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THE EARLY IRON AGE-ARCHAIC TRANSITION AT AZORIA IN EASTERN CRETE*

The Azoria Project completed five years of excavation in 2006 (Haggis *et al.* 2004; 2007a; 2007b; Whitley *et al.* 2007). The aims of fieldwork have been to document parts of a nascent Greek city that are relevant to reconstructing sociopolitical and economic organization on Crete in the Archaic period, and using Azoria as a case study, to identify the stages of development of the settlement from 1200 to 500 B.C. The main goal of the project has been to examine the form of a small-scale Archaic Cretan city, looking at changes in the political economy in the 6th and early 5th centuries, periods that have in the past been characterized by economic recession and isolation from the wider Greek world (Morris 1992; Prent 1996-1997; Coldstream – Huxley 1999; cf. Kotsonas 2002). Countering this trend in the literature, the central argument of the Azoria Project has been that the economic growth apparent in the later part of the Early Iron Age (EIA) and the early Archaic period culminates in a period of ur-

banization at the end of the 7th century through the early 6th century, which we consider to be a phase of significant growth on Crete, involving the restructuring of settlement and reorganization of emerging centers while establishing the essential form and character of Greek cities of the Classical and Hellenistic periods on the island.

The advantage of examining this transition at Azoria is that excavation has recovered stratigraphic evidence for continuous occupation throughout the Early Iron Age coupled with a catastrophic and sudden abandonment in the early 5th century. This late Archaic destruction horizon preserves, in essence, a pristine Archaic city in its earliest phases of development —archaeological contexts suggest the components of a “proto-polis,” indications of the initial stages of urbanization and coalescence of civic institutions, unencumbered or unobscured stratigraphically by later Classical or extensive Hellenistic-Roman occupational sequences. In 2006, we explored the western slopes of the South Acropolis (**fig. 1**) completing the excavation of the Archaic civic complexes: namely, the putative *andreion*, consisting of a complex of kitchens, storerooms, and dining facilities; and the Monumental Civic Building, a large main hall with stepped seats and an adjoining shrine and adjacent service complex (Service Building). Ultimately, we are interested in understanding how and precisely when the Archaic form of the settlement was established, including this distinctly public or civic architecture, and the na-

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ture of the transition from Late Geometric to Archaic periods.

With this diachronic perspective, we are able to reconstruct details of the dynamics of culture change at Azoria at the end of the 7th century, presenting a picture of nucleation of population, reorganization of public and private space, and the appearance of new forms of architecture and systemic assemblages, very much in keeping with normative views of material patterns in the wider Aegean (Lang 1996; 2007, esp. 183-190), as well as in Crete itself. Evidence on the island to date suggests a date near 630 for significant changes in burial and settlement mobility, which Kotsonas (Kotsonas 2002) connects to polis formation. Azoria might be a case in point. By the 6th century the Azoria settlement had evidently expanded to its maximum size, which we estimate to have been as large as 15 hectares. At the end of the 7th century, material patterns show a horizon of rebuilding that includes the establishment of public buildings, the formalization and elaboration of what can be called civic architecture, and thus the creation of the city center itself (**fig. 1**). For Azoria, Kotsonas's date of 630 (Kotsonas 2002, 53-54) for the formation of cities is not far off, although we need to complete the study of stratified assemblages to be certain. It suffices to say here that evidence for a late 7th century change is found across the site.

We use the term "civic" because we think that the contexts suggesting public activities at the site—new building practices; reorganization of public and domestic space; and changes in the agropastoral economy and suprahousehold activities—reflect social configurations in keeping with an Archaic urban environment and administered organizational structure. The term "city-state" implies an urban center and its surrounding territory, a broader regional community growing out of preexisting EIA village-clusters that had, by the end of the 7th century relocated social, political, economic consciousness and practices from the wider region to the South Acropolis of Azoria (Haggis 2005).

