

Eastern Boeotia Archaeological Project 2014 Report

On July 14, 2014 the Eastern Boeotia Archaeological Project (EBAP) concluded the third full six-week season of excavation at the site of Ancient Eleon in the village of Arma (Figs 1 and 2). This project is a *synergasia* between the CIG and the 9th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities at Thebes, under the co-direction of Brendan Burke (University of Victoria), Bryan Burns (Wellesley College) and Alexandra Charami (9th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities/Thebes Museum). Dr. Olga Kyriazi (also of the 9th Ephorate) is also a key partner in our research project. We are very grateful for the research funding we received in 2014 from an Insight Grant from the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council of Canada (#435-2012-0185), the Loeb Classical Library, and the Institute for Aegean Prehistory. We also appreciate the dedicated efforts of the students and affiliated scholars who contribute so much to our work.

Our project, in summary, addresses two major periods in at the site of Eleon, located on an elevated plateau overlooking the Theban plain, *en route* to Chalkis and the Euboean Gulf. First, a prehistoric phase spans the Mycenaean period (Late Bronze Age), ca. 1700-1050 BC, during which connections between Eleon and the palace center at Thebes varied in intensity. We have material of early Mycenaean date (LH I-II) and substantial levels dating to the Late Helladic IIIB and IIIC subphases. The best preserved settlement remains come from a burnt destruction level of the LH IIIC Early. Second, activity of the Archaic and Classical periods relates to the material we have uncovered in association with the large polygonal wall that dominates the eastern side of our site. We have uncovered new remains of the wall, including a very deep exploratory trench along the face to establish a construction date. We have also explored the ramped entryway into the site. Beneath the ramp's multiple surfaces we have recovered large amounts of miniature vessels (*skyphoi* and *kotyliskoi*), along with other distinguishable types of Boeotian ceramics. Associated with these fineware vessels are numerous terracotta figurines, the vast majority of them seated or standing female figures, that suggest a cult was located here or nearby.

What follows is a report on the results from the areas explored this past summer, beginning in the Northwest, moving to the Southwest and then the Southeast (Fig. 3):

Northwest

Excavation in the site's northwestern sector (Fig. 4) now reveals a more coherent architectural complex that is rebuilt in three distinct phases, with deposits distinguished by pottery dated to LH IIIB2, IIIC early and IIIC middle periods. The structure, not fully excavated, measures at least 11.25 (E-W) x 14.4 meters (N-S). The northern section is divided into two large rooms, each of which features a centrally positioned hearth. The building's second phase preserves the best evidence for its construction, use, and destruction in a fiery event dated to the LH IIIC early period. It seems the final phase was a reconstruction that selectively built around the remains, leaving a collapsed deposit of wall stones, mudbricks, and roofing material accumulated in the center trenches B2a and B2c (Figs. 5 and 6). The floor level beneath this collapse contained

fineware ceramics (including a pictorial krater), cooking and storage wares, copper alloy blades (Figs. 7-9), and textile tools. In an adjacent space to the east, continued industrial activity is indicated by a series of six hearths positioned around a central stone that may have been a post supporting the roof (Fig. 10). Presumably the southern half of the room was unroofed, since the largest hearths are clustered here, including three that are built directly upon the other.

This year's work in NWC2d revealed the western end of the structure's southern wall where a large, squarely cut cornerstone also serves as the terminus of a north-south wall. Floor levels that can be associated with this phase have been difficult to isolate, but there are significant amounts of IIIB pottery and as well as the spectacular find of a stone jewelry mold fragment (Fig. 11). This red steatite mold typical of glass working in Mycenaean palatial workshops was on a level sealed further beneath the IIC early destruction in NWC2c, and suggests new possibilities for the range of material connections and activities of Eleon within the network of the Theban administration.

