Detailed Report Eastern Boeotia Archaeological Project 2017

The Eastern Boeotia Archaeological Project (EBAP) concluded the second season of a three year permit extension for excavation at the site of ancient Eleon in the village of Arma on July 8, 2017 (Figures 1 and 2). This project is a *synergasia* between the CIG and Ephorate of Antiquities of Boeotia, under the direction of Dr. Alexandra Charami (Ephorate of Antiquities of Boeotia) and co-direction of Brendan Burke (University of Victoria) and Bryan Burns (Wellesley College). Drs. Olga Kyriazi and Kiki Kalliga are also key partners in our research project. We are very grateful for the research funding we received in 2017 from an Insight Grant from the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council of Canada (#435-2012-0185), the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, and the University of Victoria and Wellesley College. The Canadian Institute in Greece has facilitated and supported the permit process each year. We also appreciate the dedicated efforts of the students and affiliated scholars who contribute so much to our research. In 2017 the project included 33 people in the foreign team: three professors in addition to the co-directors (Burke, Burns, Lupack, Herrmann, Lam), one post-doc (Lis), four staff (Bianco, Theocharous, Ross, Zochos), six graduate students (Anderson, Bertram, Sadarananda, Van Damme, Yuki, Schaefer), six former undergraduates (Bartlett, Bellows, Causer-McBurney, Reid, Daruvala, Latimer, and 13 undergraduates (Frayne, Engstrom, Karas, Evans, Michaluk, Kocurek, Heiser, Cox, Johnston, Sykes, Thurley, Brewster, Nicchitta).

Chronological summary: Our work has identified four major periods of occupation at the site of ancient Eleon, located on an elevated plateau overlooking the Theban plain, *en route* to Chalkis and the Euboean Gulf: First, a prehistoric phase spans the early Mycenaean period (from the end of the Middle Helladic and beginning of the Mycenaean palatial period, ca. 1700-1450 BC). In the second period, toward the end of the Mycenaean age, we have substantial levels dating to the Late Helladic IIIB and IIIC sub phases. The site seems to be abandoned by the Early Iron Age. The third phase is Post-Bronze Age that varies in levels of occupation, but the earliest recovered material is Late Geometric Euboean pottery of the 8th c. BCE. Eleon itself, however, seems not to be reoccupied in any substantial way until the 6th c. BCE. Also dating to the Archaic period is the construction of the large polygonal wall. After another long period of inactivity at the site we reach the fourth and latest archaeological phase in evidence: the Medieval period, from which material survives in surface levels and deeper pits only. These finds date consistently to the 15th and 16th centuries CE, which could indicate a relatively late date for the stone tower whose remains mark the western end of the site, beyond our permitted area of excavation.

Figure 1: Aerial of Ancient Eleon facing north. Current excavation area is in the NE corner of the

acropolis, to the right of the large tree.

Research Goals 2017: The majority of work in 2017 concentrated within and around an enclosure which we call the Blue Stone Structure (BSS), so named because of the polished blue limestone used to cap a large, rectangular perimeter wall (Figure 2). This structure was capped with a mound of clay marking an early Mycenaean cemetery of some significance dating to the formative period of Mycenaean society, ca. 17th c. BCE. Our main goal in 2017 was to excavate as many burials in the Blue Stone Structure as possible within the northern half of the enclosure and to expose fully the perimeter wall, with particular focus on the long, eastern wall. One of our research questions addresses the relationship between the construction of the BSS perimeter wall and individual burials. Although our work is not yet completed, we believe the earliest tombs were dug and built within this demarcated space ***prior*** to the construction of the BSS, and then subsequent tombs were constructed inside.

Blue Stone Structure

Figure 2: Blue Stone Structure from the west. The second stele discovered in 2017 is in the middle.

