

The Plakari Archaeological Project

Preliminary report on the fourth field season (2013)

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Abstract

The 2013 fieldwork campaign at Karystos-Plakari in southern Euboia provided valuable new insights into the structural developments of the cult site from the Early Iron Age down to the end of the Classical period. The remaining part of the open-air sacrificial refuse area was excavated, which again yielded large amounts of animal bones, pottery and small finds (mainly EIA, but also later material). On Terrace 2, a long wall was uncovered, running north–south; probably constructed before the mid-7th century BC, it is the earliest architectural feature to date. Perhaps during the later 7th century BC, the entire area was enclosed by a peribolos wall. At the same time, this seems to have functioned as a terrace wall, supporting a platform and a semi-circular stone feature. Burnt material found inside and around it indicate that it served as an altar. In 2012, we uncovered a number of metal finds in this area; this year, we found more iron knives and a bronze phiale mesomphalos, indicating that the semicircular stone feature was the focus of various cultic activities. To the north, a series of surfaces was found, again with clear traces of burning. Broken pottery and animal bones indicate that this area was used for sacrifices and ritual eating and drinking from the late 6th to early 4th centuries BC. During the late 5th or early 4th century BC, the living rock inside the peribolos wall was leveled and Building A was constructed in the NW corner. No material later than the end of the Classical period was retrieved from Building A and the area around it. The only evidence for temporary re-use of the Plakari hill top comes from a Late Ottoman hut or lookout excavated this year on the hill's summit.

Keywords

Karystos-Plakari – southern Euboia – excavations – Early Iron Age to Classical sanctuary – Late Ottoman lookout.

Introduction

In 2009, VU University Amsterdam initiated a fieldwork project, in collaboration with the 11th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, centring on the archaeological site of Plakari near Karystos in southern Euboia, and its immediate

surroundings. The Plakari Archaeological Project is multidisciplinary in scope, combining systematic excavations with geoarchaeological landscape and palaeoecological research, archaeobotany and zooarchaeology. The project aims to understand the character of the human occupation in and around Plakari, and to investigate how the site functioned in various periods on a local, a regional and a supra-regional level.¹

The 2013 excavations

During the 2013 field season (8 July–5 August), excavations were continued on the southern slope of Terrace 2 (Trench 1, the ‘open-air sacrificial refuse area’) and on Terrace 2, where in 2011 and 2012 the Late Classical Building A and its forecourt had been discovered (Trench 2). New trenches were laid out on the western slope of Terrace 2 (Trench 2b), on the highest part of the Plakari hilltop (Trench 5) and in the area close to the rock-cut niches (Trench 9) (for location of trenches, see fig. 1).²

Trench 1c

In Trench 1, our aim was to finish the excavations of the Early Iron Age EIA open-air sacrificial refuse area by extending the trench to the north-west (Figures 1–2: Tr. 1c). The collection of artefacts and ecofacts was maximized with the help of dry-sieving and wet-sieving, using a flotation machine. The finds appeared to follow the patterns established during previous seasons: the deposit contained large amounts of pottery (mostly of the Protogeometric to the Sub-Geometric period), many small finds, large quantities of animal bones and some

¹ Preliminary reports in Crielaard et al. 2011–2012, 2013, 2014; Crielaard 2012; see also Chidiroglou 2014; Groot 2014.

² Jan Paul Crielaard acted as project coordinator and, together with Maria Kosma, as field director. The trench supervisors were Aline Sinke (Trenches 1c, 2b and 9), Stefan Kooi (Trenches 2aW and 2e), Ruben Brugge (Trench 2d) and Marjo Schlaman (Trench 5). Marjo Schlaman was also responsible for the coordination of the photography of the architectural remains and, together with Jaap Fokkema (VU University), for mapping and drawing these in preparation of Fig. 4. Stefan Kooi was responsible for the 3D photogrammetry and air photographs employing a drone. The work in the museum was coordinated by Filiz Songu (VU University), who was also responsible for recording the finds and studying pottery and small finds. Dr Xenia Charalambidou (Fitch Laboratory, British School at Athens) coordinated and conducted the research project on the EIA pottery, Dr Maria Chidiroglou (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) studied the Classical pottery from Building A. Bert Brouwenstijn (VU University) was responsible for drawing and photographing the archaeological finds. Ed de Vries drew a large selection of EIA sherds. A team of 11 students from VU University and two from Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne assisted in the field and the museum.



