

THE KOUPHOVOUNO PROJECT

2004



STUDY SEASON

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fourth season of the Kouphovouno Project took place during the four weeks 12 July – 6 August 2004. Particular thanks are due to the members of the Archaeological Service of the Greek Ministry of Culture who helped the progress of the project and extended the hospitality of their facilities at their headquarters in Sparta: Mrs Panagiotopoulou, Stella Raftopoulou, Nassos Themis and Elena Zavvou. We are most grateful to Dr James Whitley, Dr. Eleni Hatzaki, Helen Clark and all the staff of the British School at Athens for their prompt and skilful advice in setting up the study. The work was funded by the British School at Athens, the Society of Antiquaries, the British Academy, the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, the Universities of Liverpool, Clermont Ferrand and Nottingham, the École Française d'Athènes, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and CNRS. Without their support the fieldwork could not have taken place.

The team was led by Professors William Cavanagh, Christopher Mee and Josette Renard. Progress was made on study of the pottery fabrics by Dr Ian Whitbread (U. of Leicester), Dr Anna Karabotsoli continued her study of the chipped stone tools and Dr Armelle Gardeisen studied the animal bones. Raphaël Orgeolet (U. de Paris I), assisted by Virginie Thomas, produced digitized images of the plans, and the preparation of our records for GIS, under the overall supervision of Dr Matthew Fitzjohn, was carried out by David Hammond, Victoria Jefferson and Dimitris Bizimis. Catharine Mee acted as finds assistant, and Dorothée Desvignes and Laurie Edwards organised the sorting of the residue from flotation, as part of the archaeobotanical studies under Dr Amy Bogaard. Dr Bill Phelps visited us and gave advice on the pottery. Jenny Doole acted as drafts person and Estelle Carraud kept house. Annaïg Frémont took digital photographs of the finds, and Emmanuelle Fournier (U. de Clermont Ferrand) recorded the finds other than chipped stone and pottery. Jamie Murray, Catherine Spencer and Ben Start worked mainly on the project database.

Aims

The main objective for this season was to complete the study of Areas A, D, E and F: the former two were trials made in 2001 but were not part of the land purchased in 2002, and so will not be excavated further. Likewise Areas E and F had an overburden of historical levels and hence, given the aims of the project, are unlikely to be a priority for further work. In addition there were tasks which it had not been possible to complete during the full excavation season last year: sorting of the residue from the soil sample flotation, digitising plans and entering relevant data on AutoCad for the GIS programme, finds processing (pottery, chipped stone, ground stone, animal bones, small finds), digital photography of finds, entering of excavation records on the database and a general check to make sure all electronic records were up-to-date and accurate.

Study of Areas A, D, E and F

Area A

Immediately below the plough soil appeared a 'stone-platform' feature extending roughly 3.4 m N–S and 3.6 m E–W. This was set in a much cleaner, yellow clay matrix containing just a few stones, evidently decayed mud-brick. Near the E edge, a skeleton

was discovered, lying in a grave bounded to the E by a line of stones. A pair of copper alloy tweezers (Fig. 1) accompanied the burial.



Figure 1: Area A Context 0009, copper alloy tweezers accompanying the burial

The 'stone platform' was excavated in quadrants, allowing E–W and N–S sections to be reconstructed. The stone fill was of very loose rubble, consisting of cobbles, earth and a large number of sherds (as well as animal bones and stone tools and other finds). This had been dumped into a pit cut into the earlier levels. The fill (and the pit into which it had been deposited) was deep, and excavation suggested that originally at least 7 m³ of material were dumped here (Fig. 2).

