

ARCHAEOLOGICAL NEWS

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THE PYLOS REGIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT: 1992-1994*

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In the summer of 1994, the third and final season of the Pylos Regional Archaeological Project (PRAP) took place under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens. Over the course of some six weeks, intensive survey teams worked in three new parts of our study area in southwestern Messenia (centered notionally around the Palace of Nestor): a coastal transect at the very north of our study area (near the Langouvardos River valley), in a rugged upland area near the modern town of Gargalianoi, and east of the Aigaleon mountain range, which probably formed the provincial boundary of the Mycenaean kingdom of Pylos (fig. 9). The approximately ten square kilometers covered by our method of intensive survey (which involves team members walking fifteen meters apart, counting all visible cultural material and collecting all diagnostic artifacts) brought the total area covered in the three years of the project to about forty square kilometers.

Southwestern Messenia had, of course, been the subject of significant fieldwork before, including the regional work of the Minnesota Messenia Expedition. Our more intensive work has doubled the number of known sites in the area we surveyed; in 1994, for example, a dozen new sites were identified. Just as one example of how PRAP has revised our understanding of settlement structures in this area, in the valley system east of Aigaleon (the location of the modern village of Margeli) only one site had previously been known: the large conical hill of Koutsoveri, apparently occupied principally during the Middle Bronze Age. PRAP field teams located the remains of six additional sites, chiefly of historic date and including a possible Roman cemetery. We have sought to build in other ways on the work of the Minnesota Messenia Expedition, for example through an "inventory survey" of sites they had previously reported. We have investigated nearly all such sites within a seventy square kilometer area, a process that involved relocating them, re-examining their surface assemblages,

plotting their spatial extent and—in some cases—observing deterioration in condition since their first discovery.

Experts involved in our project span all periods from the Palaeolithic to Early Modern era, and we have recovered material evidence from across that entire time span. In 1993, the coastal site of Romanou/Rikia yielded lithics dated near the transition between the Upper Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic period. Project geologists Eberhard Zangger and Michael Timpson now suggest that the soil matrix at this site may be significantly older (at least 100-150,000 years old); important questions of artifactual context, however, remain to be clarified. The early presence of humans in the area is given stronger support by a small but dense assemblage of chipped stone discovered in 1994, also in a coastal context at Vromoneri/Vergina Rema. These lithics are heavily patinated and larger than the norm; preliminary analysis by John Cherry, William Parkinson and Curtis Runnels suggest the presence of Levallois flakes and a core, Mousterian sidescrapers, and other late Greek Mousterian elements. Apart from these coastal sites, the highlands near modern Gargalianoi also yielded numerous lithics. Obsidian is uncommon across our study region; the various lithic materials employed appear to derive chiefly from locally available chert cobbles. Well-known Bronze Age artifact types such as prismatic blades, cores, denticulates and hollow-based arrowpoints are present, but our commonest lithic finds remain flakes with small areas of expedient edge retouch or notching.

Neolithic and Early Bronze Age finds have traditionally been poorly represented in southwestern Messenia. We have recovered a few Neolithic sherds, identified by their distinct fabric, at several locations, including the Palace of Nestor. As for the Early Bronze Age, a remarkable Early Helladic assemblage was discovered at a coastal site at Vromoneri/Nozaina, a homogenous collection of diagnostic Early Helladic

II shapes including T-rim and conical bowls, as well as a possible sauceboat rim. Early Helladic material was also discovered at the Palace, as well as at the multi-period large site of Ordines, at the northern end of our study zone. Some of these pieces, including Bass bowl rims and crescent lug handles belong to Early Helladic III, a phase conventionally thought to have been absent in Messenia. Recently, however, this period has been recognized in the earliest pottery from Nichoria in eastern Messenia; we have now established its presence in the west as well.

Middle and Late Helladic remains are more frequent across our study area. The greatest concentration of Mycenaean material, of course, came from our gridded collection on the Englianos ridge in the immediate vicinity of the Palace of Nestor. Remains of Late Helladic IIIA-IIIB were very common and included many plaster fragments, several with painted decoration. Apart from our surface collections here, a program of geophysical prospection was undertaken in 1994 by a team directed by Dr. Falko Kuhnke of the University of Braunschweig. Preliminary magnetometry analysis suggests that substantial remains of large structures are preserved to the southwest of the Palace, in the area of the Lower Town trenches dug by Carl Blegen and on a terrace farther to the west. By contrast, previous work (coring and magnetometric prospection) to the northeast of the Palace revealed far worse indications of subsurface preservation.

Over the three year course of the project, such a combination of archaeological, geophysical and geomorphological investigation has provided significant new insights into the important settlement at the Palace of Nestor. Apart from ascertaining subsurface conditions, we have learned that the town was both larger and longer-lived than previously thought. While analysis of the surface pottery is not complete, it is already clear that habitation extended for some twenty hectares around the Palace—four times the size of earlier estimates. The settlement continued from Neolithic through Bronze Age times, with some signs of activity in the Geometric and Byzantine epochs as well.

Study of the post-palatial period in Messenia has been somewhat overshadowed by an emphasis on the Bronze Age, yet the region has an extremely complex and fascinating history—one that sometimes seems to diverge from other parts of Greece. It should be noted that pottery sequences for historic Messenian ceram-

ics are not yet well understood, and that our results at this point should be taken as very preliminary. One very interesting pattern that does emerge from our work, however, is the existence of relatively large, relatively long-lived settlements in the Messenian landscape. Compared to other regions of Greece, where cyclical patterns of nucleation/dispersion in the countryside are often observed, Messenia tends to support more constant nucleated settlement. The factors behind this phenomenon remain to be explained, but for certain periods may lie in Messenia's unusual history. For example, in the Archaic-Classical era (a period typified elsewhere by dispersed settlement), we may be witnessing the effects of Spartan control and exploitation of Messenia to its own purposes.

