

## Eastern Boeotia Archaeological Project: Preliminary Report on Excavations 2011-2013

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The Eastern Boeotia Archaeological Project (EBAP), a *synergasia* of the 9<sup>th</sup> Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities at Thebes and the Canadian Institute in Greece, conducted a trial excavation in 2011 for 4 weeks, and two full, six-week seasons in June and July 2012 and 2013. The full excavation is directed by Alexandra Charami (9<sup>th</sup> Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities), Brendan Burke (University of Victoria), and Bryan Burns (Wellesley College). Our work at the site identified as ancient Eleon (38°21'21.17"N 23°28'54.17"E), within the village of Arma, refines our knowledge of eastern Boeotia in a fertile territory between Thebes and Chalkis (Fig. 1).

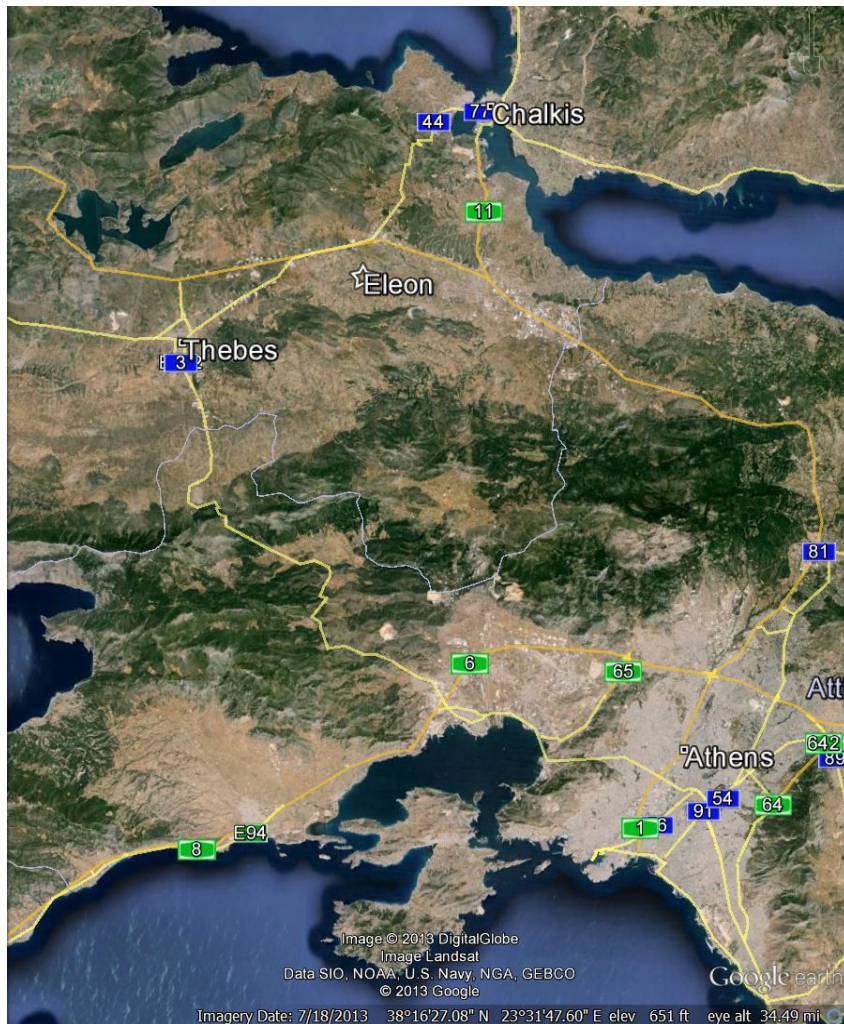


Fig. 1 Map of eastern Boeotia. Google Earth

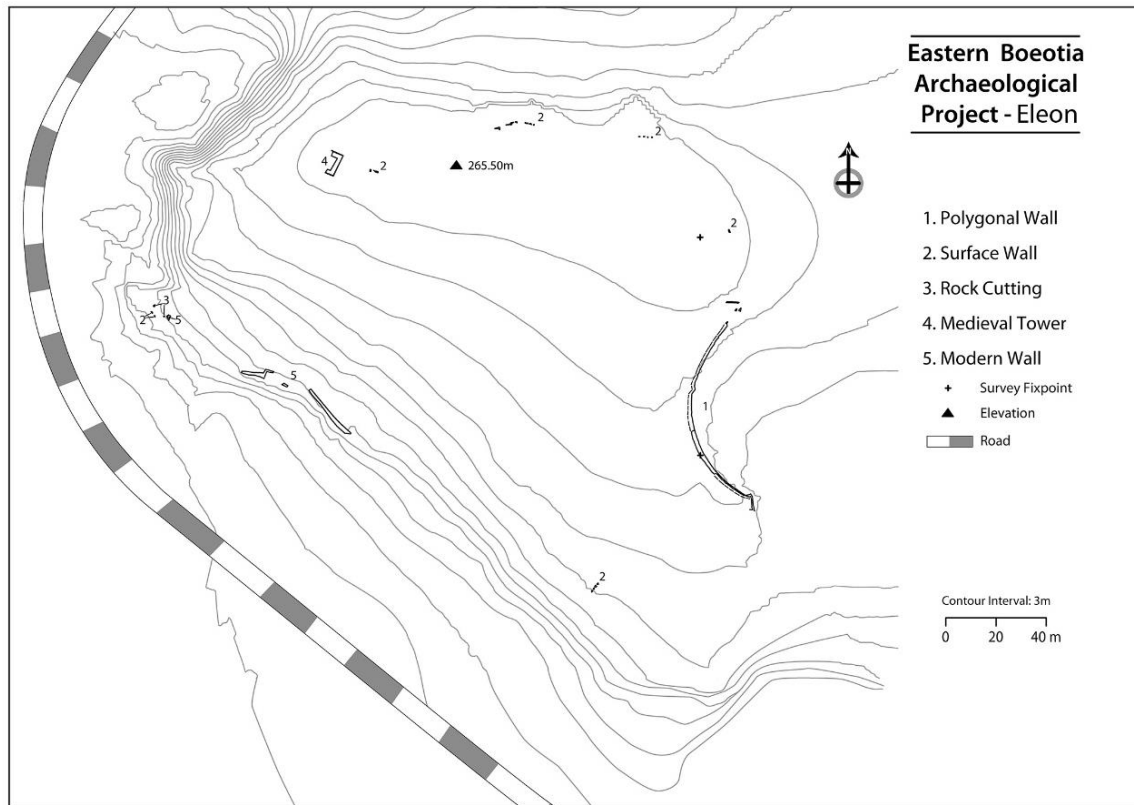


Fig. 2 Topographic map of Eleon Acropolis. Eastern Boeotia Archaeological Project

The excavation builds on our surface survey project (2007-2009) and our recording of the walled settlement on the Eleon acropolis (Fig. 2). The most extensive and longest sustained activity at the site spanned the Late Bronze Age, beginning with significant deposits of Middle Helladic – early Mycenaean Minyan and Matt painted wares. Evidence for the Mycenaean settlement in Late Helladic periods is not surprising since the site of Eleon appears as *e-re-o-ni* on two Linear B tablets from Thebes (Ft 140.5 and X 155.1). Occupation extends well into the LH IIIC phases, possibly suggesting a period of vitality at Eleon, somewhat different from that of the major palace sites such as Thebes, Mycenae, and Pylos. In addition, we have a range of evidence indicating renewed activity at the site during the Archaic and Classical periods, including artifacts indicative of cult activity and the construction of the site's most prominent feature, the curved polygonal wall that creates an eastern boundary (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3 Curved polygonal wall at ancient Eleon. Photo: B. Burke