In previous seasons we excavated four burials outside of the Blue Stone Structure: one was a clay lined cist for a child in the northwest quadrant (NW B1b, in 2012); two were stone built cists that had been robbed out immediately west of the BSS (SWA1c, 2014); and in 2016 we found a shallow grave just outside the southwest corner of the BSS (SWA2b) which contained the flexed articulated remains of an adolescent (preliminarily identified as a 15 year old male) fully

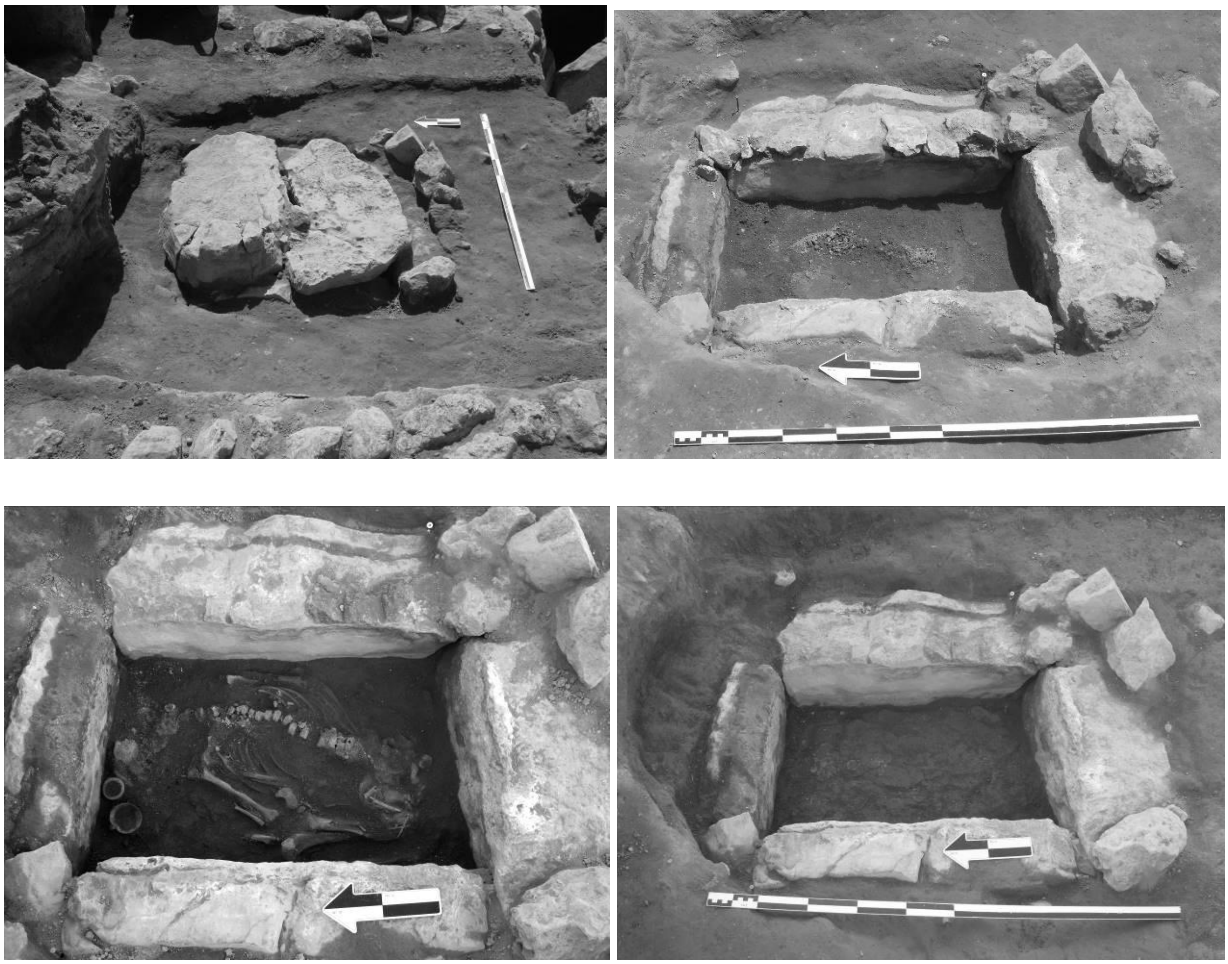
preserved in a contracted position with no associated artifacts.

Inside the BSS we fully excavated four tombs in 2015 and 2016, one of which had a built dromos to Tomb 5 which was mistakenly identified as a robbed tomb ('Tomb 3'). In 2017 excavation of the remaining fill in Tomb 5 was completed as a check to ensure all human remains had been removed in 2016 (Figure 3), which was the case. We also began a process of taking micromorphology samples (Figure 4) to understand better the use and reuse of these tombs. This will continue in 2018.