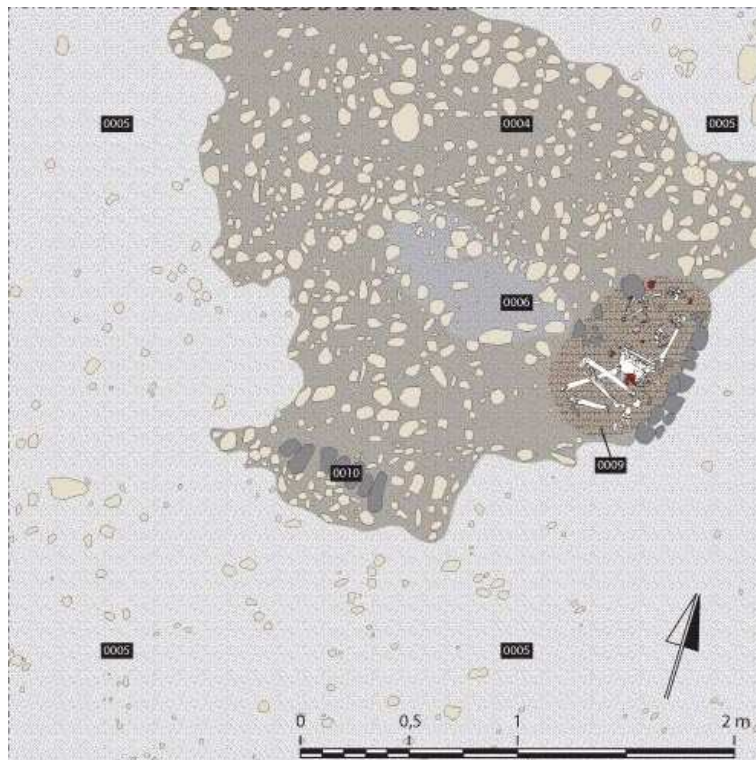


Figure 2: Plan of the 'stone platform' context 0004 and the burial 0009 in Area A

The pottery was predominantly EH2 (Fig. 3), and is an important assemblage of the earlier part of this period.



Figure 3: Area A Context 0011, EH2 sauceboat decorated with monochrome Urfirnis

Area D

Area D was placed at the top of the tell. Archaeological levels were reached immediately below the plough soil, a few cm below the modern surface. Erosion had probably removed the most recent settlement levels and moved them towards the foot of the tell, as Neolithic levels were uncovered very quickly after the start of work. An area of stones, found along the west baulk of the trench (Contexts 0303 and 0309), contained much LN and FN pottery (Fig. 4). It could have been a stone wall which had collapsed, belonging to a building of which neither the plan nor the elevation could be restored. However, as the plan made at the close of excavation makes clear, there seem to be lines of stones in the FN contexts.



Figure 4: Area D Context 0311, Late Neolithic Black Ware pedestal bowl stem

In the SW part of the Area, a stone platform (contexts 0306 and 0310) made of small stones and earth (dated to EH in the upper part and to FN lower down), cut a LN level (Contexts 0308 and 0311). The function of this type of feature, common at the site of Kouphovouno, is difficult to define: one could interpret it as the foundation of one part of a dwelling, whose floor level/walking surface had disappeared, or an open-air construction like a small courtyard.

The pile of stones held the skeleton of a baby (0313) which was excavated, and that of an adult (0315) which was left in place. No clearly datable material was found in association.

Area E

Area E was set on the western slope of the tell, a dozen metres from the top. It had Late Roman material mixed with finds of Neolithic, Early, Middle and Late Helladic, Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic date, in all Contexts between 198.64 and 197.45 masl. The site had plainly undergone terracing and other modifications in the Roman period, which would explain the mixture of finds. A stone feature, which was excavated, plainly formed a part of these modifications, even though its exact nature could not be ascertained. The section made in the NW of the Area through the concentration of stone gave no sign of wall foundations or organised structural remains. A small Roman jar, which was resting on its base, was found in the W section and might indicate an occupation layer disturbed to the E by terracing.