As part of the architectural enclosure of the site, we have documented evidence related to Classical and Archaic cult activity associated with an elaborate ramped entrance system and gateway to the highest point of the site which incorporated Mycenaean remains in the later architecture. And finally, we have a substantial deposit of Ottoman ceramics recovered through excavation which corresponds with the fragmentary tower still visible on the western edge of the acropolis overlooking the plain between Thebes and Chalkis.

Our excavations have concentrated in three general areas of the site: the Northwest, Southwest and Southeast (Fig. 4). Work in the Northwest and Southwest revealed structures with substantial walls dating to the Mycenaean palatial period, when Eleon was a secondary center of Thebes, and the subsequent LH IIIC period. The multiphase architecture that transitions from the LH IIIB to LH IIIC periods indicates a sustained presence throughout the period of palatial collapse. The broad range of artifacts recovered point to diverse activities and social complexity: painted pottery, ivory and bone carvings, ceramic rhyta, and terracotta figurines, along with strong evidence for textile production. Thus far, the best-preserved phase of activity dates to the period after the great fires that destroyed the major Mycenaean palace centers.





Fig. 4 Schematic plan of excavated areas at ancient Eleon (2011-2013). G. Bianco

### Northwest:

Excavations in the Northwest, the site's highest topographic area, uncovered LH IIIC Middle material and reached pre-Mycenaean levels including Early Helladic III/IIB, documenting the longest Bronze Age sequence uncovered at Eleon thus far. Substantial architectural remains indicate several phases of building and rebuilding throughout the Mycenaean age including Late Helladic IIIB and IIIC Early and Middle periods. The best preserved settlement remains come from a burnt destruction level of the LH IIIC Early. One room was modified from the LHIIIB to LH IIIC period, and contained a group of vessels indicating dining activities. Bartek Lis reports 18 complete or well-preserved pots so far, including three jugs and a hydria, four deep bowls, three kylikes, two cooking pots, a dipper jug, and a kalathos. A large ceramic *asaminthos* (bathtub) was set partially within the floor, likely early in LH IIIC early, near a large hearth made of discarded tiles and sherds (Fig. 5).

