Zakynthos Archaeology Project 2009 Summary report

Within the framework of the Zakynthos Archaeology Project, the fieldwork of 2009 was carried out in three campaigns: one week from 20-26 April, four weeks from 15 June-11 July and one week from 12-18 October. The week in April served to familiarize ourselves with the landscape and the topography of our research area A. In addition, systematic study of the lithic artifacts collected during previous campaigns was begun. During the summer campaign most of the fieldwork was carried out: intensive archaeological survey, geomorphological survey and ground reconnaissance on the basis of historical aerial photographs. In the October week we finished the intensive archaeological survey and find processing and we continued the study of the lithics. The short campaigns in April and October also served to continue our program of pre-visits and re-visits of tracts in order to investigate seasonal influences on the survey results. In total, 48 persons participated in the project this year, from various Dutch, Greek and foreign institutions.[1] The majority of the participants were involved in field walking for the intensive archaeological survey and in the find processing within the Venetian castle of Zakynthos.

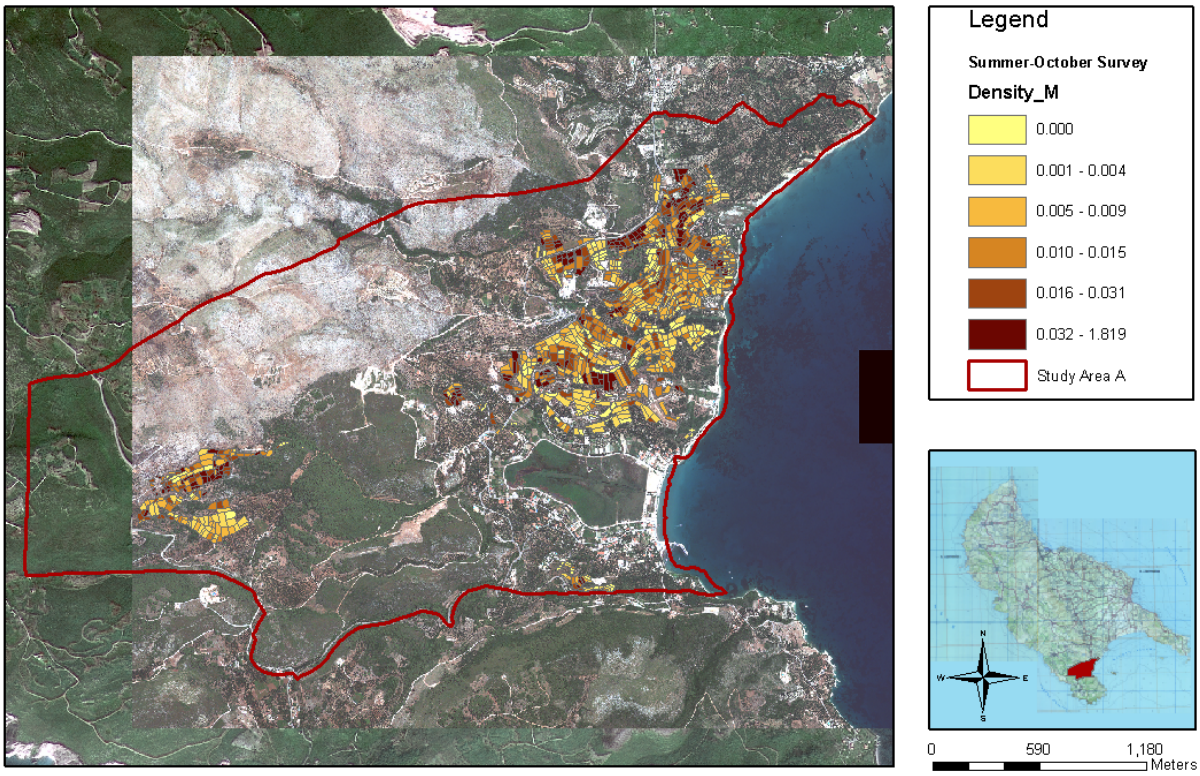

Fig 1: Density map of research area A

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. The campaign of 2009 focused on our research area A in the community of Laganas. The geography of the area is determined by the presence of Keri Lake, a brackish, swampy lake where black pitch is pushed up to surface from lower geological layers. In particular, the survey concentrated on three zones (fig. 1):

- Near Ambelos in the west, where a ruined village is present that is mentioned on a 17th century map. Our hope was to discover remains dating to the Medieval period.

