

Zakynthos Archaeology Project 2007 – Summary report

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Within the framework of the Zakynthos Archaeology Project, the fieldwork of 2007 was carried out in three campaigns: a week from 16-21 April; four weeks from 18 June to 15 July and again a week from 22-27 October. The shorter campaigns in April and October were limited in scope and served to study finds in our base at the Venetian Kastro in Zakynthos town. In addition, in these weeks pre-visits and re-visits of tracts are done in order to investigate seasonal influences on the survey results. In total, 44 persons participated in the project this year, from a range of Dutch and Greek institutions.¹ The majority of the participants were involved in field walking for the intensive archaeological survey. In addition, the geological survey was continued, as well as the analysis of aerial and satellite images. Find processing and preliminary study of the finds were carried out at our base within the Venetian castle of Zakynthos, while GIS and database work was also done.

The methodology of the Zakynthos Archaeology Project is based on a comparison of the distribution of archaeological material between three different parts of the island. In 2007 the survey was conducted in our area B, which is situated in the interior of the island and stretches from the higher mountains in the west to the alluvial plain in the east. At a prominent hilltop in the center of the area the medieval site of Palaeokastro is situated, commanding two routes from the plain into mountains. During the summer campaign, most energy went to surveying this hill and the surrounding valleys (fig 1)

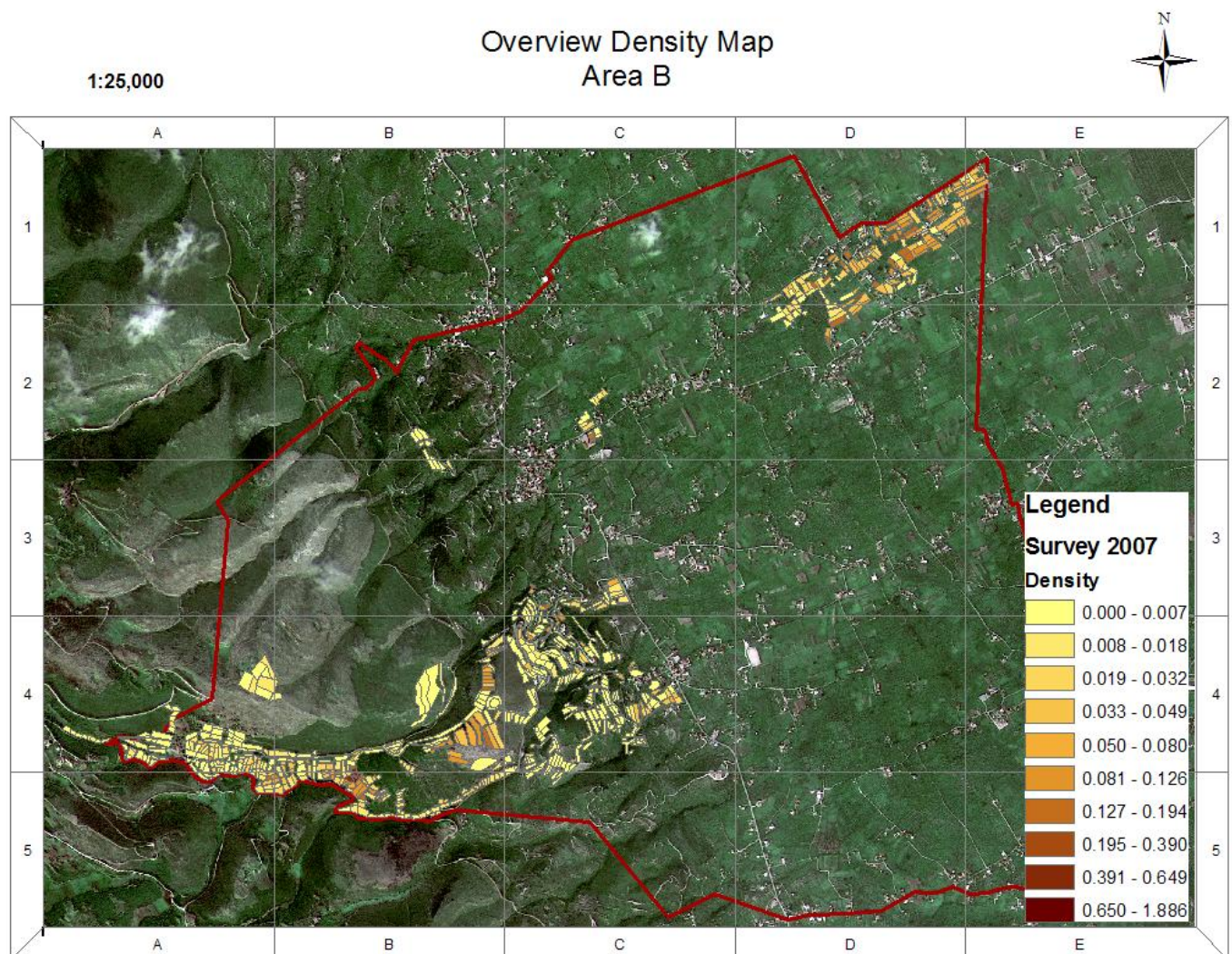


Figure 1: surveyed areas in 2007

The mountain valley west of Palaeokastro is called Achiouri. According to the Geological Map, this valley is situated in so-called “red beds” a reddish type of soil, that is often associated with palaeolithic finds. The pottery in the valley found during the survey dated almost exclusively to late Medieval or early Modern times. However, our survey also showed a clear presence of heavily patinated lithic artifacts, which were widely distributed in all tracts. However, it may be questioned, whether these lithics can be associated with the red soil of the valley. The slopes directly north of the valley showed a high number of similar artifacts as well, while a clear concentration of these artifacts was found on the mountaintop directly above the site (tract 2080: fig. 2). Natural flint of high quality occurs in the near vicinity of these tracts, indicating that this material may have been retrieved and worked in the area. Our geologists collected soil samples in the valley, which are currently being studied. Together with the geomorphologic observations in the area, we should be able to establish whether the lithics in the valley have been deposited by sedimentation or can be considered to be in situ.