Figure 3: Tomb 5 with dromos to the north.

Figure 4: Micromorphology sample being taken.

Tombs 6 (Figure 5a-d) and 8 (Figures 10, 11) were a part of unit SE A1a. Tomb 6 was the first of the new burials dug in 2017. It was located between the two grave stele at a relatively high level (compared to the other tombs). The small rock lined cist held a single child, approximately 9.5 years old. Finds from this tomb were not many but included a miniature Vapheio cup and a miniature pyxis both found near the child's cranium and two copper alloy coiled rings.



Figures 5a-d: Excavation of Tomb 6.

Figures 6: Tomb 6 LH I pottery: P1565 – Grey Minyan pyxis and P1566 – Grey Minyan Vapheio cup, miniature.

Excavations further to the north exposed a second in situ grave stele which was part of a built platform and spine wall similar to the constructions around the stele excavated in 2016. We investigated the relationship between this second stele and Tomb 8 (discussed below).

Tomb 7 is the northernmost tomb of the BSS thus far, and is rather complicated. At some point in the past the tomb collapsed probably with the earliest phase of construction of wall 45 above it. We assume this wall was built to hide and protect the tomb itself but may have caused its collapse (Figure 7a below). This tomb was discovered while we were removing the relatively clear fill above. The earth gave way suddenly and one of our students leg descended about 50 cm into the

tomb chamber. The only way to safely excavate the tomb was to fully expose and clear away the wall above, since blocks from this wall had already fallen into the tomb.


Figures 7a-b: Tomb 7 collapse and excavated


Figure 8a: Tomb 7 (northern half) commingled remains; Figure 8b: Tomb 7 (southern add-on)

secondary deposit.

Commingle and friable remains were found throughout the unusually constructed stone-lined cist of Tomb 7. The minimum number of individuals is estimated at 8 currently, adults and subadults. It seems that there were several periods of use and that it served as a place for secondary burials as well as primary ones. Several interesting finds also emerged including some well-preserved complete vessels that all date within the LH I phase but are made in different ceramic traditions including Polychrome, Minyan, and Matt-painted.

Figures 9. Tomb 7 LH I pottery: P1732 – Bichrome jug with pointed base; P1729 – Grey Minyan jug; P1730 – Matt Painted ring-handled cup;

In 2016 we saw the indications of another tomb north of Tomb 5 and even further north we saw the southern edge of the second stele built into a spine wall. In 2017 we wanted to know if these two were connected, the stele and the tomb.

Near the stele, but not directly beneath it we explored Tomb 8. This was revealed and cleaned after the complete excavation of Tomb 6 in SE A1a. It seemed to have been disturbed, we thought perhaps robbed along its short northern end. The southernmost capstone was however still in place (Figure 10 below) and removed by mechanical means.

We found the remains of a single individual. Bone preservation was good and small elements are present and were recovered. The body was placed in the southwest corner of the tomb on a compact clay surface, positioned on the right side with the head to the south facing east. The legs are flexed to the east. The left arm appears to have been semi-flexed but the humerus is out of position, rotated 180 degrees. The cranium is fragmented and friable. The dentition (loose teeth and a mandible fragment) was found scattered along the east side of the cranium and is relatively complete. Three copper alloy coiled rings were found: two along the cranial base (the northern margin of the cranium) and appear to be positioned near the mastoid processes, roughly behind the ears, and one was found below the maxilla. A preliminary assessment of the dentition indicates that the individual in Tomb 8 is roughly 7.3 years old with an age range of 6.1 to 8.7 years old. Like the child recovered from Tomb 6, this individual would have been very short for their age. Based on the post-cranial measurement recorded during excavation, this individual would have been roughly 100 cm in height, which places the individual below the 1 percentile in height compared to modern standards.

Finally, while trying to understand further the relationship of the second grave stele with the burials in the area, a secondary pit-burial was discovered in SEA1a. The child was again about 7 years old based on the collected teeth. The preservation of the epiphyses with this burial suggests that it was carefully collected as a secondary burial. The commingled remains, including the inverted cranium, long bones to the north, and others placed near vertical, were redeposited in a small featureless pit.

