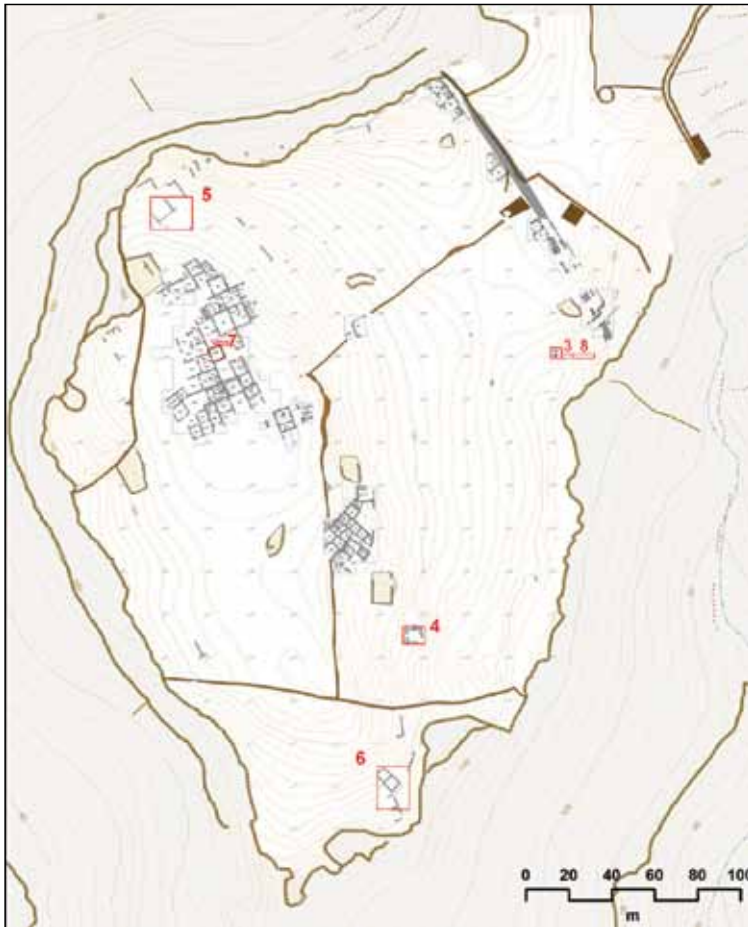


Zagora Archaeological Project: 2013 Season

by Stavros A. Paspalas, Lesley A. Beaumont and Margaret C. Miller



Figs. 1–3 (clockwise from above): Plan of the excavations; opening of Trench 6; Trench 3 mid season. Photos by Irma Havlicek, © PHM.

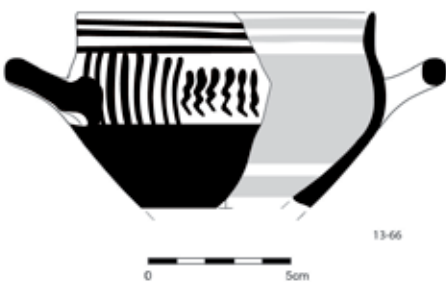


Fig. 4: LG II skyphos from Trench 6. ZAP 13-66. Drawing by Anne Hooton.

¹ ZAP is a collaborative project between the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens and the Archaeological Society at Athens, together with the Department of Archaeology of the University of Sydney, with the participation of the Powerhouse Museum: <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/zagora/>

It was so hard to wait for September 23, 2013, to come. Though the second of our three years of ARC-funded fieldwork at Zagora, 2013 was going to be our first full excavation season.¹ Indeed, it was to be the first full season since the 1960s and 1970s campaigns led by Alexander Cambitoglou exposed the geometric town, providing an unparalleled opportunity to examine life in the eighth century BC. Even now, almost forty years later, Zagora remains a unique resource for insight into polis formation in this early period. *Bulletin* readers may recall that in the 2012 season attention was focused on a range of reconnaissance and survey strategies devised to broaden our understanding of the site within its terrain.

The plan for 2013 was different: six weeks of excavation, in five zones widely dispersed across this large settlement in a bid to maximise potential information about domestic, industrial, social and political life (fig. 1). For this a much larger team of volunteers and different kinds of specialists were required. New strategies were needed too, from the macroscopic (satellite imaging analysis), through the catascopic (aerial photography by kite; fig. 6, sidebar) to the microscopic (water-sieving and soil sampling; see the Zagora dig blog on the Powerhouse website).