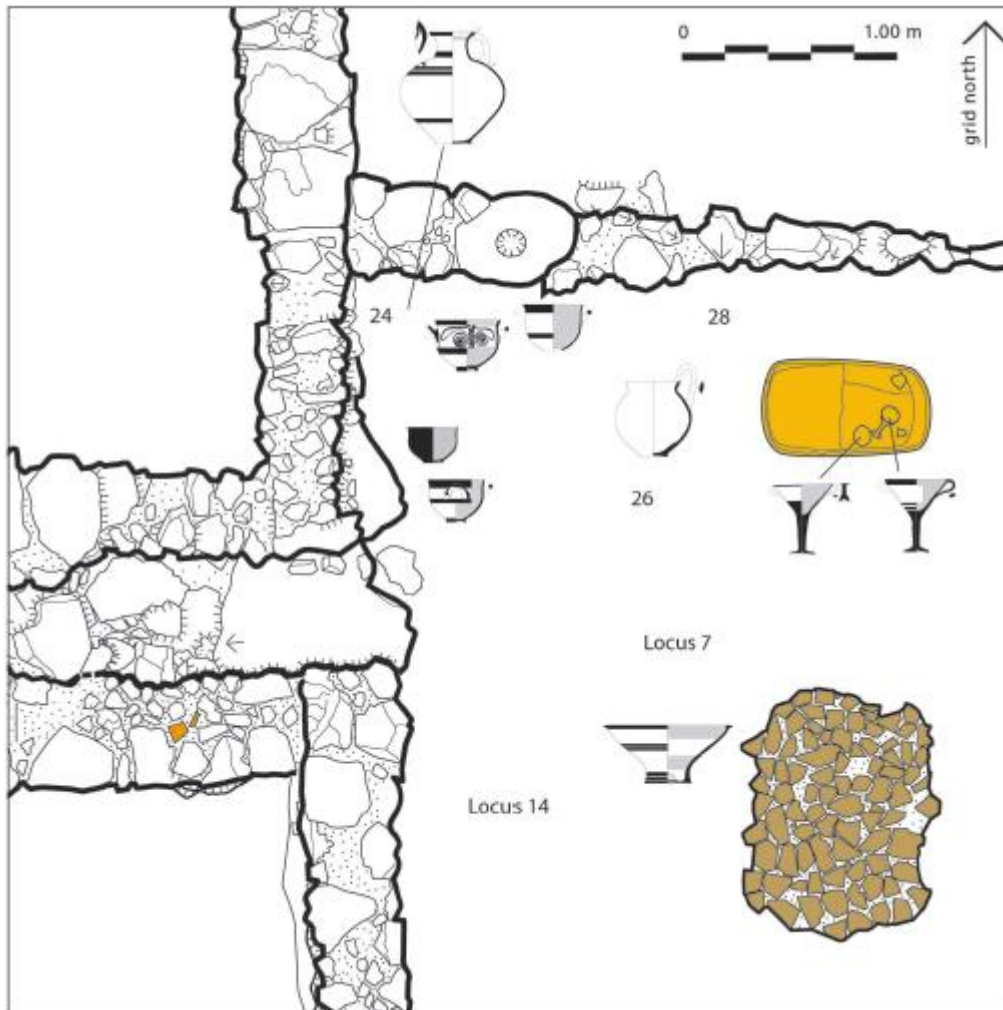


Fig. 5 Trench NWB2d with the location of LH IIIC pottery indicated by number, the bathtub (orange), and sherd-hearth (brown). G. Bianco

The objects were all preserved in a fiery destruction of the LH IIIC Early period, characterized by dense deposits of ashy soil and charcoal. Inside the bathtub (Fig. 6) were two nearly intact LH IIIC kylikes (Fig. 7) and the stem of a third. The destruction date is based on the shape and decoration of the kylikes and the deep bowls (e.g., Fig. 8). The burnt destruction level in Room 1 is preceded by an earlier floor deposit also dating to the LH IIIC Early period. This phase is distinguished by the presence of unburnt whole vessels, including four deep bowls with characteristic decoration, and may correspond more closely to the room's initial construction. Both the terracotta basin and the original platform of the hearth, built of broken roof tiles, were fixed in place at a lower level, compared to the floor on which the vessels placed at the time of the fiery destruction event later in IIIC Early.



