

Report Zakynthos Archaeology Project 2011

The 2011 campaign of the Zakynthos Archaeology Project was a study season combined with geological fieldwork. In addition, we invested in the local Public Relations of the project by having press coverage and a presentation for the island's inhabitants.¹



Figure 1: Professor N. Kontopoulos (Patras University), Dr. G. van Wijngaarden (University of Amsterdam) and Dr P. Avramidis (TEI Mesologghi) standing next to the mechanical coring equipment

Geology

The Zakynthos Archaeology Project is based on a comparison between three different parts of the island with regard to the distribution of archaeological remains in the landscape. In addition to the archaeological surveys in the campaigns 2006-2010, detailed geomorphologic descriptions have been made of each of the research areas. In between the areas A, B and C is the fertile alluvial plain of Zakynthos (figure 2). The plain, essentially, constitutes the connection between the three research areas and its formation is of crucial importance to understand the distribution of archaeological remains on the island.

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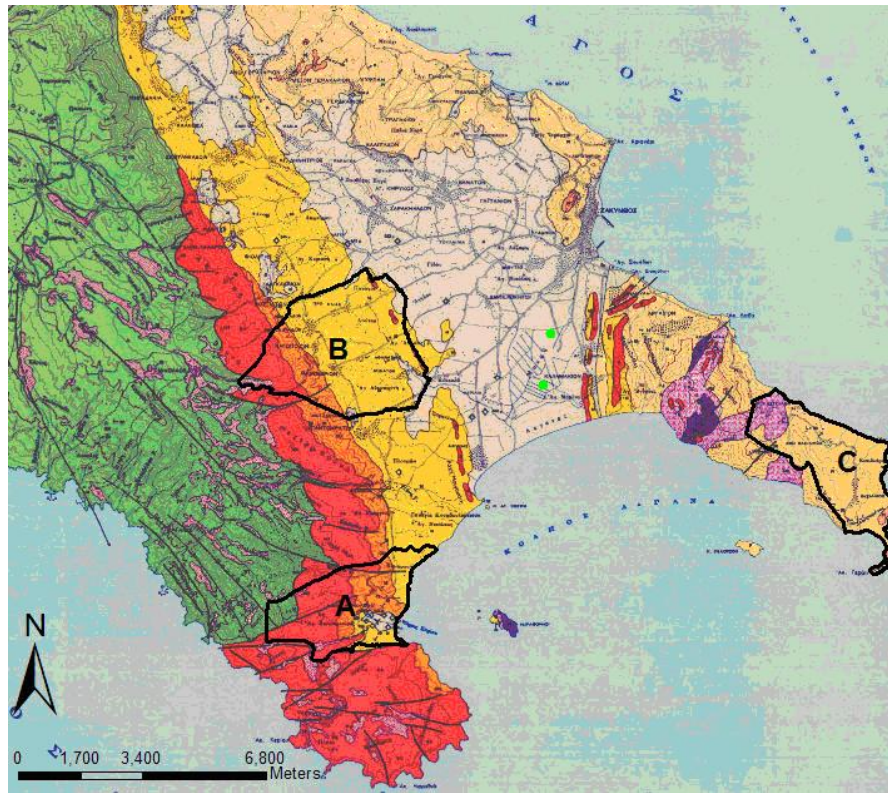


Figure 2: The three research areas of the Zakynthos Archaeology Project projected on the geological map. The two green dots in the alluvial central plain indicate the approximate locations of the two corings carried out in 2011

In 2007, exploratory geological research has been done into the formation of the central plain. This research, which included corings by hand-auger, indicated that the central plain has evolved from a marine environment to a brackish lagoon to the current plain. The peninsula of Vasilikos, on which our research area C is situated once was separated from the rest of the island. C14 dates, which unfortunately have a very wide margin of accuracy, suggest that the processes of sedimentation by which the central plain formed started from 6350 BC onwards, i.e. sometime in the Neolithic period.

In 2011 we cooperated with Professor. N. Kontopoloulos (Patras University) and P. Avramidis (TEI Mesolonghi) in a detailed geological study. The aim was to investigate the transition between lagoon and marine environments in the area of the central plain. In order to do so, we carried out two mechanical corings, at selected locations near lowest point of the central plain. The two corings were done each to a depth of 30 meters, which, according to our estimates of the rate of sedimentation on the island would take us to an age of 20,000-30,000 BP. A150 samples were taken for scientific analyses, notably grain-size and definition of carbonates. The cores were packed in plastic and boxes and sent to the laboratories of Patras university for further study. Organic samples will also be submitted for C14 dating, in order to obtain a detailed chronology of the formation of the plain. The samples are currently being analyzed in the laboratories at Patras and Mesologghi. First results are expected in March 2012.

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Material researches

The 35th Ephorate for Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities and the Zakynthos Archaeology Project cooperated in the furnishing and renovation of a suitable workspace, housed in the abandoned grammar school of the town of Aghia Marina in the center of the island. Due to these efforts suitable premises for the study of material are now available (figure 3).



