

EBAP 2007 Report to Teiresias

The Eastern Boeotia Archaeological Project is a *synergasia* of the Canadian Institute in Greece (Brendan Burke, University of Victoria, Bryan Burns, University of Southern California, and Susan Lupack, University College London) and Vassilis Aravantinos (Director of the Thebes Museum and the 9th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities). The long-term goals of the Eastern Boeotia Archaeological Project (EBAP) are to document and interpret the evidence for the land use, settlement patterns and burial practices resulting from the human occupation of eastern Boeotia over an extended chronological period. We have located our study specifically on the plains surrounding the modern villages of Arma, Eleon, and Tanagra, which are bounded by the heights of Mount Teumessos and the Soros range along the south and the Ipatos Mountains on the north, partially because of the intrinsically interesting sites they contain (Eleon and Tanagra) and partially because this area connected the Boeotian center of Thebes to the eastern sea and was therefore a major route for external contact. Our primary research interests focus on developments during the Late Bronze Age, for which evidence in the region is clearly present, yet our methods of study include a broader analysis of the region's long-term history. We are therefore pursuing documentation and study of all periods. Our initial field work in June 2007 proved very successful in terms of locating, collecting, and analyzing surface material which we found to represent activity from the Neolithic through early modern periods. In 2008 we plan to expand our collection zones, refine our interpretation of the ceramic evidence, continue mapping architectural features on the acropolis of Eleon and elsewhere, and to document the funerary landscapes of both Tanagra and Eleon.

Over the course of four weeks we conducted eighteen days of artifact collection and analysis with a crew of twelve field walkers. Other workdays were spent creating data management software, consulting with local landowners and officials, and instructing team members in collection strategies and analytical techniques. During the first season we surveyed and collected 277 units across some 20 hectares.

With a focus on the elevated settlement, provisionally identified as Eleon, our method of survey was intensive. Walkers spaced 10 m apart covered individual transects totaling over 18 km. We were fortunate enough to detect large quantities of diagnostic artifacts in nearly every area surveyed. Our walkers counted a total of 56,720 sherds in the field, of which 6,742 were retained for analysis. Preliminary analysis was conducted on all collected ceramic and lithic objects, which are now stored in the apotheke of the Thebes Archaeological Museum. More detailed analysis focused on the material from within the walled area of Eleon, some initial results of which are detailed below. Even the region surrounding the walled settlement was relatively rich in artifact counts. Average field density was 0.45 sherds/square-meter, with only 30 fields of density higher than 1 sherd/square-meter.

We also began a digital mapping project of the site of Eleon, its natural topography, and the built features preserved above the ground. Funds from the Institute of Aegean Prehistory were critical to the basic operations in the field. Funding from the Loeb Foundation has enabled the purchase of equipment that will sustain continued seasons

(total station, GPS, computer hardware and software). Additional funds from USC are being used during the current academic year for the analysis of data through GIS programming, and will provide for the incorporation of satellite imagery and aerial photographic in our study of this region.

Initial Results

Our collection and preliminary analysis of cultural material suggests three major phases of activity at Eleon: Late Bronze Age (including a robust Middle Helladic phase), late Classical-Hellenistic, and Ottoman.

The Bronze Age material was of a much longer range than expected from casual observation. Our collected material from the elevated area and its slopes included one very nice find that appears to be a good representative of the Neolithic period - a sizable sherd with broad diagonal orange bands on a cream background. The Early Helladic and early Middle Helladic periods were more extensively represented by several distinctive hand-made sherds. In the Middle Helladic the population of Eleon may have increased significantly considering the large number of sherds that we collected from that period. The majority was of the readily identifiable Grey Minyan ware, but some Yellow Minyan was also found. It is notable how much the quality of the Gray Minyan varied; some pieces were burnished in a haphazard manner, while others had a very high gloss and complicated profiles. We suspect these wares were most likely not produced at Eleon, which shows that its inhabitants were engaged in extensive trade during the Middle Helladic era. In addition to the Minyan wares it was gratifying to also find some good examples of two other diagnostic Middle Helladic wares, Matt-painted and Bichrome ware.

The early Late Helladic period, the beginning of the Mycenaean period, is signaled by the appearance of a distinctive Late Helladic fabric, but many examples had been somewhat burnished, as if the potters were reluctant to give up the old method of decoration. The Late Helladic II and III periods are well represented by numerous handles with swaths of paint at their bases, kylix stems (some plain, some with rings of paint), and rims with characteristic bands of red paint. The darker brown to black paint on a dusky background is also common. Several finely decorated pieces were also found, which will help in dating the collection more precisely. Among them is one piece that has a horizontal string of diamonds with dots in their centers, and another with a good section of a scale pattern. Several examples of monochrome deep bowls indicate that Eleon must have been active into the latest LH IIIB and early IIIC periods. Further study will be needed to see how late into the IIIC period occupation of the site went. Geometric sherds do seem to be represented, but here too, further study is required to identify more precisely the dates to which they belong.