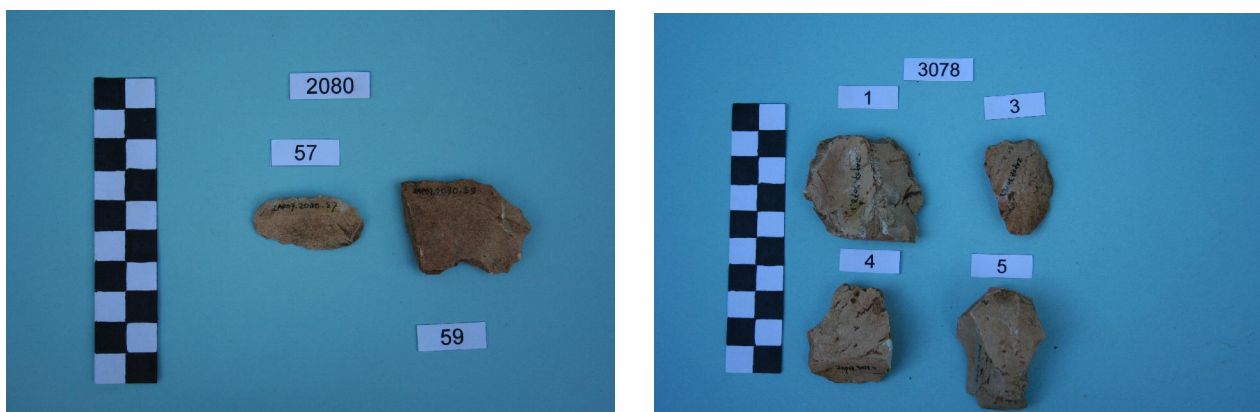


Figure 2: lithics from tract 2080

The prominent hill of Palaeokastro has clearly been important in different periods. On the northern slope a concentration was discovered of pottery dating to the Classical and Hellenistic periods. In addition, (Late) Roman pottery and finds dating to the Venetian and (early) modern periods were particularly abundant. Among the relatively large quantities of pottery, small numbers of prehistoric finds were discovered as well. Lithics objects were widely distributed on the slopes of the hill. Most of the lithic finds were rather undiagnostic and heavily patinated objects. However, a small number of unpatinated and well-produced flakes and blades that may date to the Neolithic and/or Bronze Age were also found. These may be associated with small numbers of prehistoric pottery that is mostly of reddish coarse ware with a black core and large inclusions, which also occurs in Epirus, Lefkada and Kefallonia and are generally dated from the Neolithic to the Late Bronze Age. In addition, a decorated base as found of fine ware pottery, which may be dated to (Proto)-Geometric times. Clear concentrations of prehistoric artifact were not discovered however. Further study is necessary to show whether we are dealing with a large area that was sparsely used in prehistoric times, or whether sites are obscured because of the abundant later finds.

The afternoon teams started in the eastern part of the research area, which is situated in the alluvial central plain of Zakynthos. They progressed westwards in the direction of the mountains. To our surprise, find densities were rather high in the alluvial plain. Partly, this may be related to the good visibility among the vines (fig. 3). In addition, most finds can clearly be dated to modern times. Interestingly, the German army appears to have used the area extensively during World War II, as is clear from a number of wells with German inscriptions and dating to 1943-1944. A small number of finds dated to far earlier periods, however. Some lithic objects occurred even here, as did very small

numbers of prehistoric pottery. Clear concentrations of such finds have not been discovered and these finds are most likely the result of the re-deposition of soils and/or deep excavation.



Fig. 3: survey among the vines in the alluvial plain.



In April and October of 2007 pre- and re-visits were conducted of certain tracts. The aim of these visits is primarily to monitor the influence of seasonal factors on the survey results. Agricultural practices and vegetation changes can provide a different view of specific areas. For example, a field in the area of Vasilikos that was overgrown during the summer of 2006 was freshly ploughed during April 2007. Whereas the tracts in the vicinity of this field had yielded substantial numbers of Roman finds during the summer, we now found an arrowhead that can be dated to the Neolithic and/or Bronze Age. The visits also allow us to monitor the condition of areas and sites that have already been investigated. In the area of Vasilikos building for tourism is particularly intensive. Several of our sites that were identified during 2006 appear to be threatened, as is the Mycenaean site of Kalogeras.

Within the framework of the Zakynthos Archaeology Project the geological survey is carried out by the Vrije Universiteit and the Greek Institute for Geological and Mineralogical research (IGME). Different types of geological research were carried out. A geomorphologic description and map of the research area is currently being prepared, based on observations in the field and the analysis of soil samples that were taken by coring. In addition, research is being carried out with regard to the formation of the central plain of the island. A total of 24 corings were conducted by augering in the central plain, providing the means to study the sedimentation process of the plain. An exciting discovery during these investigations were Classical sherds at a depth of almost five meters below the present surface. At another location a flint artifact and a probable prehistoric fragment were discovered at a depth of almost 2 meters below the present surface. These investigations indicate the extent to which the landscape of the island has been changed and are of value in interpreting the survey results.

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