

ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: DO NOT DROWN IF YOU CAN

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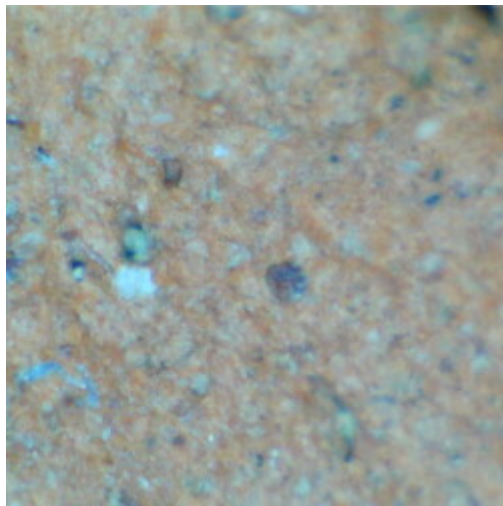
On July 11th this year I was in Eastern Crete. In the morning Elisa and I went to Agios Nikolaos to visit Vera Klontza-Jaklova and her team doing preparation work on the finds from Priniatikos Pyrgos. As always, it was instructing to see material from other research projects and discussing about ceramic finds with the actual thing *in your hand* is just so much better. Then we headed towards Priniatikos Pyrgos the site, that sits nicely between two sandy beaches just a few kilometers east from Agios Nikolaos. Swimming in the Aegean is one of the many privileges we have as “adoptive citizens” of Crete. After lunch we slowly moved to Mochlos, a Minoan settlement that is partly built on a very small isle, 100 meters away from the coast. There’s a small boat that will bring you on the isle – and pick you up when, after visiting the archaeological site, you ring the bell of the chapel built on the shore. The best part is sitting at one of the bars on the main shore, drinking a φραπέ and looking to those busy Minoans across the minuscule stretch of water.



The modern village of Mochlos seen from the Minoan site on the islet

The title of this post has nothing to do with the waters of the Mediterranean, nor underwater archaeology for that matter, but rather with the reflections I have been making in the days before going to Agios Nikolaos, Priniatikos Pyrgos and Mochlos. On Sunday I had the privilege of being interviewed by [Let's Dig Again](#) about my experience as an Italian archaeologist abroad. During the live broadcast, [Cioschi](#) suggested that some of what I said about being careful not to drown in Mediterranean archaeology could be good material for this very post. And here I am, one week later, still with the same motto: do not drown.

It's not just the sheer size of the storage buildings filled with hundreds of thousands of finds even for single archaeological sites (millions and millions if taken all together), the unmanageable amount of published and unpublished literature even when restricted to small geographical regions and specific chronological periods, the ever increasing difficulties and costs of fieldwork for Mediterranean archaeology. That would be enough to have an headache and give up for good. Rather, I am increasingly worried about the heavy burden of tradition, both "old" and "new", so to speak. The excavation site of the Byzantine Quarter in Gortyna is only meters away from the 1904-excavated temple of Apollo Pythios, for which we have detailed diaries of Federico Halbherr, the founding father of Italian archaeology in the Mediterranean – and that's roughly 110 years of studies that seem to stand against you, with the epigraphy and monumental archaeology *en vogue* until the mid-20th century and then the gradual explosion of modern positivist Mediterranean archaeology with all our stratigraphy and chronotypology and political-historical framework and Roman empire and that. I only study a subset of this, a slice from a bigger cake really: ceramic finds.



Microphotograph of a ceramic body – a red-slipped dish I still don't know much about, labeled GQB CER 636.1