a qualitative point of view, our sample is enriched by its direct connection with two major urban infrastructures: the street system and the water

1 Preliminary reports appear systematically in *ASAtene*: Zanini 2001; Zanini & Giorgi 2002; Zanini & Giorgi 2003; Zanini 2004; Zanini, Giorgi & Vattimo 2006; Zanini *et al.* 2011. Members of the team in the years 2011-2013 were, together with the authors of this paper: Alessandro Carabia, Maria Sole Distefano, Silvio Leone, Samanta Mariotti, Nina Marotta, Stefania Picciola, Francesco Ripanti and our *epoptria* Maria Mavritsaki. The considerations exposed in this paper are the results of seminars and discussions held during the excavation and study campaigns and will be soon accessible on QGB website (<www.gortinabizantina.it>). Our approach to collaborative knowledge management is detailed in Zanini 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; Zanini & Costa 2009. We would like to express our gratitude to the 23th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities and the 13th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities and their staff, and to the organisers of the third AEK conference.

2 The almost endless literature on Early Byzantine city is collected in Saradi 2006 and Zavanogno 2009.

system. Indeed, the main feature in GQB is the network of roads and water supply structures that appears in the area after the 365 AD earthquake, when a new nature of the district emerges, both domestic and productive.

We believe that a city, either ancient or modern, is made of two elements: the people who live in it and the architectural “shell” in which their lives take place. From this point of view and in this phase of our research in Gortyn, we are interested in following the everyday life of these people and we believe that the best way to do it is by following the road network and the water supply system. For this reason the results of our last excavation campaigns will be presented in this paper following these mainlines.

The quarter is crossed by a street.³ As far as it has different orientation from the network of the Roman town, it can be considered a new feature born in a period of “weakness” of the urban tissue of Gortyn in general (Lippolis 2004) and of the Pythian area in particular. This period starts early in the 4th century and culminates in the 365 AD earthquake, which therefore can be considered a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the road.

The GQB street goes westward from the main Roman road (the so-called North Street, named after its position north of the Praetorium complex), probably toward new districts built after the earthquake, namely in the area where the christian basilicas of Mitropolis and Mavropapas will be built later (Di Vita 2010, 309-328). In late 4th - early 5th century, the street plays an important role, as it divides the inhabited part of the District from the uninhabited one.

On the southern side of the street, new structures follow its orientation, and not the earlier grid: small rooms have been identified in our excavation, partially visible under later buildings (Zanini, Giorgi & Vattimo 2006, 896-899). In the northern area, the theatre annexed to the temple of Apollo, already abandoned before the earthquake, was ruined by the earthquake (Bonetto *et al.* 2009), while the area of the sanctuary and its structures undergo several “poor” reuses. In the past years, we excavated one of these structures (Building C), originally dating back to the Roman period and reused as stable before the earthquake and as rubbish dump after it (Zanini *et al.* 2011, 1110-1117).

In the middle of the 6th century, in the frame of a major revival that the city as a whole is undergoing (Zanini 2013, 182-184), a large building complex (Building A) is built south of GQB street, directly connected with one or more fountains-reservoirs (Zanini, Giorgi & Vattimo 2006, 899-900). This building is perhaps part of a larger complex of the Byzantine Houses near the Praetorium, now under excavation by the University of Macerata (see Perna *in this volume*, p. 575-584), to which it seems to be linked by a wide courtyard. In contrast, the area north of the street seems to be abandoned, as the few remains of older structures – already in ruins by the 6th century – show. It is only as late as the 7th century that a remarkable change in this situation can be observed and the contrast between the evidence facing the two sides

3 The orientation of this street is north-east/south-west. For practical reasons, in this paper it is supposed to run east-west, and the relative position of the buildings are given consequently. For the archaeological sequence of GQB street: Zanini *et al.* 2011, 1104-1106.



Fig. 1 : General view of the Early Byzantine District (GQB) in Gortyn from SW.

of the street becomes even more striking (fig. 1). The large building (Building A) has no more its focus on the southern courtyard, but it is now divided into smaller units overlooking the GQB street (Zanini, Giorgi & Vattimo 2006, 900-904). At the same time, a new complex (Building B) appears in the area north of the street, whose construction is accompanied by a huge land fill that seals the older structures.

