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► **To cite this version:**

Florence Gaignerot-Driessen. Forging a Community: Social and Political Changes on the Anavlochos in the Early Stages of the Greek City-State. 12th International Congress of Cretan studies, Sep 2016, Heraklion, Greece. halshs-01800500

HAL Id: halshs-01800500

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01800500>

Submitted on 6 Jun 2018

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Forging a Community: Social and Political Changes on the Anavlochos in the Early Stages of the Greek City-State

ABSTRACT

In this paper, the settlement(s) located on the Anavlochos massif and its community(ies) are considered in the geographical frame of the Mirabello region and in the historical context of the formation process of the polis (13th -7th c. BC).

The Anavlochos mountain range consists of a 5-km-long North-West/South-East crest of limestone extending above the village of Vrachasi. Earlier excavations by Pierre Demargne and more recent investigations have revealed that the site was settled between the Late Minoan IIIC period and the beginning of the 7th c. BC. This naturally defensible ridge controls the major communication axis linking Central and Eastern Crete. To the North, it overlooks the coastal plain of Milatos, where a Greek city-state was established from the 7th c. BC onwards, and the Late Bronze Age (1350-1250 BC) settlement of Sissi, whereas the urban centre of the Archaic polis of Dreros is located less than 10 km to the South-East. Since 2015, an archaeological, topographical and geomorphological survey of the Anavlochos massif has been carried out by the French School at Athens. The first results allow some preliminary observations on the settlement pattern on the massif, where a Protogeometric nucleation is clearly observable. The size and organisation of the Geometric settlement which developed in the central canyon also deserves to be considered: the urban planning, the seemingly lack of a central public space, and the existence of a potential sanctuary overlooking the Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age cemetery which was visited until the Classical period, after the settlement was abandoned, all account for critical social and political changes in the early stages of the Greek city-state. Residential, funerary and religious evidence indicates that in the Late Geometric period a community was in formation, forging its identity and probably marking its territory.

KEYWORDS: Late Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, Mirabello, Anavlochos, polis formation, social groups, community, mountainous site, survey

In this paper, the settlement (or settlements) located on the Anavlochos ridge and its community (or communities) are considered in the geographical frame of the Mirabello region (Fig. 1) and in the historical context of the formation process of the Greek city-state between the 13th and the 7th c. BC. It intends to show how the archaeological data so far collected on the Anavlochos ridge may, or may not, document social structures and political organisations during this formative stage of the human past.

