

Eulah Matthews and William Neidinger

The Acropolis of Bylazora

UDK: 904:725.96(381),,652”

At the commencement of our first season in 2008 we divided the site of Bylazora into six sectors, utilizing previous test soundings and accidental discoveries that were made in the 1980s and 1990s (**Fig. 8**). Four of those six sectors are located on the acropolis of Bylazora. Sectors 1 and 2 turned out to be dry holes dug into what we now believe are huge mounds of fairly sterile soil deposited on the acropolis in modern times. Sector 3, an old refilled sounding from previous years, was reopened in 2008; expanding it, we exposed about 25 meters of the northern defensive wall of the acropolis and discovered the propylon (monumental gateway). Sector 4 was a ceremonial pool accidentally unearthed in 1994 by bulldozers digging for road base material. Sector 5 was a sounding made in the 1990s on the middle terrace of Bylazora. Sector 6 was, according to the accounts given to us this summer by men from the nearby village of Knezje, originally an old trench dug by the Yugoslavian army during war exercises in 1983. This explains the modern food tins and bullets found there this summer.

In 2010 TFAHR divided its efforts between Sectors 3 and 6.

A Tentative Chronology for the Acropolis of Bylazora

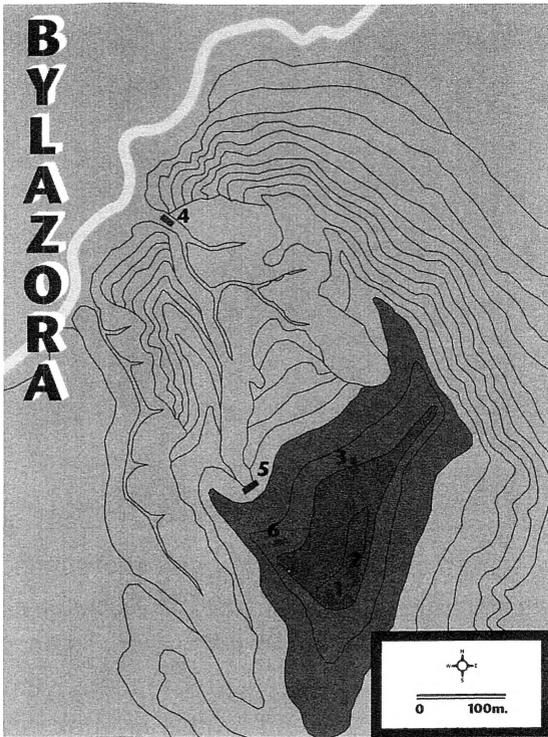
In 2009 we proposed a tentative chronology that still holds up fairly well after our 2010 discoveries.

Phase 1: The acropolis is surrounded by a casemate wall. A large tower (First Tower) flanks an entrance in the northern part of the acropolis; an altar was erected beside this entrance. Ceramics from houses that were probably destroyed to build the wall date to *ca.* 400 BC, giving us a rough date for the construction of the wall and First Tower. This is not to suggest that there are not habitation strata at Bylazora pre-dating Phase 1, since scattered pottery finds indeed date back to at least the seventh century BC.

Phase 2: The First Tower is largely dismantled as the propylon is constructed. A new altar is built roughly in the same location as the old one, but at a higher level. Phase 2 can be dated to the early fourth century BC.

(Fig. 9)

Phase 3: Bylazora is attacked and the propylon is destroyed, but a small Doric style building is built on another part of the acropolis.



Phase 4: Squatters move into the ruins of the propylon; this part of the acropolis of Bylazora (Sector 3) seems to have gone derelict at this time. Pottery from one of the squatter buildings built into the ruins of the propylon give this First Squatter Period a lifespan of roughly late fourth century BC to *ca.* 275 BC. One candidate for the destroyer of the propylon is King Philip II of Macedon, who attacked and conquered the Paionian kingdom in 358 BC. The end of the First Squatter period came with the invasion of the Danubian Celts (Gauls) in 279 BC.

Phase 5: This is a period of partial abandonment of at least the northern part of the acropolis.