While Late Minoan IIIC to Late Geometric remains have been exposed across the excavated areas of the South Acropolis, the clearest stratigraphy was exposed in 2003 and 2004 in the well-preserved deposits underlying the Archaic Service Building (Haggis *et al.* 2007b). Here it was noticed that the foundations for Archaic structures had intruded upon Early Iron Age and Early Orientalizing buildings, usually destroying or burying earlier architectural remains. Most often, where occupation surfaces were recovered below Archaic levels, they proved to be Late Minoan IIIC in date, although 8th and 7th century floors have been found. The foundation deposits are usually mixed deposits of EIA and Early Orientalizing pottery, the latter date providing a very broad *terminus post quem* for the main Archaic rebuilding phase. Thus the tentative foundation date for the initial Archaic building phase, including its series of impressive megalithic spine walls and new house types, seems to be the middle to the late 7th century (Haggis *et al.* 2007b; cf. Kotsonas 2002). In this period the essential form of the Archaic settlement was established. While modifications and additions were made throughout the 6th and early 5th centuries, the 7th century marks the significant period of change, imprinting on the landscape a new settlement plan and new ideas about how space was to be used.

Thus, our working hypothesis for excavation in 2006 was that sometime in the mid-to-late 7th century a sociopolitical change had occurred involving or instigating a deliberate break from the Early Iron Age past and its five century-old patterns of occupation. Recent stratigraphic work sheds light on this abrupt transition, and has shown the potential of refining the date of transition. On the southwest slope of the South Acropolis the southern end of a large building of Late Geometric date was recovered (**fig. 1**: B3000). Its internal width is about 6.0 meters, and there is a well-built doorway in the center of the exposed south wall, leading to another room, which was largely de-

stroyed and remodeled in the early 7th century (fig. 2). The early 7th century modifications also included a new built threshold in the doorway of the extant south wall and an additional room constructed on the east side of the building, opening directly onto a courtyard to the south (fig. 2). Both the added room and courtyard are at a higher level than the original LG building. The courtyard was evidently separated from the raised ground level of the main building by a retaining wall and was accessible via a stairway at the south end.

While the function of this LG-EO building is not yet fully understood—the actual interiors of the rooms have not been excavated—the 7th century courtyard was found littered with burnt and unburnt pottery dating from LM IIIC to the Orientalizing period, but primarily belonging to Late Geometric and Early Orientalizing (fig. 3). The deposit consists of over 7000 sherds and the vast majority, some 85 percent, are fine ware, with more than half the fine-ware sherds belonging to drinking vessels (various cups, including low-necked cups, skyphoi, kotylai) and approximately one fifth representing pouring vessels (especially hydriae and some oinochoai). Among the coarse sherds, the only commonly represented shape is the cooking pot, comprising over 60 percent of the coarse pottery. Furthermore, the condition of the pottery from this deposit is unique among the ceramic assemblages thus far recovered from the site in the thoroughness and uniformity of the breakage and the infrequency with which joins among sherds could be found, suggesting that it is the result of ritual activity repeated over a long period of time. Sherds from thin-walled pots, such as drinking vessels, have a typical maximum preserved dimension of 1.5 - 4 cm, while those from larger and thicker-walled shapes, like hydriae, are 3-6 cm in size. Approximately 60 percent of this pottery exhibits indications of burning. The ceramic remains are found along side large numbers of animal bones, also burnt and unburnt (fig. 4) in a matrix of dark, ashy soil (fig. 5: “burnt layer”).

We think that these are the remains of feasts or sacrifices discarded from the building in its last phase of use. The interior of the building is as yet unexcavated, but its size, chronology, quality and regularity of construction, associated assemblage, and axial-aligned access to the main room, suggest the remains of a hearth temple or house temple (Prent 2007, esp. 143-144).

