

Zagora Archaeological Project: 2015 Study Season

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After three very productive field seasons on Andros (2012–2014), funded by the Australian Research Council, the Zagora Archaeological Project (ZAP) has reached the full study phase, and a major part of this undertaking took place from mid-September through mid-November 2015. A small team, of no more than 10 individuals at any one time, was occupied in the work areas and storerooms of the Archaeological Museum at Chora processing the excavated finds (see p. 13).

Zagora, as is known to regular readers of this *Bulletin*, is located on the west coast of the island of Andros, and it offers unrivalled evidence for the nature and organization of an Early Iron Age Greek settlement. In any attempt to understand community life in the ninth- and eighth-century BC Aegean, a pivotal period in Mediterranean history, Zagora stands alone. This is why so many scholars eagerly await the publication of our new investigations and the successful 2015 study season has now laid the foundation for the publication of our work.

Australian involvement at Zagora began in the 1960s, when Professor Alexander Cambitoglou led the first Australian expedition to the site, which he excavated through to 1974. In 2012 a new Australian project began at the site, directed by Professor Margaret Miller, Associate Professor Lesley Beaumont and the current author, as a collaborative undertaking of the AAIA with the University of Sydney, the Archaeological Society at Athens and the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. It was material from these new Australian campaigns that was at the heart of the 2015 study season. With the help of volunteers the washing of the finds (mainly pottery) was completed (**fig. 1**), and then the finds were fully recorded with the aid of tablets that enabled every day's collected information (including images) to be downloaded onto the project's database in the afternoon, and so archived. Those artefacts that required conservation were conserved, and numerous finds photographed and drawn for publication. Progress was made on the faunal analysis, testimony to the Zagorean diet and husbandary practices, while the ceramics selected for residue analysis and the archaeobotanical remains are now ready to be sent to their respective researchers.

A number of finds that the study team worked on in 2015 stand out as exceptional. Foremost of these is the relief pithos (a large storage vessel;



Fig. 1: 2015 ZAP team members washing finds in the Chora Archaeological Museum.



Fig. 2: Details of the large eighth-century BC relief pithos from Zagora. Above: newly positioned fragments; below: linear motifs. Photos by Bob Miller.

see the 2014 *Bulletin*) with the remarkable figured imagery that includes, among other themes, goat herds with hovering snakes above and a central scene in which a swordsman combats a lion, as another threatens him from behind. More fragments of this vessel were identified and subsequently placed within its decorative scheme thus allowing a fuller appreciation of the vessel's imagery and iconographical messages (fig. 2). This is an important gain as this category of large storage jars offered what was probably one of the major fields for figural imagery available to the Zagoreans, and the more that can be retrieved of it results in securer interpretations of its message-laden scenes.

Similarly, we are now in a better position to understand the phases prior to Zagora's final period of occupation at the end of the eighth century, thanks to the fill of a large natural cavity in the bedrock which included a great amount of pottery (in addition to many animal bones, obsidian tools and a few bronze finds). The fine ware pottery from this fill finds parallels that may date as early as the beginning of the ninth century, if not

even earlier. Notable within this material is the predominant presence of many drinking (and possibly dining) vessels, along with a smaller number of serving vessels such as kraters and jugs. The further study of these finds, alongside that of the cooking wares and the animal bones from the cavity, will supply important information as to social practices which generated the material deposited within it.

The 2015 study season also clearly established the spread of early material in other areas of the site, which was normally found in lower levels below structures or other features. This was the case in the house excavated in Trench 4, as well as in the area of an enigmatic unfired clay installation, associated with an ash deposit, in Trench 11. Thanks to ZAP's endeavours, Zagora has a deeper and richer history, a history that is further augmented by the important finds that date to the very end of the settlement's existence, c. 700 BC.

A major component of ZAP's work undertaken in 2015 was the continuation of the conservation of the architectural remains uncovered in the Australian campaigns of the 1960's and 1970's. This is a long-term project, undertaken at the Greek Ministry of Culture's request, which is now in its second year. We have the very good fortune to have Dr Stephania Chlouveraki, Greece's foremost architectural conservator, direct this arm of ZAP. In 2014 she and her team (including a student from the University of Sydney) completed the conservation of the remains of the sixth-century temple built on the site long after the settlement had



Fig. 3: Rehan Scharenguivel, Thodoris Marinis and Stefania Chlouveraki consulting during the conservation of the revealed buildings at Zagora.

been abandoned (fig. 3). This year saw the conservation work move to the excavated architecture in Area J that consists of a conglomeration of rooms that would have comprised a number of domestic units. The remains were cleaned, fallen stones restored to their rightful place (and this was only possible thanks to the exemplary documentation from the early Australian excavations), and—where required—new mortar (based on the precise type that would have been used by the ancients) reinserted between the stones. Furthermore, a sympathetic *cordon sanitaire* was established against the lower course of the walls thus providing them with protection against renewed damage caused by plant growth. The resulting clarity of the remains makes these ancient houses more readily intelligible to the modern visitor.

The architectural conservation programme is a time-consuming and expensive challenge. However, it is certain that when complete (and there are a number of years to go yet) the work now being undertaken at Zagora will be considered truly worthy of emulation—our site is setting the standards to be followed. ZAP was fortunate to receive a grant for this work in 2015 from the Institute for Aegean Prehistory/Kaplan Fund. In effect, Zagora competed with a large number of other sites within Greece, and was one of a small number considered worthy of support; the Project is very grateful to this American funding body as well as to the private donations from Australians that enabled completion of the season. Even so, much remains still to be done and financed before the architectural conservation programme is completed.

Of course, none of the above work could have been undertaken without the support of the Greek Ministry of Culture—especially the staff of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the Cyclades, and in particular those based on Andros. Finally, the 2015 team members are owed a big vote of thanks. They persevered, often under taxing conditions, at the job at hand and ensured that the tasks that needed to be done were completed.

The 2015 ZAP Team

The project was most fortunate to have the enthusiastic help of the 2015 team members. The Institute's Research Officer, Beatrice McLoughlin, was instrumental in the organisation of the season and, most importantly, in the field of ceramic studies, where she received especial help from Antonio Bianco and Julia MacMahon. Annette Dukes courageously volunteered to oversee the logistics of the season so as to ensure that our planned campaign of work was achieved, and succeeded in doing so. Anne Hooton brought, once again, her much sought-after skills as an archaeological illustrator to Andros and clearly documented a range of finds. Bob Miller, assisted by Lee Miller, produced great photographs of a significant amount of the material uncovered in 2012, 2013 and 2014. Dr Wendy Reade returned to Andros to conserve our pots, and under her excellent tutelage, she was assisted by Lee Miller, and Rehan Scharenguivel (once his period with the on-site architectural conservation with Dr Stephania Chlouveraki had come to an end). Lea Alexopoulos dedicated her time primarily to the processing of the animal bones so that Dr Melanie Fillios could study them, while Susan Wrigley and Hannah Gwyther worked relentlessly, along with Annette Dukes, in processing all manner of material, though mainly ceramics.

All these friends of Zagora are returnees to the project. Their good natured dedication and commitment to the archaeology of this important site is what allowed so much progress to be made. Thanks to all.