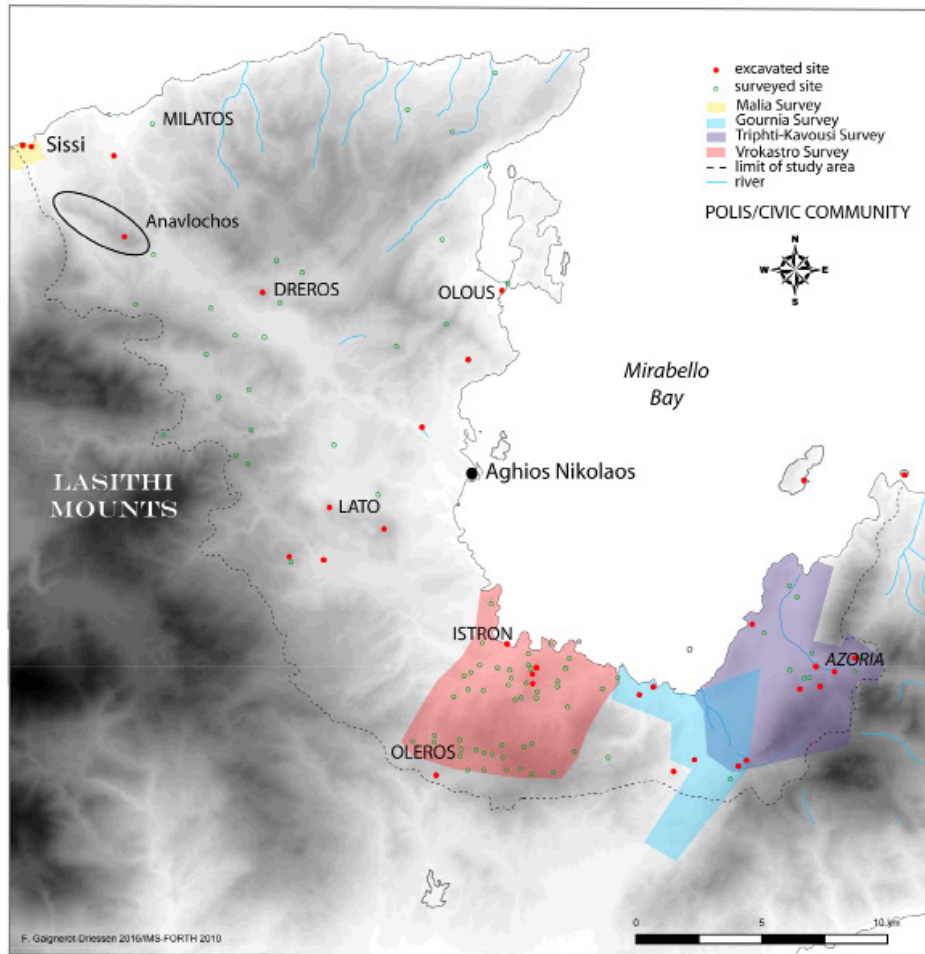


Fig. 1. Archaeological investigations in the Mirabello region.

THE REGIONAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE MIRABELLO BAY (13TH C. BC - 7TH C. BC)

The region that surrounds the Bay of Mirabello (Fig. 1), an area of transit between central and eastern Crete, owes its unity to the small piece of sea shared to the North and the natural borders of the Lasithi Mountains, the Siteia Mountains and the Schinavria ridge to the West, East and South. For consistency, this region should also include the coastal plain of Sissi, since it forms a natural outlet for the Mirabello valley starting at Aghios Nikolaos. From the beginning of the 20th c., this area was intensively explored through archaeological surveys and excavations, and numerous sites dating from Late Minoan III to the Archaic period were brought to light. Among them, the urban centres of seven poleis or civic communities can be identified, namely Milatos, Dreeros, Oλους, Lato, Oleros, Istron and a last one (perhaps Larissa) located on the Azoria hill.

From the Late Minoan III period to the Archaic period, distinctive settlement patterns can be recognised in this area.¹ Just after the collapse of the Palace of Knossos, in Late Minoan IIIA2, the region offers a picture of small and dispersed settlements, with sites located mainly on the

¹ For a detailed description and interpretation of these settlement patterns, see Florence Gaignerot-Driessen (2016), *De l'occupation postpalatiale à la cité-Etat grecque: le cas du Mirambello (Crète)* (Aegaeum, 40), Leuven-Liège: Peeters.

coast and sporadically reoccupying the remains of larger earlier settlements of the Neopalatial period, such as Sissi, Gournia and Mochlos. At the end of Late Minoan IIIB, most of these sites are abandoned in favour of inland hills. These newly founded sites overlook the main axes of communication and form clusters, a pattern first noticed in the region of Kavousi (Haggis 1996), likely sharing land for agro-pastoral purposes. A turn in the history of the region is detectable in Protogeometric times, as noticed as a general trend on Crete (Wallace 2010). Most of the sites founded in the previous period are then abandoned, but inside each cluster of sites of the Late Minoan IIIC period, a selection process leads to settlement nucleation. It appears that at this moment the most distinctive acropoleis offering the largest suitable space for living and building were selected for settlement. During the Late Geometric period, the communities which had grouped through coalescence had become sufficiently powerful and organised to carry out major urban projects, sometimes entirely modifying earlier settlement structures. For the final and decisive turn in the regional history, we need to wait for the beginning of the 7th c. BC. Only then is the existence of the polis and its institutions clearly attested by the inscribed laws of Dreros (Gagarin and Perlman 2016, 197-221). At this time, the centuries-old cemeteries are deserted, graves become invisible in the landscape, and “Greek temples” develop within urban centres, as well as in extra-urban and rural locations. Civic buildings and spaces are then also created. And from a geographical point of view, the beginning of the Archaic period is also a moment of consolidation or ultimate relocation of settlements at coastal locations.