Sometime toward the end of the 7th or early 6th century, the building was abandoned, filled in, and covered over with a street that runs along the terrace to the west (fig. 5). This street is important as it was to provide the main access to the Archaic civic buildings on the west slope (fig. 1: “Service Building” and “Monumental Civic Building”). Another clue to the EIA-Archaic transition came to light a bit farther south on the same terrace. The 7th century inhabitants apparently constructed a street and a building complex, perhaps a house, directly over an intact Early Iron Age tholos tomb (fig. 1: B3700), incorporating the capstone and stomion into the eastern wall of the later Archaic building (fig. 6). The tholos tomb is small and roughly elliptical in shape with a height of 1.25 m. from the floor to a single schist-slab capstone. On preliminary analysis, it appears that there were at least four adults and two children, with the earliest burials pushed to the back of the tomb, and the latest extending into the stomion. The finds included a hand-built juglet, a flask, a stirrup jar fragment, a skyphos, a juglet and a bowl, two conical ceramic whorls, and a bronze ring fragment. While some sherds on the floor of the tomb are LM IIIC in date, the vessels associated with burials are Protogeometric in date (Whitley *et al.* 2007).

Thus, in the late 7th century, the modification of the southwest slope involved the deliberate filling-in and burial of a Late Geometric-Orientalizing building of considerable size and special function—possibly a house temple—as well as an LM IIIC-Protogeometric tomb in order to accommodate a new street (figs. 5-6). The entire renovation project can be connected to a major phase of rebuilding across the site

—the construction of spine walls as well as the civic buildings to the west and north.

We think that this effective erasure of Early Iron Age structures is characteristic of a broader process of renovation and the reorganization of private and public space in the settlement in the Archaic period. Signs of this urban renewal are apparent in every area of the site, usually in the form of deep pebble and cobble fill deposits that conceal earlier constructions and contain displaced Early Iron Age occupation debris (Haggis *et al.* 2007b). This foundation fill is often found associated with the construction of massive —sometimes megalithic— spine walls that run along the natural contours, serving to structure habitation space and communication routes (Haggis *et al.* 2004, 349-352, 364-366; 2007a, 263-265). The physical transformation of space, involving the alteration, obliteration, or complete concealment of the Early Iron Age topography, must also reflect changing social identities and a new political consciousness: the construction of a new urban environment required a deliberate disengagement from and reorientation to the Early Iron Age past.

On the west slope of the South Acropolis, two cult places came to light in 2006, allowing further reflection on the transition between Iron Age and Archaic occupation phases. Immediately west and downslope from one of the *andreion* storerooms are the remains of a typical bench shrine of Late Minoan IIIC date (**fig. 1**: “LM IIIC shrine”). One fragment of a large terracotta figure with upraised arms was found on the bench, and four other fragments were found in the vicinity of the bench. Immediately below and southwest of the LM IIIC shrine is another shrine, a small two-room building of Archaic date (**fig. 1**: “Archaic Shrine”). The building is situated on a terrace formed by a rise in the bedrock immediately north of and accessible through a doorway in the north wall of the Monumental Civic Building. It consists of two small interconnected rooms: the southernmost room has a clay floor and a rectangular bench or altar and adjoining stone-lined hearth. A se-

ries of well-built steps, forming a kind of seating area or theatral space, was built up against the west face of the terrace wall that supported the fill of the shine terrace.

A number of objects were found lying directly on the top of the altar, while others, preserved in the matrix of collapsed ceiling debris, had evidently fallen from the altar on the west and south sides. The objects include two miniature skyphoi, a miniature bronze bowl, three ribbed stands, and 14 terracotta figurines and fragments. The figurines consist of a variety of types and stylistic dates: hollow cylindrical; daidalic wheel and mould made; zoomorphic; and four coarse anthropomorphic Geometric figures (**fig. 7.3-6**). All of the anthropomorphic figurines, including the Geometric types, are female. Additional finds from the room include a glass bead, a spindle whorl, a piece of folded bronze and a number of marine shells: triton’s trumpet, clam, limpets, and murex. A bore’s tusk and cranial fragments were also recovered.

A doorway in the northwest corner of the room has a step up to a small irregularly shaped storeroom. Burning on the floor and a fallen olive-wood roof beam in the south half of the room are indications of the Late Archaic destruction, which left a well-preserved assemblage including two pithoi, a Geometric krater (Knossian PGB) (**fig. 8.1**), three transport amphorae —one evidently containing wine— an Attic lamp and exaleiptron, and a bronze awl.

