Preliminary report on the 2012 season at Plakari

Jan Paul Crielaard

During the 2012 field season, which lasted from 16 July to 14 August, we continued our excavations on the western side of the hill top. Of the 2011 trenches, Trench 1 was enlarged, while in Trench 2 work was concentrated in sections 2a and 2c (see Map 1: 1a-b, 2a, c). The excavations in Trench 3 in the northwestern corner of Terrace 1 were not continued.¹

Map 1 Location of 2012 trenches.

Trench 1 a-b
Trench 1 is located on the south slope of the Plakari hill top (Map 1: 1; Map 2). This is the area where the southern section of Terrace Wall (TW) 1 can be traced over a distance of several metres until it reaches the point where it has partly collapsed due to the bulldozing of road A2 to its south. As a result of this collapse, a large deposit of pottery, bone and other finds had become visible in the scarp of the road. This deposit has been interpreted as a sacrificial refuse pit (bothros or apothêtēs), supposedly dug in

¹ For details, see under Results > 2011 season > PDF
Map 2 Trenches 1b, 2a and 2c.
a peripheral part of the sanctuary, against TW 1. Trench 1a, which to the south is bordered by the road scarp, is relatively small (4 x 2 m) but it yielded a host of animal bones, small objects of metal, stone and terracotta, and pottery fragments (10th–7th centuries), especially painted fine wares, linked to eating and drinking. Most of these finds had been uncovered within a thick layer of gravel. Its position shows that it had slid down from an area higher up the hill, to be halted first by a pocket formed by natural rock folds and then by TW1.

In 2012, last year’s Trench 1a was dug down to bedrock and then considerably expanded (= Trench 1b) until the two trenches together covered an area of 77.38 m² (Fig. 1). Here, the primary aim of our activities was to retrieve as much pottery and as many small finds and animal bones and botanical macro-remains as possible, in order to obtain more information about the cult, the cult activities, the people participating in these rituals, and the chronological span of these cultic activities. As in 2011, the collection of finds was maximized with the help of dry-sieving and wet-sieving, using a flotation machine. In total, we retrieved some 22,000 pottery fragments, almost all datable to the Early Iron Age, no less than 289 small finds (see Table 1 below; Fig. 4a,c; also PDF Metal conservation 2012: nos. 8–14) and again many animal bones. One of the Geometric fragments bears a graffito in the shape of the letter alpha; this is the earliest example of writing retrieved from the site thus far. A few objects are of a later date, including oil flasks in the shape of a bird or sirene (mid-6th century).²

Sheet metal  Finger / ear rings  Pins / needles  Fibulae  Beads  Knives / blades  Arrowhead  Figurines  Figure vases  Scarabs  Spindle whorls  Fragments (unident.)  Other  Total
Gold 1
Bronze 5 56 19 11 1 7 3 102
Iron 4 75 3 22 1 26 4 135
Lead 1
Stone 1 1
Terracotta 1 1 11 1 1 3 12 4 39
Shell (worked) 1
Bone 1
Total 5 62 94 14 3 22 1 13 23 3 289

Table 1: Trench 1a-b: number of finds per find category recovered in 2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tr. 1 a-b</th>
<th>Metal (gold, bronze, iron)</th>
<th>Glass</th>
<th>Stone</th>
<th>Terracotta: figurine frs.</th>
<th>Terracotta: other</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>PG and G pottery frs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earlier research (1979–2009)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 excavations</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>6,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 excavations</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>22,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>28,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Number of finds per type of material from Trench 1a–b.

