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The Artemision at Amarynthos: The 2021 Season

KARL REBER, ANGELIKI SIMOSI, MARIA CHIDIROGLOU, CHLOÉ CHEZEAUX, JÉRÔME ANDRÉ,  
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Les «maisons des dragons» eubéennes: fouille du *drakospito* d'Ilkizès

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Aegina, Hellanion Oros



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## THE ARTEMISION AT AMARYNTHOS: THE 2021 SEASON

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*Introduction*

Following up on the excavation seasons directed by Karl Reber and Amalia Karapaschalidou, which led to the spectacular discoveries that confirmed the identification of the sanctuary of Artemis Amarysia, a new research program was launched in 2021 under the lead of the undersigned<sup>1</sup>. The project's goals are to study the origins of Amarynthos, the sanctuary's integration within the ancient landscape of central Euboea, and the evolution of the sacred space devoted to Artemis Amarysia. The excavation team now focuses on the site's earlier phases of occupation, mainly the prehistoric settlement on the Paleoeekklisies hill and the Geometric and Archaic remains in the sanctuary area, while the survey team has launched a new field exploration between Eretria and Amarynthos. What follows is a summary of the main results of the 2021 season.

*The prehistoric settlement on the hill of Paleoeekklisies*

One of the current research agendas consists of studying the extension of the Bronze Age settlement and its spatial and chronological relationship with the later

sanctuary<sup>2</sup>. The significance of prehistoric Amarynthos was established by the British survey of the 1960s and later confirmed by the test trenches conducted by the Greek Archaeological Service<sup>3</sup>. It has been reasonably assumed that the toponym *a-ma-ru-to*, which appears on a Linear B tablet at Thebes (TH Of 25), refers to this settlement. If Late Helladic layers were excavated at the foot of the hill during earlier campaigns and isolated Mycenaean sherds were discovered in the area of the Archaic temple<sup>4</sup>, the recent purchase of two plots of land connecting the sanctuary to the hilltop allows a more extended and detailed investigation of the site's earliest phases of occupation (*fig. 1*)<sup>5</sup>.

In 2021, trenches were simultaneously carried out at the west edge of the hilltop and on the lower slope. On the hilltop, the exploration of the Bronze Age layers was hindered by a massive Medieval building just below the surface (trench XXXIII)<sup>6</sup>. The building was constructed over a burial ground characterized by adult and child inhumations. Unfortunately, the limited and modest nature of the material finds (a bronze ring and a belt buckle fragment) do not allow for a precise date. The epigraphic analysis of a tile with graffiti<sup>7</sup>, placed above the head of one of the deceased, may provide further insight in the future.

The prehistoric layers are accessible immediately to the West (trench XXXV), on the terrace cut some 2 m into the slope by the construction of a modern house (now demolished). Bronze Age remains emerged directly under the modern floor. They consist of a wall running

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<sup>1</sup> The program is supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation. We are especially grateful to the Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports, in particular P. Adam-Veleni, K. Benissi, and S. Spyropoulou, as well as the entire staff of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Euboea. The activities of the Swiss School are also supported by the University of Lausanne, the Fondation philanthropique Famille Sandoz, the Stavros S. Niarchos Foundation, the Isaac Dreyfus-Bernheim Stiftung, the Ceramica-Stiftung, the Société Académique Vaudoise, the Fondation Théodore Lagonico, and Swiss Universities.

<sup>2</sup> The research and fieldwork on the prehistoric settlement are led by Tobias Krapf and Daniela Greger.

<sup>3</sup> Sackett *et al.* 1996, 64–66; Parlama 1979; Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Verdan *et al.* 2020, 79–80.

<sup>5</sup> In 2020, a first trial trench (XXXVI) was opened E of building 4 and the stratigraphy (mostly Mycenaean) behind the demolished house on the slope was documented (XXXV). See *AntK* 64, 2020, 143 *fig. 1*.

<sup>6</sup> Width 6,35 m (N-S). Excavated length 5,50 m (E-W). Two phases of the building have been identified, the first with stuccoed walls. The S wall of the building had already been discovered in a small trial trench in 2019.

<sup>7</sup> T7767.