Three things are interesting about the shrines exposed on the west slope of the South Acropolis (**fig. 1**). First, they occupy a space between the *Andreion* Complex and the Monumental Civic Building, suggesting a cognizance or recognition and historical memory of a place of local significance or community cult, surviving the Early Iron Age-Archaic transition. Second, the close juxtaposition of two shrines of very different date is probably evidence of some continuity of cult activity in this area of the site or recognition of the importance of the area. Finally, the condition of the LM IIIC shrine indicates that it might have been respected and

perhaps even maintained throughout the early Archaic building phases. Contrary to the usual pattern of destruction, burial, or conscious concealment of Early Iron Age structures on the southwest slope, the shrine was likely to have been left intact if unused throughout the Orientalizing renovations, during which the small two-room Archaic shrine was built on the terrace immediately below.

The finds from the Archaic shrine itself further demonstrate continuity of activity. Geometric figurines are found alongside 7th and 6th-century types on the altar of the south room (fig. 7.3-6), while in the north room, the Geometric krater (fig. 8.1) was recovered in the same floor deposit as the 5th century amphorae, and other objects such as the imported exaleiptron and lamp. This is to say, in the context of cult, ritual equipment survived the urbanization phase and was reintegrated into new buildings. Objects were recycled for reuse in new contexts of ritual display, while the LM IIIC-PG bench shrine was respected, if not effectively incorporated into the new urban topography.

Thus, in the late 7th century at Azoria differential responses to the Early Iron Age topography may reflect different kinds of social and political behavior in the emergent city. In general, the Archaic context of the EIA remains indicates a conscious effort to conceal the past by means of constructing a new civic topography. Early Iron Age buildings and objects had a strong symbolic value requiring that they be carefully controlled, rationed, and reintegrated into new systemic contexts that emphasized new and perhaps more distinctly public venues of aristocratic display, but at the expense of visible references to specific local lineage connections, such as the possible hearth temple and PG tholos tomb on the southwest slope. If Prent is right that hearth temples represent, in the first instance, a “spatially indistinct” elite context of ritualized commensality and sacrifice, operating alongside other EIA venues of cult activity, such as the LM IIIC-type bench shrine (Prent 2007, 148), by the 8th and early 7th centuries

such buildings had come to occupy a dominant and formal position with combined political and cultic roles within the emerging urban topography of Cretan cities. The basic forms of hearth temples, such as at Dreros and Prinias, suggests that such a building at Azoria would have housed a small group of privileged participants, a narrowly defined and probably local elite structured by kinship relationships that are likely to have consisted of certain aristocratic families from Azoria itself. If a hearth temple is to be found on the southwest slope in B3000, as we have suggested here, it was purposefully destroyed and decisively buried to make way for new civic complexes that incorporated cult buildings and activities. We conclude from this that in the Archaic period ritual activity was channeled to new venues of public congregation and display such as the *andreion*, the Monumental Civic Building with its shrine, and the Cult Building on the south slope (fig. 1) (Haggis *et al.* 2007a; Whitley *et al.* 2007). This does not however indicate that the substance or meaning of ritual had changed significantly, only that the identity of the participants and their sociopolitical relationships had to be redefined and reoriented to a new poliadic structure requiring new architectural forms. The nature of the change must be sought in patterns of mobility of cult places and cemeteries, as well as in the changing patterns of deposition in these contexts (Perlman 2000, 74-76; Kotsonas 2002, 46-50). What Azoria adds to the discussion is that the regionally disparate cemeteries, sanctuaries, and settlements of the Early Iron Age go out of use in the course of the 7th century (Haggis 2005), at precisely the same time that Azoria was both expanding and formalizing its urban character, part of which involved the construction of new public buildings that integrated areas for ritual, communal dining, and consumption of prestige goods (Haggis *et al.* 2007a).