Phase 6: A nearly 0.5 meter thick layer of sterile soil is laid down over the ruins

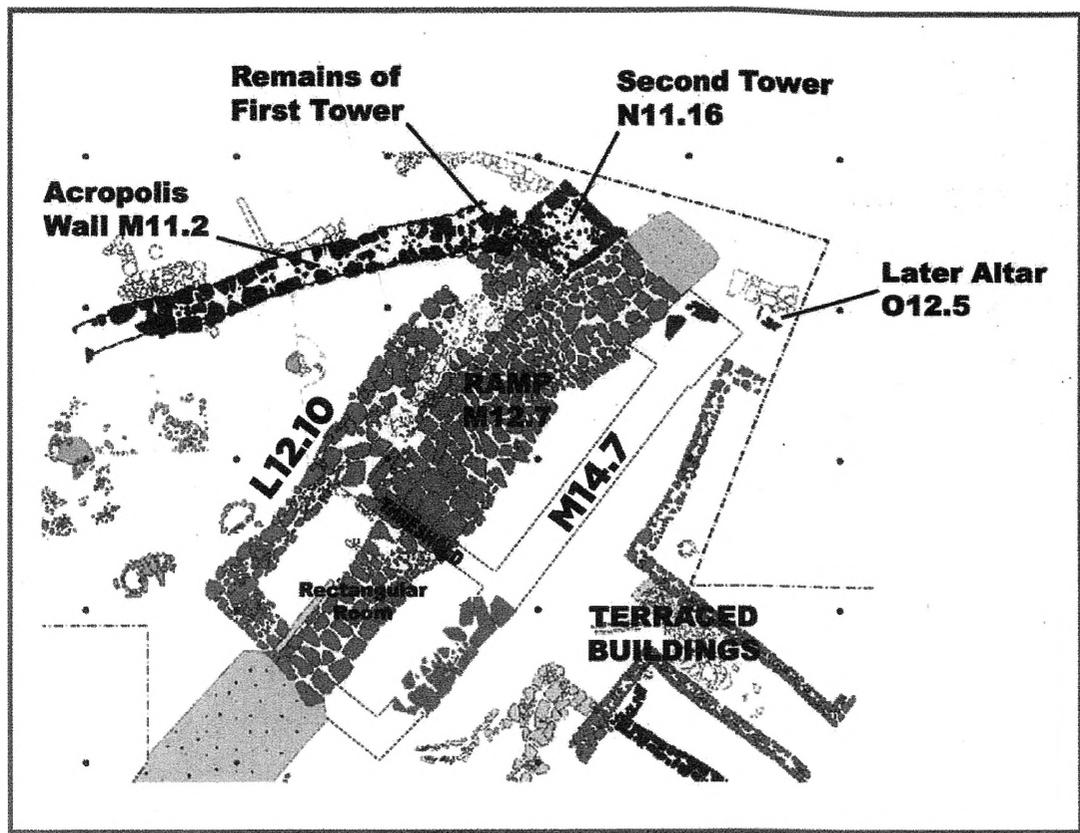
of the First Squatter Period and a Second Squatter Period commences, people again living in the ruins of the former public structures of the city. Squatters utilized the still standing lateral walls of the propylon as well as the magazines of the casemate wall of the acropolis. This appears to be the final phase of habitation at Bylazora; pottery from the Second Squatter Period dates to the early second century BC.

Phase 7: The destruction of Bylazora came in two stages. Bylazora itself was probably left desolate by the wars between the Paionians, Dardanians, and Macedonians. The Romans may have delivered the *coup de grâce* to the city with their conquest of the Balkans in the early second century BC. But a systematic dismantling of the city came later.

Sector 3. The Propylon.

Most of the evidence for the chronology of the acropolis has come from the trenches of Sector 3. The commanding feature of Sector 3 is the propylon (**Fig. 9**). As we mentioned, the propylon did not exist in Phase 1. Next to the large First Tower was some sort of entrance into the acropolis, but since it rests beneath the stones of the ramp of the propylon, our chances of exploring it are minimal. A small altar was erected on the eastern side of this original entrance (**Fig. 10**).