Fig. 6 Bathtub with LH IIIC kylikes. Photo: B. Burns

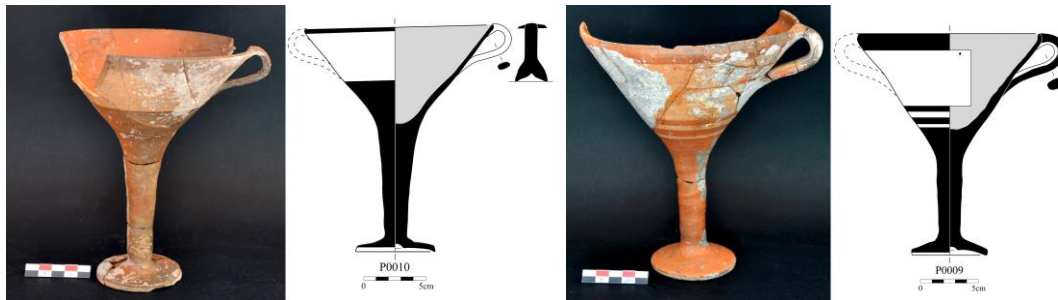


Fig. 7 LH IIIC kylikes. Photos: B. Burke; drawing: T. Ross



Fig. 8 LH IIIC Early monochrome interior deep bowl. Photo: B. Burke; drawing: T. Ross

In his study of the vessels' form and decoration, Trevor Van Damme has identified good parallels in Lefkandi 1b phase for the Eleon material. The striking similarity of features between the two sites' pottery confirms a date for the destruction of Room 1 in the later years of the IIIC Early period, and points to networks of exchange that resulted in close stylistic similarities between the two sites. To what extent material from Euboea made its way to Eleon and *vice versa* remains to be determined.



EBAP - Eleon 2013

Trenches NW B2c, NW B2d, NW B1a, NW B1b

Fig. 9 Northwest excavations 2013. G. Bianco

The destruction levels in the Northwest continue beyond this room (Fig. 9), preserving in the area to its west a series of artifacts suggesting small-scale textile production, including spindle whorls, terracotta spools, and three circular bricks that may be spindle stands. Also among the contemporary LH IIIC remains in the western unit are a large hydria found *in situ* with a stopper across the mouth, terracotta spools, a quern stone, and spindle stand, a nearly intact stirrup jar, a quern stone, and a bronze pin. Two small fragments of painted wall plaster were uncovered, preserving blue and yellow paint, as well as two molded blue glass ornaments. Both the plaster and ornaments are likely from an earlier, LH IIIB occupation.

There are stray finds in this area from the Geometric through Classical periods, and more extensive evidence for occupation in the Medieval period. The most substantial post-classical material is a broad scatter of roof tiles with grooved decoration in found in units NWB2d, NWB1b and continuing into the eastern baulk. During or after the Medieval period a surprising number of pits were dug across the area. The burrowing activity of animals has subsequently

enlarged and connected these circular pits, creating significant disturbance to the stratigraphy in the southern units NWB1a and B1b. The area also contains the first articulated human remains recovered at Eleon: a MH clay cist tomb was found during the last week of digging in 2013. The tomb was well preserved despite the significant amount of later disturbance and held the intact skeleton of a child, interred face down with contracted knees. Analysis on this Middle Helladic discovery will continue in 2014.

