Eastern Boeotia Archaeological Project 2018

The Eastern Boeotia Archaeological Project (EBAP) concluded the final season of a three-year permit extension for excavation at the site of ancient Eleon in the village of Arma, for the six weeks from May 28 to July 7, 2018. Once again, the synergasia between the CIG and Ephorate of Antiquities of Boeotia was directed by Dr. Alexandra Charami (Ephorate of Antiquities of Boeotia) and daily operations were managed by co-directors Brendan Burke (University of Victoria) and Bryan Burns (Wellesley College). Dr. Kiki Kalliga also continued as a valued partner on behalf of the Ephorate.

Primary funding came from an Insight Grant from the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council of Canada (#435-2012-0185), the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, and the University of Victoria and Wellesley College. The Canadian Institute in Greece has facilitated and supported the permit process each year. We also appreciate the dedicated efforts of the students and affiliated scholars who contribute so much to our research. In 2018 the project included 36 people in the foreign team: seven PhDs (Burke, Burns, Herrmann, Jazwa, Lis, Maijanen, Van Damme), four archaeological professionals (Bianco, Karas, Theocharous, Ross), six graduate students (Allen, Bertram, Cruz, Madsen, Sadarananda, Thurley), five former undergraduates (Beatrice, Bellows, Hellstrom, Nagle, Trevino) and fourteen undergraduates (Baillie, Braun, Byron, Carvajal-Rodriguez, Chisholm, Dallis, Day, Engstrom, Hemmerling, Jordan, Kocurek, Rutherford, Stainton, Sugioka).

Figure 1: Aerial view of the excavations at Ancient Eleon, facing east toward Arma and Euboea.
Figure 2: Areas explored in 2018 at Ancient Eleon
Chronological summary: Our work has identified four major periods of occupation at the site of ancient Eleon (Figure 1), located on an elevated plateau overlooking the Theban plain, en route to Chalkis and the Euboean Gulf: First, a prehistoric phase spans the early Mycenaean period (from the end of the Middle Helladic and beginning of the Mycenaean palatial period, ca. 1700-1450 BC). In the second period, toward the end of the Mycenaean age, we have substantial levels dating to the Late Helladic IIIB and IIIC sub phases. The site seems to be abandoned by the Early Iron Age. The third phase is Post-Bronze Age that varies in levels of occupation, but the earliest recovered material is Late Geometric Euboean pottery of the 8th c. BCE. Eleon itself, however, seems not to be reoccupied in any substantial way until the 6th c. BCE. Also dating to the Archaic period is the construction of the large polygonal wall. After another long period of inactivity at the site we reach the fourth and latest archaeological phase in evidence: the Medieval period, from which material survives in surface levels and deeper pits only. These finds date consistently to the 15th and 16th centuries CE, which could indicate a relatively late date for the stone tower whose remains mark the western end of the site, beyond our permitted area of excavation.

Research Goals 2018
Work in 2018 extended to different parts of the site (Figure 2) but concentrated within and around an enclosure which we call the Blue Stone Structure (BSS), so named because of the polished blue limestone used to cap a large, rectangular perimeter wall (Figure 3). This structure was capped with a mound of clay marking an early Mycenaean cemetery of some significance dating to the formative period of Mycenaean society, ca. 17th c. BCE. Our main goal in 2018 was to identify and explore as many burials in the Blue Stone Structure as possible; to better define the northern half of the enclosure; to fully expose the perimeter wall, with particular focus on the long, eastern wall; and to fully document remains of the clay tumulus. We made major progress in each goal, and explored the immediate surroundings of the BSS as time allowed.
Burial Contexts

This season we excavated seven significant burial contexts within and around the Blue Stone Structure (Figure 4). Like those excavated in previous years, the majority are simple built tombs: a single chamber with stone walls, covered by large capping stones. Even these vary considerably in size and manner of construction, while a few are more complicated structures. Their use can often be richly complicated too, due to the regular practice of communal burial in this period.

Tomb 9 (SE A1a)

Excavation in SE A1a began with the opening of Tomb 9, which was made visible at the end of the 2017 season. With the removal of two blue capstones slightly overlapping each other, Initial excavation revealed a single young adult with their head oriented in the northwest body turned towards the west. A single intentionally placed grave good was a Murex seashell northeast of the individual. Removal of the fill below, a second burial was discovered in a small pit at the bottom
of the tomb. It appears these unarticulated remains belong to an adult; no artifacts were recovered in this lower pit.

