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Processing Team Final Report, 1999

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Field activities

The Processing Team, led by Daniel Pullen, included Jonathan Stevens, Erin Mursil, and Karen McPherson; in the last week Tim Gregory also did some of the processing. Because the Survey Teams stopped work on Thursday 29 July, we were able to catch up and process all materials in the field by the end of work on Friday 30 July.

The Discovery Unit processing continued in the same fashion as established early in the season. The Survey Teams flagged significant objects or objects which they felt met the “ChronoType Selection Criteria” of being different from any other object. The Processing Team then went into a DU to conduct the processing by sorting and identifying the materials, filling out the Survey Unit Item Registry sheets (by either me or Tim Gregory), and deciding which objects were to be drawn or photographed. This process was cumbersome when we had to move from flag to flag, and were not able to take advantage of comparing one set of objects at a flag with those at another. This situation did not always make the best use of the three draftsmen accompanying me; if there was not a large quantity of material, or if there was not a large quantity of diagnostic material, the draftsmen often had nothing to do. At flags with lots of material, however, it was sometimes difficult to organize the activities of the 3 artists as well as keep track of photography and do all the recording. Another problem was determining how many flags were in a field. One team would give us a list of DUs and flag counts, while the other team would place a blue flag with a flag count on a tag in the field but not always in the same relative position in the field. The counts were often not correct, so we could not be certain that we always retrieved everything.

At the flags we sorted the objects by body part and decoration. We employed the ChronoType Criteria selection system as much as possible for processing, but in the end numerous body sherds and handles were not always processed. Particularly problematic were the handles (primarily amphora). Nearly 28% of ceramics processed from the DUs were handles. This high frequency reflects the recognition and flagging practices by the teams, not necessarily reality. In the end we did not process every variation of the handles as we perhaps ought to have had by the ChronoType system. If we had, we would have had closer to 35% of processed objects being handles. A breakdown of major vessel parts in DUs processed by us (based on 2431 ceramic vessel parts):

	total	team 1	team 2
rims:	27%	27%	26%
handles:	28%	30%	26%
body:	33%	30%	35%
bases:	8%	8%	8%
neck/shoulders:	2%	2%	3%
other:	2%	3%	2%

Team 1 retains its nickname of the “Handle Team” and Team 2 retains its nickname of the “Body Sherd Team”.

Altogether we processed 2859 objects from 227 DUs, or on average 12.6 objects per DU [these figures include objects from DUs 626, 627 and 628 flagged in the DU process, but not objects processed under the LOCA process]. These 2859 objects are documented by

some 190 digital photos and 420 drawings; there are a few group photos, and the total number of DU objects photographed is about 250. Thus about 9% of the DU objects are documented by digital photographs and about 14% are documented in drawings. It will be interesting to compare these figures to those obtained by the Survey Teams in the field through their counting procedure.

It should be noted that as the field season progressed and we became more confident in our descriptions of the materials flagged that we began to document fewer examples through drawings and photographs. Thus some common Roman cooking, plain, and coarse wares which showed up repeatedly are documented by numerous drawings in the first part of the season, but rarely in the later part.

In the afternoon the photographs were downloaded by one of the Processing Team members. Due to lack of computer access and the team members' different schedule from mine, no data entry was done by the team members. When we decided to scan all the pencil drawings we ran into difficulty in that the one scanner available was at Ancient Corinth, and thus could be accessed only in the evening when everyone else wished to use the machine. Allie Hicks began, Tom Peterson continued, and Jack Wells finished the scanning of the drawings during the last week of the field season and the week after. Marti Brown compiled the Drawings database during the week after the field season, and Jack Wells edited the Drawings database.

Documentation

The documentation consists of the SUIR sheets, the digital photos downloaded onto the laptop "Tito" and the pencil drawings on A4 millimeter graph paper. The objects processed were recorded onto the SUIR sheets in the field. The SUIR sheets proved to be fairly flexible and provided adequate room for notes, descriptions, and indications of drawings and photographs. Having only 10 items per page, with each line prenumbered greatly facilitated keeping order. The pencil drawings have all been scanned into JPEG format onto the desktop "Jorgé". The photo database (part of the Finds database) indexes the photos. The drawings database (also part of the Finds database) indexes the drawings.