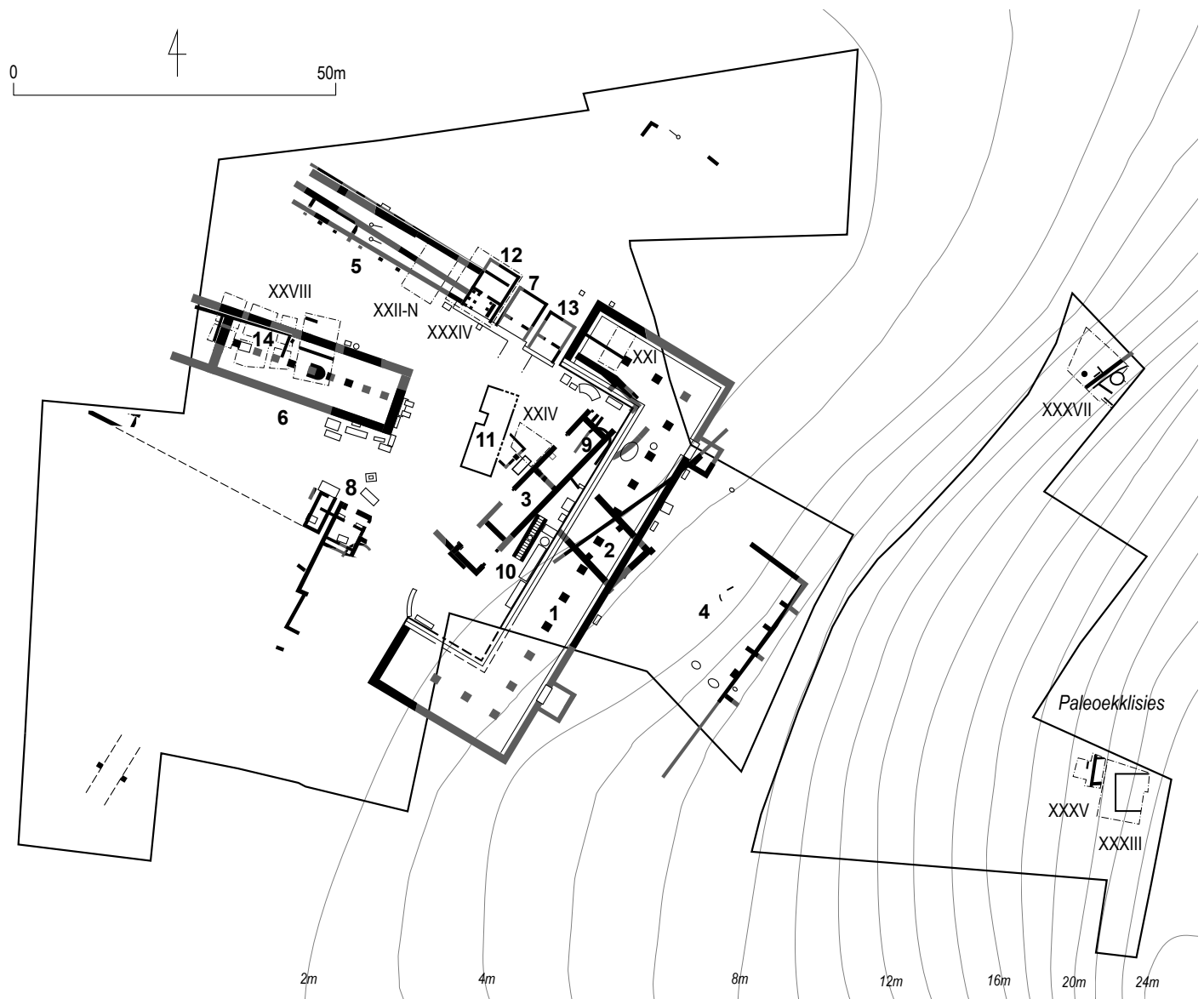


Fig. 1 Plan of the excavation at Amarynthos

north-south, behind which a large amount of Mycenaean pottery was discovered. The removal of the modern house's sewage in 2020 has revealed the existence of Early Helladic structures 1,3 m below the terrace. This means that over 3 m of archaeological layers are preserved in this area.