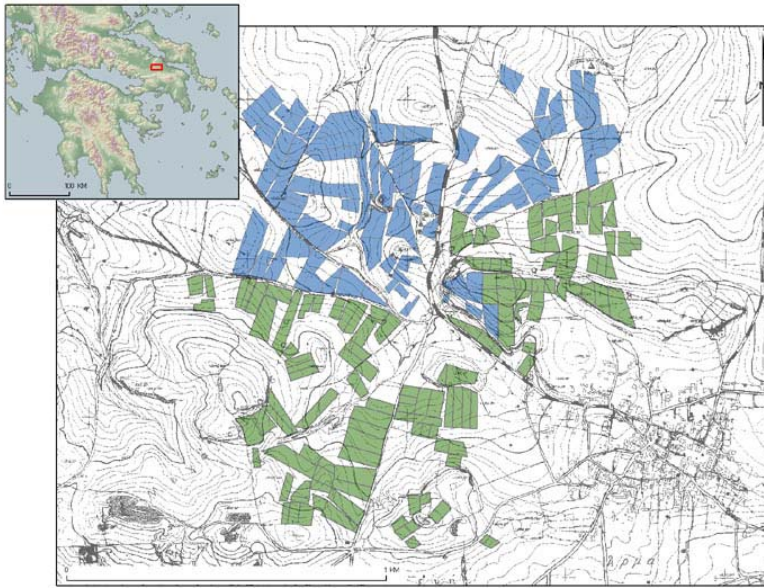
The most impressive built feature at the site of Eleon is a well preserved stretch of Lesbian polygonal masonry that follows an unusual, curved path. In 2007, this wall was drawn using a total station and ArcView drafting software by Sigrid Eliassen and her team from the Danish Institute in Athens. The wall measures over 70 meters in length and is preserved in some parts to a height of 5 meters. Some earlier scholars interested in the

site thought the polygonal wall to be Archaic, based on the style of masonry. Given the relative absence of Archaic material and the high concentrations of black-glazed pottery with highly articulated profiles, a major construction project was more likely carried out in the later Classical period resulting in this wall. Perhaps the history of Eretria provides a likely sequence of events, in which the 4th century saw an architectural revival that included sophisticated use of polygonal masonry. Understanding the function of this wall will require further study and possibly excavation. Although there are traces of towers and entry points in the wall, the concave form and the fact that only one face of it is visible suggests the possibility that this was a retaining wall rather than a fortification wall.

The post-classical tower preserved at Eleon, as one of numerous such constructions in central Greece, has been associated with the period of Frankish rule centered at Thebes (Lock *BSA* 1986). Our collected material, however, suggests a significantly later date. Of the post-classical material, exceptionally few sherds date earlier than the 15th century. We are fortunate in having members of our senior staff who specialize in this period of Greece's history (C. MacKay, Bryn Mawr College, K. Kourelis, Clemson University), and we have the cooperation of the Byzantine Ephoreia based nearby at Chalkis.

Survey in the region immediately surround Eleon also produced significant results. Among these are substantial clusters of building material to the northwest that were previously unidentified. Most significant were the partial foundations of a square tower, measuring 3 x 3 meters, with traces of a wall running to the north and south. These remains suggest the expansion of settlement well beyond the elevated center of Eleon, perhaps during the classical period. Other accumulations of cut stone are no longer *in situ*, having been moved to the periphery of fields by cultivation practices. We intend to study aerial photos of the region from earlier decades, with the hope that they will document traces of construction that remained prior to intensified land-use.

Fixed features were also detected to the southwest, where a number of chamber tombs were located in the slopes of the hills surrounding Eleon, which were apparently opened and emptied in fairly recent times. The closest parallel to these rough hewn chambers cut into the natural bedrock is found near modern Tanagra, 7 km to the south-east. The largest concentration of tombs around Eleon was found below the church of Profitis Eleias, where over 20 tombs were recorded and mapped in 2007. All were heavily disturbed and devoid of ancient material. Erosion and modern damage make the exact dimensions of many difficult to discern, but one tomb was fairly intact. It features a dromos approximately 6 m long from the hillside surface to a small low entrance cut into the natural rock face. A substantial chamber is preserved within the rock face, with only material of the tomb's modern use as a shelter evident. Further cleaning and recording of these tombs are necessary in order to detect material dating to their ancient period of use and to fully explore the possible existence of undisturbed tombs.



Survey by EBAP 2007 in the area of ancient Eleon, modern Arma.

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