Figure 1. Plan of Plakari hilltop showing the location of the 2013 trenches



Figure 2. General view of Trench 1c (from N). Southern section of TW2 (un. 4) visible in the top left-hand corner of the photo



Figure 3. Trench 1c: spherical, Corinthian *aryballos* (un. 8 #673 SF 417)

shells (see Table 1 below). Although most of the material was randomly dispersed, we found pockets of material indicating that some of the sacrificial refuse had been deliberately deposited in a specific spot. For example, one of these pockets consisted of relatively large fragments of long bones ‘standing’ in an upright position; another contained joining fragments of the base of a large vase and rim fragments of a drinking vessel. We again found artefacts of a later date than the majority of the material (Figure 3), suggesting that ceremonial activities continued down to an advance stage of the Archaic period.

Trenches 2aW and 2b–e

One of the main aims of this year’s campaign was to complete the excavation of Terrace 2. In Tr. 2e in the eastern part, we excavated the last, small part of the forecourt of Building A. In the western part of Terrace 2, a 2 m wide strip running parallel to the western section of TW2 had remained largely untouched. This was excavated in the northwest as Tr. 2d and in the southwest as Tr. 2aW (see Figure 1). Tr. 2aW partly covers the area of Tr. 2a, where in 2012 we discovered a trapezoid stone feature (un. 128) and some strata – some yielding a considerable quantity of finds – that were clearly older than the 4th-century Building A and its forecourt.

Another important aim of the 2013 campaign was to expose, draw and plan TW2 and other architectural remains, and to establish their date and phasing. Tr. 2b was laid out against the outer face of TW2 (see Figure 1) in order to find out more about the date, dimensions and construction of this wall, and to verify whether an entrance or access was located on this side of the terrace.

Our excavations in Tr. 2d and Tr. 2aW brought to light a sequence of structures and made it possible to reconstruct diachronic developments in the architecture and functioning of this part of the sanctuary. The Protogeometric and Geometric periods are represented by abundant material from the open-air sacrificial refuse area, but not by any architectural features, although it is likely that cultic activities took place on the flat part of the hilltop (the later Terrace 2), immediately north of the sacrificial refuse area. The earliest architectural remains in this area are indicated in Figure 4 in red. These are a long wall running north–south over Terrace 2 (un. 85/un. 244) and the already mentioned trapezoid stone feature (un. 128) to its south. This wall is constructed along the line where the bedrock starts to dip down to the west, thus delineating a terrace or open space to its east. Un. 128 is constructed in line with this wall and may either represent its southern end or be a separate feature. The latter is more likely, as the construction of un. 128 is different from the rest of the wall; perhaps it served as an altar or offering table. These structures must pre-date the mid-7th century,

During a following phase, perhaps in the later 7th or 6th century BC, the area was enclosed by a peribolos wall (Figure 4: walls in brown). The space between the western section of this peribolos wall (un. 146) and the earlier ('red') wall was at some point in time (late 6th century BC?) filled in with large stones (un. 234 in Tr. 2aW, un. 93 in Tr. 2d). The position of these stones showed that they had tumbled down from wall un. 85/un. 244; some of the stones had ended up against the inner face of the peribolos wall (Figure 5). It cannot be excluded that this had been done intentionally to create a stone platform and thus enlarge the area of Terrace 2.

To elaborate a little on the peribolos wall, excavations in Tr. 2b falsified our initial hypothesis concerning an entrance located on the west side of T2. Instead, it provided useful insights into the construction of the W portion of the terrace/peribolos wall (un. 146). It was placed on top of the bedrock. A foundation of schist stones laid in a less careful fashion supports a superstructure using large, worked blocks of schist alternated with stacks of small lime stones, together standing almost 1 m high (Figure 6). The schist stone was probably worked on the spot, as indicated by a layer of stone fragments found near the base of the wall. The scarce pottery fragments and other finds unfortunately did not allow a more precise dating of the wall.

Returning to the platform enclosed by the peribolos wall, a semi-circular stone feature (un. 239/un. 240) was built on top of the stone fill in the southern part of Tr. 2aW (Figure 4: walls in yellow; Figure 7). It had been the focal point of a variety of rituals: inside and next to it we found burnt material and animal bones – suggesting that it could have functioned as an altar – as well as a number of iron knives and a bronze *phiale mesomphalos* (Figure 8). It also became clear that last year's concentration of metal objects (bronze ellipsoidal object with ring, bronze button, iron pins, iron hook, fragment of large iron spear, bronze horse figurine), terracotta rattle and an East-Greek or 'Creto-Rhodian' *aryballos*⁴ can also be associated with the semi-circular feature.