Phase 2 saw the construction of the propylon some time after 400 BC. What precisely occasioned the construction of this monumental gateway is not known. Perhaps it was done by way of repairs to the city after Sitalkes' destructive invasion of Paionia and Macedonia in 429 BC, although the extant ancient sources do not specifically mention Bylazora as being in Sitalkes' path. In truth, we are currently at a loss to determine the date of the propylon, until we can lift some of the ramp's stones and excavate underneath them. In any case, the building of the propylon necessitated



the partial dismantling of the older First Tower and the construction of a smaller, more compact Second Tower (N11.16) that flanked the ramp on the west. When we excavated beneath the foundation of the Second Tower in 2009, we found stones of the acropolis wall and First Tower beneath the Second Tower. Likewise, the eastern tower of the propylon rested, as we discovered this season, almost directly upon the lower courses of the original defensive wall at this point.

A new altar (O12.5) was built along with the propylon. The two altars from Phases 1 and 2 explain the enormous amount of ash and burnt animal bones found scattered about the entrance to the propylon. A small altar at the entrance to the city is a commonplace in ancient Mediterranean cities.

The propylon (**Fig. 9 and 11**) consisted of two towers flanking the entrance, an inclined ramp, and a rectangular room whose stones were laid flat; the ramp and rectangular room were separated by a raised threshold, whose stones sport a socket for a locking bolt and show signs of vehicular wear. Two thick walls (L12.10 and M14.7) served as the lateral walls of the propylon and supported the roof. Evidence for a tiled roof came from the abundance of roof tiles found directly above the paving stones of the ramp in the 2008 season. Most of the eastern lateral wall was quarried away in antiquity. In the 2010 season we discovered some of the foundation courses of the eastern wall of the rectangular room (**Fig. 12**).

Several small buildings (Fig. 9) were built to the east of the propylon and



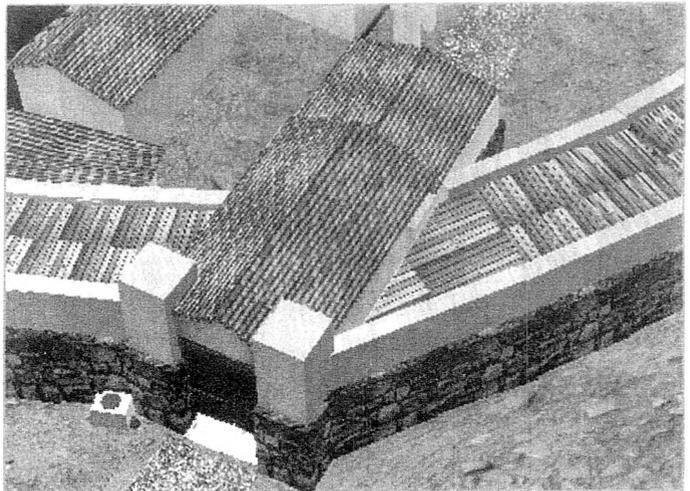
further uphill on the acropolis; they were definitively aligned with the propylon and cascaded downhill in terraces following the inclination of the ramp of the propylon, which was also probably the natural slope of the hill. A deep sounding through the floor of one of these buildings revealed an earlier structure of Phase 1 that followed a similar alignment (Fig. 13), meaning that the general orientation of the northern entrance to the

acropolis of Bylazora remained the same in Phases 1 and 2.

Sector 3. A Casemate Wall.

One of the features of the acropolis wall that always struck us as peculiar was its thinness, about 1.10 meters thick. While perhaps this might be considered thick in absolute terms for a wall, for a major defensive wall of a city it is certainly not all that substantial. How could it have withstood a siege? How could it have supported a fighting platform for soldiers defending the city? The mystery was solved this season. Defensive wall M11.2 was only the outer wall of a casemate wall that fortified the acropolis of Bylazora. The inner wall of the casemate wall, wall J13.12 (Fig. 14), was uncovered this season. Walls I13.8, J13.7, and K13.12 joined the inner and outer walls dividing the casemate into separate rooms or magazines (Fig. 15). The roof covering the magazines would have served as the fighting platform for the soldiers defending the city.

Walls I13.8 and J13.7 rest directly atop a large terracotta surface (I13.14) whose exact function remains unknown (Fig. 16). I13.14 appears to be earlier than the casemate wall, belonging, therefore, to a pre-Phase 1 period of Bylazora's history. Only future excavation might reveal the nature of this surface.



Sector 3. The Squatter Periods.