Up to date, only the southern part of Building B has been excavated, but it presumably occupies the entire block, stretching until the extension of the main North Street. The southern rooms of the building (namely rooms 18, 19, 20 and 22 in Chart 1), facing the street of GQB, had been partly brought to light in previous campaigns (Zanini *et al.* 2011, 1106-1110).

Since 2011 the research has been focused on the northern part of the complex, bringing to light a rather irregular, trapezoidal space (room 27 in Chart 1), which probably serves as a courtyard to connect two different parts of the complex with different orientation (one overlooking the main North Street, another facing GQB street). The evolution of this space is particularly interesting as it clarifies the transformations of the building as a whole, for which we have identified a sequence of three constructive phases. Stratigraphic data (Zanini *et al.* 2011, 1108) suggest that the first phase of Building B dates from not earlier than very late 6th to early 7th century.

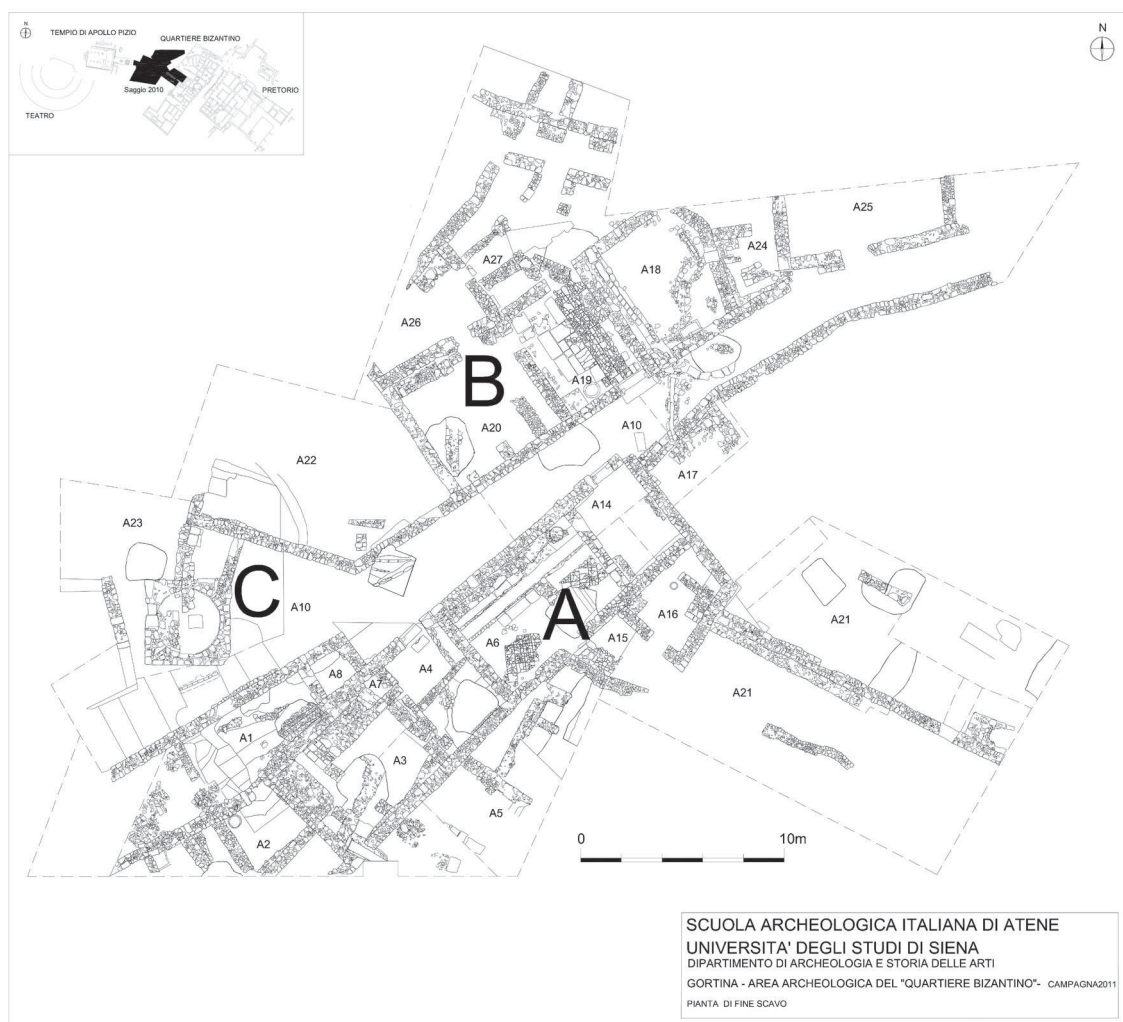


Chart 1: Map of the excavation area of the Early Byzantine District near the *Python* in Gortyn.
Plan by Stefania Picciola and Samanta Mariotti.

The southern part of the building could be accessed from GQB street through room 19 (fig. 2), a wide entrance when considered in the context of the contemporary city: both the floor and the wide threshold on the street are made of large reused limestone slabs, whose primary use was probably in the paved area in front of the temple of Apollo or in the annexed theatre. Evidence for similar reuses in Early Byzantine Gortyn is known only from monumental buildings and churches.⁴ Westward, room 19 opens to a set of two large, not

⁴ As the christian basilica of Mitropolis in its second phase: Farioli 1998; Farioli & Borboudakis 2005.



Fig. 2 : GQB, Building B, from E.

paved, rooms (20 and 26 in Chart 1), probably functioning as the service area of a residential complex that was developed on an upper floor whose presence can be inferred by its collapse. Furthermore, room 19 on its northern front opens to the aforementioned courtyard 27, which is also paved with slabs and placed at a higher level, originally accessible through one or two steps, now lost. East of room 19 is another open space (18 in Chart 1), which had to be accessed from courtyard 27.