The stone platform created between the 'red' and 'brown' walls must have been in use for a considerable period. In the area north of the 'yellow' semi-circular feature, a series of surfaces was found in both Tr. 2aW and 2d, again with clear traces of burning (fig. 9). Broken pottery and animal bones show that this area was used for sacrifices and ritual eating and drinking from the late 6th to the 4th century BC.

In the late 5th or early 4th century BC, the sanctuary was restructured. The area east of the red wall was cleaned and the living rock levelled. In the north, Building A was constructed within the area delineated by the remains of the 'red' wall and

⁴ Crielaard et al. 2014, 14-16, with figs. 9-11.



Figure 5. Trench 2aW: stones originally belonging to wall un. 85/un. 244, lying against the inner face of the peribolos wall (un. 146/un. 75)



Figure 6. Trench 2b: peribolos wall (un. 146): foundation and superstructure



Figure 7. Tr 2aW: photogrammetric 3D reconstruction of semi-circular stone feature (un. 239/un. 240; from E), probably an altar (by Stefan Kooi)



Figure 8. Trench 2aW: bronze *phiale mesomphalos* (un. 138 #418 SF265; inv.no.2968)



Figure 9. Trench 2d: area with traces of burning (un. 88 and un. 90)

the ‘brown’ temenos walls. In 2013 we removed the baulk that had been left in place in the eastern part of the building, so that its eastern wall (un. 81) became exposed and the building’s dimensions could be established. It seems that the western and southern walls of Building A were built earlier than its northern wall (Figure 4: green and blue walls).

The area to the south of Building A functioned as a forecourt. It contained schist-made cists or bins, a stone platform, and several low division or retaining walls, which were discovered during the previous two campaigns. In 2013, a wall (un. 107) was discovered in Tr. 2e running north–south and set against two bed-rock outcrops. It can be interpreted as a low retaining wall creating a kind of low platform on which a third, bin-like feature (un. 144) was located, built against the eastern section of TW2. A stone step or bench was constructed against the exterior of wall un. 107 to facilitate access to the platform.

The quantity of small and large animal bones found in the open-air area covered by Tr. 2d – as already mentioned, in use from the late 6th to the 4th century BC – stands in stark contrast to the almost complete absence of bone material inside Building A. Other finds from this area include vases bearing inscriptions similar to



Figure 10. Trench 2d: fragmentary *Kernglass* alabastron (un. 82 #201 SF514; inv.no. 3001)

those from Building A⁵ and such valuable goods as a piece of a flower-shaped ornament of gold and a glass perfume bottle (see Figure 10). C. 320 BC Building A was destroyed, which seems to mark the end of the sanctuary.

Trench 9

This trench is located close to the summit (see Figure 1), immediately west of the rock outcrop with the two rock-cut niches.⁶ Excavations in this area were meant to clarify whether there were remains of cult activity that could be associated with

⁵ Most of the inscriptions are found on black-glazed bowls; 'HI' occurs three times, 'E' one or two times, 'AII' twice, 'A' twice (one time on a coarse ware fragment), and 'II' one time. Two other bowls are possibly inscribed with 'AI' and 'I' or 'H', respectively. The graffiti 'HI' and 'I' can be interpreted as abbreviations for *hi(eron)* or *hi(eros)*, 'AII' possibly for Apollonōs ('Apollo's'), see Chidioglou 2014, 6.

⁶ For a photo, see Crielaard et al. 2011-2012, 93, fig. 11.

the rock outcrop and the niches. However, after less than a day of digging it became clear that no more than 5 cm of soil covered the bedrock and that the area was entirely devoid of archaeological remains.