Tomb 10 (SW A1b)
This large chamber was covered by a single, massive capping stone, which seems to have sealed the tomb quite effectively. Its contents were remarkably well preserved, compared to other tombs at Eleon and Mycenaean Greece more broadly. The remains of three individuals were well articulated, especially the last person interred, estimated to be 12 years old. This individual was found with three necklaces, a beaded bracelet and a Minyan cup. Other grave goods in the tomb include two unfired pots in the northwest corner of the tomb, pieces of wood that were heavily degraded and many fragments of a woven textile. Two other individuals, who appear to be male and in their mid-twenties, were positioned against the eastern side of the chamber; all three individuals were placed in the tomb with their heads in the south and their feet in the north. Individual 1 was facing east while both individual 2 and 3 were facing west.

Figure 4: Tomb 10 from the north
Tomb 11 (SE A1c)

An unusual concentration of human remains were found immediately outside the southeast corner of the BSS (Figure 5). The initial discovery of the skeletal material came in conjunction with the excavation of a medieval pit, but it soon became clear that the extensive remains were associated with the Mycenaean structures, including the position of a cranium and numerous other bones in a niche within the buttress wall (Figure 6). Stratigraphically, Tomb 11 appears to have been built prior to the construction of the buttress wall as wedging stones were placed on the S edge of the capstone, which underlie the lowest exposed course of the buttress. The tomb was in use after the construction of the buttress as well, however, as proven by the presence of the deposit in the niche.

Numerous isolated remains were found above the cover slabs for Tomb 11, and enormous quantities within. Early estimates of the minimum number of individuals is 27, including remains of at least three infants present. No bones were found in articulated position and many were heavily degraded. Multiple hyoids, ear ossicles, and other small or fragile bones were found, suggesting a fairly complete collection of the remains of the individuals who were re-interred here. Tomb 11 contained more grave goods than any other tomb thus far excavated at Eleon (Figure 7): eight complete vessels, three copper alloy pins (two with heads in the shape of pomegranates), six spindle whorls (one incised), five copper alloy coils, two other metal coils – most likely silver. There were also 58 stone beads, rock crystal and carnelian, plus a rock crystal prism seal stone incised with a flying fish motif. The eight pots recovered were: two matte-painted ring-handled cups, a bichrome wide-mouthed jug, a small Grey Minyan pyxis with vertical piercings, a Grey Minyan juglet, two matte-painted Vapheio cups, and an amphoriskos in medium coarse fabric (possibly a coarse Minyan).
The capstones of Tomb 12 were originally revealed by excavations west of the BSS (SWA1a) in 2015. At that point, the blocks were designated as “disturbed capstones” of a tomb that – like others near the surface – no longer contained ancient remains. When given the opportunity to lift the stones this year, we found that the tomb was disturbed, but was far larger and more interesting than we had estimated. The chamber of Tomb 12 extended further than expected to the east, where it turned and joined a small dromos to the south (which had been visible in 2015, but was thought to be a small, empty tomb) (Figure 8). The W wall of the tomb measures 1.5 m long, E wall is 1.7 m long, N wall is 3.8 m long, S wall is 2.6 m long. The eastern end of the tomb contained a large accumulation of stones, many of which appear to be fallen structural remains, either of the tomb wall or fragments of capstones. However, the amount of accumulated material suggests additional stones were added to fill the void after the tomb had been disturbed. Beneath this deposit, fragments of pottery include LH IIIC vessels, confirming that the tomb was filled in the period when the site’s post palatial settlement spread to the area of immediately west of the BSS. At a lower level, disparate human remains suggest the tomb held multiple individuals.
Tomb 13 (NE A1c)
Tomb 13 measures 1.4 m (N-S) by 1.3 m. (E-W) and is the lowest structure within the northern BSS, with its capstones located below rubble packing for the perimeter wall immediately to its east. This indicates the tomb was present first, and the proximity suggests it was included within the northern extension of the BSS intentionally. In addition to the remains of an articulated individual on a hard surface, two pits located at the northern and southern ends of the chamber contained commingled bones. Initial analysis of the recovered skeletal material indicated the remains of approximately 10 individuals, with five individuals in the northern pit, two individuals in the southern pit, and three individuals in the upper level of burial. Only the one burial, a male in the upper level, was articulated and most closely associated with a pyxis with a corroded surface.