The most impressive discoveries were made on the lower slope, where two large Early Helladic walls appear to follow the relief of the hill (trench XXXVII, *fig. 2*). Their outer faces are well preserved and retain a rubble fill, with no evidence for an inner face<sup>8</sup>. A defensive

<sup>8</sup> Orientation NE-SW. The southern part of both walls is destroyed. Western wall (M174): 5 courses in position (0,65 m), preserved on a

function for these retaining walls appears plausible, but this hypothesis can only be confirmed by future excavations. A stone anchor (*fig. 3*)<sup>9</sup> was discovered at the foot of the lower wall, which, along with other finds (including a fragment of a Cycladic frying pan), asserts the site's connection with navigation along the Euboean Gulf and contacts with the Cyclades.

length of 5,2 m. Eastern wall (M181): 3-4 courses in position (0,75 m), preserved length 4,4 m. Interestingly, the Prehistoric walls on the lower slope of the hill remained partially visible in the historical period. A few Classical miniature vessels and clay figurines were laid down as dedications at the base of the wall.

<sup>9</sup> 2545-1. Preserved height 47 cm (broken on the top), width 52 cm, thickness 8-11 cm.



Fig. 2 Early Bronze Age wells and walls in trench XXXVII at the foot of the hill

Two perpendicular walls have been identified behind the retaining walls, beneath a layer of debris. Additionally, two wells were uncovered in the same sector but only partially excavated for security reasons. While the upper part of the eastern well was constructed with stones and filled during the Middle Helladic period<sup>10</sup>, the western well was dug into the soil and contained pottery of the Early Helladic I period<sup>11</sup>. This second well, which is located west of the retaining walls, is currently the oldest structure identified at Amarynthos.

The finds made in 2021 cover the entire Bronze Age sequence, from the Early third millennium to the Mycenaean period. If the 2006 excavations showed that the Middle Helladic settlement extended well beyond the slopes of the hill<sup>12</sup>, the 2021 campaign has now asserted the significance of Amarynthos in the Early Helladic

period and its occupation since the Early Helladic I at the latest.

#### *The archaic sanctuary and the temples*

In 2020, the discovery of an exceptionally rich offering deposit within the limits of a building interpreted as a temple marked a new step in the exploration of the Artemision<sup>13</sup>. The 2021 excavation was consequently centered on this area<sup>14</sup>, forming the sanctuary's core, and revealed the continuation of the deposit, as well as a high density of remains and a complex stratigraphy.

#### A succession of temples

To this day, three building phases overlapping each other have been identified (*fig. 4*). Of the latest temple (6),

<sup>10</sup> St249. To the W, ten courses (1,3 m) have been preserved. Diameter 1,3 m at the top. Top at 8,03 m. Level reached during excavation: 5,95 m.

<sup>11</sup> St245. Diameter 1 m. Top at 4,34 m. Level reached during excavation: 1,74 m. The pottery of its fill has many parallels in the Early Helladic I phases of Manika (Sampson 1985) and Kalogerovrysi (Sampson 1993). We thank Sylvie Müller Celka for her comments on the assemblage.

<sup>12</sup> AntK 54, 2011, 144–159.

<sup>13</sup> AntK 64, 2021, 148–150. The research and fieldwork in the temple area are directed by Tamara Saggini, Samuel Verdan, Olga Kyriazi, Jérôme André, and Thierry Theurillat.

<sup>14</sup> Other sectors were also investigated in 2021, especially the northern stoa (5) and the contiguous oikos (12) where sections of walls belonging to an early phase of the sanctuary were uncovered (trenches XXI, XXII-N and XXXIV), as well as the large basin made of Corinthian tiles (St195), which was fully excavated in front of the Archaic building 3 (trench XXIV). See also AntK 64, 2021, 144–146.





Fig. 3 Bronze Age stone anchor

only the cella foundations, made of large slabs of conglomerate, are preserved. There is no evidence of a peristasis. A succession of large bases roughly aligned in the temple's axis attests to the existence of a central colonnade. The temple's eastern façade is oriented towards an altar (11), and the rear part to the West features an inner room (an adyton or an opisthodomos)<sup>15</sup>.

The temple's history and the activities it once hosted cannot be detailed because the elevation and occupation levels are not preserved. However, its construction can securely be dated to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE based on the chronology of the offering deposit (see below).

