# In Crete, an ancient city is uncovered

**Group Blue**



Two archaeology students sift through dirt and look for ancient artifacts at Azoria, a city that was destroyed by fire 2,500 years ago. The archaeological site is located on the island of Crete off mainland Greece. Photo: Rob Christensen/Raleigh News & Observer/MCT

KAVOUSI, Greece — In June, high on a hill overlooking Mirabello Bay, the digging once again resumed. Slowly but surely, an ancient city lost for thousands of years is being uncovered.

*Notes on my thoughts, reactions and questions as*

*I read:*

Archaeologists and students from the U.S. were using shovels and picks in their quest to understand the mysteries of Azoria. The ancient city in Crete was destroyed by fire about 2,500 years ago. Crete is an island off Greece in the Mediterranean Sea.

Fragments of writing have been found on pottery at the site, but the language of Azoria has yet to be figured out. So clues must be gathered from the things people left behind: buildings, personal items, tools and food.

The project is the life’s work of its director, archaeologist Donald Haggis.

Digging is only allowed for six weeks per year, but Haggis has been at it since 2002. Considerable work has already been done.

**Where European Civilization Started**

Today on the hilltop, there are a couple of dozen students, archaeologists and Greek workers. They are busy digging around different building foundations.

“It’s fun whacking away,” joked Duke University student Chelsea Bright, who plans to become an archaeologist. “It’s like you’re a lumberjack.”

The hilltop is a series of excavated houses and unearthed public buildings. Foundations, lower walls and sometimes benches have been discovered. Haggis serves as a foreman, directing the crew of dozens of students and Greek workers — most of them local Cretan farmers — in their digging.

Crete is a magnet for archaeologists. The island, near the Greek mainland, is where European civilization started with the Minoan culture from 2700 to 1450 B.C.

In 1900, the American archaeologist Harriet Boyd Hawes discovered the site of Azoria as part of her exploration of the area. However, she did almost no digging, and the site remained unexplored for the next century.

In 1988, Haggis decided that Azoria might be worth a closer look.

**Pottery Pointed The Way**

Haggis and fellow researcher Margaret Mook were convinced from pottery they found that the site was much older than initially thought. They concluded that Azoria would be a worthwhile site to study.

“This just thrilled us,” Haggis said when they found the old pots. “Always in the back of my mind I was to dig there.”

Azoria was a small city, with an estimated population of 2,000 to 5,000 people. It developed following the great Minoan civilization.

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*I read:*

There had been settlements on the mountaintop of Azoria for centuries, but a full-blown city did not develop until around 630 B.C. But around 480 B.C., it was destroyed by a catastrophic fire, probably as a result of being attacked by invading forces. Eventually, it became lost in time. Today, it offers a time capsule of what a Cretan city looked like during the Archaic Period of 900 to 500 B.C.

Because no one has been able to decode the language of the Cretans of this period, much of their history is a blank slate: It can only be interpreted from what is dug up from the ground.

So far, the dig has uncovered a town with a rich public life. Among the discoveries was a building that was likely the location of shared public meals. The building includes dining rooms and kitchens, and storerooms that had what was left of ancient grapes, olives and grains.

**A First For The Site**

The dig also uncovered what is called the Monumental Civic Building. Primarily a large hall, this building has a stepped bench built into its walls and an adjoining two-room shrine.

It is the first time, said Haggis, that two large public buildings of the period have been unearthed. They suggest that many of the men ate together — perhaps because all were soldiers.

Whatever is found at the site is taken to a nearby institute, where research is conducted and the shards are painstakingly reconstructed into complete pots.

Each year, American students — most of them future archaeologists — do field work at Azoria. This summer, 42 of them are working on the project.

The students are drawn to archaeology for different reasons. For Emma Buckingham, the reasons include a love of all things Greek and Roman, and “the joy of discovery.” For Tim Shea, it’s a matter of putting the Greek and Latin he learned at a Jesuit high school to good use. An inspiring high school teacher influenced Julie Juhasz.

**Hard Work Under A Hot Sun**

Despite the postcard setting, the students are doing physically demanding, dusty work under the broiling sun. The students start work at 7 a.m. and finish by mid-afternoon, when the sun becomes unbearable. However, the more senior students, known as trench masters, work late into the afternoon to carefully record the day’s findings. Most students find the work both intellectually and physically challenging — but some take to the hard work.

“I love the history and the experience," said Juhasz, "and there is something satisfying about swinging a huge pick.”For those working at the site, there is the romance of uncovering the past, as Juhasz found out when she discovered a pot.

“It’s like a connection with someone who died 3,000 years ago,” Juhasz said.

**Comprehension Questions:**

1. What does the discovery of the Monumental Civic Building suggest?

A. the town had a rich culture

B. the town had a rich public life

C. the town mostly consisted of students

D. the town mostly consisted of businessmen

2. Archaeologists are seeking help from all of the following to know about the history of the Cretans EXCEPT:

A. language of the Cretans

B. public buildings

C. food items

D. tools

3. What is the connection between Harriet Boyd and Donald Haggis?

A. both are archaeologists associated with the digging at Azoria

B. both are archaeologists who have encoded the language of the Cretans

C. both are associated with the digging of the Monumental Civic Building

D. both are training American students to become future archaeologists

4. Select the paragraph from "Where European Civilization Started" that describes the people involved with the digging at Azoria.