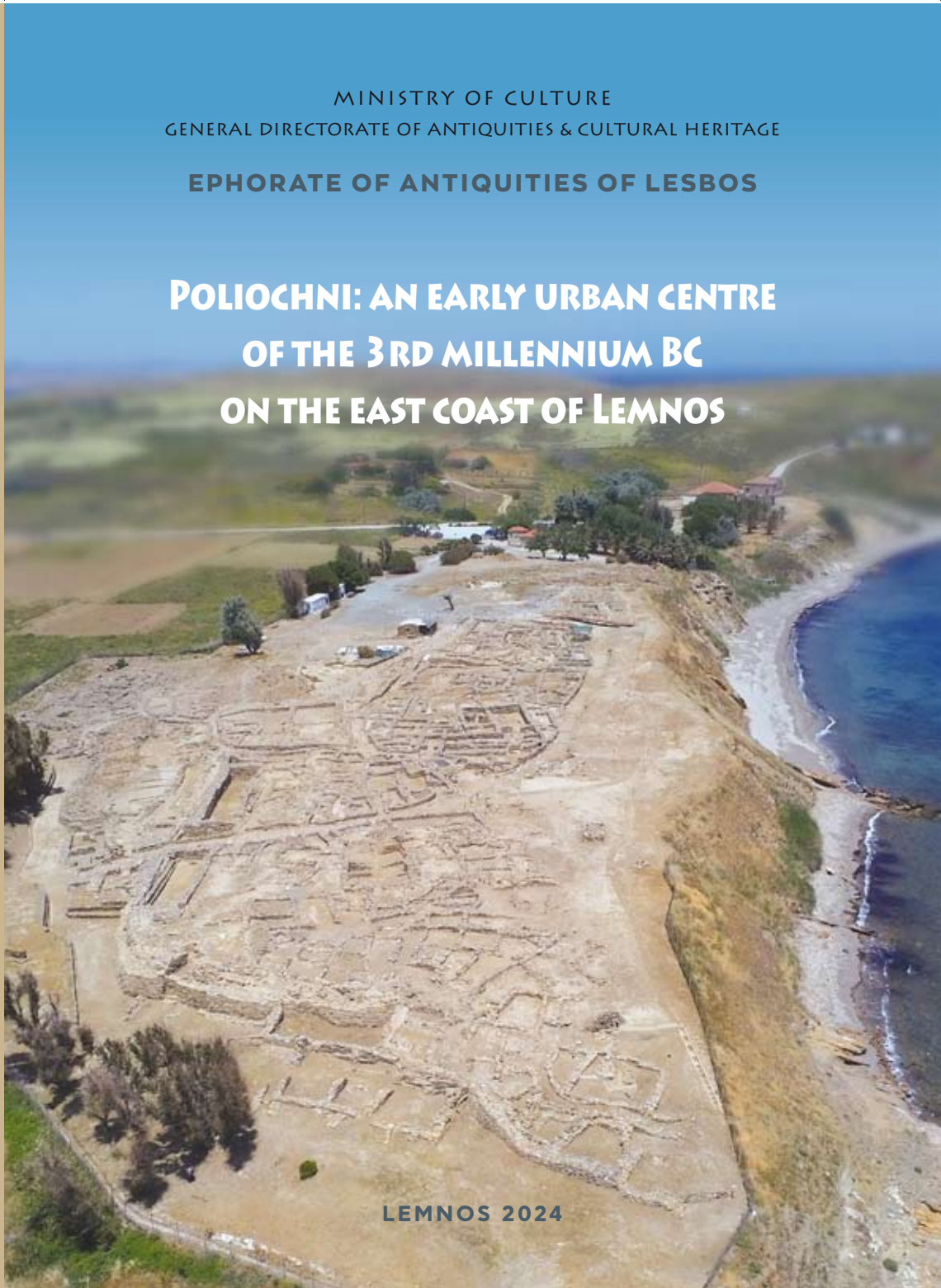




Students from Kaminia in the Bouleuterion (Council House) of Poliochni (IASA archive)

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MINISTRY OF CULTURE
GENERAL DIRECTORATE OF ANTIQUITIES & CULTURAL HERITAGE
EPHORATE OF ANTIQUITIES OF LESBOS