The dry-stone foundations and mudbrick elevation of an earlier temple (14) were discovered under the later temple. It was probably built in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and remained in use during most of the 6<sup>th</sup>. The plan, whose restitution remains hypothetical, displays remarkable features: a large, central, rectangular base was undoubtedly the focus of some ritual actions and might have supported a cult statue (*fig. 5*)<sup>16</sup>. To the West, an internal partition wall indicates the existence of a back room, a common feature attested in both successive temples.

<sup>15</sup> A comparison with several temples of Artemis located around the southern Euboean Gulf (Aulis, Brauron, Halai) shows close similarities in their plans and suggests that the back room was probably an adyton (Travlos 1976; Hollinshead 1999). The depth of the back room at Amarynthos is likely to remain unknown, as its West part is located outside the boundary of the excavation site.

<sup>16</sup> The base St228 is made of a course of large roughly squared blocks, lying on smaller stones. It measures at least 1,75 × 1,00 m.

Although the layers and structures related to this temple have been partially destroyed by the construction of the later temple (6), the material found on its floor level provides evidence for the character of the offerings stored in the building during its use.

Beneath this temple (14), the remains of a long wall may foreshadow the discovery of a third building, perhaps dating to the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

### The Archaic altar

A rounded structure (St200) was discovered in 2020 within the perimeter of building 6<sup>17</sup>. Its aspect, function, and chronology are now better known: it was a massive altar whose original elevation must have been close to one meter (*fig. 6*)<sup>18</sup>. Its horseshoe shape is unusual in a Greek context, where circular and semi-circular altars dominate alongside quadrangular examples<sup>19</sup>. The upper surface must have accommodated the sacrificial fire, as indicated by a succession of fine layers of ash and burnt clay. Its sides were covered with a clay coating and repeatedly whitewashed with lime – a sign of the care given to its maintenance.

Around the altar, the layers contained tenuous remains of the ritual activities accomplished for Artemis: ashes, charred splinters of animal bones, and melted bronze particles. Several features surrounded the altar: to the North, a mudbrick wall seems to trace a limit defining the sacrificial space<sup>20</sup>, while to the West, the floor was

<sup>17</sup> AntK 64, 2021, 149.

<sup>18</sup> Dimensions: c. 2,8 × 2,3 m. The S-E angle of the structure has been almost entirely destroyed by later works.

<sup>19</sup> Horseshoe shaped features interpreted as altars have been found inside cult buildings of the Mycenaean period, in Mycenae (building Gamma of the Cult Centre, see Mylonas 1972, 24–26 pl. VIb–VI), and Kalapodi (South Temple 2, see Archaeological Reports 59, 2013, 20). Apart from their shape, however, they are very different from the Archaic altar of the Artemision. The latter finds much closer parallels in semicircular structures, interpreted as altars, which have been found in several sacred places in southern Euboea: at Zarakes, near Karystos (Plakari and Karababa) and on Mount Ochi (see Kooi *et al.* 2020, with further references).

<sup>20</sup> Surprisingly, the mudbrick elevation rests directly on the floor, where a stone foundation might have been expected. Where the wall