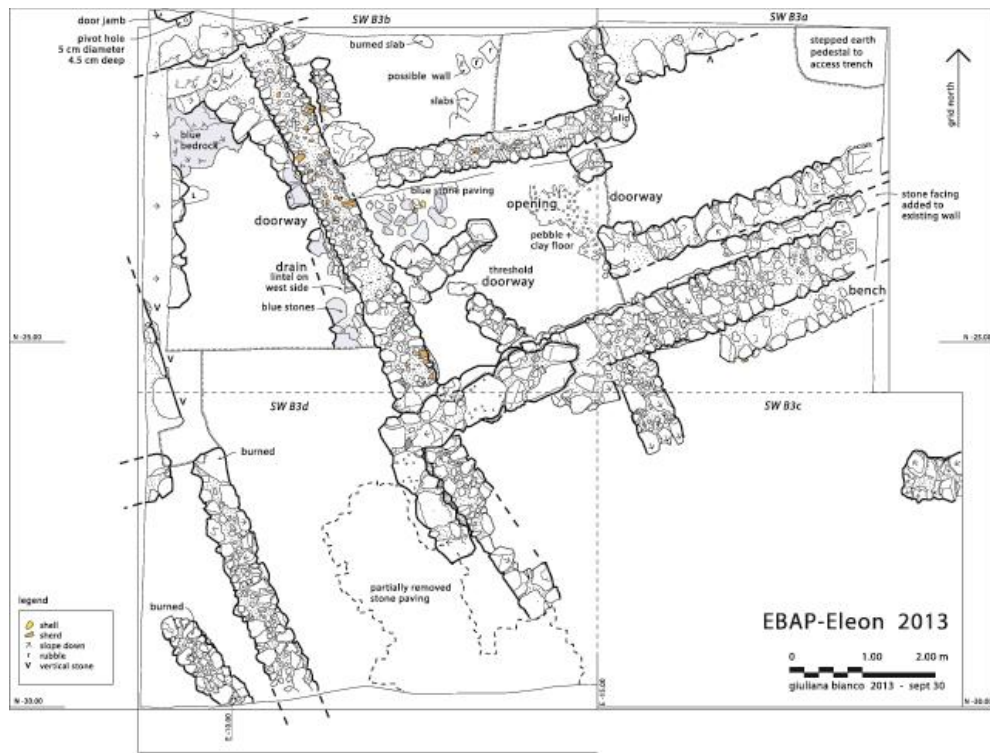
### **Southwest:**

Thirty meters south of the Northwest zone, exploration was made of a 10 by 10 m unit, SWB3 on our site grid (Fig. 10). Here the current ground level slopes from North to South, creating a deeper fill in the north. Cultural remains are fairly close to the surface however. The square generally has a rich amount of mixed pottery, as was the case in our systematic surface survey of 2007 in this area. The surface and top soil clearing material includes Byzantine/Ottoman wares, usually green-glazed, scant traces of Archaic/Classical wares such as black-figure Boeotian, and recognizable Mycenaean forms, primarily of the later phases (LH IIIB-C). Roof tiles, pithoi, and coarse ware pottery are relatively rare in the surface levels compared to other excavation areas at the site. Trash middens and dense scatter of refuse material produced mixed ceramics and substantial faunal remains and charcoal-rich soil that will enable palaeobotanical studies and radiocarbon analysis.

The Southwest unit yielded a range of material which suggests cult activity in the area from a broad chronological period. Although not a chronologically distinct stratum, with material ranging in date from Middle Helladic to Medieval, the fill below the surface layers was also notable for concentrations of Archaic/Classical material. Beginning with the surface clearing, a fragmentary anthropomorphic plank-figure was found, likely Archaic in date. It consisted of the lower skirted body segment with protruding feet (Fig. 11a). In addition to this, miniature vessels and lamps, fine black glaze ware, female (Fig. 11b) and animal (Fig. 11c) figurine fragments were found.

Of particular note is the discovery of three joining sherds from an Archaic Boeotian kantharos preserving a dipinto added after firing on the exterior wall (Fig. 12): [- - -]σιάδαο [- - -]; a personal name in the genitive, e.g. [- - - Καφι]σιάδαο [- - -]. We suggest that the text functions as an owner's label or to mark a dedication.





Trenches SW B3a, SW B3b, SW B3c, SW B3d

Fig. 10 Southwest excavations state plan 2013. G. Bianco



Fig. 11a-c: Plank figurine (a); terra-cotta female figurine (b); tortoise figurine (c). Photo: B. Burke



Fig. 12 Archaic Boeotian kantharos with dipinto. Photo: B. Burke; Drawing: T. Ross

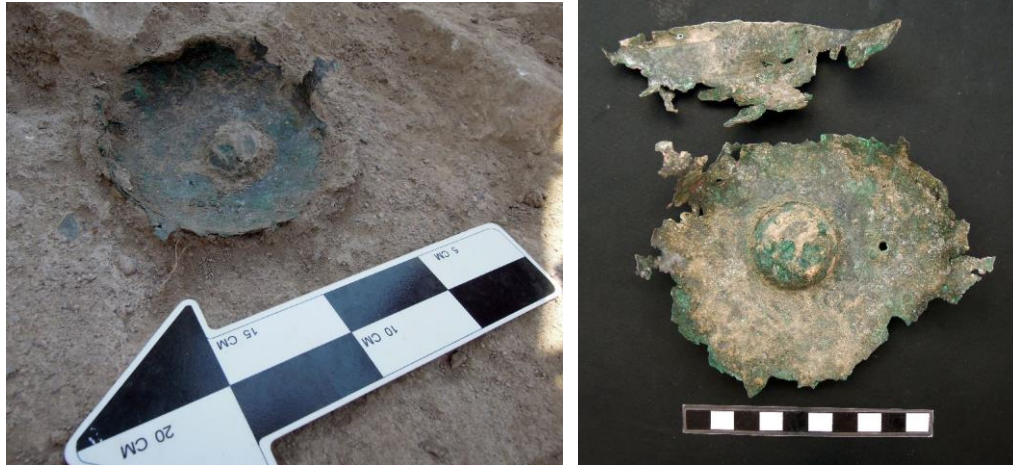


Fig. 13 Copper-alloy phiale from Southwest. Photos: B. Burke



Fig. 14 SW B from north, 2013. Wall 10 is upper right, joining Wall 26. Walls 19 and 21 are lower right. Photo: B. Burke.

The concentration of the Archaic/Classical material was located in the western half of the Southwestern excavation, and its mixed contexts suggest that this material washed down from a primary use area to the north which will be explored in 2014. The later finds found in these mixed contexts include two copper-alloy phiales (Fig. 13).

Architectural remains in the Southwest correspond to several Mycenaean periods, though each is only partially exposed at present. The most substantial construction in SWB3 is formed by the intersection of Wall 10 (ca. 0.85 m) and Wall 26 (ca. 0.65 m width), which may have been built in the later LH IIIB period (Fig. 14). Although the construction of these walls is not yet precisely dated, the structure goes out of use in LH IIIC Early. This building is followed by a IIIC Middle

phase, for which the best preserved architecture is represented by the room including Walls 19 and 21 in the north.