Another interesting and related pattern is that while buildings may have been destroyed or replaced in the late 7th century, EIA objects were evidently selected and reused. For exam-

ples, an LM IIIC pithos appears in a 5th-century storeroom in a house on the south slope (Haggis *et al.* 2004, 354), while LM IIIC and Geometric figurines (**fig. 7.1-2**), as well as a Protogeometric B Geometric krater (**fig. 8.2**) have been recovered from Archaic contexts in the Service Building on the southwest slope (Haggis *et al.* 2007b). In the Monumental Civic Building (**fig. 1**), a large hall with stepped seats and adjacent service rooms, significant amounts of dining debris attest to public feasts of some kind, and the adjoining shrine, mentioned above, contains recycled Early Iron Age vessels and votives. In the main hall itself, the presence of kernoi attests to ritual functions within the building's main hall—one moveable stone kernos (**fig. 9**), found face down on one of the steps in the building, is certainly of a Minoan type perhaps recycled from a Bronze- or Early Iron-Age context somewhere on the site or from one in the surrounding region. The new meaning of these antiques was perhaps not as heirlooms—that is, meaning conferred by virtue of their connection to specific places, people, or kinship groups. We think that they might have expressed more generic notions of antiquity; general and intrinsic, re-formed in the new systemic context of the civic center, perhaps independent and irrespective of their specific origin. By way of contrast, because the LM IIIC shrine on the west slope was tied to ancient community cults, it might have been maintained, preserved, and perhaps reintegrated into the fabric of the city. Even though the two-room Archaic shrine had effectively and practically replaced its EIA predecessor, it was physically connected to the Monumental Civic Building, emphasizing the reintegration of the cult into the inclusive civic institutions of the Archaic city.

In conclusion, the results of recent excavations at Azoria demonstrate a radical rebuilding in the late 7th century—a punctuated point or a Yoffeesque phase transition that should involve some form of cognitive restructuring (Yoffee 1997). Early Iron Age houses and burials, and perhaps the house temple itself, sym-

bols of age-old lineage groups, are found literally buried over, visibly and symbolically erased, while Minoan and Early Iron Age artifacts were apparently selectively retained and redistributed in new civic venues of public display. Civic buildings on the site are locations of communal feasting, displays of prestige goods, and sacrificial ritual—ostensibly a paradigmatic confirmation of the shift in emphasis from specific and local kinship to communal identities and civic consciousness; the essence of the Greek city.

On the surface of things elite depositional practices and even the household symposium had become integrated into the social fabric of public, political and cultic rituals. In the putative *andreion*, and Monumental Civic Building complexes, personal sympotic equipment, weapons and armor, and imported pottery and metals were used and consumed in spaces used specifically for public dining and sacrificial offerings. This new urban architecture does not embrace, renovate, or actively monumentalize preexisting EIA buildings, but suppresses and even actively erases them from the urban topography. Objects on the other hand were carefully recovered, laterally cycled, and reincorporated into new venues of communal ritual and ritualized political interaction (**figs. 7-9**), -looking like largely corporate social strategies of integration. Yet what we know of the actual organization of the Cretan city is that it appears to have retained many aspects of its kinship-corporate structure, not unlike David Small's view of Greek poleis such as Athens (Small 1995; 1997). What is perhaps important is that political power of the Archaic Cretan city was variably distributed and counterpoised, suggesting institutional divisions that had, by the early 6th century, taken on material and architectural forms. The juxtaposition of civic buildings on the west slope at Azoria could reflect a bilateral and even heterarchical structure, aspects of the decentralized and economically bifurcated polis.

We are not saying that local elites with Early Iron Age kinship ties were necessarily sup-

pressed, dissolved, or even diluted in the new political configurations of the Archaic city — indeed the lingering identities of such groups and their connections to the Dark Age past are emphatically expressed in the Late Geometric and Orientalizing record (Wallace 2003). It was however necessary for them to be reshaped and reintegrated in new social institutions with inter and intra-regional political implications (Kotsonas 2002, 55-56). We tend to oversimplify the situation, however, if we express the transition as merely a shift from the interests of local elite, a Dark Age aristocracy, to those of a broader or more inclusive community — a *demos* or middling citizenry. What is important about the transition in the late 7th century is the mobility and reintegration of community cult and social groups into architectural forms that expressed new ideas about the organization of the city, while providing the means and sociopolitical contexts to cross-cut the inherent limitations and divisive boundaries of localizing and ancient kinship structures. The Archaic inhabitants of Azoria did not ignore or shun their connections to their Early Iron Age past, they simply reinvented them and found new ways to express their links to the landscape and a new community of place.