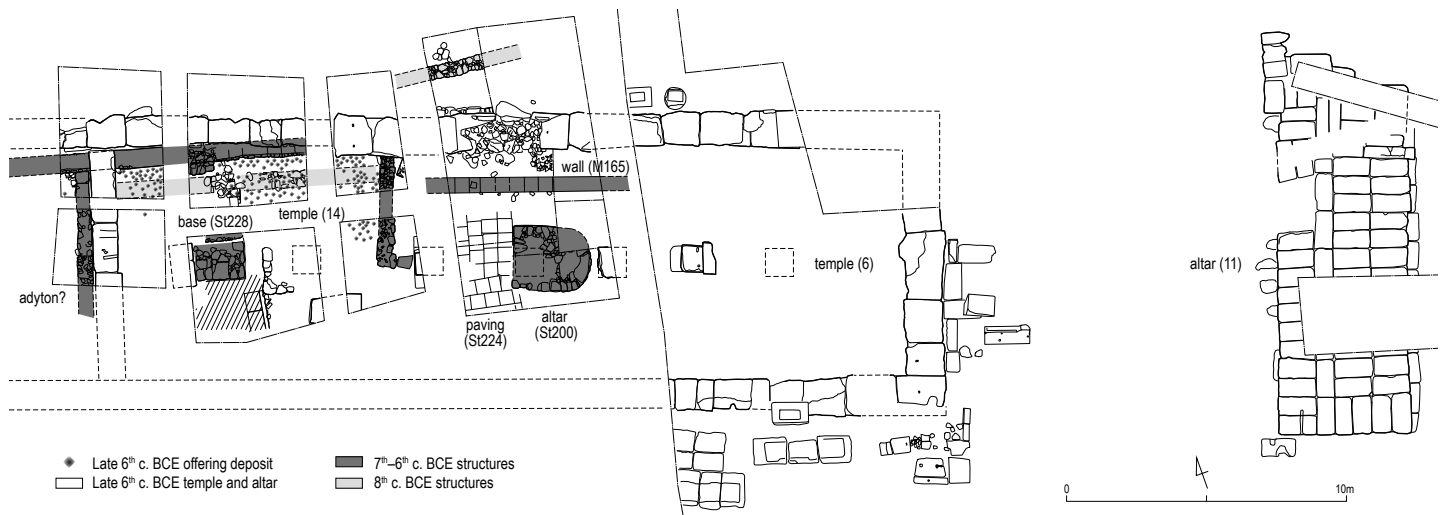


Fig. 4 Plan of the Archaic phases of the Temple of Artemis

carefully paved with mudbricks<sup>21</sup>. The altar was still in use well in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, but the date of its construction remains unknown. It functioned for an extended period, as suggested by the accumulation of layers that raised the floor level in use with temple 14. The construction of the last temple sealed both structures, and the altar's location was moved further east.

#### The offerings

The excavation of the offering deposit in 2020 and 2021 has brought to light over 600 finds. The objects were deposited immediately below the foundation level of the last temple (6) and placed according to the spatial layout of the earlier temple (14), along the northern wall of the cella and the back room (*pl. 15, 1; fig. 4*). Therefore, the deposit was probably laid down between the abandonment of the ancient building and the erection of the new temple.

The best-represented categories of artefacts are vases, terracotta female figurines, seals and small pieces of jewellery (pearls, pendants, rings, earrings, fibulae) in gold, silver, bronze, glass, faience, ivory, and bone. Eighty complete vases were recovered, mainly closed shapes (54). Local *hydriskoi*, local and Attic black-figure *hydriai* and *lekythoi* make up the majority. The open shapes (20) are rarely figured; they include local *kotylai* and Attic type C cups or cup-skyphoi. The overall typological, stylistic, and chronological homogeneity of the as-

semblage suggests that the vases were selected and deposited as one and not as individualized offerings. The discovery of four bronze *phialai* and two other unidentified vessels, as well as at least two pieces of armour (a bronze shield and an iron helmet) complete the wide range of this votive deposit. If, at first glance, these metal objects stand out from the other offerings, they are not unusual in sanctuaries of female deities (*fig. 7*)<sup>22</sup>.

Another exceptional discovery was made in the vicinity of what appears to be the entrance of temple 14: a shapeless mass of charred wood, bronze pieces, and bone or ivory elements, probably the remains of a wooden coffer set with bronze and decorated with appliques (*pl. 15, 1*). The meticulous excavation of this ensemble brought to light remains of a blade wrapped in a cloth, most probably stored in the coffer, and other pieces of three different textiles, one of which probably purple-dyed<sup>23</sup>. Although it is extremely rare to discover this type of perishable material in Greece, the offering of textiles was a common practice in Greek sanctuaries, as attested by ancient authors, iconography, and epigraphy<sup>24</sup>.

The extensive excavations carried out at Amarnthos since 2012 have revealed the presence of numerous monuments, thus providing a general yet partial overview of the sacred space and its long-term evolution. During this phase of exploration, attention was drawn to the architectural remains. The last field seasons have changed this perspective: with the discovery of a well-contextualized

is best preserved, five courses are visible (M165). The square module of the bricks is 50 × 50 × 8 cm.

<sup>21</sup> The bricks of the paving (St224) have the same dimensions as the ones of the wall (see previous note).

<sup>22</sup> See e.g. Baitinger 2011.

<sup>23</sup> The remains of cloth have been examined by Bela Dimova (BSA).

<sup>24</sup> Brøns 2015. The richest examples are given by inventory lists from the sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia: Linders 1972; Cleland 2005; Grand-Clément 2021.