Despite the fact that excavated levels were mixed chronologically, perhaps in part due to the disturbance of significant tumble and some slope wash, there were numerous finds that reflect the nature and chronological range of the material uncovered.

Although isolated sherds have been found which seem LH IIIC Late in character, the upper-most constructions and closed contexts in SWB3 likely date to the LH IIIC Middle period. These walls are often made of a single course of large stones with smooth surfaces on either face usually placed vertically with small rubble in the center. Some of the walls were robbed or disturbed, perhaps from agricultural activity. The LH IIIC Middle phase is not fully understood, but notable finds include a large figural krater with a horse-drawn chariot scene (Fig. 16), a high number of bull figure fragments, and specialized ceramic shapes including ring vases (Fig. 17), part of an animal head rhyton (Fig. 18), and parts of a kalathos with decorated rim. From within the structure several mendable vessels have been identified including a hydria with antithetic loop, a linear deep bowl, and a fine-made jug with twisted handle.

Below this stratum a trash deposit, likewise of LH IIIC Middle date, was excavated and found quite extensively around walls of the eastern side of the square. The deposit in the western half of SWB3 has later Archaic disturbances which obscure the stratigraphic sequence of the LH IIIC deposit. Currently it is believed that this trash material is associated with the structure formed by walls 19 and 21 located along the north baulk line of the square, continuing into the unexcavated area to the north. Characteristics of this deposit include the presence of large bone and antler fragments, as well as mendable pieces of pottery with at least three painted stirrup jars, one of particular interest on account of its burnished finish.

The walls of the Southwest are, in general, well preserved. The largest two, wall 26 and 10, are composed of three courses of medium-sized roughly worked stones, with a leveling course of small fist-sized rocks likely for mud-brick superstructure. The length of these walls, still not exposed to their full extent, suggests a substantial structure. The area produced mendable pottery of an LH IIIC Early date, including: a linear basin with monochrome interior, medium band deep bowl with monochrome interior, and a two handled plain-ware vessel likely for storage.



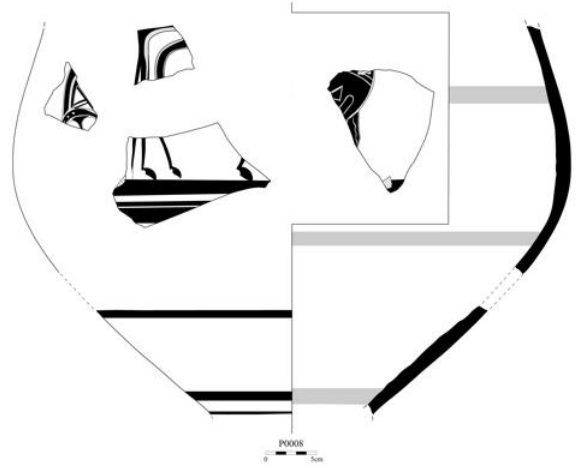


Fig. 16. Figural krater with horse-drawn chariot. Photo: B Burke; Drawing: T. Ross.



Figs. 17 and 18 Mycenaean Ring vase fragments and animal head rhyton. Photos: B. Burke

Throughout the destruction level associated with this building were found both pan and cover roof tiles, with good parallels from recent excavations at Mycenaean Thebes. The number of roof tiles preserved does not reflect a complete roof; rather it seems likely the roof tiles were re-used in later periods, as evidenced by the roof tiles found in so-called 'sherd-hearths', both in the Southwest excavations and also in the Northwest area. This structure is particularly interesting because it goes out of use in LH IIIC Early, based on a destruction deposit. The depth of the destruction deposit as well as the presence of two rather distinct ashy lenses suggests a two-story construction, rather than two separate chronological horizons.





Figs. 18 Copper-alloy fibula. Photo: B. Burke.



Fig. 19 Ivory head with inlaid eyes. Photo: V. Karas

A stratified scatter of dense ceramic and bone material was also uncovered in the northern-central zone of the trench. Within the burnt matrix, debris included large pan and cover roof tiles with ceramics dating primarily to LH IIIB2. These include a high number of decorated and plain serving vessels (deep bowls, cups and kylikes), a decorated mug on which elements of a vertical whorl shell motif are visible, joining pieces of a fine globular stirrup jar with rosettes at the shoulder, a narrow-necked jug, and the false neck and associated body sherds of transport stirrup jars. Other notable finds from this collapse level include a copper alloy fibula (Fig. 18).

Another find that is likely contemporary with the LH III B material was a small ivory head (Fig. 19). This small relief carving depicts a human head, cut flat across the back, with facial features of an eastern style. It comes from a LH IIIB stratum dated by the pottery, but the style of carving does not have good parallels in the Greek Bronze Age. Its eyes, inlaid with bitumen and small pins of silver or lead, suggest this was a creation of the east Mediterranean and perhaps influenced by Neo-Assyrian styles. The imported Syrian carving of a human head from the Mycenae cult center is perhaps the closest parallel from a Bronze Age context, but the Eleon example is different enough to encourage us to look for other, later comparanda.