THE ANAVLOCHOS CATCHMENT: DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY OF RESEARCH

The Anavlochos mountain range, located in the Mirabello region (Fig. 1), consists of a 5-km-long North-West/South-East crest of limestone extending above the village of Vrachasi. This naturally defensible ridge controls the major communication axis linking Central and Eastern Crete. To the North, it overlooks the coastal plain of Milatos, where a Greek city-state was established probably from the 7th c. BC onwards. The Kastellos of Milatos, occupied since the Late Minoan IIIC period, may have been its urban centre during the Archaic and Hellenistic period, as suggested by surface remains (Gaignerot-Driessen 2016, 197-200). To the East, the Anavlochos ridge overlooks the coastal plain of Sissi, where an important Minoan settlement abandoned in Late Minoan IIIB is currently under excavation by the Belgian School at Athens (Driessen this volume; Driessen et al. 2013). The urban centre of the Archaic polis of Dreros, where the first laws of the Greek world were recovered, is located on a hill less than 10 km to the East (Zographaki and Farnoux 2014). This site is also currently under excavation by the Greek Archaeological Service (Ephorate of Lasithi) and the French School at Athens. The highest peak of Vigla, located at the South-East limit of the ridge, forms the most distinctive part of the massif and makes it identifiable from all the main ancient settlements of the Mirabello Bay. From there one can see the entire Mirabello Bay and identify all the distinctive hill sites of the region up to the Siteia mountains, namely Lato, Thylakas, Vrokastro, Kavousi Kastro and Azoria. The North-West extremity of the ridge offers a view of the bay of Malia and up to Iraklio in clear weather.

Mariani and Evans, who advised Harriet Boyd to start exploration of the Anavlochos, are among the first visitors to the ridge. But the first excavations were carried out by the French archaeologist

Pierre Demargne under the auspices of the French School at Athens. From August 19th to August 23rd 1929, Demargne excavated six Geometric houses in the settlement of the central valley, a series of Late Minoan IIIC-Late Geometric graves below at Lami and a votive deposit including Geometric figurines, Daedalic moulded plaques and figurines and Late Minoan IIIC-Protoarchaic pottery on the North slope of the western peak, a place called Kako Plaï (Demargne 1931). Some years later, in 1990, two young fellows of the French School, Alexandre Farnoux and Jan Driessen, briefly explored the Anavlochos ridge again and found Late Minoan IIIC material in the settlement (Farnoux and Driessen 1991), followed by Krzysztof Nowicki (2000, 171-173). Over the last 10 years, rescue excavations have been undertaken by the Greek Archaeological Service (Ephorate of Lasithi).² In 2012, two houses were excavated in the Geometric settlement. In one of them, the floor level was entirely gone – the slope being generally badly eroded – and this gave us the chance to dig the fill of the massive terrace wall. The material recovered from this fill was mixed from Late Minoan IIIC to Late Geometric and also contained debris of a metallurgical workshop. The two houses were almost empty, likely reflecting a planned abandonment of the settlement, and the most recent pots recovered on the floor level are dated to the very beginning of the 7th c. BC (Zographaki, Gaignerot-Driessen and Devolder 2012-2013). In 2014 a rescue excavation was carried out at the top of Vigla, where Middle Minoan II finds were recovered.³

THE 2015-2016 SURVEY: METHODOLOGY AND PRELIMINARY RESULTS

These various investigations highlighted the important archaeological potential of the ridge and this is why the French School at Athens started a systematic research program in 2015. As a first step in the investigation, a two-year archaeological, topographical and geomorphological survey of the Anavlochos ridge was conducted in 2015-2016 (Gaignerot-Driessen et al. forthcoming) (Fig. 2).