Tomb 14 (SE A1a)
The capping stones of a tomb located far beneath stele 2 were exposed in 2017, when we recognized there was no safe way to excavate the tomb without removing the marker above (Figure 9). Given the significance of our two stelae, still in situ for over 3,000 years, we were content to leave the tomb unexplored. Near the end of the 2018 season, however, we observed that the capping stones had shifted – presumably due to heat, moisture, and surrounding activity
– and small stones beginning to fall inside. Because of the danger of further collapse, we moved forward with expedited recovery of contents from the accessible portion. Working from the eastern side of the tomb, Nicholas Herrmann removed the remains of two to three individuals concentrated in the southeast corner of the tomb. One individual in primary burial position and appeared to be oriented east to west; no artifacts were found.

**Tomb 15 (NW A1d)**
The most significant aspect of the investigation of NW A1d during this 2018 season was that we found a large concentration of human bones in our established Locus 15, an area which appears to be the beginning of Tomb 15. As of the end of this season, Tomb 15 does not have exposed west or north walls but does have a very solid east and south wall. We are not sure why there is no visible west wall as we are at a pretty deep elevation relative to the other walls stones becoming revealed but in regards to the north wall that we are not seeing the tomb is 30 centimeters wide at the current area because the grid square is cutting off the rest of it and we have not excavated at all north of the developing tomb. As we uncovered the human bones in the area, we found that it was becoming an extensive pile and we have at least 3 individuals accounted for with bones extending into the north scarp and straight down. Given the bones that were revealed before lifting occurred (IMG_173, IMG_174) it is safe to assume that the pile does down a decent amount and the area ended with us removing as much of the bones as possible that were not going into the bulk of the north.

**Northwest trenches:**
When rain and accumulated moisture limited excavation in deep BSS trenches, we re-opened excavation in the NE room of the northwest complex (NWB3d). Previous excavations here never reached the same floor levels found in adjacent rooms, and we hoped to identify several activity layers within the room. Indeed, several floor levels were identified around the room’s central hearth, although refined study is need to coordinate their ceramics with those of other parts of the complex.

Figure 10a and b: Northwest from the north and from above
Southwest trenches:
The new trench SWA2c was also opened when rain prevented excavation elsewhere and continued for three weeks, from June 18 to July 6 (Figure 11). The goal of this season’s excavation was to better understand an unresolved connection between the Archaic/Classical ramp with the structures in the southwest. Trace remains of built structures include a very flat stone slab (locus 6), placed on a packed surface (locus 9), which contained mixed Medieval and Mycenaean pottery. Artifacts relate to votive deposits of the Archaic and Classical periods were found in this general area in previous seasons and this year fragments of bronze pins were found.

Figure 11: Southwest from above.  
Figure 12: 2018 Open House with Arma village

In 2018, we were also able to participate in some very rewarding community activities. The local school children of the Tanagra area had an exhibition focused on the archaeology of the region – called the Tanagra Express and they kindly invited us to participate. We in turn were also able to host a group from the town of Arma, where our project is based. We had nearly 100 people come to our Open House in July (Figure 12) and we were able to share our research results with the community and to show the full extent of our excavations up to July 2018 (Figure. 13).
Figure 13: Schematic plan of ancient Eleon, end of season 2018.
2018 Staff List
Senior staff/consulting scholars and areas of research and responsibility.
Architecture – Giuliana Bianco, M.A., University of Toronto
Ceramics, Mycenaean – Dr. Bartek Lis, Polish Academy of Science; Bronze Age-Classical - Trevor Van Damme, UCLA
Conservation – Vassiliki Karas, Nefeli Theocharou, Independent Contractors
Collections Managements – Arianna Nagle, University of Victoria; Janelle Sadarananda, University of Pennsylvania
Draftsperson – Tina Ross, M.A., Independent scholar
Osteology – Dr. Nicholas Herrmann, Texas State University
Trench Supervisors – Alyssa Allen, Joe Bellows, Jacob Engstrom, University of Victoria; Haley Bertram, University of Cincinnati; Scott Evans, Wilfrid Laurier University
Digital Technology Interns – Caroline Beatrice, Grace Hellstrom