Fig. 5 Base for a cult statue (?) inside the Early Archaic temple (14)

offering deposit and several preserved layers of activity around the altar, we are getting closer to the people visiting and performing rituals in the Artemision.

#### *The Eretria-Amarnthos Survey Project*

The research at Amarnthos is now supplemented by a multidisciplinary regional archaeological survey project whose goal is to study the integration of the Artemision within the ancient landscape<sup>25</sup>. If the first component mainly deals with the region's archaeology, human ecology, and history from the Bronze Age to the Byzantine period, the second component tackles issues that are more specific to the sanctuary of Artemis, such as the relations between the shrine and the demes, the trace of the sacred way (*hierá odos*), and the topography of the religious landscape.

#### The study area and its limitations

The study area covers the vast coastal plain stretching between Eretria and Amarnthos, the Sarandapotamos valley, and the slopes of Mount Voudochi and Servouni (*pl. 15, 2; fig. 8*). This area comprised several ancient features and settlements (demes), as well as the sacred road that made its way through Eretria's eastern necropolis towards the Artemision<sup>26</sup>. Unfortunately, this region has been affected by an intense form of *rurban-*

<sup>25</sup> The survey is co-directed by Sylvian Fachard (ESAG – University of Lausanne) and Angeliki Simosi (EAE), with the collaboration of Chloé Chezeaux (University of Lausanne) and Olga Kyriazi (EAE).

<sup>26</sup> See Fachard 2012, 50–54.



Fig. 6 The Archaic altar with the mudbrick floor in front of the Early Archaic temple (14)

*sation* over the last decades, particularly along the coast. Therefore, the archaeological survey is severely obstructed and impacted by the fences that demarcate private properties and villas. For example, close to half of the 2021 projected survey area (6 out of 13 km<sup>2</sup>) – situated east of Eretria, between Magoula and the modern town of Amarnthos – was inaccessible to our survey teams. Under such circumstances, this first season was limited in scope, mainly aiming at testing the feasibility and limitations of pedestrian survey in such an urbanized landscape, both from a practical and methodological point of view. Despite the severe obstacles provided by the modern built environment, we were surprised and relieved to discover that traces of ancient occupation are numerous and often impressive outside the built-up zones. These preliminary results have reinforced our opinion that it remains imperative to survey this region as systematically and intensively as possible before the quasi-programmed destruction of the ancient surface remains.

#### Survey methodology

In order to systematically quantify and collect the distribution of artefacts across the landscape, we employed an “intensive” pedestrian survey method. Field-walkers walked side-by-side, spaced evenly at 10 m apart, and recorded all visible surface pottery, tiles, and lithics within a 2 m wide transect<sup>27</sup>. All ceramic artefacts (pottery and tile) were counted, but only diagnos-

<sup>27</sup> We adopted the method used by the Mazi Archaeological project, see Fachard *et al.* 2015; Knodell *et al.* 2016.



Fig. 7 Offerings from the Late Archaic deposit: a. Attic black-figure lekythos of the Phanyllis Group; b. Ionian terracotta female figurine; c. Bronze mirror with a handle figuring a young naked girl playing krotala; d. Iron blade with fabric residues; e. Phoenician glass amphoriskos; f. Gold applique; g. Bone/ivory seal of the crouching lion type; h. Terracotta spindle whorl with a gorgoneion

tic sherds were collected. Numbers were recorded in a database and mapped on GIS, where surface densities and features distributions were produced and analyzed<sup>28</sup>. The project was supplemented with extensive survey and site documentation, DGPS and drone mapping, as well as LiDAR-based remote sensing<sup>29</sup>. The 2021 team, composed of 8 to 13 people, surveyed 301 units over three weeks of fieldwork for an overall surface of 2,16 km<sup>2</sup>. Over 24'000 pottery sherds and 22'800 tile fragments were counted. Close to 500 diagnostic sherds were collected, catalogued, drawn, and dated. Based on this first, diagnostic season, we can trace the main periods and areas of occupation in this section of the plain.

#### Preliminary insights into the region's occupation

The survey brought to light several small sites dating from the Late Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age, which supplement the previously known sites of Eretria, Magoula, and Amarynthos. However, no sites dating to the Middle and Late Bronze Age were discovered in the 2021

<sup>28</sup> Data was collected using ArcGIS 123Survey software operated on iPads and analyzed on ArcGIS Pro 2.8.3. DGPS mapping was done using a Leica Zeno FLX 100 operating on a Leica Zeno Mobile app and tablet.

