EXCAVATION OF THE EARLY IRON AGE SETTLEMENT AT AZORIA

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Figure 1. B3500: Sondage from the east, showing Archaic cobble fill and spine wall construction.

A goal of the Azoria Project has been to recover and document the remains of a city occupied during the 7th through early 5th centuries B.C., encompassing a period that remains a mysterious gap in the archaeological record, characterized rhetorically and dramatically in the literature as a "period of silence," or "second Dark Age." While recent scholarship has finally shifted its emphasis from historical explanations to account for the apparent lacuna in the 6th century to archaeological questions of systemic discontinuities in material patterns, work at Azoria set out to reassess evidence for sociopolitical change on the island, the character and duration of Early Iron Age (EIA) occupation, and the meaning of stratigraphic discontinuities at the end of the period. The main research questions of the Azoria Project center on how the Early Iron Age cultural landscape changed at the end of the period, after an apparently protracted phase of stable development, ultimately affecting the form of the Archaic settlement. In a sense, work at Azoria represents a study of Iron Age settlement structure in the Kavousi region, examining stratigraphic discontinuities as the basis for reconstructing changing regional sociopolitical structures. Although our approach involves the examination of new configurations of houses and communal buildings—the archaeological evidence for changes in social and economic behavior in the latter 7th century B.C.— to understand the implications of culture change, requires exploration of the Early Iron Age occupational sequences.

Figure 2. B800: Late Minoan IIIC Building from the south.

Excavations at Azoria were reopened in 2013 for the purpose of studying the transition from the Early Iron Age to Archaic periods; the chronology and character of a significant horizon of rebuilding on the site at the end of the period; and the pattern of the Early Iron Age activity on the site and in the region. While there is evidence for Final Neolithic and Early Minoan III occupation at Azoria, previous work in 2002–2006 demonstrated an initial foundation date for the settlement in Late Minoan IIIC, and continuous occupation through the Early Iron Age and Orientalizing (O) periods. Excavations have succeeded in exposing parts of the Late Minoan (LM) IIIC and Late Geometric (LG) settlement, stratified occupation layers underlying Archaic buildings across the southwest slope of the South Acropolis. Although Archaic foundation deposits typically contain EIA material, indicating that most of the area of the peaks and upper slopes of the site were occupied in these periods, it remained to explore the extent, structure, and chronology of these various occupation phases. This stratigraphic work forms the focus of the current stage of excavation at Azoria.

The task has not been easy. In terms of spatial extent, both excavation and survey have demonstrated that in LM IIIC the site was substantial, encompassing an area of about 6.0–9.0 ha—indeed considerably larger than the neighboring EIA villages of Vronda and Kastro, which probably did not exceed a hectare in size. What we normally find in stratigraphic soundings conducted so far is that the Archaic builders in the latter half of the 7th century dug aggressively into the hillsides in efforts to modify the terrain, effectively destroying or otherwise burying EIA and Orientalizing (O) buildings. That is to say, the early Archaic period is characterized by a significant cultural change and stratigraphic horizon—a dynamic restructuring of the landscape, marking a transformative phase transition in the history of the settlement. Terraces were substantially reconfigured and new foundations consist of massive spine walls and deep and densely-packed deposits of cobble-sized stones, normally over a meter deep, and containing LM IIIC–EO pottery. We excavated a number of such structured cobble fill deposits in 2013, in efforts to understand technical aspects of planning and constructing the Archaic settlement, as well as to determine the precise date of this stratigraphic horizon—which we correlate to a site-wide phase of constructing new houses and civic buildings (Figure 1).

Such foundation deposits also encapsulate the remains of earlier buildings, building phases, and sequences of occupation. One such structure was exposed in a sondage in B800, on the upper southwest slope, at the western edge of the agora—in the space behind the east wall of the Archaic Service Building (B1500-B700). The expansion of this sounding in 2013 revealed the dense cobble fill, with the expected range in dates from LM IIIC to the 7th century, as well as a well-preserved LM IIIC building (Figure 2). The limits of the structure on the south were not reached in 2013, but the excellent preservation of the walls and stratigraphy suggests the continuation of the building along the terrace in this direction. As excavated, the building is substantial, some 4.0 m long (north-south) and 2.0 m wide. On the interior, underneath the cobble fill level, a layer of roofing material and wall collapse was exposed sealing a hard-packed clay floor surface.

The walls are well preserved, notwithstanding the modification of this terrace during the Archaic building phase. The foundations stand to about five courses of small to large boulders (ca. 1.20–1.50 m in preserved height; 0.60–0.80 m in width). There is a stone platform or stand in the northeast corner—a single large stone with a slight depression contained a concentration of pebbles, and next to it, a stone pot lid. There were also patches of ash and discolored clay that indicated burning on the floor in front of the stand. Traces of ash were found as well in the middle of the room, along with fragments of an LM IIIC tripod cookpot and cooking tray.