The importance of Building B can be inferred not only by its dimensions (some 25 m on the south front, plus courtyard 18) and by the quality of its building materials, but also by its strict connection with the urban water system (Chart 2). A number of features from the first phase are clearly intended for the collection and management of rainwater: courtyard 27 collected and canalised rainwater, as suggested by the sloping floor and the curb alongside the courtyard. In room 18, a large water collector connected to an external water pipe crossing GQB street testifies the need to dispose of a large amount of water. A second water pipe, made of clay pipes and re-used amphorae, went out from room 20 toward the street and flowed into another water pipe, made in turn of clay pipes and amphorae, which runs westward along the street. Overall, all clues suggest a close connection of Building B with the water supply and discharge system in this part of the town.

The very importance of this relationship is that, if considered together with the small houses/productive units of Building A facing the same street, it clearly shows how the street is actually no longer a street, but it has become a kind of elongated courtyard, annexed to Building B. The road is becoming

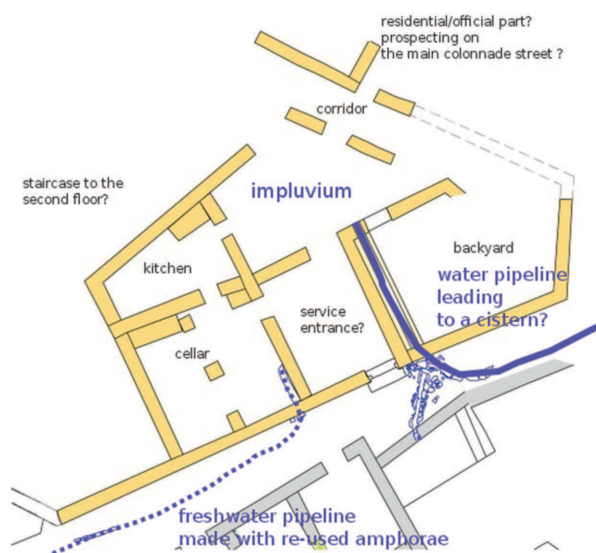


Chart 2 : GQB. Schematic plan of Building B and its connection with the urban water system.



Chart 3 : GQB. The district in the 7th century.

less linear and defined, and buildings added to its sides begin to encroach on it (Chart 3).

The transition from the first to the second phase, occurring during the 7th century, does not mean significant transformations of the spaces of Building B, that retain their original extent with some changes of use. One of the covered rooms west of the entrance becomes a storehouse of globular amphorae (more than 20 were found crushed under the collapse of the roof and the upper floor). Transformations are more significant in open/uncovered areas, where the excavation has yielded traces of productive activities similar to those from Building A and, more generally, from the whole city in its last phases.