### **Southeast:**

Work in the Southeast quadrant of the site concentrated on understanding the most prominent visible feature at the site of Eleon, the massive wall built in the so-called Lesbian polygonal style, where it follows a curved path over 80 m in length, preserved up to 5 m in height along the

east side of the acropolis. One of our primary research questions for the historical phases of the excavation is to contextualize the construction of the wall at Eleon. Remarkably, our initial excavations in this area recovered no significant material of either the Archaic or Classical periods, but broader excavations have now revealed an important continuation of the wall's architecture and finds that date its period of use. We have now exposed a ramped entry way of multiple layers of crushed lime. This entry is framed by extensions of the polygonal wall and by reused Mycenaean constructions.

None of the associated finds, however, can be related to a typical settlement or household. Rather, numerous miniature vessels, terracotta figurines, and bronze items, suggest cultic activity dating to the sixth and fifth centuries BC.

Unfortunately the original architectural context for the figurines and miniature vessels has not yet been found. What we have excavated, however, is a multi-phase ramp made up of crushed limestone pebbles, which created a white surface (Fig. 20). This ramp led to an impressive threshold block that was uncovered to its full extent, spanning almost the entirety of the corridor produced by two parallel Mycenaean walls. At a total length of ca. 3.25 m and a total width of 0.47 m, the block exhibits a high level of symmetry: the rectangular cutting and metal pivot at the north end is complemented by a second such set at the south end, while a central line divides the block in two almost exactly at the midpoint and any cuttings or wear marks evident on one side of this dividing line are echoed on the other (Fig. 21).

There is significant wear on only the western side of the block; the eastern face still retains a sharp roughly 90 degree angle. We believe the entrance held two large doors, effectively prohibiting any wheeled traffic. A pit was also discovered in the SE area, directly in front of the threshold block. This pit yielded almost no pottery or terracotta finds, a marked difference from other deposits in the area. It did, however, contain an almost completely intact animal skeleton, preliminarily identified as an adolescent lamb/goat with no visible butchering marks. A large rock was placed in the center of the pit as well, providing some indication that the animal may have been purposefully buried, though the lack of pottery or a discernable burial assemblage makes the date and nature of the pit uncertain.