The deep Archaic cobble fill extended behind the walls of the building on the north and east, effectively concealing but also preserving the integrity of the foundations. The unusual depth and condition of the occupation debris in the room suggest little later EIA use of the structure. This could mean that either that the building was abandoned and left exposed into the 7th century, up to the time of the filling of the terrace during the construction of spine walls, or more likely, that the Archaic builders excavated down to the building, disturbing later phases of use, but choosing to leave its earliest architecture intact. The presence of Late Geomteric (LG) and Early Orientalizing (EO) material in the

cobble fill layer confirms the existence of later occupation phases that were likely destroyed during the reconstruction of the terrace at the end of the 7th century.

It has been challenging to sort out the spatial extent and structure of PG-EO phases at Azoria. In 2006, for example, on the southwest slope, we recovered an LM IIIC tholos tomb underlying an Archaic street. The tomb contained several intact Protogeometric burials belonging to its final use phase. Our initial assumption was that this tomb, and thus an extra-mural cemetery, should mark the furthest western limits of the EIA settlement, though this would suggest a settlement size considerably more contracted than that indicated by the distribution of visible LM IIIC surface pottery. Immediately west and downslope of the tomb, however, excavation also exposed the southeast corner of a large LG-EO building, clearly a substantial structure, using boulders in the foundations of its east and south walls. This monumental construction demonstrated conclusively that the PG tholos, certainly visible throughout the 8th and 7th centuries, did not mark the western edge of the LG settlement. Its presence within the settlement has confounded our assumptions of the structure of the site in the period.

Moreover, on the same terrace, lying to the north of the PG tomb along the same contour, is yet another substantial EIA building. In 2006, we revealed the south façade of two rooms of this structure, called in earlier reports the "EIA-O Building." The walls and main rooms clearly extended northward under an unexcavated modern agricultural terrace, and an exploratory excavation at the base of the wall in the building's south room exposed a neat sequence of LG–EO occupation levels overlying an even earlier clay surface. This EIA-O building, apparently of unusual size, preservation, and duration of use, was the main focus of our stratigraphic excavation in 2013.

In 2013, we exposed the basic form and LG–EO phases of the building (Figure 3). It consisted of five rooms: a southernmost room (B3900) was evidently the entrance—perhaps a vestibule or prothalamos—which we had partially uncovered in 2006. In the 7th century, this room was remodeled, narrowed on its east side by a diagonal wall, and a stair was inserted in the room's southeast corner, providing access to a raised courtyard space on the east, providing access to a long east room in B4000. A well-built doorway connected this south room to the building's main room (B4100), which was a single hall with a central hearth

Figure 3. EIA-O Building (B4400, 4100; 4000) from the northwest.

Figure 4. B4100: EIA-O Building from the south

Figure 5. B4000: View of room from the south

in its earlier phase (LG), and then subdivided into two rooms in its later phase (EO). The back or northern room of the building (B4400) was built up against a bedrock outcrop and accessible from the main room through a doorway at the east end of the dividing wall. Finally, a fifth room, the east room (B4000), was a narrow elongated hall, apparently added onto the building in the 7th century phase, though it could have an earlier foundation. It was accessible through a doorway and courtyard at its southern end, mentioned above, and thus communicated with the main rooms from the outside of the building on the south. A potter's kiln was constructed within the northern end of this east room.

The EIA-O Building is unusually large, carefully constructed, and enjoyed a long use life without significant modification until its 7th century phase. It is about 10.0 m long and 8.0 m wide in its internal dimensions. It was subdivided into two rooms in its earliest phase (B4100 on the south and B4400 on the north), and four rooms in the 7th century. The main room (B4100) of the building had complex stratigraphy. A deep layer of stone debris and very dark soil, containing a large amount of pottery and animal bones, covered most of the area of B4100. This dark soil appears to be the remains of an Archaic-period dump, perhaps accumulating over a long period of time in the course of the 6th and 5th centuries while the adjacent terrace to the east (B4000) had a street running along the contour above the building and directly over the narrow room in B4000. The presence of this Archaic dump within the exposed walls of an abandoned EIA building is unusual on the site—normally the architecture of such early structures is carefully concealed, buried by cobble fill, as in the case of the LM IIIC building in B800 mentioned above.

Below this dump layer, we discovered a remarkably uniform deposit of cobbles, about 30 cm deep—in size, shape, and distribution, looking very much like the Archaic cobble fill we normally find in foundation deposits across the site. This stone fill extended across the full extent of the internal space of the building, also forming the foundation for a small buttressing wall or screen wall in the southeast corner of the main room, evidently installed to support the south segment of the room's east wall, which had at some point slipped to the west, perhaps bowing under the weight of the fill and packing for the Archaic street in on the east. It appears as if the layer of cobble fill was originally deposited as part of a filling episode, perhaps for the foundations of an Archaic building project, but then abandoned, and left exposed to collect the dumped debris.