One of the main questions of this campaign was whether we could discern patterns in the distribution of the *bothros* material, or indeed identify where the *bothros* was originally located. According to the preliminary conclusion we drew last year, votives and other sacrificial material had washed down the hill slope, possibly from Terrace 2. Due to the much larger area that was exposed during the 2012 campaign, we were able to establish that this was only partly the case. In the northern part of Trench 1b, we touched upon a part of TW 2 where the lower courses were intact (see Map 2: un. 4); this retaining wall had been built over a thin layer of sacrificial debris (see Map 2: un. 5). Moreover, we found that in several places on the hill slope certain categories of finds were clustered together, for instance small concentrations of dress pins, or sherds from the same vessel (see Fig. 2a–b). This clustering was even clearer in the case of parts of large iron objects (one possibly part of a tripod) that had been buried together in two adjacent cavities (Fig. 3). On the other hand, in a number of cases joining sherds were found in very different...
Fig. 2 Tr. 1b: Attic MG I skyphos. a as found in situ; b partly restored.
locations, suggesting that some of the EIA pottery had been deliberately broken before being left on the hill slope. It seems, then, that some objects had been deliberately deposited in a specific spot, whereas others – notably pottery fragments – were spread over the hill slope in a more random fashion. Some of the material had slid down the hillside and was halted either by the uneven surface of the natural rock or by Terrace Wall 1.

**Trench 2**

Trench 2 is situated to the north of Trench 1 and immediately to the west of the summit (Map 1: 2; Map 2). This is the area of the smaller of the two terraces, Terrace 2 (T2), which is delineated on three sides by TW 2. Perhaps TW2 set apart the section of the sanctuary that was more sacred and that gave access to the area of the rock-cut niches a little more to the east. In 2011, our excavations had focussed on Trench 2c, in which a rectangular building of dry stone masonry had come to light. This building (Building A) measures approximately 4.65 m (N–S) by >5.21 m (W–E); for stratigraphical reasons, we did not excavate its eastern wall. A series of fine schist slabs uncovered against its northern wall may have functioned as low tables or shelves. A host of plain or black-glazed pottery, mostly dating to the 4th century, was found on and next to these slabs. The building’s interior also contained many iron and especially bronze items. Most of the pottery was associated with the preparation and consumption of food and drink. This seems to have happened at night, as a considerable number of terracotta lamps were found with the pottery. This and the presence of a hearth in the centre of the room, allow us to interpret it as an hestiatorion.

In 2012, we continued our work in Trench 2c, excavating the interior of Building A down to bedrock (Fig. 5). As in the previous season, it yielded a rich collection of plain and black-glazed 4th-century pot-
tery (figs. 4d, 6) and bronze jewellery and other metal items (Fig. 7; PDF Metal conservation 2012: nos. 5–6). More surprising were the finds of two objects dating to much earlier periods, namely a terracotta korē figurine from the second half of the 6th century (Fig. 4b) and a Protocorinthian conical oinochoe from the later 8th century BC. In 2011, we found an early 5th-century lekythos in this trench.

In Trench 2a to the south of Building A (Map 2), we exposed the forecourt of the hestiatorion (figs. 8–9). This contained two schist-made cists or bins, a stone platform, and several low division or retaining walls (Map 2). The most obvious parallels for the stone bins and platforms are found in Early Iron Age and later cultic contexts in the Cyclades. However, the stratigraphy and building style of the walls show that the forecourt and stone-built installations are contemporary with the 4th-century hestiatorion. It appears that before the building and its forecourt were constructed, the area had been thoroughly cleaned, with the exception of a single Geometric sherd. However, we recovered surprisingly few finds from the period that the hestiatorion was in use; exceptions include the lower part of the face of an Archaic terracotta statuette, a remarkably well preserved bronze horse figurine and a possible plumbum made of bronze (Fig. 10; PDF Metal conservation 2012: nos. 2 and 4). The horse figurine was found near the southwest corner of Trench 2a; later it appeared that this small area was the only part of the trench where earlier levels had been preserved, sealed by the surface of the forecourt. Near the end of the campaign we touched upon a rectangular stone structure (Map 2: un. 128: a bench or altar?) and, next to it, several intact objects that may date to the 7th century BC, including two aryballoi, an iron sword and a terracotta rattle (Fig. 11; sword: see also PDF Metal conservation 2012: no. 18).\footnote{4 For a demonstration of the rattle, see video report on this website: Media > Video > ‘2600-year-old rattle’.

