

## The “Return” to Zagora: the 2012 Field Season

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



*The view looking south from Zagora (photo: Bob Miller).*

A difficult scramble over challenging terrain, blistering heat, blustery winds and driving rains; or the most interesting settlement site in the world of Aegean archaeology, enriched by its distinctive historical profile and blessed with spectacular vistas in all weather conditions? It is difficult to characterise fieldwork at the 10th–8th century BC town of Zagora on the Greek island of Andros, rich both in archaeology and in challenges to the ingenuity of the archaeologist.

Between 17 October and 27 November 2012 the Australian Research Council-funded **Zagora Archaeological Project** successfully commenced the Australian “return” to Zagora with its first field season. ZAP, as it is fondly known, is a collaborative venture between the AAIA, the Dept. of Archaeology at the University of Sydney, and the Archaeological Society at Athens. The Project also draws on the innovative expertise of our Sydney colleagues in Arts e-Research, and further works closely with the Powerhouse Museum in reaching out to school age students and the general public more broadly. (See blue side-bar by Irma Havlicek.)

How did Zagora work as a town? Were there discrete districts for specific activities or for different social classes? Was it in any way planned or did it just grow organically, following the terrain? Did it expand from an initial point or was it at first sparsely occupied and then filled in until homes were tightly packed along narrow streets? Was there an open space for a market and public gatherings? We know of one place of worship—the altar at the highest point—but were there others, as one might expect in a polytheistic society? What was the relationship



### The Powerhouse Perspective

by Irma Havlicek

Why does archaeology matter? Or history? What can we learn about our lives and our civilization by better understanding how life was lived at Zagora c. 3000 years ago?

These are the questions we had in mind as we were developing the Zagora Archaeological Project website, in preparation for a return to archaeological work at Zagora in 2012.

The task for the Powerhouse Museum is to communicate the work and findings of Zagora to a wider audience, principally through the website. A key purpose of the website is educational; we have provided archaeological and historical context, but have kept the tone of the content friendly and accessible with the aim of reaching the widest audience.

We are particularly hoping to reach secondary school students, and are preparing free curriculum-linked lesson plans for teachers to use in their classrooms. For younger children already available are two free, downloadable Zagora-themed activities—a design-matching dominoes game and a colouring-in and storytelling activity, created by Powerhouse online producer, Kate Lamerton.



*Zagora-themed children's activities (photo: Kate Lamerton).*

*cont' on following page*

*cont' from previous page*

There are two blog components of the website. The 'Around Andros blog' is a general magazine-style introduction to the lifestyle, food and culture of Andros and beyond. It is intended to attract people whose main reason for visiting may not be archaeological, but who may then explore and enjoy the archaeological content. It also gives us an opportunity to promote the magic of the Greek islands and to express our gratitude to the Greek people who have been so very warm and generous to us while we were working there.



*The team lunching in Chora, Andros.*

The 2012 Zagora Archaeological Project provided the opportunity to reveal through our blog how an archaeological project is undertaken in the early 21st century with all the geophysical and surveying technologies, geological expertise and computer capabilities available to us now. It has been gratifying that even some seasoned archaeologists have found the information we were able to provide there enlightening.

My Powerhouse colleague, curator and archaeologist, Dr Paul Donnelly, and I experienced the 2012 archaeological season at Zagora—and climbed, cleared land for geophysical analysis, dug and brushed soil, lugged away wheelbarrow loads of soil, roots and rocks, and documented, photographed and blogged about the project—along with the other Zagora team members there.

*cont' on following page*

of the town to its terrain? Were the terraced fields along the slopes or maritime access from the bays below most important to its economy? Why around 700 BC was this previously flourishing town abandoned? These are some of the questions that we seek to address over the current three-year period of funded research.

It has been some forty years since fieldwork at Zagora, under the direction of AAIA Director and founder Alexander Cambitoglou, stopped. Those excavations had exposed a good number of Geometric period houses fitted with massive storage for agricultural produce, within a precocious fortification wall. After such a length of time, site assessment, cleaning and documentation were a necessary first step in 2012, a step that had the added benefit of helping the new team become closely familiar with Zagora. We quickly came to appreciate the utility of the 20x20 m site grid established in the 1960s, as well as the confusing modern agricultural field walls that arbitrarily divide the site into zones: the settlement is surprisingly large and, with no conspicuous landmarks, the vegetation is sufficiently intrusive that one can easily lose one's sense of precise location. The creation of a digital map of the site, under the expert eye of architect/surveyor Richard Anderson, will be a valuable foundation for all our fieldwork. What also became apparent as our work progressed was how densely settled this large site had become by the Late Geometric period and, further, how plentiful is the evidence of slag for ancient metalworking activities at a number of locations across the settlement.