The Database

A four-file database in FileMaker Pro was created to handle the objects and their documentation. The database consists of the main Finds database which records mostly the information from the SUIR forms, a Photo database which records information on each item's photograph(s), a Drawings database which records object drawings, and the ChronoType database which provides the standardized nomenclature and dating scheme employed by EKAS. The Finds, Photo, and Drawings databases are linked through what I call the "object reference number", a combination of the Discovery or LOCA Unit number (standardized to 4 digits), the Subunit number (used only in LOCA collection; standardized to 2 digits), and the Item number (standardized to 2 digits) resulting in an 8 digit number. The Finds database has a portal to view the photos for any particular object and a portal to view the drawing for any particular object.

The ChronoType database is treated as a lookup field in the Finds database; if available in the ChronoType database, a "start date" and "stop date" for the particular chronotype is imported into the Finds. As the ChronoType database is updated the Finds database will be updated automatically.

Richard Rothaus has already successfully imported the Finds database into the GIS system for the project.

Observations and Suggestions for Next Year

Field Procedures

If we expand the number and/or size of the Survey Teams, we will need to have a second Processing Team. Of particular importance would be to retain a specialist in Archaic through Hellenistic material, as that is the biggest gap in the collective knowledge of the current personnel. We can make do with only two artists on each team, provided they are trained prior to arriving in the field. Provided that the Survey Teams are working in adjoining areas as they were this year, it would be feasible for the Processing Teams to trade off depending upon what is being found, or to call in the other ceramic specialist for consultation.

We need better communication between the Processing Team and the Survey Teams. While for the most part the Processing Team could figure out what was going on, it would save time and frustration if there were a few changes. The walkie-talkies worked intermittently, which was a problem. More problematic was our lack of knowledge of DU identification and boundaries and usually incorrect flag counts. It would be good for the Processing Team to have a copy of the aerial photo printouts onto which can be marked the DUs. The teams need to be consistent in marking the DUs and flag counts. The use of a blue flag with a tag on which is written the DU and number of flags was very helpful in the field (the practice of one team), while having a sketch plan and counts for several DUs (the practice of the other team) was also useful, primarily for planning the day's activities.

Field Procedures – LOCA

The LOCA procedure done at Rakhi Boska was very time consuming in both the laying out and collecting of the grided circles as well as in the processing. Most likely a more representative sample of what was at the site was obtained through the LOCA procedure, but the “hoovering” of all ceramics within the 5 m² circles produced a lot of ceramics which could not be effectively examined in the field. The material from each of the LOCA circles was equivalent to a DU in terms of quantity of material and time it took to process. Other than a more representative sample of vessel parts, I am not certain that the LOCAs produced information that wasn't already discovered in the DUs. There were admittedly a couple of very definite MN pieces in LOCA circles which confirmed my suspicions from the DUs of the presence of material from that time period. But further work on the slopes north and south of Rakhi Boska produced more Middle Neolithic, and thus I would have identified that period at the site.

I would recommend that the LOCA procedure be amended to using the ChronoType Selection Criteria for collection. “Hoovering” should be relegated to lithic scatters or to some other type of material distribution which would merit such attention.

Activities later in the day

If all members of the project are truly integrated into the same system next year, then more work can be done on data entry by the Processing Team members. The Photo and Drawings database could be started and updated daily. Scanning of drawings, if done every day, shouldn't take very long (about 1 hour each day), and we can avoid the crunch at the end of the field season.

The inputting of the SUIR forms needs to be done by the ceramic specialists, as the process of inputting is in part analytical. Having consistent field observations and consistent data input insures greater reliability of the data, I believe. This process, though, is time consuming, and can take up at least 1 hour if not more per day.

Expanded Activities

If we are going to bring materials in, we will need to establish an effective lab organization to accommodate both the in-field DU processing and the lab processing. With two full-time ceramics specialists we would probably be able to meet both these requirements, even with three teams in action. Each Processing Team leader could stay back for one or two days per week, if items are coming in continuously, or one Processing Team leader could stay back for an entire week if all the LOCAs are picked up in a relatively short time.