Preliminary conclusions

Our preliminary conclusion is that from the 11th or 10th century BC onwards, the western part of the hill top was used for cultic activities. At this point, it is not possible to determine whether these activities took place in the open air as at contemporary Zagora (Andros), Koukounaries (Paros) and Hyria (Naxos), or whether the area housed one or more cult buildings. A first glimpse of cult installations dating to an early phase of the sanctuary is provided by this year’s discovery of a stone bench or altar, and what seem to be dedications lying more or less in situ (sword, aryballoi, rattle). We expect that further excavations in this area will shed more light on the nature of this context.

It is likely that the part of the hill slope south of the later Terrace 2 (area of Trench 1a–b) functioned as an open-air bothros, delineated to the south by TW 1, which can be regarded as a (freestanding) temenos wall. The huge quantities of broken pottery suggest that during the Geometric period, this area was used for large-scale or frequent sacrificial feasting, accompanied by animal sacrifices and the consumption of meat, as indicated by the find of iron knives and large quantities of animal bones. The dedication of diadems, finger...
rings, dress pins, fibulae and other, especially female personal ornaments may be connected to such lifecycle rituals as the later *proteleia*, that is, pre-wedding sacrifices that were part of rites of passage before marriage.\(^7\)

On the basis of the present evidence, it is difficult to establish whether cult continued into the Classical period. So far, the 6th and 5th centuries are represented by only a few securely datable finds (some black-figure sherds in Tr. 2a; the above korē figurine in Tr. 2c; bird or sirene vases in Tr. 1b ). Terrace 2 was constructed

Fig. 8 Tr. 2c and 2a: hestiatorion and forecourt, seen from North, with Tr. 1b in the background.
in the 4th century BC, after the area that it encloses had been thoroughly cleaned. On the other hand, it is
of interest that in the hestiatorion – the main feature for which Terrace 2 was built – the tradition of sacrificial
feasting was continued. Graffiti on pottery indicate that these celebrations honoured the goddess Nikē
and probably Apollo. The cult installations in the building's forecourt (bins and stone platform) followed
a model that had a history going back to the Early Iron Age. In the 4th-century hestiatorion, a number of
antiques were preserved (Protocorinthian oinochoe, Archaic korē figurine, early 5th-century lekythos).
Perhaps these were valued as a tangible link with the earlier cultic history of the spot.

**ANALYSIS OF FAUNAL REMAINS**

From 7 to 16 August 2012, the animal remains collected during the first two excavation seasons (2011
and 2012) were studied by Dr Maaike Groot at the Archaeological Museum in Karystos. A total of
26,592 fragments were analysed; the vast majority of these had been retrieved from Trench 1a–b. With the
exception of a small number of fragments that require further investigation, all fragments were identified
as far as possible to species and skeletal element. Due to the extremely high fragmentation, only a small
proportion of the fragments could be identified to species.

No wild mammals or fish were present (although one tooth requires further investigation). Bird
remains were rare. Only 6% of the 26,592 fragments could be identified to species. Sheep dominates
the assemblage, followed at some distance by cattle and pig. The only other species present is dog. Of
the animal bone fragments, 18% have been burned. One interesting finding is the overrepresentation
of burned femur and tailbone fragments, which fits exactly with the expectations based on literary and
iconographic sources and other zooarchaeological research.

In November–December 2012, Dr Groot stayed at the Fitch Laboratory at the British School in
Athens (made possible by a Senior Visiting Fellowship) in order to analyse the small number of frag-
ments that required a reference collection, and to conduct a literature study and a preliminary analysis
of the data. The analysis was focused on skeletal element representation and burning. A report on the
preliminary results of her studies will be published in *Pharos* along with the preliminary report on the
2012 field campaign. With further fieldwork to be carried out in the next three years, the current plan
is that all faunal remains collected in that period will be analysed in the last excavation season in 2015.
A final report on the faunal remains will be written at that time.