**POLIOCHNI: AN EARLY URBAN CENTRE
OF THE 3RD MILLENNIUM BC
ON THE EAST COAST OF LEMNOS**

LEMNOS 2024



*The enclosure of Poliochni after completion
of the restoration works 2016-2023
(Ephorate of Antiquities of Lesbos archive)*

On the SE coast of Lemnos and along the mouth of Vroskopos bay, on an elongated hill, the prehistoric settlement of Poliochni developed. Its key geographical position –opposite the legendary city of Troy and on the sea routes of the NE Aegean– seems to have played a pivotal role in the development of trade and contacts with other known settlements of the time. Additionally, its location ensured view of the wider area, while its immediate proximity to the fertile plain and the presence of water guaranteed not only the survival, but also the prosperity of the prehistoric inhabitants of the area.

An area of 10 acres of the settlement of Poliochni has been investigated, while its total area has not been brought to light. It was continuously inhabited from around the middle of the 4th millennium until the end of the 3rd millennium BC, while isolated findings indicate the use of the area up to around 1200 BC.

Excavators marked the successive building phases of the settlement with different colours on its plan and, thus, the naming of the building phases after the corresponding colours was established.



Space 14, the so-called Bouleuterion (Council House), during the excavations in the 1930s (IASA archive)

Black marks the earliest building phase (3500/3400-2900/2800 BC). The houses were of oval plan, single-room, with stone-built bases and a superstructure made of perishable materials. The settlement was open, without a surrounding enclosure, while no other elements of its organisation are known, as this phase was identified after research in selected excavation trenches.

The next building phase is the blue one (2900/2800-2700/2600 BC). During this phase, the settlement remained open and expanded to the NW and the SW. Houses acquired a four-sided plan, while works of public character were also implemented, such as a well and a small, stone-built conduit, both reflecting early achievements of engineering. In the final stage of this phase, innovations were detected in the settlement that relate to its early urban organisation, as are the public works, which presuppose organisation, central planning, labour distribution, technical know-how and specialisation. The aforementioned works of public character include the peribolos, which now encloses the city, and impressive retaining works, which, at the same time, served other functions as well. Among them are the



Tripod cooking pot of the blue building phase (Archaeological Museum of Lemnos, Ephorate of Antiquities of Lesbos archive)



Clay vessel (strainer) of the red building phase



Depas Amphikypellon (two-handled drinking cup) (National Archaeological Museum, NAM archive)



Gold Jewellery (earrings) from the treasure of Poliochni (National Archaeological Museum, NAM archive)

Clay zoomorphic vessel of the yellow building phase (National Archaeological Museum, NAM archive)



large four-sided spaces for the reinforcement of the artificial slope, such as spaces 14 and 28, more widely known as Bouleuterion (Council House) and Granary respectively. In private architecture, the megaron type house plan is established. As regards architecture, the term refers to the rectangular, elongated, single building with a vestibule (entrance hall) and an entrance on one of its narrow sides. An opisthodomos is often added, that is, an extra room at the rear.

The blue phase is smoothly succeeded by the green phase (2700/2600-2500/2400 BC), which is considered a period of demographic and residential development. A propylon (monumental gateway) with two square towers is built at the central entrance of the settlement, while within the settlement, urban blocks are now clearly formed and the buildings they comprise are fully recognised. Poliochni, Myrina and Thermi on Lesbos constitute the earliest examples of settlement organisation in urban blocks –each of which includes one or more independent buildings– in the Aegean. Alleys facilitated traffic between the buildings of each square, while drainage pipes carried away rainwater. In the case of Poliochni, from the green phase onwards at least, residences comprised the megaron, as the main living space, and auxiliary rooms for storage and/or food preparation attached to one or both its long sides. Each residence had a courtyard, often commonly shared with its neighbouring houses.

In the next two periods, the red (2500/2400-2200 BC) and the yellow one (2200-2100/2000 BC), the enclosure was repaired and reinforced, the central streets and squares were paved, while communal structures, such as the wells, continued to operate. There was no radical change as far as the urban planning system is concerned; however, the construction technology and the orientation of the buildings changed. Especially during the yellow period, during which the city was rebuilt following a fire, construction looks less diligent. Architectural forms remained standardized and the expansion of private buildings resulted in appropriation of public space. Throughout time, the megaron remained the main unit of each building, surrounded by other ancillary spaces. A catastrophic earthquake is thought to mark the end of the yellow phase and the abandonment of Poliochni at around 2000 BC. Since then, the settlement never recovered.