Below this cobble layer, a 10–20 cm stratum of occupation debris was found distributed across a narrow patch of a clay floor surface in the eastern side of the room. This floor, representing the latest use phase of the room, was extant for some 2.0 m on the south (in the southeast corner of the room, narrowing to about one meter from the east wall). Because of erosion, the surface does not survive across the full spatial extent of the room, but enough of it was recovered along the east side to indicate that it was part of a significant renovation phase in which the floor level of the room was elevated, and subdivided into two rooms by means of a cross wall and connecting doorway on the east. The renovation of the room and surface belongs to the Early Orientalizing period.

The material exposed underneath this 7th c. floor level consisted of a deep stratum of floor packing, dense stone debris, and roofing clay, covering another earlier clay floor surface—this floor represents the earliest occupation phase so far recovered in the building. The floor is remarkably even and well-consolidated, and though there are patches of burning, they are probably

indications of cooking activities. The surface is preserved across the entire area of the room, underlying the later cross-wall segments, though it is best preserved in the south. In the center of the room there was a hearth of burned clay, roughly rectangular in dimensions (ca. 1.0 x 0.5 m), though partially obscured by the later cross wall. To the southeast of the hearth is a stone post support (Figure 4).

This LG-EO room was an impressive space nearly square in shape, 6.50 m long (north-south, interior dimensions) and 6.0 m wide (east-west) with the hearth centered in the east-west axis, about 3.80 m from the south wall, so slightly north of center on the north-south axis. Almost 40 square meters in area, the room was substantial, with a well-fashioned doorway leading south into the vestibule (B3900), which served as the prothalamos or front room of the building. A doorway in the north (about 1 meter wide) led over a threshold block into B4400, the north room of the building, which apparently used the same floor level continuously through two major phases of occupation with little significant change. The floor of the northern room is well preserved across the central and eastern parts of the room. The room is 2.70 m wide (north-south), and extant to some 5.0 m east-west. The absence of a stratigraphically distinctive floor surface, at the level of the later floor in the adjacent rooms to the south, along with the stepped transition through the doorway, suggests that the room's floor continued in use, with some evident resurfacing through various periods of occupation.

The east room of the building (B4000) is a long hall-like space, bordering the entire east side (Figure 5). It represents a modification of the EIA-O building in 7th century. In this phase, the south room or vestibule in B3900 was truncated, its southeast corner removed, and a diagonal wall, put in its place, narrowing the space, but expanding the area on the east side, whose ground level was raised to provide access to the east room of the building. This east room is 9.20 m long (north-south) and about 1.80–2.0 m wide, with the space widening slightly at its southern end. Narrowing at its northern end (to about 1.5 meters), the room contained the chamber of a potter's kiln (Figure 6). The kiln occupies about 3.5 m of the northern end of the room, marked on the south by an aperture to the stoking chamber and stepped access to the door of firing chamber, which is no longer preserved. The stratigraphy of the room is complex and important in evaluating and dating the transition from Early Orientalizing to Archaic periods.

In the 6th and early 5th centuries, the entire area of this room was systematically filled in and covered by a street running along the contour of the southwest slope above the Southwest Buildings and immediately below the Service Building (Figure 7). We orig-

Figure 6. B4000: Potter's kiln from the southeast.

Figure 7. B4000: Archaic street and cobble packing from the south.

inally exposed part of this street in the adjacent trench (B3000) to the south in 2006. We continued excavation to the north in efforts to expose the full extent of the street surface running below the Service Building. Excavation in 2013 revealed the upper surface of the street, a packing or resurfacing level, and underneath, an earlier street level. Underlying the earliest street and packing, was a 30 cm-deep layer of Archaic cobble fill (Figure 7). Occupation debris underlying the cobble fill consists of the abandonment-phase deposition within the 7th century room. Roofing material, occupation debris, and wall collapse, mixed with localized indications of burning, were found throughout the room. A number of whole vessels were found on the floor along the east side—including a small cookpot, two short necked cups, a hydria, a coarse plain krater with an inscription, and an aryballos.

The stratigraphy of the area over the kiln, in the north part of the room was a bit different. While the Archaic street extended over this area, stepping up slightly with a single-course step in the street, the cobble fill consisted of densely packed large cobbles and small boulders, overlying a thick layer of greenish gray phyllite clay—similar in consistency to roofing material, but possibly serving as leveling fill raked across the area and used as bedding for the cobble fill.

