

Zakynthos Archaeology Project 2008 -- Summary report

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Within the framework of the Zakynthos Archaeology Project, the fieldwork of 2008 was carried out in three campaigns: a week from 14-18 April, four weeks from 16 June-12 July and again a week from 13-18 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, 46 persons participated in the project this year, from a range of Dutch, Greek and foreign 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. As in the previous year, the survey in 2008 focused on 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. In 2007, the mountainous part of this island had been surveyed, as well as a part of the alluvial plain. This year, we surveyed the foothills and the upper plain, thus obtaining insight in the distribution of archaeological material in the full transition from mountains to plain (fig 1). A total of 1298 tracts were covered by field walking, resulting in the collection of some 21,000 finds, mostly ceramics and lithics. The find distribution was generally thin, with just few concentrations of finds (fig. 2). As before, lithic artifacts constituted a very high proportion of all finds in all parts of the research area.

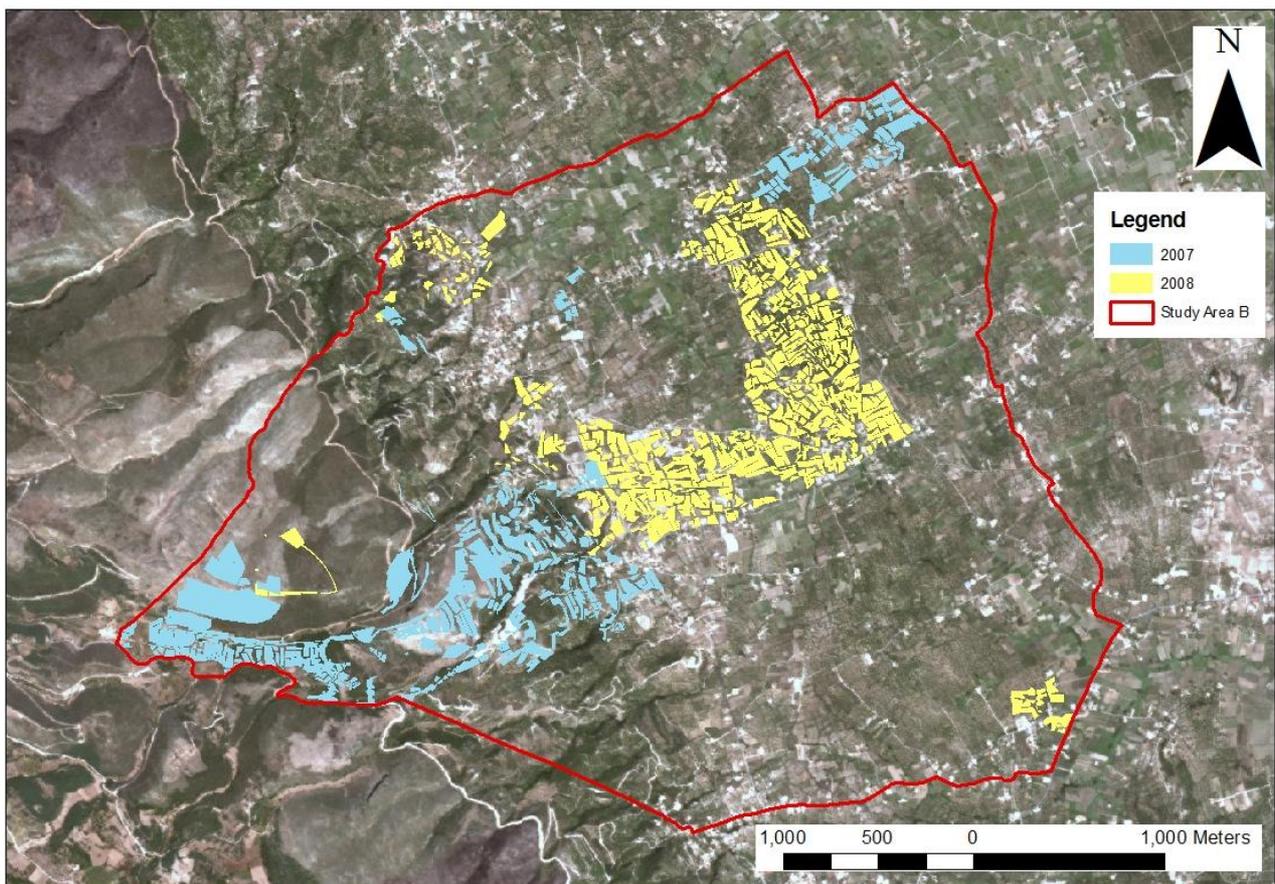


Figure 1: research area B and the investigated fields in 2007 and 2008