In detail, in courtyard 27 the second phase is marked by the installation of a roofing, four pillars of which have been identified. In this context, some finds from the collapse of the building are particularly significant. A marble slab with a cruciform monogram was found in room 20, broken in several fragments by the collapse from the upper floor (fig. 3). The monogram is still under study and hasn't been read yet, but the features of the artifact (in particular traces of red on the back-ground field and the possible traces of gilding on the letters) and the typology



Fig. 3 : GQB. Marble slab with monogram from room 20 (inv. 8327).

of the monogram seem to indicate a 7th-century chronology and maybe its relevance to a public authority. The findspots of the fragments and the absence of any evidence for mortar on the slab surface suggest that it was not reused as building material, but rather set on a wall as part of the room decoration and fallen down during the collapse of the building.

Furthermore, several fragments of painted plaster with red lines (maybe letters) and vegetal decoration on a white background were recovered from the collapse of room 19 (fig. 4), and could be dated at the time of construction of the building or at a later time. In room 27 the com-

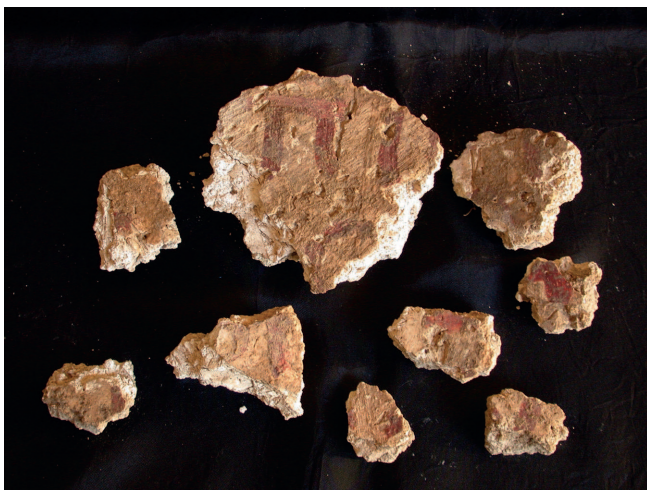


Fig. 4 : GQB. Fragments of painted plaster from room 19.

plete skeletal remains of two *Ovis* sp. were also found, which clearly indicate the different use of the building in the second phase, when indicators only at first glance in contrast coexist. A decorated chafing dish in Glazed White Ware I, produced in Constantinople not before the beginning of the 8th century, completes the set of relevant finds (fig. 5).

The second phase ended with the collapse of roofs throughout the building, perhaps as a result of an earthquake during the first half of the 8th century.

The third phase consists of the last reuse of the ruins of Building B. Little is known of this very late use (from the mid-8th century onwards, as fragments of glazed pottery produced in Constantinople, perhaps in the 9th century, indicate): some fireplaces and the bases of some pithoi. A small hut with a fireplace was built in room 18, left free from ruins. These traces show that in this phase the entire area was devoted to poor and temporary activities, probably related to the reuse of building materials.

To sum up, beyond their specific meaning, the painted plaster, the slab with the monogram, the chafing dish and especially the quality and the overall size of Building B indicate that it is maybe connected to some public (religious or civil) use or otherwise belongs to a member of the urban *élite* of Gortyn. This new feature enhances the knowledge of this area of the city. In fact, the presence of a member of our urban *élite* or the seat of an important public authority must be contextualized within a district where we know to have been the seat of civil authority until the era of Heraclius, in an area that seems to keep a strong public role until a very late age. A neighborhood where the public infrastructure seems to continue to operate as well and in which, precisely because of this, the working and living spaces of urban life are reorganized until the mid-8th century.

The traces of the most recent phase are few in number and too difficult to date accurately. It is possible that they are the result of occasional activities.