**STUDY OF THE EARLY IRON AGE POTTERY**

So far, about 28,500 pottery fragments have been collected from Trench 1a–b (2011–12). The majority
of the sherds were of decorated fine wares dating to the Protogeometric and Geometric periods. Also
noteworthy is a small but interesting group of coarse wares with incised decorations from the same
general period. The ceramics from Trench 1a–b are being analysed for final publication by Dr Xenia
Charalambidou.

Dr Charalambidou was in Karystos from 28 July to 18 August to study the Early Iron Age pottery
that was found in these trenches during the 2011 and 2012 campaigns. A first and essential step was to
define the criteria to determine the characteristics of the local pottery production in the Karystia and
distinguish them from those of other Euboean centres (Eretria, Chalkis, Lefkandi). To this end, during

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8 See PDF Preliminary report 2011.
9 The relatively small quantities of marine faunal remains excavated in Tr. 1a–b (none were found in Tr. 2) will be
   separately studied by Dr Tatiana Theodoropoulou of the Wiener Laboratory, American School of Classical Studies at Athens.
Fig. 9 Tr. 2a: forecourt of heistatorion, seen from North.

Fig. 10 Tr. 2a: bronze horse figurine (SF228).
the 2012 campaign, emphasis was placed on the macroscopic examination of the ceramic material, which included the identification of fabric groups, manufacturing techniques, vessel shapes and types classification, and vessel surface decoration and vessel sizes. A large number of representative sherds were selected and catalogued with the help of index numbers. Birgit Konnemann drew and inked 130 pieces of the representative pottery and digitalized 113 of these pieces. More than half of all the representative pieces were photographed by Dr Charalambidou.

Furthermore, a first part of the pottery catalogue containing full details of size, fabric, shape, decoration and dating of the finds, was prepared for final publication. In addition, a first selection of pottery fragments was made for the petrographic and chemical analysis that is scheduled for 2013/14; here, the focus is primarily on coarse wares (mainly cooking wares that were used in a cultic context).

The next stage of the study will be a continuation of the macroscopic analysis, combined with a quantitative analysis of the ceramic material in order to reveal degrees of homogeneity or variability in ceramic production and consumption practices of the Early Iron Age pottery found at Plakari. The use of ceramics in the cultic context at Plakari and the inherent symbolism will be considered in relation to the origin of ceramics, in order to see whether certain shapes or types were preferred, and to understand the production and consumption patterns in relation to the social groups that visited the sanctuary.
STUDY OF EIA SMALL FINDS

A study of the EIA small finds was performed by Filiz Songu throughout the six-week campaign (13 July–22 August). Her study covers both the small finds discovered between 1979 and 2009 and those from the more recent excavation campaigns. The number of EIA small finds has increased substantially since last year’s campaign (see Table 2). A digital database and catalogue were created; both include descriptions, photos and line drawings of the objects. Bert Brouwenstijn made the drawings and took the photographs.

STUDY OF CERAMICS AND SMALL FINDS FROM THE HESTIATORION

Dr Maria Chidiroglou spent three weeks (16 July–3 August) in the Archaeological Museum of Karystos, cataloguing and describing the 4th-century small finds and intact vases from the hestiatorion.

CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION OF METAL OBJECTS

Mrs Maria Kontaki and Mr Pantelis Feleris – conservators of the National Archaeological Museum at Athens – worked as freelancers for two weeks (17–28 September) in the Karystos Museum on the conservation and restoration of bronze and iron objects (see PDF Metal conservation 2012). This year the emphasis was on items from the hestiatorion (PDF Metal conservation 2012: nos. 1, 3, 5–7, 15, 17), as some of these were in a bad condition, although the conservators also treated a number of EIA dress pins and fibulae from Trench 1a–b (PDF Metal conservation 2012: nos. 8–14). In 2013, the EIA material will be given priority.