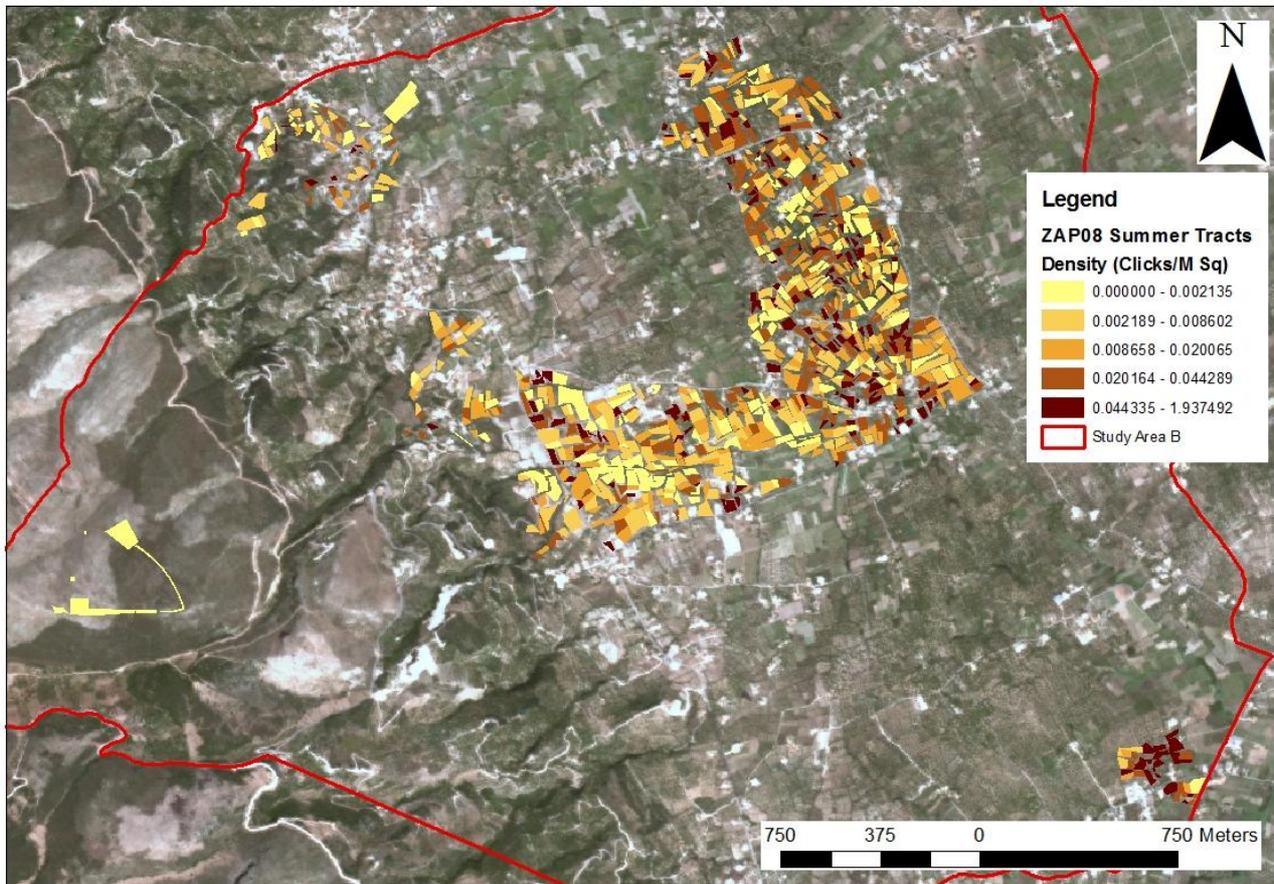


Figure 2: Find densities in the tracts of 2008

Unsurprisingly, the ceramic material that was collected, consisted for the most part of modern or pre-modern material. In general, all the material is very fragmented and heavily worn. Small quantities of pottery datable to prehistory and antiquity have been found. Clear concentrations in the distribution of this antique material have not been attested, with the possible exception of Mouzaki-Brouma, where among the abundance of lithic artifacts (see below) a significant proportion of Hellenistic-Roman pottery also came to light. Another clear concentration of finds from the same period was attested in an overgrown field in the foothills at Lagopodo, directly south of the monastery of Eleftheotria (tract 3612). A revisit in October to this field, when the vegetation had gone, confirmed the presence of relatively large quantities of pottery that can be assigned to Hellenistic-Roman times. The pottery was generally of larger size and more diagnostic than usual and surrounding fields also yielded somewhat higher proportions of ancient material. Considering the location of this concentration at the foot of the steep mountain slopes, we think that this site represents an ancient farmstead.