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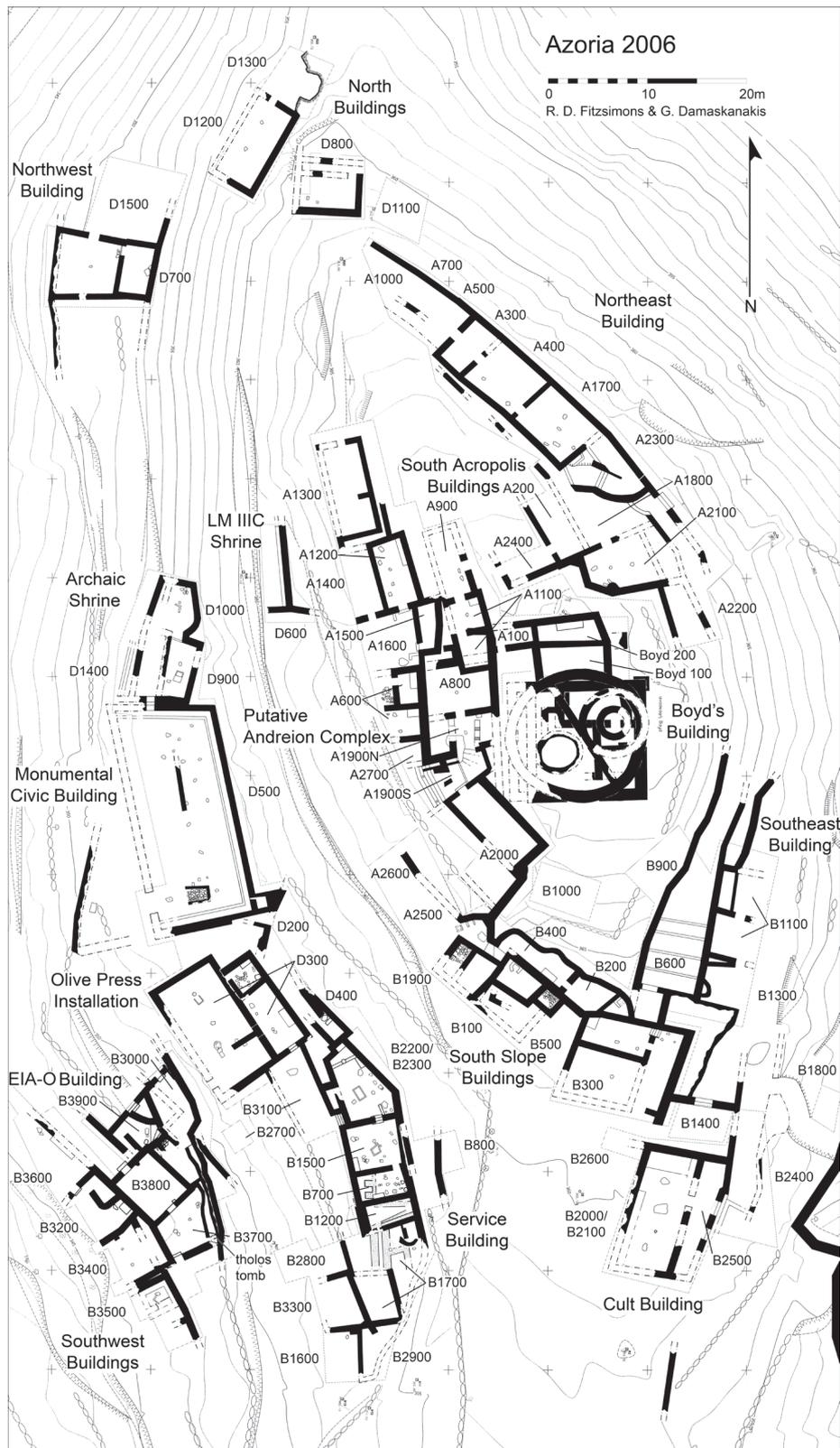


Fig. 1. Azoria: plan of the South Acropolis (R.D. Fitzsimons and G. Damaskinakis 2006).