Much of the ceramic evidence from all of the tombs of the BSS cannot be dated earlier than the LH I period, including the Vapheio cup, the Grey Minyan jug and the Bichrome jug. There are several problems that should be pointed out that prevent establishing a better chronology of the burials based on pottery finds:

a) few vessels per tomb;
b) most [if not all] pottery classes cannot be ascribed to a particular stage of the LH I period, like the Gray Minyan shapes, unpainted fine open shapes etc.;
c) lack of stratigraphic sequence for the MH/LH I transition at the site, which could address point b);
d) not a single tomb produced an assemblage that could be placed securely in late MH or, on the other hand, more advanced LH I or even LH II;
e) Presence of secondary burials (commingled and other) as opposed to a sequence of primary burials with associated offerings.

Figure 10: Tomb 8 bottom right, before excavation. Tomb 5 and stele to the left.

Figure 11: Excavation of Tomb 8.

Figure 12. Tomb 8: P1718 – Unpainted ring-handled cup

Figure 13a (left) Tomb 8 from the north east, with Tomb 5 behind. Second stele, at a higher level, is visible on right. Another tomb, unexcavated lies below partially covered in fill.
Figure 13b (right) shows the single internment from Tomb 8, a young child.

All of the human remains associated with the Blue Stone Structure, both within and without, demonstrate that there was a population of early Mycenaeans at Eleon who physically separated select burials from a larger cemetery that likely began in the Middle Helladic period. This follows a pattern known from the great grave circles at Mycenae, which were also constructed amidst an

earlier MH cemetery. Similarly, all recovered material from the BSS gives a date contemporary with the Shaft Grave era, that is, the late Middle Helladic and early Late Helladic periods (ca. 17th c. BCE). This was the formative period of the Mycenaeans and at other sites we can see elites working to establish themselves in a mortuary landscape and working to distinguish themselves from their forebears and contemporaries through their burial architecture. Scholars have noted the experimental nature of early Mycenaean burial customs and constructions around Greece. Shaft graves on Aegina, at Lerna and within the grave circles at Mycenae are only one form. Early chamber tombs and incipient tholoi are also known in the Peloponnese. In Boeotia, built cists and stone lined pits are found at Thebes, Eutresis, Orchomenos, and, near Yliki and Paralimni, the burials are within stone periboloi (Dakouri-Hild *OHABA*, 2010 pp. 619) comparable to Eleon. Although the grave goods from the BSS may not at first seem overtly high-status, the totality of finds, including a bronze dagger, ivory pommel, and well-made vessels, and the elaborate construction suggest to us a group of distinct individuals who were separated and commemorated.

The BSS is oriented North-South with a length of approximately 17 meters, making it one of the largest Shaft Grave era constructions known, at least from central Greece. In addition to excavating the burials inside the BSS, another goal for 2017 was to get the full extent of the eastern wall which begins in the southeast corner with a large orthostate measuring at least 1.57 meters high (Figure 14). We opened two trenches (SEA1b and SEA1d) toward the east and exposed the full wall. For about 10 m the wall is consistently capped with pieces of the smooth blue limestone, flush with the exterior face of the wall, but often thicker than the courses below. The northern end of this eastern wall was also marked with an orthostate block, with a height of 0.98 meter. In 2017 we exposed the fill above the middle part of the eastern wall and we isolated levels of the tumulus construction that ran over the wall and sloped downwards, from west to east.

Figure 14: Blue Stone Structure burial complex from the southeast. Orthostate which begins the eastern long wall is visible on the left. Two standing grave stele are in the center.

The lower courses of the eastern wall are constructed differently than the blue stone capping and from this we now believe that the blue capping came during a later phase. The lower courses are mainly vertical sandstones. The interstices and the upper parts are made of smaller rounded stones and then rectangular cleaving limestone, often of the blue-stone variety.

In previous seasons, we uncovered the ends of two roughly made stone walls (Walls 45 and 44) running North-South which seem to have been structural supports for the clay mound built over the Blue Stone Structure. A course platform connected the two.

Figure 15a-b: BSS end of 2015, aerial and plan, southern half showing cobble layers, spine walls and tombs below.