The survey area represents about 150 ha. Most of it has been walked intensively by survey units of 1 ha each. In certain instances, where the slope was too steep, the vegetal cover too thick, or the land too disturbed by modern use, survey units have been walked randomly or, in one instance (in the North-East part), following transects. All architectural remains were recorded and mapped. The surface material was exhaustively collected by survey units, or subdivided units, when a concentration was noticed or when the material was recovered around a specific architectural or natural feature. The whole of the material has been quantified on site but generally only objects, fine ware and diagnostic coarse ware sherds were retained and sent to the apothiki. The rest was randomly rejected by survey unit or subdivided survey unit. The topographical map will be superimposed on aerial views taken by drone in 2016 and rectified by photogrammetry.

Our first concern, of course, was to relocate and reconsider the remains investigated by Demargne on the basis of his archives and reports, and this was done in the settlement, the cemetery, and at the votive deposit of Kako Plaï.

² I would like to warmly thank Vaso Zographaki for inviting me to take part in these, both in 2012 and 2014, and entrusting me with the study and publication of the ceramic material.

³ These finds are still under study and will be published in the *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*.

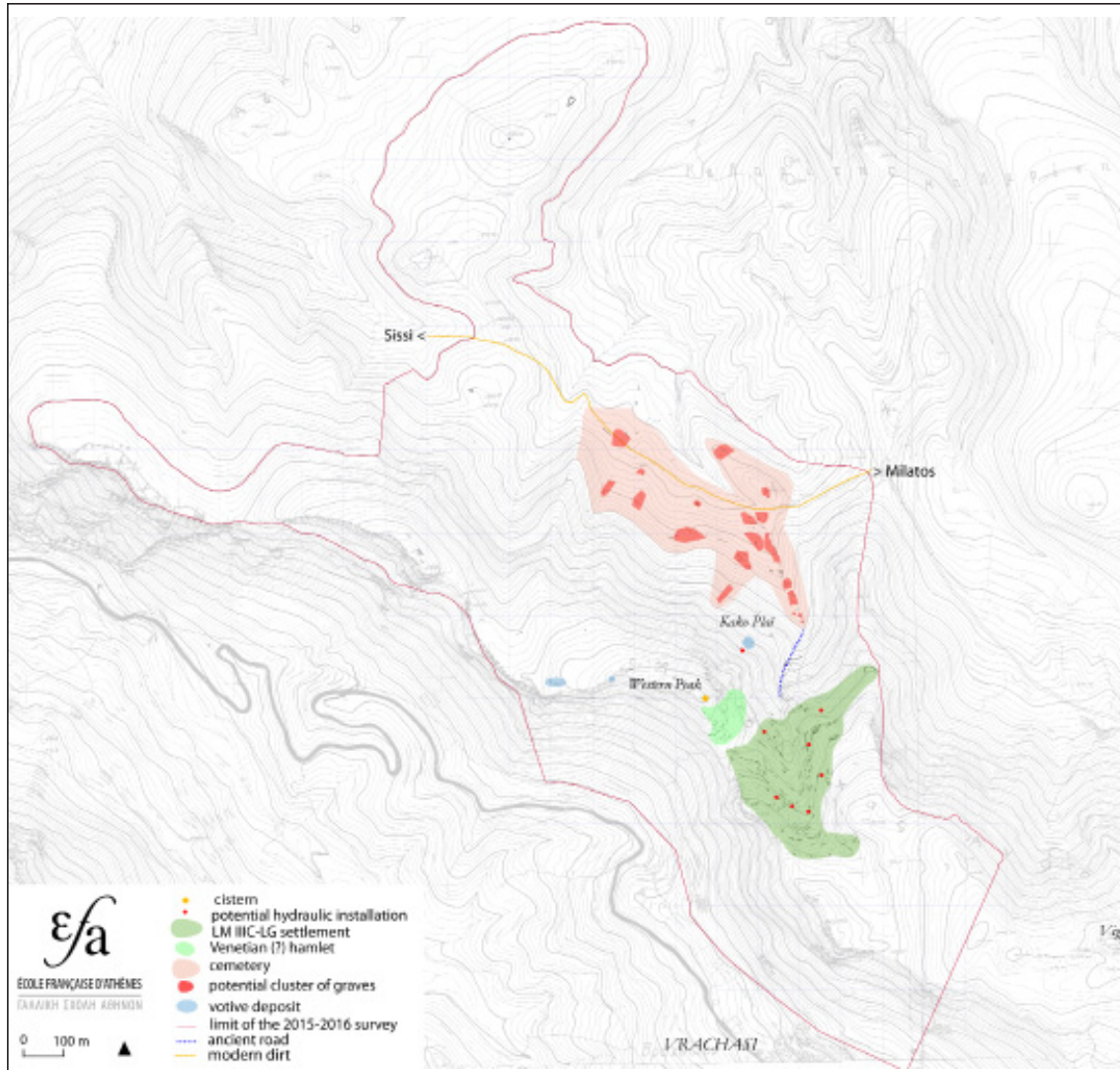


Fig. 2. Topographical plan of the 2015-2016 survey (©Anavlochos Mission/EFA).

From the first results of the survey, it appears that different Late Minoan IIIB-C hamlets were established on the ridge. All of these seem to have been abandoned at the end of the period, except for the one or the ones located in the central valley. There, Protogeometric material, in particular skyphoi with conical foot, was noticed over an area of about 10 ha, but no architectural remains from this period can be securely identified. So we have absolutely no indication of the shape and organisation of the Protogeometric settlement or settlements. On the basis of the results from the survey and the 2012 excavations, however, it is clear that the settlement was entirely restructured in Late Geometric times and that it densely extended over at least 10 ha. Massive terrace walls were then built to support houses, using the bedrock as back walls. Ramps and potential hydraulic installations, which would have collected intermittent or permanent water runoff, were also noticed and could be an indication that the settlement was organised in different neighbourhoods. So far only one cistern has been found on the Anavlochos – already noticed by Demargne –, on the summit of the western peak. From the data collected during the