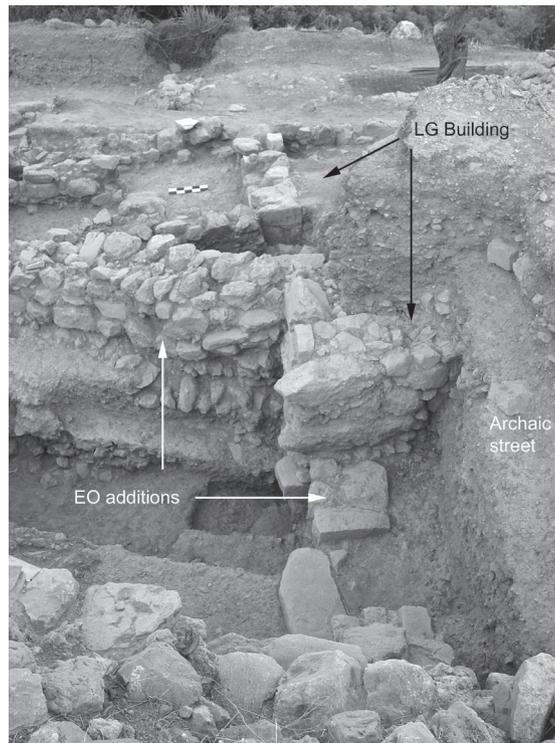


Fig. 2. B3000: Late Geometric building and Early Orientalizing additions.



Fig. 3. B3000: examples of EIA-EO pottery from the EO "burned layer."



Fig. 4. B3000: animal bones from the EO "burned layer."

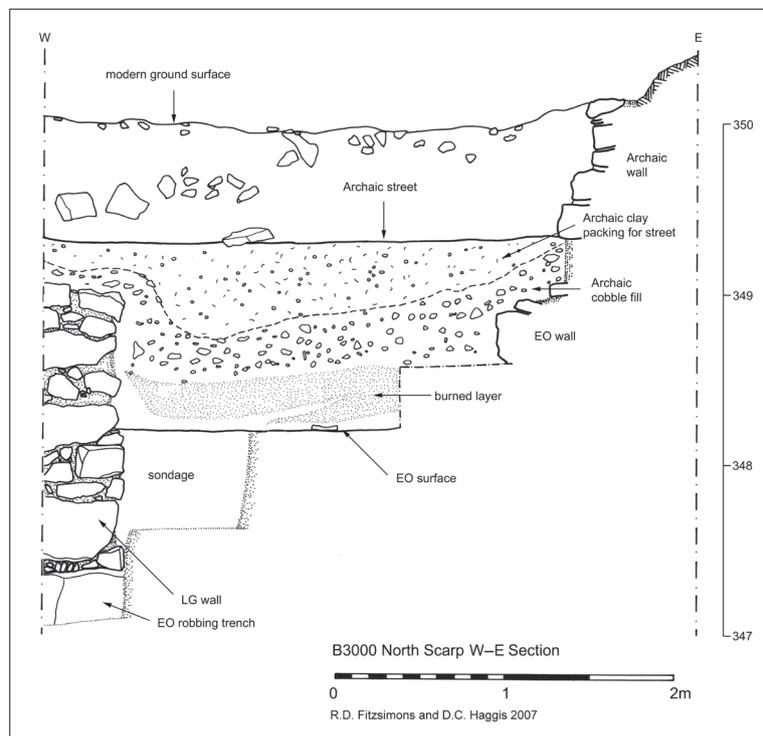


Fig. 5. B3000: reconstructed section of the north scarp, showing the southeast corner of the LG building, the EO surface and burned layer, and Archaic street level.