<sup>29</sup> An ambitious LiDAR data coverage was ordered to the Greek company AeroPhoto Co Ltd. Remote sensing is directed by Sylvian Fachard, Alex Knodell (Carleton College), and Thomas Garrison (University of Texas at Austin), and will be the object of a detailed publication.

survey area, which suggests a discrete occupation in this sector outside the above-mentioned centers.

This pattern remains valid for the Early Iron Age. However, at the end of the Archaic period, we record an increase in occupation in this sector of the plain. Although the study of the pottery remains at a preliminary stage, four settlement sites seem to have been occupied at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE: Magoula, Aghios Raphail, Tambaka, and Aghios Dimitrios (*fig. 8*). If verified, the presence of Late Archaic secondary settlements would be notable, as the Archaic period remains poorly represented in survey projects in Greece. It would also confirm Herodotos' testimony – which mentions *choria* in the countryside during the Persian siege of Eretria in 490 BCE (Hdt. 6, 108) – and demonstrate the vitality of occupation during this period.

This trend becomes more pronounced in the Classical period, as attested by the discovery of surface pottery in 72 survey units (*vs.* 10 for the Archaic period). This number also demonstrates the spreading of rural habitation, characterized by the increase of secondary settlements and the erection of rural houses and farmsteads. In parallel, we record a densification of nucleated settlements in the sectors of Aghios Ioannis-Kotroni, Magoula, Aghios Raphail, and Tambaka-Aghios Dimitrios. The latter are substantial settlements whose size can be estimated at 2–4 ha and which we currently interpret as deme centers<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> On the Eretrian demes, see Knoepfler 1997; Fachard 2012 and 2019.