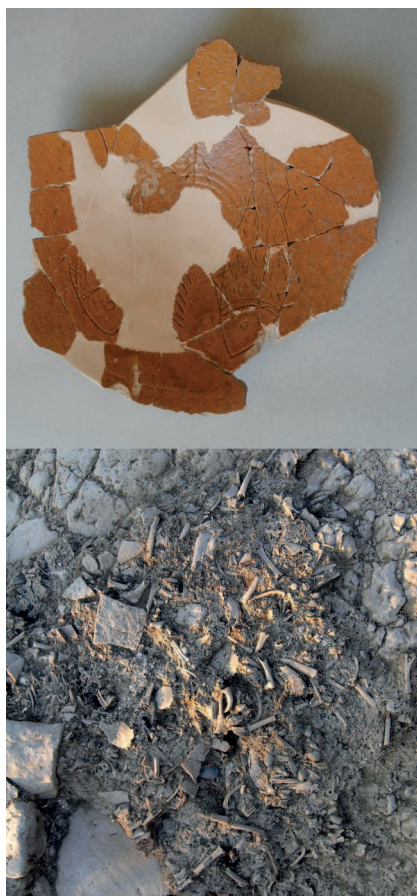


Fig. 5 : GQB. Skeletal remains of two *Ovis* sp. (bottom) and a decorated chafing dish in Glazed White Ware I (top): a contrasting image from courtyard 27.

In any case they suggest clearly that the experience of urban life that had lasted for 15 centuries came to an end even in Gortyn, leaving space to forms of human occupation that can be generically defined “medieval”.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bonetto, F., Ghedini, F., Bressan, M., Francisci, D., Falezza, G., Mazzocchin, S. & Schindler Kaudelka, E., 2009. *Gortyna di Creta, teatro del Python*. Ricerche e scavi 2007-2010. *ASAtene*, 87/2, p. 1087-1098.
- Di Vita, A., 2010. *Gortina di Creta. Quindici secoli di vita urbana*. Bibliotheca Archaeologica 45. Roma: «L'Erma» di Bretschneider.
- Farioli, R., 1998. Il mosaico pavimentale della basilica di Mitropolis a Gortina. In: *Domum tuam dilexi. Miscellanea in onore di Aldo Nestori*. Studi di antichità cristiana 53. Città del Vaticano: Pontificio Istituto di archeologia cristiana, p. 295-304.
- Farioli, R. & Borboudakis, M., 2005. Basilica di Mitropolis. Scavi 2005. *ASAtene*, 83/2, p. 673-696.
- Lippolis, E., 2004. Lo stadio di Gortina. In: *Creta romana e protobizantina*, vol. II, p. 573-598.
- Perna, R., in this volume. Πρόσφατες έρευνες γύρω από το Νότιο Κτήριο της Συνοικίας των Βυζαντινών Οικιών της Γόρτυνας, p. 575-584.
- Saradi, H., 2006. *The Byzantine City in the Sixth Century. Literary Images and Historical Reality*. Athens: Society of Messenian Archaeological Studies.
- Zanini, E., 2001. Indagini archeologiche nell'area del 'quartiere bizantino' di Gortina (campagna 2001). *ASAtene*, 79, p. 379-381.
- Zanini, E., 2004. Indagini archeologiche nell'area del 'quartiere bizantino' del *Python* di Gortina: terza relazione preliminare (campagna 2004). *ASAtene*, 82/2, p. 751-768.
- Zanini, E., 2009a. Città, microterritorio e macroterritorio (e mobilità degli uomini) nel Mediterraneo proto-bizantino: il caso di Gortina di Creta. In: G. Macchi (ed.), *Geografie del popolamento: casi di studio, metodi, teorie*. Siena: Siena University Press, p. 111-122.
- Zanini, E., 2009b. La ceramica del Quartiere Bizantino del *Python* di Gortina (Creta): qualche appunto per un approccio riflessivo. *Facta*, 3, p. 75-88.
- Zanini, E., 2009c. Uomini e “cocci”: i contesti ceramologici del Quartiere Bizantino del *Python* in una prospettiva antropologica. *LANX*, 4, p. 44-72.
- Zanini, E., 2013. Creta in età protobizantina: un quadro di sintesi regionale. In: D. Michaelides, P. Pergola & E. Zanini (eds), *The Insular System of the Early Byzantine Mediterranean: archaeology and history*. *Limina/Limites*. Archeologie, storie, isole e frontiere nel Mediterraneo (365-1556), 2. Oxford: Archaeopress, p. 173-189.
- Zanini, E. & Costa, S., 2009. Sharing Knowledge in Archaeology: Looking forward the Decade(s). In: M. Tsipopoulou (ed.), *Digital Heritage in the New Knowledge Environment: shared spaces & open paths to cultural content*. Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture / Directorate of the National Archive of Monuments, p. 69-72.

