# In Crete, an ancient city is uncovered

**Group Green**



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 the Mirabello Bay of Crete, 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 North Carolina and across the U.S. were using shovels, picks, trowels and sieves in a quest to understand the mysteries of Azoria. The ancient city on the island of Crete was destroyed by fire about 2,500 years ago.

So far, no graveyards have been found, and depictions of language on pottery at the site are indecipherable. So clues must be gathered from the remnants of buildings, personal items, implements and food.

The project is the life’s work of its director, Donald Haggis, who is an archaeology professor at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

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

**A Magnet For Archaeologists**

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

“It’s fun whacking away,” quipped 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 off 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, while conducting a survey of eastern Crete, Haggis became intrigued by the idea that Azoria might be worth a closer look.

**A City Lost In Time**

Haggis and his partner in the project, 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.”

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Azoria was a small city, with an estimated population of 2,000 to 5,000 people, that started after the great Minoan civilization.

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

Because no one has been able to decipher 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 remnants of grapes, olives and grains.

**Civic Buildings Unearthed**

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

It is the first time, said Haggis, that two large civic buildings of the period have been unearthed. They suggest that the men ate together — a sort of early fraternal organization, perhaps with some military significance. “Imagine it as a kind of fraternal military elite,” Haggis said.

Whatever is found at the site is taken to the nearby Institute for Aegean Prehistory Study Center for East Crete.

It is here that the painstaking work of turning found shards back into their original form as pots is done, and where research is conducted.

Each year, college students — most of them future archaeologists — do field work at Azoria.

This summer, 42 students are working on the project, including 15 from the University of North Carolina and four from Duke University.

**"I Love The History"**

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.

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 midafternoon, 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 it both intellectually and physically challenging until they get into the routine — 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. According to the article, which of the following is NOT CORRECT?

A. The city of Azoria was destroyed around 2,500 years ago.

B. Students and archaeologists are trying to learn about the Minoan civilization by deciphering its language.

C. Archaeologists have dug up a building that includes dining rooms, kitchens and storerooms.

D. College students from various universities planning to become archaeologists do field work at Azoria every year.

2. All the following have been discovered at the dig EXCEPT:

A. tools

B. food items

C. cemeteries

D. personal belongings

3. The article draws a connection between all of the following EXCEPT:

A. the Archaic Period and 800 B.C.

B. Donald Haggis and Greek workers

C. European civilization and the Minoan culture

D. the University of North Carolina and field work at Azoria

4. Select the paragraph from "I Love The History" that states the motivation that drives students to become archaeologists.