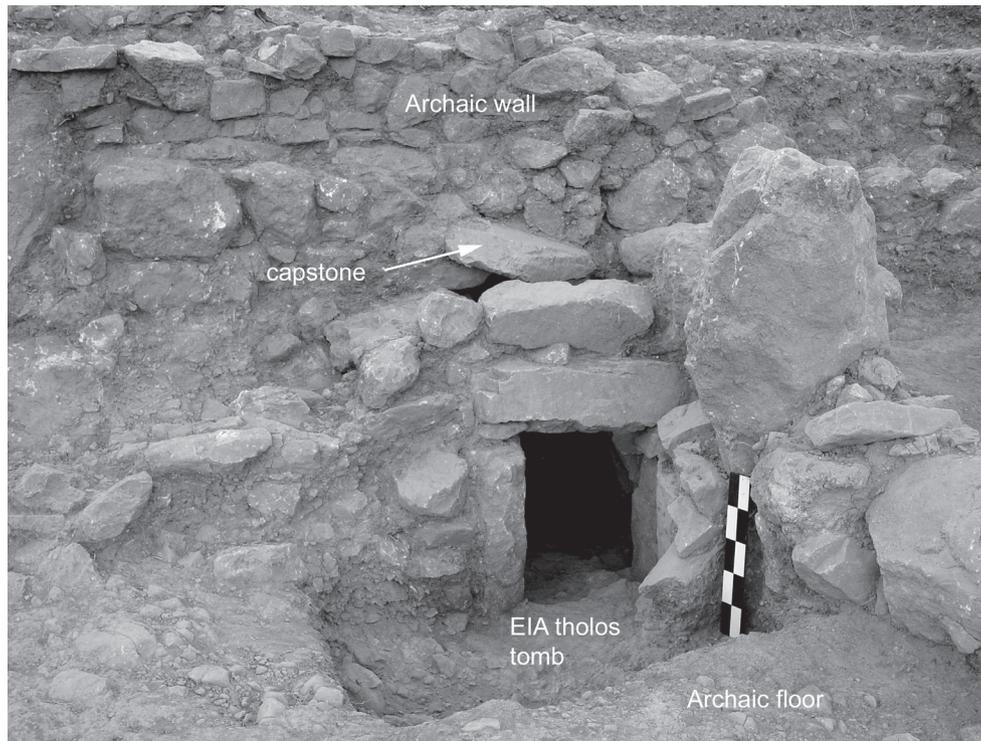


Fig. 6. B3700: southeast corner of the Archaic building in B3700 showing the stomion of the PG tholos tomb, and above it, the Archaic wall and street.



Fig. 7. EIA figurines from the Archaic Service Building (1, 2); the Archaic Shrine (3-6).

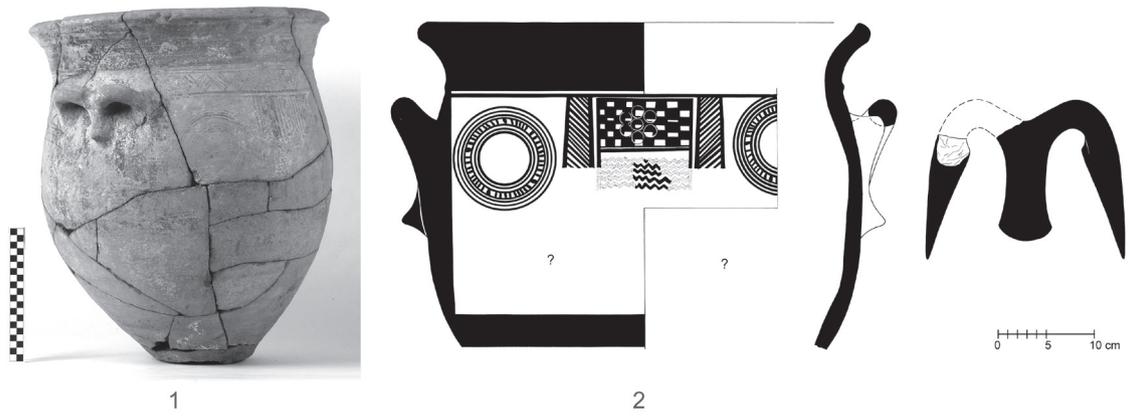


Fig. 8. Geometric kraters from D1000 (1) and D400 (2).



Fig. 9. Minoan kernos stone from the Archaic Monumental Civic Building (D500).