- Zanini, E. & Giorgi, E., 2002. Indagini archeologiche nell'area del 'quartiere bizantino' di Gortina: prima relazione preliminare (campagna 2002). *ASAtene*, 80/2, p. 898-918.
- Zanini, E. & Giorgi, E., 2003. Indagini archeologiche nell'area del 'quartiere bizantino' di Gortina: seconda relazione preliminare (campagna 2003). *ASAtene*, 81/2, p. 913-945.
- Zanini, E., Giorgi, E. & Vattimo, E., 2006. Indagini archeologiche nell'area del quartiere bizantino del *Pythion* di Gortyna: quarta relazione preliminare (campagne 2005-2006). *ASAtene*, 84/2, p. 889-914.
- Zanini, E., Giorgi, E., Triolo, E. & Costa, S., 2011. Indagini archeologiche nell'area del quartiere bizantino del *Pythion* di Gortyna: quinta relazione preliminare (campagne 2007-2010). *ASAtene*, 87/2, p. 1099-1129.
- Zavagno, L., 2009. *Cities in Transition: urbanism in Byzantium between late antiquity and the early Middle Ages (500-900 A.D.)*. BAR-IS 2030. Oxford: Archaeopress.

Η ΑΝΑΣΚΑΦΗ ΤΗΣ «ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΗΣ ΣΥΝΟΙΚΙΑΣ ΤΟΥ ΠΥΘΙΟΥ» ΣΤΗ ΓΟΡΤΥΝΑ:

ΜΙΑ ΕΙΚΟΝΑ ΓΙΑ ΤΟ ΤΕΛΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΜΕΣΟΓΕΙΑΚΗΣ ΠΟΛΗΣ

ENRICO ZANINI, STEFANO COSTA,
ELISABETTA GIORGI & ELISA TRIOLO

Η ανασκαφή της «Βυζαντινής Συνοικίας του Πυθίου» στη Γόρτυνα ξεκίνησε το 2001 από το Πανεπιστήμιο της Σιένας σε συνεργασία με την ΙΑΣΑ. Εντοπίζεται στο μνημειακό τμήμα της ρωμαϊκής και πρωτοβυζαντινής πρωτεύουσας του νησιού, ανάμεσα στον ναό του Απόλλωνος Πυθίου και το Πραιτώριο. Η απουσία αρχαιότερων μνημείων στην περιοχή της ανασκαφής μάς επιτρέπει να τη χρησιμοποιήσουμε ως παράδειγμα για τη μελέτη του τέλους μιας πρωτοβυζαντινής μεσογειακής πόλης.

Οι έρευνες έφεραν στο φως μια συνεχή ακολουθία μετασχηματισμών στον αστικό ιστό από την ύστερη ρωμαϊκή εποχή έως τον 8ο αι. μ.Χ. Συγκεκριμένα, οι τελευταίες ανασκαφικές εργασίες επικεντρώθηκαν σε ένα μεγάλο συγκρότημα (το Κτήριο Β), το οποίο οικοδομήθηκε στη νότια πλευρά της κεντρικής οδού της συνοικίας στο τέλος του 6ου/αρχές 7ου αι. και συνδέεται με μία δημόσια λειτουργία θρησκευτικού ή διοικητικού χαρακτήρα ή ίσως με κάποιο μέλος της κυρίαρχης *élite* της Γόρτυνας στις τελευταίες φάσεις της ζωής της πόλης.

ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΟ ΕΡΓΟ ΚΡΗΤΗΣ 3

ΤΟΜΟΣ Α': ΕΙΣΗΓΗΣΕΙΣ ΦΟΡΕΩΝ - ΗΡΑΚΛΕΙΟ -
ΓΕΝΙΚΑ ΘΕΜΑΤΑ



ISBN (VOL): 978-618-82325-2-5
ISBN (SET): 978-618-82325-0-1

ΠΕΘΥΜΝΟ
2015