In 2012 a major goal was to ascertain whether information regarding the town plan and density of population could be gained through geophysical survey of sub-surface remains. The geophysicist Dr Apostolos Sarris, with a hardy team of specialists from the Institute of Mediterranean Studies in Rethymnon, Crete, undertook the survey. Though vegetation and rock piles made much of the site inaccessible to geophysical survey, important information is now being extracted from the results gained.



*A terracotta horse statuette found on the surface in the southern area of the settlement may attest to cult activity away from the altar and temple area. ZAP 12-04, 2:3 (photo: Bob Miller).*



*Delicate geophysical survey equipment is carried along the steep tracks to Zagora by mule (photo: Irma Havlicek).*



*Apostolos Sarris pushing the Ground Penetrating Radar cart Zagora (photo: Irma Havlicek).*

A few days surveying and scrambling down the slopes from the settlement to the bays to the north and the south yielded very little information about the ancient access to and use of what seemed to be local safe harbour. The investigation of the terrain by our geologist, Dr Ioannis Bassiakos of the Greek National Centre for Scientific Research "Demokritos," offered an explanation: the geology is highly unstable, with rock slips from the marble cap on the headland a frequent occurrence. A little experimental archaeology in the form of a trip to the site by fishing boat on the part of participant Steve Vasilakis, a Sydney University postgraduate student researching maritime landscapes, and local captain Thanassis Skoinas, verified that the shore is less hospitable now than it probably was 3000 years ago, owing to such rock falls.



*Geological analysis reveals the dynamic nature of the landscape. What is now visible down the slopes and at the shoreline post-dates the geometric town (photo: Lesley Beaumont).*

A final goal this season was to prepare for a full excavation season in 2013 by setting a couple of trial trenches in the last two weeks. One was located on a probable line of town access, some thirty meters inside the ancient gate through the fortification wall; no road was uncovered, but steeply sloping bedrock led to the discovery of a thick occupation deposit, preserved intact for next season's excavation. The other trench was set on a slope in the south of the site within an area where we had noted a good deal of metalworking debris and also at which point an ancient schist house wall was visible. Clearance of the area revealed a room with a well-preserved bench complete with settings for the insertion of storage vessels. Excavation was deliberately halted at a wall fall sealing the house deposit to save it for exploration in 2013. Both trenches offer invaluable aid for planning our field strategy for next season.



*Stavros Paspalas excavating, Trench 1 (photo: Bob Miller).*

*cont' from previous page*



*Beatrice McLoughlin, topographical survey (photo: Bob Miller).*

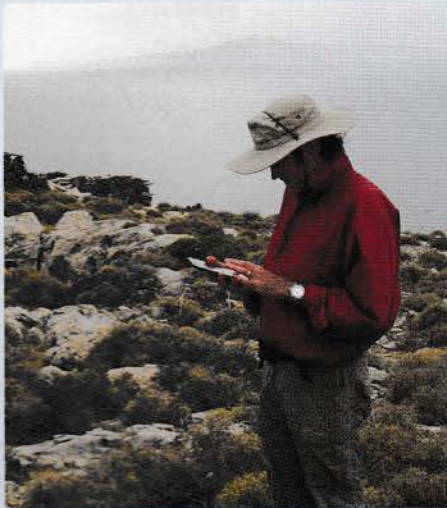
I have developed a huge admiration for archaeologists through my work on this project. Every archaeologist and archaeology student/volunteer I had the pleasure to work with was a keen team player, positive and adaptable, with the project objectives firmly in mind. I found their enthusiasm for learning and understanding impressive and their enormous capacity for strenuous physical and mental work awesome.

And may I say, they apply themselves to having fun with the same dedication as they apply to their work! It was certainly a rich experience, for which I am grateful.

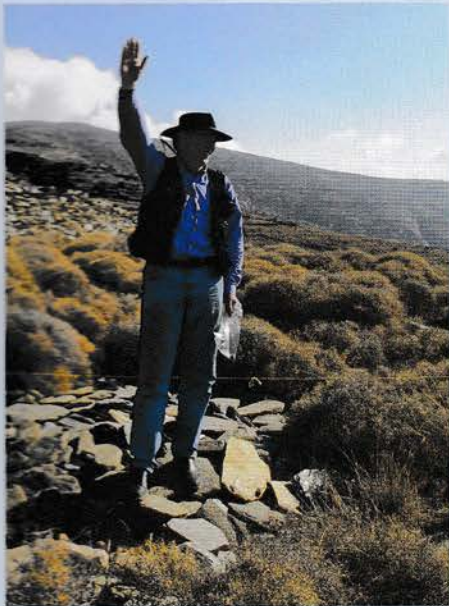
We hope that through the website we will encourage an increased appreciation of the research coming out of Zagora and the value of archaeology, and to convey the principle that without understanding our past, we are ill-prepared to fully understand our present or wisely navigate our future.