Excavation underneath the cobble fill exposed the kiln's stoking chamber, which contained a mixture of ash, and ashy and burned soil (Figure 6). The kiln's clay floor—that is the actual floor of the firing chamber—and wall lining do not survive, though small patches of red clay are visible on the north and east walls, and adhering to the central pillar or post, while fragments of the floor itself were found within the stoking chamber. The base of the central pedestal consists of two boulders, standing about 0.5 m high, though the floor of the stoking chamber was not reached in 2013. The kiln's north and east walls stand to a preserved height of about 1.5 m. The east wall of room B4000 has a regular and well-constructed face, though a change of construction is visible at the point of the kiln's entrance. Here the east wall abuts two large boulders, apparently stacked, and protruding into the space of the kiln's chamber, and the even coursing is discontinued at this juncture—forming a distinctive curve around the back of the building and extending along the north to form the wall of the firing chamber.

The stones lining the stoking chamber and the walls of the firing chamber are burned, in some cases calcined, and stained with a black and gray powdery ash. Though the floor of the kiln does not survive, fragments were found within the stoking chamber. Its position can be estimated by a line of ash, which corresponds to the top of the step at the entrance. Fragments of both wasters and pisé lining of the walls and floor have been recovered from the stoking chamber and adjacent contexts.

The function of the EIA-O Building is not certain, and an analysis and interpretation of the structure must await a complete study of the ceramic, faunal, and plant assemblages from the various phases of use, as well as further excavation within the building itself. It is clear, however, that the earliest floor surface recovered was used continuously from LG into EO, and in a transitional phase in the 7th century the rooms were largely cleared of their contents, perhaps recycled and moved to other areas of the site before abandonment. Only the east room (B4000) preserves an assemblage of mostly complete vessels, evidently buried at the time of the construction of the first street at the end of the 7th century. Why the rest of the building remained only partially filled-in, with its architecture left mostly exposed, is not yet clear and will require further consideration. The taphonomy of the building however represents a marked departure from patterns observed elsewhere on the site, where EIA structures appear to have been destroyed or completely concealed by Archaic filling and building operations.

The large size of the EIA-O Building, its complex plan, regularity of construction, and integration of a pottery kiln within the building are unusual features for normal domestic space, as is its close proximity to the LM IIIC-PG tholos tomb, lying a few meters to the south of the entrance. Moreover, excavation in 2006, in the courtyard and doorway of the east room, discovered a substantial hearth or pyre deposit—a dump of burned animal bone and fine drinking wares, representing multiple periods of use (EIA-EO) and suggesting accumulated debris from ritual, drinking, and dining episodes. Thus the evidence, while not conclusive, presents characteristics of a special-function building used for dining and drinking, over extended period during the Early Iron Age, and left mostly intact during the rebuilding of the site at the end of the 7th century. As we have emphasized in earlier reports, the plan and dimensions of the main structure are not inconsistent with the form of known Early Iron Age hearth temples.

A new phase of excavation at Azoria, begun in 2013, has allowed us to begin piecing together a picture of the Early Iron Age town underlying the 6th-century settlement, and new evidence for reconstructing details of culture change in the transition from Early Iron Age to the Archaic period. The site has produced not only a palimpsest of these earlier occupational levels, but clear indications of continuous occupation for several centuries until an abrupt phase transition in the late 7th century transformed the Early Iron Age topography and cultural landscape. For the most part, the Archaic builders sought to bury these earlier settlement remains—the Archaic street constructed along the southwest slope is a remarkable example of this process: the east room of the EIA-O Building was completely filled in preserving but also concealing its contents and architecture. In general the placement of Archaic buildings seem to have avoided using EIA walls for their foundations, and never does the orientation of the earlier architecture seem to predict or guide the structuring of space in the late 7th and 6th centuries. While some buildings were destroyed in the process of rebuilding the settlement, for the most part it appears as if the earlier structures and occupation debris were contained or integrated into the Archaic foundations, as if intentionally preserved but effectively concealed by the new urban plan.

This dynamic alteration of the landscape at the end of the 7th century involved a deliberate manipulation of the artifacts and features of the Early Iron Age settlement. We have demonstrated elsewhere that this physical engagement with the earlier settlement involved recovering and removing earlier objects, such as pottery, figurines, iron slag, and other artifacts from their original context, and then relocating and reintegrating these things into the buildings of the Archaic city. The construction of the Archaic city required not only new buildings and a new settlement form and structure, but an active and dynamic engagement with the past—the places and buildings—which involved a series of conscious decisions to retranscribe the deeply stratified Early Iron Age settlement into the Archaic landscape. The Archaic city was in a sense not merely superimposed on earlier structures, but its creation was an active negotiation with the past, in many ways, a recognition, reaffirmation, and recreation of the EIA systemic contexts of households and communal places that find new forms in the Archaic city center.

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