The five excavation areas targeted built structures and external spaces in known as well as unknown sectors. An obvious candidate for an open space was the point where the inhabitants of Zagora arrived through the town gate. Here a test trench was placed in 2012. Excavation of a wider area in 2013 exposed superimposed surfaces belonging to roads or, more likely given the width of some 10 m, a communal open space (Trench 8). Adjacent Trench 3 surprised us with its depth of stratigraphy: elsewhere on the site, soil barely covers the bedrock, but here we found ourselves excavating down two metres through rich deposits of pottery, animal bones, shell, and obsidian flakes! The explanation: it was a cavity in the bedrock, a natural rubbish-bin (fig. 3). The saying ‘one man’s rubbish is another man’s treasure’ held true: here well stratified finds dating to the late ninth and early eighth centuries BC provide a window into the earlier history of Zagora, offering new avenues of research into diet, industries, and commerce.



Fig. 5: Glass bead. ZAP 13-73. Drawing by Anne Hooton.

To the south-west, a house partly exposed in 2012 beckoned. In 2013 excavation revealed the full extent of an approximately 6 x 5.5 m room (Trench 4; sidebar, lower image); walls continuing to the north and south show that it belonged to a larger complex. Benches for holding storage pithoi lay along the north and eastern walls. The associated pottery dates to the Late Geometric II phase, approximately 730 to 700 BC. One find, rare in a domestic context, is a glass bead; as a probable import from the ancient Levant, it represents quite a fashion statement (fig. 5).

Seeking to establish the extent of habitation, we opened Trench 5 at the extreme north of the site (fig. 6). Here in 2012 a concentration of iron slag and pieces of obsidian, suggestive of an industrial installation, was observed. In 2013 careful cleaning of a major wall collapse visible revealed three walls defining a room, as well as a possible exterior space. The pottery throughout dates to the later eighth century. Walls and pottery corroborate the extent of occupation in the town’s later stages.



Fig. 6: Aerial view of Trench 5.

Aerial kite photography at Zagora



Above: Hugh Thomas preparing the camera rig for aerial photography; below: Adam Carr launching the kite. © PHM; photos by Irma Havlicek.

The site of Zagora is famous for its howling winds. Although this wind makes excavation difficult, it provides the perfect conditions for kite photography, opening up an exciting avenue of photographic recording. The technique is highly cost-effective and not only allows excavators to see on a regular basis the progression of their trench from a whole new perspective, but delivers wonderful results! (See also the site montage, inside front cover.)



Aerial view of Trench 4.



Figs. 7–8: Lion combat motif from an applied-relief pithos from Trench 7. Photo by Vasilis Tsairis, drawing by Anne Hooton.



Fig. 9: Coiling the 450 m water-sieving hose during end-of-season tidy-up in the newly-restored dig hut.



Fig. 10: Lesley Beaumont conducting a tour of Zagora for local residents. © PHM; photo by Irma Havlicek.

² Dr Stefania Chlouveraki visited the site in conjunction with her preparation of the Architectural Conservation report and gave some valuable advice about short-term conservation of the recently excavated free-standing walls.

The same picture of dense settlement in the late eighth century emerges also in the south (Trench 6; figs. 2, 4), where visible walls of a structure were plotted on the site plan in the 1960s. Yet here there are interesting nuances. It seems again to be domestic, with a schist bin sunk into the floor, but unlike the agglutinative schist construction elsewhere, this structure stands free, two rooms with walls built entirely of the local grey marble. It is too early to posit an explanation—functional, social, or topographical—for this intriguing local architectural deviation.

A different strategy located Trench 7: it is co-extensive with D26, a hitherto unexcavated room, part of a domestic complex investigated in the 1970s. Below an extensive collapse, fragments of a number of pithoi were found scattered across the whole room, along with other ceramics securely dated to the later eighth century. Pithoi were used to store all manner of agricultural produce. In some parts of Greece (such as the Cyclades, Euboia and Boiotia) they can be extensively decorated with hand-modelled applied relief and so are known as relief pithoi. This class of artefact plays an important role in early Greek art, but most surviving early figural pithoi are only fragmentary. Room D26 will change that: one monumental relief pithos stands out for its complicated imagery, including animal friezes and a scene of a sword-wielding male figure losing out to two lions (figs. 7–8). When all the fragments are collected and it is restored, it will be the first early relief pithos to preserve a substantial part of its complete iconographic programme, as well as to have a secure domestic provenance.

Our fieldwork at Zagora in 2013 produced important data that has led to our better appreciation of this lynchpin site for the understanding of life during the Early Iron Age in Greece. Our season planned for 2014 holds equal promise. We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all the team members who worked cheerfully in trying circumstances, as well as to all our supporters in Australia. Thanks too to our colleagues in the Greek Ministry of Culture and Sport, especially to Dr. P. Hatzidakis, Ms. A. Angelopoulou and Mr. P. Koulouris, for their unstinting support.² We are deeply indebted to a good number of Andrians who helped us in so many ways during our period on the island. Highlights of the season included a public lecture on our excavations, delivered at Chora, the main town of the island, and on-site tours given to local residents by the Directors. We conceived these events as a gesture of thanks towards our host community and were very pleased that so many Andrians came to learn about our excavations on their beautiful island (fig. 10).