Area F

Just below the plough soil, whose surface lay at 199.2–199.4 masl, an alignment of hard-packed clay crossed the area from NE-SW (0503). Certainly considerably later than the Roman period, it could not be associated with any stone foundation or clay floor and its significance is not clear. We next encountered a major Late Roman destruction deposit, consisting of tile, pottery (Fig. 5) and jumbled stone. Finds included a coin, glass and a



Figure 5: Area F Context 0503, Late Roman flagon

square-headed Roman iron nail. This destruction deposit was exposed over the whole extent of Area F, though two baulks were left unexcavated to allow sections to be drawn.

In order to explore the lower levels we opened a trial at the W end of the Area ('box A') and took this down to approximately 0.75 m below ground level. Underneath the destruction deposit, Middle Neolithic occupation levels were recovered. A small shell pendant (Fig. 6) was found within the earth contained by a small upturned MN carinated bowl. No EH material was discovered below the Roman, possibly because the Bronze Age levels had been terraced away.



Figure 6: Area F Context 0518, Middle Neolithic shell (mother-of-pearl) pendant

Specialist Studies

Pottery

Study of the pottery focused on Areas A, D, E and F. The bags from each context were re-examined and the diagnostic sherds were divided by date and ware/decoration, the details being recorded, with comments, on the excavation database. This will allow us to compare the proportion of sherds datable to each period and can be related to data we have already recorded on the number of fine/coarse sherds and their weight. Those sherds which were felt to be most significant were also catalogued, drawn and photographed and will feature in the publication of these Areas.

Particular points of interest, taken chronologically, include the complete Middle Neolithic vessels found in the deepest contexts in Area F (0515-0520), together with patterned, scribble-burnished and monochrome Urfirnis. There were few Late Neolithic contexts in these areas but D0308 and 0311 have Black Ware, Grey Ware and some Matt-Painted. Area D also has the best Final Neolithic contexts, in particular 0309 and 0310. The pottery is typically heavy, not particularly well made and inconsistently fired, so that the surface colour is very variable.

A0004, the stone-filled pit, contained a large quantity of pottery which, apart from a few residual Middle Neolithic and Late Neolithic sherds, appears to be consistently Early Helladic 2 early and should help to define this period ceramically in Laconia. The fine ware vessels consist of sauceboats, bowls and jars but it is in the coarse wares that we see local characteristics, such as large bowls with plain diagonal cordons.

A few Middle Helladic, Late Helladic and Archaic-Classical sherds were identified but in mixed contexts. However, in Area E and more especially Area F there were intact Roman contexts. The pottery was examined for us by Clare Pickersgill who reports that most of the datable sherds are Late Roman, probably C5 AD.

Some of the pottery excavated in 2003 was also examined. Ian Whitbread undertook a fabric analysis of the pottery from the sondage in Area C, which is purely Middle Neolithic, and the most diagnostic sherds were catalogued, drawn and photographed. Contexts in Areas G, mostly of Late Neolithic and Early Helladic date, were also restudied.

Chipped Stone

Artefacts from Areas A, D, E and F were studied by Dr Anna Karabotsoli. 134 artefacts were recovered and of these 73% were of obsidian. We illustrate a fragment of a barbed and tanged arrow-head made of translucent, rose flint from Area D (Fig. 7).



Figure 7: Area D Context 0307, fragment of a barbed and tanged flint arrow-head

GIS

The 2004 season saw the continuation of digitisation of the excavation archives to create a project GIS and a sustainable digital version of all project data. Three Liverpool University students (D. Hammond, V. Jefferson and D. Bizimis) oversaw: 1. scanning of excavation plans from the 2003 excavation season and 2. digitisation of the excavations plans in AutoCAD 2000 for the GIS.

Faunal Remains

Armelle Gardeisen had already studied the animal bones from the 2001 excavation season, and this year she examined contexts from Areas B, C, E, F and G. So far some 2784 fragments have been examined of which only about one third (918) could be identified, due to the notable fragmentation of the bones and the deposit of mineral concretions on the surface. In general the main domesticates are represented and wild animals are not common, though boar and deer are attested. The samples from contexts of historical date (Areas E and F) were too small for analysis. In the prehistoric periods there are not, at the moment, marked differences from one period to another.