*cont' on following page*

cont' from previous page



Paul Donnelly of the Powerhouse entering data into a tablet on site.



Andrew Wilson of Arts e-Research indicating a "point of interest" on the first day of team survey training.

The content described above, including the downloadable activities for children, is at:

[www.powerhousemuseum.com/zagora](http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/zagora)

Feel free to comment on the blogs of the website or send us an email with your comments or suggestions:

[zagora@phm.gov.au](mailto:zagora@phm.gov.au)

Photos by Irma Havlicek © PHM, unless otherwise specified.



Ever ingenious, Bob Miller creates an elevation tripod for bird's eye views over house wall collapse and pithos bench in Trench 1 (photo: Hannah Morris).

Throughout our six weeks of fieldwork, the contribution of Arts e-Research at the University of Sydney—represented in the field by Andrew Wilson<sup>1</sup>—was central to developing an innovative digital recording system, both for our field survey and excavation activities. Underpinned by the “Heurist” database devised by Arts e-Research and customised for the Zagora Archaeological Project, our team ventured daily into the field armed with Samsung and Lenovo tablets with which to record their data. This 21st century approach, which lies at the cutting edge of the digital humanities, will enable us to process and manipulate our data in such a way as to extract the maximum possible information about its spatial and chronological distribution and its significance for reconstructing life in an Early Iron Age settlement.

There are challenges on the horizon: the Australian Research Council has invested in the fieldwork for six-week seasons in 2013 and 2014, but an increasingly urgent consideration is the need to engage in major architectural conservation, an item not provided for by our ARC grant. The dwellings and the sixth-century BC temple excavated in the 1960s and 1970s have survived well the ravages of time, but are not indestructible. They require careful consolidation to make their form intelligible for the site visitor and protection to ensure their continuing undamaged existence for generations of visitors to come. The preparation of an architectural conservation plan by Dr Stephie Chlouveraki is now therefore underway.

Project co-directors, Meg Miller, Stavros Paspalas and Lesley Beaumont, invaluable *apotheke* manager and ceramics specialist, Beatrice McLoughlin, and stalwart team of volunteers\*, now await receipt of the 2013 field permit from the Greek archaeological authorities to excavate selected sectors of the site. This work will help answer major questions about the development of ancient Greece during the formative period

of the Early Iron Age. Current understanding of evolving society and economy in the centuries before the predominance of Sparta and Athens in the Archaic and Classical periods is largely based on extrapolation and conjecture. Hard data about how people lived (whether in egalitarian or ranked settlements) and how the economy worked (whether agricultural and industrial activities were integrated within the domestic unit or were conducted on a larger scale and in more specialized contexts) will assuredly put any such discussion on a much firmer footing.

In closing, our thanks go to all those who helped facilitate our highly successful 2012 field season at Zagora. To Dr Vasileios Petrakos of the Athens Archaeological Society and to our colleagues in the 21st Ephorate of the Greek Archaeological Service, Panagiotis Hatzidakis, Anastasia Angelopoulou and Panagiotis Koulouris, our gratitude for your generous collaboration. To Professor Alexander Cambitoglou for his perseverance, support and encouragement. To Beatrice McLoughlin, our *apotheke* manager, archivist and so much more, what would we do without you? To Paul Donnelly and Irma Havlicek of the Powerhouse Museum, and to our Greek colleagues—Apostolos Sarris and his team, Ioannis Bassiakos, Ioannis Lyritzis and Stefie Chlouveraki—heartfelt thanks for all your invaluable input. To Andrew Wilson and Arts e-Research and to Richard Anderson, Bob Miller and Annie Hooton, our gifted surveyor-architect, photographer and draftswoman respectively, you have talent beyond compare! To the people of Batsi on Andros, particularly to our friends at the Café Kantouni and the Cava d’Oro and to Angeliki Marinaki and Thanassis Skoinas, your kind welcome and hospitality was more than we could have hoped for. To Wayne Mullen and the AAIA staff for their all-important behind-the-scenes support, the Project could not operate without you. To Virgin Australia our thanks for the generous provision of free and discounted airline tickets to team members. And last, but very far from least, to all our enthusiastic, dedicated, good-natured and utterly hardworking field volunteers,\* we couldn’t have done it without you!

\* Eleven undergraduates and postgraduates in 2012; soon we will be sending out a call for volunteers for a larger team for September-October 2013.



*Beatrice McLoughlin and Kristen Mann, the 2012 AAIA Fellow, studying finds.*



*Archaeology students break ground in Test Trench 2 (photo: Irma Havlicek).*



*Part of the Zagora 2012 team (photo: Hugh Thomas).*