- The hills surrounding Keri Lake in order to understand better the human presence around the lake. Unfortunately, the area around the lake has been substantially developed in recent years, making archaeological survey possible only in the North and the West.
- The areas of Perlakia and Kameroti to the north of the Lake. During the pilot survey of 2005 a clear concentration of archaeological finds had been attested at Kameroti. Our aim was to further explore this concentration and to understand its context by investigating the landscape around it.

The three zones cover most of the different types of landscape in this research area. A total of 988 tracts were covered by field walking, resulting in the collection of some 21,000 finds, mostly ceramics and lithics.

Ambelos

The ruins of Ambelos are situated on a hilltop just below the southern slopes of the Vrachionas mountains. The town is mentioned on several 17th and 18th century maps, but is indicated as a ruin on an 1893 map, indicating that it was deserted sometime in the 19th century. We hoped that the origins of the town dated back to periods before the Venetian period and that the area would provide us with Byzantine artifacts, of which we have, so far, identified extremely few during our surveys. Therefore, the ruined town itself, as well as the slopes above it and the valley below, where covered by intensive archaeological survey in the first week of the summer campaign. Even though the study of the ceramics is still in its initial stages, it is clear that diagnostic Medieval pottery was not present in the area. Interestingly, however, some fields yielded a concentration of ancient pottery, which has preliminarily been assigned to Hellenistic-Roman times, perhaps indicating the presence of a farmstead. Very few lithic artifacts were discovered in this area.

Fig 2. The prominent hill of *Kastello* to the northeast of Limni Keriou as seen from sea.

Limni Keriou

The lake of Keri (Limni Keriou) was known in antiquity due to the presence of black pitch or tar, which is mentioned by Herodotos (IV, 195) and Plinius (*Naturalis Historia IV-19*). At the southern shore of the lake a touristic town has developed, because of which the southern side is not accessible for archaeological survey. At the prominent hill of *Kastello* (fig. 2), to the NE of the lake, the presence of prehistoric finds has been reported by H. Zapfe (1937) and A. Sordinas (1970). Even though holiday houses have been constructed on the top of the hill, our survey teams collected much prehistoric pottery that has preliminarily been assigned to Neolithic-Early Bronze Age times. Similar pottery was scattered throughout the fields on the northern sides of the lake. There was also a substantial quantity of lithic artifacts, some of which clearly made from pebble flint. Among the flint objects were several small square blades from brown flint. One small fragment of obsidian was also collected. The distribution of archaeological artifacts indicates a significance presence on the north side of the lake in the Neolithic-Early Bronze Age. To the west of the lake, on the hill referred to as *Lofos*, a significant concentration of tiles were collected, associated with pottery, which, most likely, is to be dated in the Roman period.

Fig 3: Mycenaean finds from Kameroti, including a stone *conulus* found in 2005

Kameroti

During the pilot survey in 2005 a clear concentration of finds was attested at the hill of Kameroti. Most finds dated to the Mycenaean period, but some Archaic pottery was present as well. In 2009, this area was further explored in order to determine the boundaries of the artifact distribution. The hill of Kameroti consists of bulldozed agricultural terraces that are cultivated with olives. Historical aerial photographs indicate that these terraces were made between 1986 and 1993. To the east, the hill slopes gently downwards to the sea, where it ends in a cliff of ca. 20 m above the current water-level. The hill has a clear view towards the sea and the approach to the harbor of Keri Lake and to the routes to the central plain of the island.