survey, it is more likely that this cistern was in use in more recent times, when a small village was established on this western peak, maybe during the Venetian period.

In the cemetery, material and architectural remains, mostly small piles of stones, have been identified over a surface of about 15 ha. We recorded about a hundred potential graves. As far as we can tell for the moment, the cemetery seems to have been in use from Late Minoan IIIC to Late Geometric and was organised in clusters of graves all over the foot of the ridge. More graves were identified further in the valley floor. At the point where the last graves are located, we identified a 4-m-wide road leading to the settlement, following the bottom of the valley floor.

What is interesting is that the spot of the votive deposit excavated by Demargne on the Kako Plai slope immediately overlooks the beginning of this funerary area. Here we found more Geometric, Protoarchaic and Classical figurines and many sherds. In this specific area we exhaustively kept the material. The pottery includes some Late Minoan IIIC-Protogeometric fragments of pithoi, kraters and deep bowls, but the material here is mostly Late Geometric. Most of the coarse pottery consists of transport and cooking ware (amphorae, lekanai, jars, tripod chytrae, sometimes miniature), generally without traces of fire. A few fragments of probably non local fine transport amphorae have also been identified, as well as a number of tableware (kraters, cups, skyphoi and jugs). Just above the spot of Demargne's deposit, we noticed the presence of very badly preserved wall lines and cavities with concretion in the bedrock immediately overlooking the place. This evidence suggests that Demargne's deposit was actually connected to a sanctuary. A bit lower on the slope, a well-preserved section of a Geometric ramp has been recorded, seemingly leading from the settlement to this potential sanctuary. During the summer of 2016, we were also fortunate to localise two other cultic deposits on the other side of the western peak during the survey. The first includes 30 fragments of plaques and zoomorphic figures and figurines associated with some Late Minoan IIIC sherds. However, some of the figures could be later (Protogeometric or Geometric). The second is situated 150 m further to the West. Here, 30 fragments of Daedalic moulded figurines or plaques, all representing female figures, were recovered. Badly preserved remains of steps have also been identified in this area, potentially belonging to a 20-m-long East-West ramp.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANISATION DETECTABLE ON THE ANAVLOCHOS