Figure 3: some "high quality finds" (Zakynthos standards) from tract 3612

During our pilot survey in 2005, we inspected a concentration of lithic artifacts at the locality of Mouzaki-Brouma in the south-east of our area B. In 2008 we investigated this concentration and the surrounding fields intensively, by archaeological field walking and by geological description and coring. The counting and collection of the artifacts confirmed the very high density of the lithics in this area. In order not to clog our find processing, only representative samples of finds were collected, which were studied typologically during the October campaign. These investigations confirmed that only a very small proportion of the collected samples can be labeled as debris. There appears to be a very high quantity of artifacts, which can generally be dated to the Middle Palaeolithic. These finds are done in a low-lying plain, with light-brown Holocene soils cultivated nowadays mostly with olives. Our geological research indicated that no substantial anthropogenic soil movements have taken place. Further research on soils samples and on the artifacts may establish whether the soils and the lithics have arrived in this low-lying region by erosion and sedimentation, or whether they, somehow, should be considered in situ.



Figure 4: Lithics from a possible Middle Palaeolithic stratigraphic context (tract 4003)

V. Tournloukis (Leiden University) continued his investigations into the geological context with which Palaeolithic finds are associated. His fieldwork concentrated around the hill of Palaiokastro, where he studied exposed sections to identify possible Pleistocene red-beds, colluvial deposits and palaeosols. In particular, attention was given to a small profile exposed by a road-cut (ca. 2.50 meters in length), where a palaeosol, possibly of Pleistocene age is exposed and associated with a significant number of lithic artifacts (tract 4003). Since there is the likelihood of stratigraphic embedded Middle-Palaeolithic finds, samples were taken for soil analysis and OSL dating. The study of these samples is currently in progress.

During the research of 2007, the archaeological importance of the site of Palaiokastro was confirmed. Whereas the hill was known as a medieval site, the finds indicate activities also in prehistory and antiquity. During 2008, a systematic study was conducted of the many different walls that are present at the site. J. Horn-Lopez mapped the walls by GPS and by Total Station, and described the various sections according to typology. He has distinguished ten different construction types. An important part of the wall is constructed of large undressed blocks of the local limestone. Apart from the Medieval sections of the wall, mortar is absent. The dating of these walls is still problematic and will be done in accordance with the analysis of the finds at Palaiokastro.

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. M. Gouma (VU university) conducted geomorphological survey at Palaiokastro hill to reconstruct present and past erosion processes. This would help us to understand better the distribution of the archaeological material on and around the

hill. She collected soil samples and recorded vegetation types and land-use techniques in order to create a soil erosion model. In addition, she recorded soils and sediments at sections and in hand-corings to measure thickness of soils and determine chronostratigraphy and erosion rates. The preliminary results show that there are at least 7 different soil formations present in the area related to different types of erosion and agricultural practices.



Figure 5: the ruined church of Ayios Dhimitrios at Melinado

The ruined church of Ayios Dhimitrios at the locality of Melinado (fig. 5) has four marble columns, probably of Roman date. Part of a fifth column serves as an altar in the church, while there are also marble blocks in the walls. The marble *spolia* are usually associated with a temple of Artemis that is known from historical sources to have existed on the island. The area around the church was extensively covered by archaeological field-walking, leading to very small numbers of finds, mostly dating to (pre-)modern periods. Geomorphological research was carried out in this area by Kay Koster (VU), who noted the presence of a V-shaped valley leading into the heavily terraced plain. Both features indicate the movement of soils. He conducted 29 corings by hand-auger to a maximum depth of 5.50 m. Soil samples taken from these corings are currently being studied in the laboratories of the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. At depths up to 2 meters below the present surface modern fragments of tile were still being attested. At several places, however, plat roots and burned olive pits were attested at a depth of 2.00-2.50 meters. A few tiny fragments of pottery were also attested in this area. The area around the church of Melinado seems to have been an active accumulation zone for soils. The geography of the area has changed significantly since antiquity.

Preliminary conclusions

With the 2008 campaign, our research in area B has finished. Preliminary conclusions are:

- There is a thin spread of ancient archaeological material in the plains and foothills, with very few concentrations.
- Lithic artifacts and debris occur everywhere. In the plains and foothills there are a number of concentrations of lithic finds in Holocene deposits, of which Mouzaki Brouma is the most notable. Most of this material appears to date to Middle Palaeolithic times. The exact ways in which these concentrations have formed are as yet not altogether clear.
- In the mountains, there are a few places where Middle Palaeolithic artifacts and debris have been attested in situ. Sources of natural flint and chert also occur here.
- The hill of Palaiokastro is an important archaeological site, with evidence for human activity in prehistory, antiquity and the Middle Ages.

- At some time in antiquity and during Medieval times, extensive fortifications were built at Palaiokastro. These are most likely associated with its prominent position between two routes leading from the plains into the mountains of Zakynthos.
- In antiquity, habitation associated with agricultural activities will have been situated in the foothills and upper plain. The scatter of heavily worn ceramic sherds in these areas, most likely come from such farmsteads and hamlets. We have probably located one of these farmsteads of the Hellenistic-Roman period in the foothills of Lagopodo.
- The landscape of our research area B has been subject to severe erosion and sedimentation. The geography of the area has changed significantly since antiquity.

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