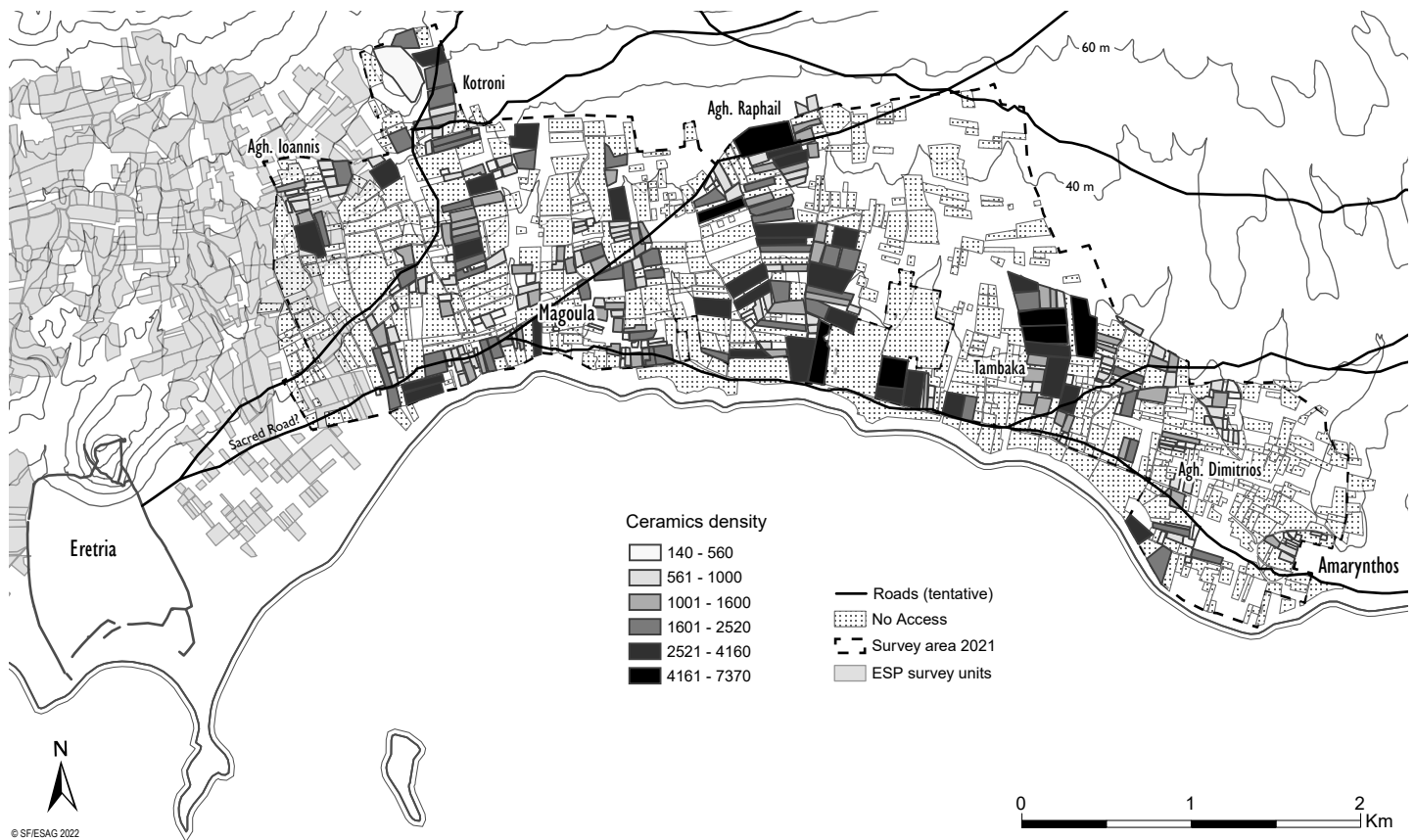


Fig. 8 Survey map between Eretria and Amarynthos, 2021

In the Hellenistic period, we record a regression in occupation, characterized by the discovery of pottery in 19 survey units (*vs.* 72 for the Classical period). The main settlements also decrease in size. However, during the Roman period, we note a slight increase (pottery found in 25 survey units), mainly grouped around Kotroni, Magoula, Aghios Raphael, and Tambaka, which are the deme centers occupied in the Classical and Hellenistic periods. In the Late Roman period, we record the rounding up of habitation around Kotroni and Magoula and the development of a site in the small alluvial delta of Manoli Myti, west of the modern town of Amarynthos. It is precisely in these sectors that the Byzantine occupation is concentrated, which, however, remains discreet between Eretria and Amarynthos (pottery found in 6 survey units).

#### Connectivity and the funerary landscape

The position of the main settlements allows us to redraw the regional communication network. A first axis crossed Eretria's eastern necropolis and roughly followed the coast in the direction of Amarynthos. Tenuous

traces of a road were spotted 2 km east of Eretria and followed discontinuously for some 600 m. The presence of funerary monuments along this axis – attested by the discovery of tombs, several sculpture fragments, and architectural blocks (*fig. 9*) – attests to its significance. Oral testimonies record the presence of a pavement made of stone slabs and wheel ruts, which have now disappeared. This stretch is the best candidate for the sacred road based on current evidence.

Further north, a middle axis linked the settlements of Magoula and Aghios Raphael before continuing towards the upper Sarandapotamos valley. Remains of tombs and three cippi and steles, of which two are inscribed, were discovered along this axis, in the sector of Aghios Raphael. These remains must be associated with the necropolis of the deme that we located in this sector and whose identity remains uncertain. A third, northern axis served the sector of Aghios Ioannis-Kotroni, occupied by three nuclei of habitation which were perhaps part of the same deme, before ascending towards the Voudochi pass or continuing east toward Aghios Raphael and the upper Sarandapotamos valley. It is important to stress that funerary remains have been dis-



Fig. 9 Marble fragment of a funerary monument discovered along the sacred road between Eretria and Amarynthos

covered along these three axes, suggesting that the three main roads leaving Eretria to the east were lined with burials and grave monuments, highlighting a much richer and diffuse funerary landscape than previously thought.

Although it remains premature to draw conclusions, this first survey season has demonstrated the wealth of the Eretrian rural landscape and its potential for future research. The following seasons will progressively reach the sector of the Artemision, allowing us to better understand the insertion of the sanctuary within the economic, funerary, and religious space of the plain.

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#### GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

EAE Ephorate of Antiquities of Euboea / Éphorie  
des Antiquités d'Eubée  
BSA British School at Athens

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Photos and drawings ESAG (J. André, T. Theurillat, T. Krapf, T. Saggini, S. Fachard), unless otherwise indicated.

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Fieldwork of the Swiss School of Archaeology in Greece 2021

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