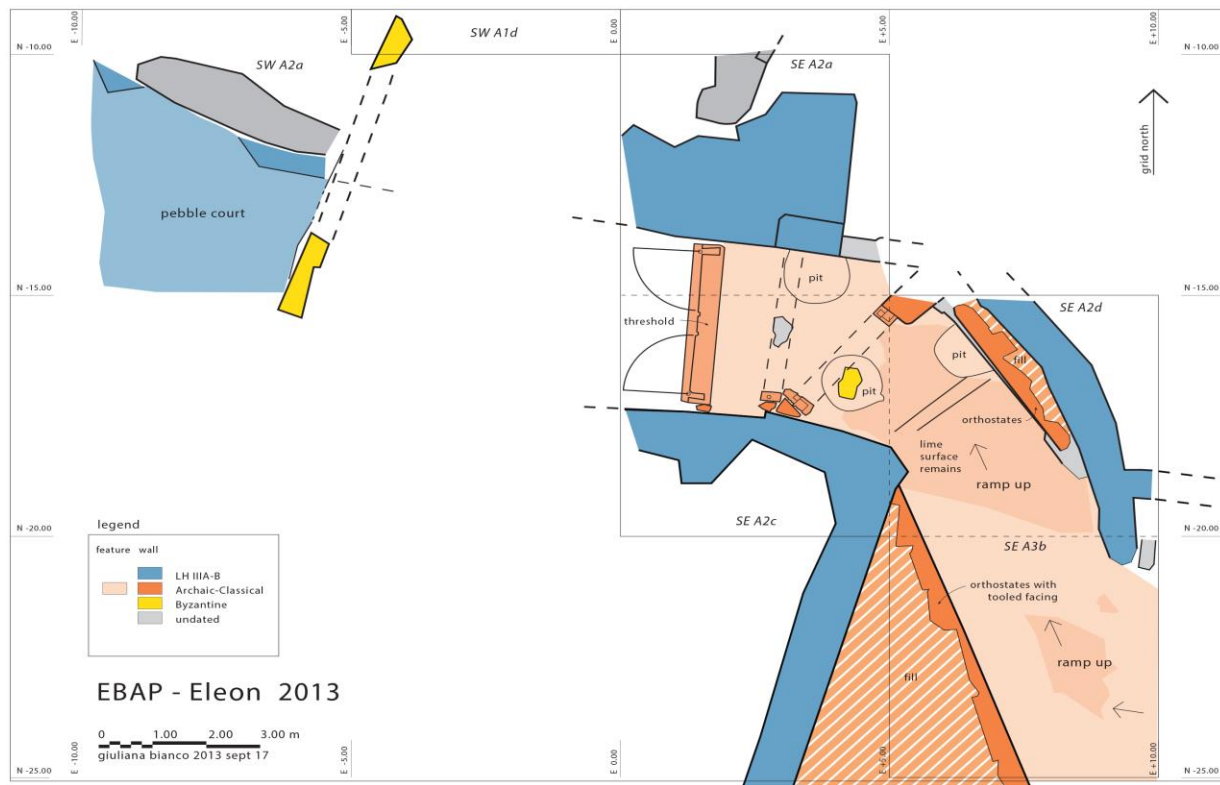


Fig. 20 Southeast sector and ramp. G. Bianco



Fig. 21 Threshold and ramp 2013. Photo: B. Burke

As a secondary benefit, the pit allowed for a view into the stratigraphy of surrounding loci. In this way, the white lime ramp surface was discovered extending from the NE corner of the trench and abutting the SE portion of a large wall. This surface had inclusions of painted terracotta roof tiles and miniature vessels lying flat within the lime material, and is likely associated with one or more of the thresholds in the area and was a kind of paving. Subsequent excavation will help to determine an exact chronology for the threshold, surrounding walls, and several remaining sections of the ramp surface, as well as their relationship to one another.

A destruction layer in the extreme southwest quadrant was made evident by a great deal of roof tile inclusions, ash, and lighter soil. The area contained a concentration of miniature vessel fragments with some intact examples, including one miniature *hydria* among the dozens of *kotylai* and *skyphoi* (Fig.22). Certain decorative schemes occur repeatedly on these miniature vessels, most frequently horizontal body bands in red, black and brown paint, frequently with a decorative motif at the rim (e.g., vertical zig-zags) and/or washy dark brown monochrome interior. Other variations are notably Corinthian in style. Other vessel types include *kylikes* and *lekanes*, along with some fine painted black figure ware. Three Boeotian *kylikes* were discovered in the SE corner. One intact example exhibited signs of having a small semicircular lip cut out of the rim, likely for pouring libations (Fig. 23 a-b). The number of complete terracotta figurines within the entrance area was also impressive. More than 10 examples of standing or seated female figures were discovered in total by the end of the season (Fig. 24). All were of comparable quality, size, and type consistent with the 5th century BC. Also discovered in this area were fragments of the earlier *papas* type figurines with *polos* headdress, indicating the date of activity may begin in the Late Archaic to the Early Classical period.

Overall, a more refined chronology of the area must be obtained from the pottery found in the trench, though it seems clear that the architecture north of the entrance represents a strictly Mycenaean context, while the area to the south of Wall 8 can be linked to sometime during the Late Archaic or Classical time period. The area must, however, be considered as a whole in order to understand its full importance. Given the quantity of miniature vessels, which are votive in nature, together with the wealth of terracotta figurine fragments found to the south, it can be reasonably assumed that religious activity occurred in the area during the Late Archaic or Classical periods.





Fig. 22 Miniature *kotlyai*. Photo: B. Burke.



Fig. 23 a-b Painted Boeotian kylix. Photo: B. Burke



Fig. 24 Terracotta female figurines. Photo: B. Burke.

Our project has begun to understand the Late Bronze Age phases of Eleon but has yet to uncover complete structures. The impressive polygonal wall of the Archaic and Classical periods, which drew us to the site initially, still raises important questions about the nature of the site in the historical period. Most interesting in this regard is the complete lack of any material characteristic of a domestic settlement. We also lack material of Hellenistic and Roman date

suggesting a probable hiatus in occupation. The Archaic and Classical finds connected to religious activities are very intriguing, particularly in light of the fact that no recognizable religious architecture has yet been found at the site. We hope to continue excavations in 2014 to provide answers to these and other questions.

We would like to thank our many colleagues and sponsors, who made this work possible. Funding for the Eastern Boeotia Archaeological Project has been provided by our long-time sponsor, the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, as well as the Loeb Classical Library Foundation, the University of Victoria, Wellesley College, and a number of private donations. The Eleon excavation is now supported by an Insight Grant from the Social Studies and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The information assembled here would not be possible without the contributions of our many colleagues and student volunteers. We are very grateful to trench supervisors Emily Anderson, Haley Bertram, Morgan Condell, Genevieve Hill, Mina Nikolovieni, Matthew Pihokker, and Trevor Van Damme. Ceramics have been studied by Leslie Hammond, Bartek Lis, Susan Lupack, Camilla MacKay, and Trevor Van Damme, small finds by Stephie Nikoloudis, and inscriptions by M.B. Richardson. We would also like to thank our architect Giuliana Bianco, surveyor Kyle Mahoney, draftsperson Tina Ross, and conservators Vicky Karas and Emilia Nifora. Finally, we express our thanks to our many friends and supporters in Arma and Dilesi. This report is dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Ino Mamoni.