The upper terraces of the hill have yielded a very high concentration of archaeological artifacts. Abundant in particular were kylix stems that can clearly be assigned to the Mycenaean period. However, artifacts that can preliminarily be dated to the Early or Late Bronze Age were also present. In addition, some later artifacts were collected, some dating o the Early Iron Age and to the Archaic period. The concentration of artifacts is most marked around the top of the hill and on the upper terraces to the SW. There are several stretches of wall visible on the surface, which appear to be older than the agricultural terraces. Particularly interesting are some walls near the top of the hill, which appear to have belonged to a square structure (ca 4x 6 m.), perhaps a tower. Large quantities of prehistoric pottery could be associated with this structure.

In the fields to the east and south-east of Kameroti, substantial quantities of pottery were also collected. Many of these can be assigned to prehistoric periods, but there are also some possible Archaic types and some much worn black-glazed pottery. In the area, which has not been affected by the bulldozing of the 1980's-1990's, there are some ruins of houses, which must have been abandoned centuries ago. The walls of these houses include some well-dressed blocks that appear to be ancient, such as a door-lintel or threshold including a post-hole. The pre-modern houses may be associated to the signs of quarrying that are also clearly visible in the area. In addition, there is a built rectangular structure, probably of a defensive nature, which may date back to Venetian or post-Venetian times.

The area to the east and south-east of Kameroti is highly complex in terms of topography and geomorphology. Our geomorphological team has, in cooperation with IGME, mapped in detail the topography of the whole area and has studied the formation of the soils with the help of coring and soil analysis. These investigations will be the basis of an erosion model of the area, which, hopefully, will help to clarify the distribution of archaeological material and identify places of ancient settlement. It is clear that the top of the hill of Kameroti constitutes an important Bronze Age site.

Fig. 4: Lithics from the concentration in Perlakia

Lithics

In comparison to the campaigns of 2006-2008 less lithic artifacts were collected this year. As noted above, there was a significant presence of lithic objects in association with prehistoric pottery in the area of Keri lake. In addition, two clear concentrations of lithics were discovered. One of these concentrations, in the area of Perlakia, had very large numbers of lithic artifacts, comparable to the quantities attested in 2008 at Mouzaki Brouma in our research area B. Both concentrations of lithics found in 2009 were in open fields, now cultivated with olives, on relatively high grounds, suggesting that they are not the result of processes of erosion and sedimentation. The geomorphological research that we have conducted in area A may indicate whether or not these concentrations can classify as "open air sites'. The typological and technological study of all lithics collected during our field campaigns is in its initial stages.

Preliminary conclusions

Preliminary results of the 2009 research in area A of the Zakynthos Archaeology Project are

- The village of Ambelos, now in ruins, does not originate in the Medieval period. Instead, some concentrations of Hellenistic-Roman artifacts have been found, probably representing ancient farmsteads in the area.

- Keri Lake has served as a focal point for settlement in many different periods, as is suggested by archaeological material on the hills around the lake. The material collected suggests a notable presence in the Neolithic-Early Bronze Age. In addition, remains dating to Hellenistic-Roman times have been attested.
- The hill of Kameroti is an important archaeological site. Surface material dates the site to the Mycenaean period, but some earlier and slightly later material is present as well. There are various walls visible on the surface that may belong to ancient structures.
- The area east of Kameroti shows signs of quarrying and the remains of a pre-modern village. In between, there are many ancient artifacts. Most of these artifacts appear to belong to prehistory (Bronze Age?), but there is also material from Archaic-Roman times. Unfortunately, this area is very difficult to interpret topographically.
- Even though lithic artifacts appear to be less abundant in area A than in the two other research areas, there are two clear concentrations of this material. Further research into the technology and typology of the lithics and correlation with the geomorphological research, should clarify the chronology and significance of these two concentrations.

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