

The Discovery of an Early Greek Hearth Temple at Azoria, in Eastern Crete

Remains of a substantial Early Iron Age building with seventh century B.C.

modifications were recovered during excavations at Azoria, in eastern Crete (Haggis et al. 2011a, 2011b). As a result of work conducted during recent study seasons, reconstructions of the building's plan, architectural phasing, and aspects of function can now be proposed. The original Late Geometric building consisted of at least two rooms connected by a doorway to a smaller room on the south. In the seventh century, there was a major renovation to the building resulting in the reconfiguration of the south room and construction on a higher level, to the east, of another room and courtyard, with a staircase to connect them to the original building. The size and orientation of these rooms place them well within the range of contemporary temples on Crete, such as at Kommos and Prinias (Shaw 2000; Prent 2005).

Although the architecture provides clues to the building's function, the most compelling evidence was found in the entrance to the adjoining east room and courtyard space. These areas were found littered with burned and unburned pottery and animal bones. The pottery represents a wide range of dates from Late Minoan IIIC to Late Orientalizing (ca. 1200-600 B.C.), but most of the material belongs to Late Geometric and Early Orientalizing phases. In these areas, there was a very distinctive stratum of burned ashy soil with plant remains and dense amounts of animal bone and especially Late Geometric and Early Orientalizing potsherds—debris that had probably collected in the south and east rooms before the building was abandoned. Among other features, the animal bone includes a high percentage that is heavily burned and indication that whole animals are represented in the debris.

The pottery consists of over 7000 sherds, of which some 85 percent are fine ware, with more than half belonging to drinking vessels (various cups, including low-necked cups, skyphoi,

kotylai) and approximately one fifth representing pouring vessels (especially hydriai 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 recovered from the site in both the thoroughness and uniformity of the breakage and the infrequency with which joins among sherds could be found, suggesting that the condition is the result of ritual activity repeated over a long period of time. Approximately 60 percent of this pottery exhibits evidence of burning. Even though the deposit was discarded before or at the time of the abandonment of the building, the pottery and animal bones suggest that this material derived from a hearth-altar (Shaw 2000a, 200b; Prent 2007), an installation forming the focal point of communal ritual dining (feasting and sacrifice) in Early Iron Age hearth temples, where the most common finds are fragments of fine drinking and serving vessels as well as substantial amounts of sacrificial and food debris.

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