Southwest

Investigation of a 10 by 10 m square in the southwest (Unit B3), expanded to the north by 5 m in 2014 with work in SW B2d and B2c (Fig.12). Structural remains uncovered this season in B2c are part of a larger complex that is associated with extensive material dating to the LH IIC middle phase. Although the architectural forms are poorly preserved, the fragmentary finds include pictorial pottery and terracotta bull figurines. The earliest buildings that we have exposed thus far can be called Building A and includes a pebble surface exposed in 2013, dating to LH IIIB. Adjacent and continuing to the north is Building C, dating to the LH IIC middle 2 period, dated by some nearly complete vessels (Fig. 13). Of great interest from our work in 2014 was the discovery of Early Mycenaean material in the form of a bichrome jug (P843) dating to the advanced LH I/II periods (Fig.14).

Since we excavated a single Middle Helladic grave in 2013, we were not surprised to find two similar cist tombs in SWA1c (Fig. 15). These two were opened and emptied long ago; our careful excavation recovered small amounts of mixed pottery, dated MH though Ottoman, and fragments of animal bone. Across SWA1d and SEA1c we uncovered what we currently refer to as the Blue Stone Structure, because of the polished blue limestone used to cap the perimeter walls (Figs. 16 and 17). This large construction is marked by orthostate blocks in its SW and SE corners connected by a partially collapsed wall, of at least three courses in height. The northern extent is not yet known since it continues into SWA1b and SEA1a. The ceramics found associated with this construction were consistently late Middle Helladic to early Late Helladic (LH I).

Within the perimeter walls of flat blue stones are two cobbled surfaces at different elevations. On the west a lower surface of 2 x 3.3 meters extends just over the southern perimeter wall and a delimiting row of large stones to the east (Fig. 18). A second, higher level of cobble stones (1.6 x

2.5 m) was found further east, running across the tops of two internal walls (Fig. 19). We did not have enough time in the season to fully excavate the cobble levels but we were able to make a trial excavation along the western side of the structure. The fill beneath the cobbled surface also dated to the Early Mycenaean period, with no later intrusions. Obsidian flakes and blades were relatively common. Of greatest significance were the unarticulated traces of human skeletons. Fragments of skull, mandible, knuckles and leg bones were recovered. The remains of human leg, which may be articulated, was left unexcavated continuing into the test baulk.

Our Greek colleagues in the Ephoreia were immediately made aware of these finds and it was agreed that work for the year should cease in this sensitive area. Both the structural remains and funerary material deserve focused attention and expert work. Our colleague Eleanna Prevedorou, a specialist in Mycenaean burials, was able to be on site during the excavation of tomb contexts, and will return in 2015. We also hope to move our water-sieving system on site to facilitate the comprehensive study of all sensitive contexts. It is greatly hoped by the Ephoreia and us that permission will be granted for limited excavation to be continued in this area for 2015, while we are also conducting a study season. We do not plan to publicize these findings until the funerary structure is completely excavated, since it could potentially lead to further illegal exploration at the site.

SE: Polygonal wall trenches

Focused excavations in the Southeast also sought to recover more precise information about the polygonal wall's architectural form and chronology. Excavating two meters' depth along the face of the wall revealed foundations far deeper than expected, but the recovered ceramics were consistently and completely of Mycenaean date. Excavation in trenches SEA3d, B3c, and B3d revealed further information about the architectural form of the polygonal wall project and crucial evidence for its chronology (Fig. 20). A foundation trench excavated directly along the tower's eastern face included three sherds of the later 6th century, along with copious amounts of Mycenaean pottery, affirming a date of the late Archaic period for the completion of the polygonal wall project.

SE: Threshold trenches and Bastions

Work resumed along the large threshold running N-S in SEA2a and A2c that was first discovered in 2012. Our aim was to understand the nature of this construction which clearly dated to the Archaic-Classical period, based on the treatment of the stone, the cuttings for the wooden elements and the bronze pivots for the doorjamb. The prolific number of female figurines, miniature vessels and painted Boeotian drinking cups suggest to us that there was cult activity in this area. We have now catalogued 56 intact and 88 fragmentary figurines, among the thousands of pieces recovered.