Figure 3: N. Pieters and O. Hoogzaad (both University of Amsterdam) at work in the Aghia Marina apothiki.

During the field work campaigns of 2006-2010 basic classifications of collected finds have been done after the cleaning and washing of the finds. This has resulted in a database of survey tracts giving preliminary information on the presence of basic categories of material and their chronology. In 2011, we have started to study the finds collected from the surface in more systematic ways. The material studies can be separated in three different groups: lithics (1); ceramics (2); technological fabric research (3).

In all campaigns of the Zakynthos Archaeology project a substantial proportion of finds were lithic artefacts and débitage. The study of the lithics is coordinated by Professor G. Kourtesi-Phillipaki from the Kapodistrian University at Athens. In previous seasons, the study of lithics had focused on the material of Mouzaki Brouma in research area B, a substantial concentration of material, which appears to date to Middle Palaeolithic times (before 30.000 BP). Other find concentrations, notably in research area A (Perlakia) and research area C (Vasilikos) show a different technology and, to some extent, different raw materials. Possibly, these find concentrations are to be dated in later periods, notably the Late Palaeolithic or even the Neolithic. Professor Kourtesi-Phillipaki and three students spent three weeks in July in Aghia Marina, in order to begin classifying the lithics of the numerous smaller find spots and compare them to the material of Brouma, Perlakia and Vasilikos. This work will be continued in 2012.

The bulk of the surface finds collected in the Zakynthos Archaeology Project are ceramic fragments. On the basis of the preliminary classifications 55 find concentrations have been identified in the three research areas. The material of these concentrations will be systematically studied for the diagnostic features by invited experts. The knowledge of the pottery from these 55 locations will

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then serve as a basis for the study of the off-site material. Several people knowledgeable on various classes of material spent some time in Aghia Marina: Ms. Gry Nymo (Norwegian Institute at Athens) looked for material that could be classified as Neolithic. Ms Corien Wiersma (Groningen University) looked at the material that has preliminarily been classified as Early and Middle Bronze Age. Dr. Joanita Vroom (University of Amsterdam) looked at the material that is considered to be post-Roman. The typo-morphological studies of pottery by experts will continue in 2012 and 2013.

In the framework of the research Project New Perspectives on Ancient Pottery, which is headed by Professor Vladimir Stissi of the University of Amsterdam, Ms Nienke Pieters has started a PhD research project into the technology of pottery production in different periods on the island of Zakynthos. She has begun her research by identifying macroscopic fabric groups among the surface pottery of the Zakynthos Archaeology Project. These classifications will serve as the basis for the selection for petrographic samples. The sampling process is supervised by Dr J. Hillditch (University of Amsterdam). We expect that thin-section samples can be taken during the summer of 2012, so that petrographic analysis can be done during the second half of 2012. In addition, Ms Pieters will carry out fieldwork in order to identify clay sources on the island.

Public Relations

The availability of the new premises at Aghia Marina made it finally possible to start presenting our work to the inhabitants of Zakynthos. Two presentations were held: one for interested citizens from the research areas and another for members of the local government on the island. In addition, two articles appeared in local newspapers and the local television station had a 40-minute broadcast on our work (21 July 2011).

An interesting result from these press appearances is that one of the land-owners of Lithakia-Kamaroti, an important Bronze Age and Early Iron Age site in research area A is now interested to conduct test trenches on his land, where he had refused before. Hopefully, we can conduct these excavations in 2012.

Acknowledgements

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¹ The Zakynthos Archaeology Project is directed by Dr. A. Vasilakis from the 35th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities (35th EPKA) and Dr G.J. van Wijngaarden from the University of Amsterdam (UvA). V. Sarris of the 35th EPKA helped us in various ways during the research of 2011. D. Nikolia and N. Komis, (both from the 20th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities) also helped us in many ways. The study of ceramics is coordinated by Professor V. Stissi (UvA). N. Pieters (UvA) carried out ceramic studies, and was assisted by O. Hoogzaad (UvA). Gry Nymo (Norwegian Institute at Athens) studied Neolithic pottery; Corien Wiersma



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(Groningen University) studied Early and Middle Bronze Age Pottery; Dr Joanita Vroom (UvA) studied the post-Roman pottery. Bart Bogaard (UvA) looked at the finds from Lithakia-Kamaroti and restructured the existing GIS. Study of the lithic artefacts is coordinated by Professor Kourtesi-Phillipakis from the Kapodistrian University at Athens (KUA). She was assisted by Nefeli Tsante and Dimitris Charalabopoulos (KUA) and Ellen Bond (Leiden University). Mrs A. Stoker (Groningen) continued her study of historical aerial photography and satellite imagery. Mrs. A. Versloot (UvA) is conducting a study of the historical and epigraphical sources about Zakynthos. The geological research is conducted in cooperation with Professor. N. Kontopoloulos (Patras University) and P. Avramidis (TEI Mesolonghi). The directors of the Zakynthos Archaeology Project are grateful to all participants for their expertise, energy and companionship.