Trench 5

Trench 5 is situated literally on the highest point of the hilltop (see Figure 1). The aim of our excavations was to test our hypothesis that a modern shepherd's hut had been built upon the foundations of an older building. This hypothesis appeared to be correct, but the underlying building was a temporary structure that, on the basis of an Ottoman coin and fragment of a clay tobacco pipe, can be dated to the early 19th century AD (Figure 11). Perhaps it was used during the Greek War of Independence as an outpost or lookout by Ottoman forces, which were based much further inland at the medieval castle of Castel Rosso.⁷



Figure 11. Trench 5: Late Ottoman hut or lookout on the summit of Plakari hill

⁷ Chapman & Schneider 1993, ch. 11-14. The Livadaki inlet, SW of Plakari, was used a number of times as a landing place by invading forces, *ibid.* 191, 202-3.

Early Iron Age Pottery Project

The ‘open-air sacrificial refuse area’ in Trench 1 was fully excavated in 2013. It has now yielded a total of 32,300 fragments (see Table 1 below), mostly painted fine wares covering the Protogeometric to Sub-Geometric periods; a small but interesting group of sherds are coarse wares with incised decorations, also of PG and G date. In 2013, Dr Xenia Charalambidou fine-tuned her analyses of the EIA ceramics from Trench 1a–c with the aim of defining the fabric characteristics of local Karystian ceramics and distinguishing these from products from other Euboian centres (Eretria, Chalkis, Lefkandi). The emphasis was on the macroscopic typological examination of such variables as fabric groups, manufacturing techniques, vessel shapes and types classification, vessel surface decoration, and vessel sizes. Pieces were selected and given inventory numbers in order to create a significant corpus of representative pottery. In addition, a catalogue of EIA pottery was compiled for the final publication with a full description of dimensions, fabric, shape, decoration and chronology. A selection of samples was also made for the petrographic and chemical analysis scheduled for 2016–17, initially with an emphasis on coarse wares (mainly cooking pots for the preparation of ritual dining). These variables will then undergo quantitative analysis to reveal degrees of homogeneity or variability in ceramic production and consumption practices. A thorough understanding of the characteristics of the local pottery and the imported categories is necessary before proceeding to the archaeometric study of the ceramic material, which will be carried out in subsequent years. Consumption issues, such as the use of ceramics in the sanctuary and the symbolism involved, will be interpreted in relation to provenance issues, that is, which fabrics and shapes were selected for use in the sanctuary, for which social categories, in which social strategies and by which modes of dissemination. A large proportion of the pieces selected for the corpus of representative pottery were drawn, digitally inked, and photographed.

Tr. 1 a–b	Metal (gold, bronze, iron)	Glass	Stone, bone, shell (worked)	Terracotta: figurine frs.	Terracotta: other	Total	PG and G pottery frs.
Earlier research (1979–2009)	22	3	9	7	4	45	?
2011 excavations	82	2	2	18	8	112	6,500
2012 excavations	240	--	10	19	20	289	22,000
2013 excavations	29	--	--	3	2	34	3,800
Total	373	5	21	47	34	480	32,300

Table 1. Number of finds per find category from Trench 1a–c

Early Iron Age and Archaic small finds

Filiz Songu studied the EIA small finds covering both those discovered between 1979 and 2009 and those from more recent campaigns. The number of EIA small finds has increased substantially since the first excavation campaign, as Table 1 illustrates. A digital database and catalogue were created; both include descriptions, photos and line drawings of the objects.

Ceramics and small finds from Building A

Dr Maria Chidioglou (National Archaeological Museum at Athens) worked at the Archaeological Museum of Karystos, cataloguing and describing the 5th and 4th-century small finds and intact vases from Building A. A preliminary report has been published in *Pharos* in 2014.⁸ The ceramic finds discussed in the article were found in the excavation seasons of 2011 and 2012; they are oinochoai, jugs, skyphoi, cups, one-handlers and handleless bowls, one fish-plate, a lid with relief decoration, one lekythos and one incense burner, as well as a number of lamps. Some of the vases bear graffiti that have been examined by the author in view of the sanctuary context, as bearing witness to cultic and sympotic activities performed. The study of this assemblage aims to assess dating of Building A, as well as to ascertain some of the traits of the local ceramic production of the 5th and 4th centuries BC, taking in view the influences south Euboean pottery workshops appear to have received from Athens, Chalcis, Eretria and other regions.

Conservation and restoration of metal objects

Mrs Maria Kontaki and Mr Pantelis Feleris spent two weeks in 2013 at the Archaeological Museum of Karystos working on the conservation and restoration of bronze and iron objects. The emphasis was on items from Building A, as some of them were in a bad condition. In 2014, the EIA material will be given priority.

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⁸ Chidioglou 2014.

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