It is worth noting that, so far, no public building or public space has securely been identified in the settlement, which was likely abandoned at the very beginning of the 7th c. The only focal point of the community or communities established on the Anavlochos seems to have been the western peak, and in particular the potential sanctuary of Kako Plai, which is located outside of the settlement, precisely at the border between the world of the living and the world of the dead (Fig. 2). This liminal location, overlooking an enduring cemetery organised in clusters of graves associating Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age burials, may have played an important part in the development of communal rituals involving the residents of the settlement. The votive material recovered is heterogeneous and it is difficult to identify one specific deity who would have been venerated in this place. An ancestor cult is a possibility, especially if we consider that Kako Plai remained visited at least until the Classical period, long after the settlement and the cemetery

were deserted, as if it formed a place of memory. Other comparable cases can be observed on Crete, for instance the Temple House at Lato (Gaignerot-Driessen 2012), the *Depôt R* at Dreros (van Effenterre 2009), Vitsylovrysi below the peak of Karphi (Pendlebury et al. 1937-1938, 98-100), the building at Karakovilia near Vrokastro (Hall 1914, 170-172), the building at Plaï tou Kastrou near the Kastro (Boyd 1901, 149-150) and maybe also the Protoarchaic Building in Azoria (Haggis 2014; Haggis and Mook 2015, 18-23). All these spaces or buildings are located in the vicinity of Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age graves and all yielded evidence for votive offerings or communal meals. There is certainly a necessity to reconsider these potential “mortuary chapels” in the historical context of polis formation. They may represent crucial communal spaces in a period of transition, when the institutions of the Greek city-state were not yet established and the civic communities were still being formed.

In the same perspective, another point deserves to be underlined. On the Anavlochos and in the Mirabello region in general, the careful reuse of Late Minoan IIIC residential and funerary spaces by Late Geometric communities is clear. This may betray an attempt at legitimization of their alleged origin and possibly also their land ownership. A Late Geometric house designed for sympotic activities was, for example, built on the remains of the main building of the Late Minoan IIIC settlement of Chalasmenos (Tsipopoulou 2004); ancient graves were visited and received offerings, as in the region of the Kastro or Lato (Gaignerot-Driessen 2015); Geometric burial enclosures were also built in the ruins of the Late Minoan IIIC village of Vronda (Day 2011). It may be noted that the Vronda case could also be considered as a peculiar instance of a long-term cemetery associating Geometric burial enclosures to Late Minoan IIIC-Protogeometric tholos tombs, since the latter were also attested at Vronda. If we consider the regional funerary pattern, the reuse of the Late Minoan IIIC settlement of Vronda for burial practices during the Geometric period may be seen as incidental and primarily consecutive to the presence of Late Bronze Age funerary remains. In any case, the Late Geometric archaeological sources evidence the existence of social groups claiming a link with mythical ancestors from the Late Bronze Age. So why not call them clans? The way these social groups were integrated or disintegrated and eventually institutionalized in the epigraphically well-attested tribes of the polis remains to be explored.

Systematic and simultaneous excavations in the settlement, the cemetery and on the western peak of the Anavlochos ridge may be very illuminating in this perspective. In particular it would be interesting to determine whether the settlement and the cemetery illustrate the same social organisation, reflecting the existence of distinct Late Geometric social groups based on kinship affiliation, real or mythical.

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