Turning to a quick overview of the historical periods in Messenia, Dark Age to Geometric activity still remain elusive, even after three years of fieldwork. Material dating to Archaic and Classical times is more frequently found across our study region. The real florescence, however, appears to belong to the Hellenistic and Roman periods, tentatively identified as beginning after the Messenian liberation from Sparta. This pattern of apparent growth over time can be traced at the site of Romanou, one of our relatively large and long-lived settlements, lying in the southern part of our study area. Apart from a Bronze Age component, Romanou possesses a very limited Geometric presence, a wider scatter of material in the Archaic/Classical era, capped off with a burst of activity in Roman times. Romanou also may have boasted productive facilities, indicated by the discovery of slag and a possible kiln site.

A very different large historical site is Marathoupolis/Dialiskari, on the northern coast of our study territory. Dialiskari can safely be characterized as a Roman coastal villa; surface finds were predominantly of the Late Roman period (including African Red Slip and Late Roman "C" Wares), though traces of earlier occupation were noted. Mosaic tesserae, glass, column capitals and a coin of Aurelian were also found, as was a fragmentary four line inscription, probably of second/third century CE date. Several extant architectural features remain at Dialiskari, including a hypocaust system, a coastal quarry, an octagonal brick foundation and cuttings for salt pans, as well as ancient columns and a Roman mosaic incorporated in modern homes. Coastal development in Messenia threatens sites such as Dialiskari. To this

end, apart from our intensive surface collections, a plan of all ancient features was made in 1994 with a Sokkia Set 5 Total Station; the Station was used at several other of our sites and was employed to help lay out collection grids as well.

An exception to our rule of relatively large historic settlements is the near-coastal site of Romanou/Glyfadaki. A small but very dense surface scatter yielded fine Late Hellenistic and Early Roman pottery, including moldmade bowls very akin to examples found at Messene. The unprecedented abundance of fine wares here argued tentatively for the presence of an elite residence. Geophysical work supports this conclusion, with the Braunschweig team identifying the outline of a large building (at least some forty meters in length along one dimension) through the detection of magnetic anomalies. Cores taken along this line, however, would suggest the walls of this structure no longer exist but that the anomalies reflect instead the disturbance of bedding trenches. According to Professor Ann Harrison, our period ceramics expert, there exists a very close correlation of these subsurface features with the surface pottery and tile.

The Byzantine and post-Byzantine epochs are represented by a variety of sites, such as two cemeteries discovered in 1994, one of tile graves, the other of tumuli. One major settlement lies at Metamorphosis/Aliartos at the base of the Metaxada valley to the east of the Aigaleon ridge. This site first was occupied in the Roman period; in the Byzantine era, the center of settlement shifted westward to surround a still copious spring. Connected with this spring is a water channel and a small plastered structure, identified by local residents as a Turkish bath. Fine Middle Byzantine glazed and sgraffito wares were discovered at the site, as were Byzantine cookwares and coarse wares which our ceramics expert, Professor Sharon Gerstel, reports to have good parallels from Nichoria and Sparta.

As for later periods, work on our Early Modern material has recently been undertaken by Kim Shelton. Ceramics from Floka/Panitsa offer one good example of an early nineteenth century Messenian assemblage. The pottery is mostly of local Greek manufacture, inspired by both Turkish and European wares. The latter type includes "blue design" plates with flower and other patterns near the rim; such finds are quite common across our study area. At Tragana/Hassan Aga, similar ceramics were found, but an adjacent

house and two walled enclosures may have Turkish antecedents. For these periods, in addition to our investigations in the field, research is being undertaken in state archives in Istanbul and Venice.

The work of archival historians is only one of many additional disciplines involved in the Pylos Regional Archaeological Project. The importance of subsurface prospection, especially in relation to coring, has already been mentioned. In one other coring program in 1994, project geologist Eberhard Zangger worked with a local well-drilling team to investigate an unusually flat alluvial plain near the site of Romanou. His working hypothesis was that this plain represented a silted-up basin, possibly filled with water in the Bronze Age. Resulting cores do appear to indicate the existence of a basin whose flat bottom, together with other indications, suggest that it was artificially constructed. Further work may reveal this as the Bronze Age port of Pylos.

Geological investigations of another character were undertaken by soil scientist Michael Timpson in 1994. Dr. Timpson mapped soils and studied buried soil exposures in portions of our study area, sampling its various underlying bedrock geologies. Comparison of his soil maps (based on landscape and geologic relationships) with archaeological data collected from these zones will establish possible relations between artifact density and natural soil-landscape units. Preliminary observations suggest that some portions of our study area have indeed been affected by severe erosion owing to human agency, leading to the loss of the original landscape surface.

Finally, botanical investigations, including palynology, have been part of PRAP's agenda from the beginning. Carbon-14 determinations have recently been released from coring samples taken from the Osmanaga Lagoon by Drs. Sergei and Güle Yazvenko. Signs of human impact on the landscape, including a sharp increase in cultivation, may be dated near the end of the fourth millennium BCE. Another pattern is a noteworthy peak, and sharp drop-off, in olive pollen, observed at a level that can now be dated to the Mycenaean era.

This report is, of necessity, preliminary in nature, and many of the initiatives described are still ongoing. Yet already many original and often provocative statements can be made as a result of the work of the Pylos Regional Archaeological Project. In 1984, a conference was held entitled "Pylos Comes Alive," at which

the life of the Bronze Age palace was explored in great detail. Ten years later, the territory that surrounded and supported that palace is now "coming alive"—and not only for the Bronze Age, but for the entire sweep of human occupation in southwestern Messenia.

NOTES

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