Ceramic evidence indicates construction in LH I, generally consistent with the ceramic evidence inside the tombs. It should be noted that we only have clear evidence for sloping clay slabs along the eastern side (Figure 4, section and photo) so perhaps it was a kind of mounded terrace.

Figure 16a-b: Photograph of the eastern and northern sides of the mound which covered the Blue Stone Structure

Encased within these poorly constructed spine walls and platform were two massive grave stele in situ. One stele was found in 2016 above the middle point of the large tomb 5. A second stele, also undecorated but of similar size to the first stele, did not stand above a single tomb but rather seems to have been built in parallel to the first and reinforced the burial nature of this area. Upon excavation, both stelai are quite prominent and this likely explains why they were concealed within the poorly made spine walls: they marked the cemetery. The builders of these tombs commemorated their dead but also wanted to ensure the integrity of this burial complex. The removal of a portion of the mound and some of the upper wall supports has enabled us to identify, so far, eight built graves concentrated within the limits of the BSS.

Figure 17: To the left is the stele uncovered in 2017; Tombs 6 and 8 are between it and the southern stele. Part of a cobble surface is also visible.

Well-lain cobble surfaces are also a feature of the BSS. In the south varying levels of cobbles surfaces were found above the excavated tombs. These cobble levels did not mark individual burials but rather seem also to have been part of a project to preserve and conceal the burials below.

Below the tumulus, the spine walls, the stele and the cobbles within the BSS at ancient Eleon we find earthen fill. Within this fill we come across large flat capstones. Most of the individual tombs are indicated by large flat capping stones which are often brittle and prone to cracking probably due to the weight of the soil fill above.[1] The capstone rests on a ring of smaller stones which forms a bedding, which in turn sits atop larger rocks that are often placed vertically creating the side walls of the tomb.

[1] Tomb 2 (excavated in 2015) did not have a capstone but was rather a clay lined cist.

Figure 18: Blue Stone Structure at ancient Eleon 2017 with numbered tombs. White arrows indicate remaining tombs to be dug in 2018.

Northwest trenches:

With unanticipated financial support from the Ephoreia to employ two local workmen, we were also able to return to the Northwest sector of the site for limited excavations. The Northwest area has primarily yielded evidence for the LH III C settlement. The best preserved settlement remains come from a burnt destruction level of the LH IIIC Early period and an unburnt sub-phase. We opened two five by five meter trenches along the north in 2017 and exposed the continuation of room construction although we did not expose the expected cross wall which must lay further to the north in the baulk. Interestingly, we also uncovered some material culture of early Mycenaean habitation. Since the material did not seem to go with any architecture, most likely the LH IIIC builders were bringing in fill for the building project which contained early Mycenaean remains. This is intriguing as we are interested in finding the settlement that goes along with the burials of

the BSS from the Early Mycenaean period.

Figure 19: Northwest sector of the site. Excavations in 2017. The two adjacent five by five meter units are at the top.

Figure 20a-b: Bone pommel or amulet. Close comparanda come from Grave Circle A at Mycenae with similar pommels are covered in gold (Karo 1930) disc, perhaps formerly covered in gold

The excavation of the Blue Stone Structure is not complete. Our expectation was to complete the excavation of the BSS in 2017 but this did not happen. The monumental size of the complex and the close density of the multiple early Mycenaean burials caused our work to proceed slowly but yielded good results. The central and northern parts of the BSS still contain an intact cobble surface which very likely covers more Mycenaean burials. Additionally, evidence for at least three more tombs are indicated; a typically fractured cap stone is partially exposed to the east of the

second stele; a similar capstone is indicated to the west, below the cobble layer. In the north, under one of the remaining spine walls we can also see the outlines of what seems to be a tomb on both sides of the wall.

For 2018 our priority is on analyzing material thus far excavated and to complete the excavation of the Blue Stone Structure. The seven excavated early Mycenaean tombs conclusively demonstrate that this is a burial monument, and its form is unusual within the Mycenaean world. We, and our Greek colleagues, are concerned that this funerary structure is excavated as soon as possible. The form and early date of the construction project is unique in the Greek world and of great relevance to the emergence of Mycenaean elites and centers of power.

References:

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