This section (Sector 3) of the acropolis of Bylazora was destroyed possibly in the mid-fourth century BC; if so, a likely candidate for its destroyer is the Macedonian king Philip II, who attacked Paionia in 358 BC, upon the death of the Paionian king Agis. But enough of the structures remained intact for squatters to move into the ruins. We used the term “squatter” deliberately, describing people who, without title, have moved into what was once public land. By anyone’s definition, a propylon is a public structure. With the propylon now in ruins, however, squatters moved into what remained of the propylon and erected temporary structures; this is the First Squatter Period (Phase 4) (**Fig. 17**). Utilizing the still standing lateral walls of the propylon, they divided the rectangular room and ramp up into smaller compartments by building wattle and daub and clay partition walls, one of which survived nearly perfectly intact (L13.11); other such walls were found in crushed or toppled over conditions in the 2008 season.

In 2008 and 2009 TFAHR excavated one of these squatter habitations and found on its floor (which was actually the paving stones of the rectangular room of the propylon) a mass of very datable pottery (**Fig. 18**). In the 2009 TFAHR publication, Jo-Simon Stokke, using the evidence of the pottery, dated the end of the First Squatter Period to *ca.* 300-275 BC. This frames the lifespan of the First Squatter Period from (possibly) Philip II’s invasion of 358 BC to the invasion of the Danubian Celts (Gauls) in 279 BC.

In addition to utilizing the ruins of the propylon, squatters also inhabited some of the terraced buildings overlooking the propylon, using stones from various ruined building to add makeshift walls to still-standing structures. From the terraced buildings the squatters of Phase 4 threw their garbage out against the eastern lateral wall of the propylon, which was still standing. The ceramic evidence from this dump confirms the dating of the First Squatter Period (**Fig. 19**).

After the Celtic invasion of 279 BC, this area of the acropolis lay abandoned for some time (Phase 5). Then a nearly 0.5 meter thick layer of fairly sterile soil was laid down over the ruins of the First Squatter Period (**Fig. 15**), and a Second Squatter Period (Phase 6) commenced, people again living in the ruins of the former public structures of the city. Squatters utilized the still standing lateral walls of the propylon and the terraced buildings, as well as the magazines in the casemate wall of the acropolis.

In the 2008 and 2009 seasons we had uncovered a considerable stretch of floor surfaces from this Second Squatter Period up against acropolis wall M11.2 (**Fig. 20**). Strewn across the floors were masses of pottery, a number of small hearths, several large *pithoi*, and numerous large chunks of burnt mud brick. But, strangely enough, we found no lateral walls connecting to M11.2, walls which would have divided this large expanse of floor surface into rooms or individual houses. This anomaly was solved in the 2010 season with the discovery of the casemate wall.

All the walls of the casemate wall were still standing during the two squatter periods, but they were later robbed out after Bylazora had fallen into ruins. The soil

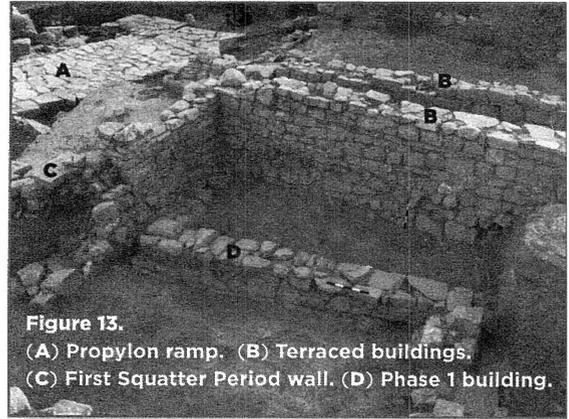


Figure 13.

(A) Propylon ramp. (B) Terraced buildings. (C) First Squatter Period wall. (D) Phase 1 building.

which filled in these robber trenches is still quite distinct from the surrounding soil all across the site (Fig. 21). So, the question becomes, how did we not, for two entire seasons and part of the third, notice these robber trenches when we excavated the floor surfaces of the Second Squatter Period? The answer lies in the proximity of the Second Squatter Period stratum to the surface. The plateau of Bylazora was arable farmland until it was recently nationalized. The farmers' ploughs went deep enough to disturb much of the archaeological remains of Phase 6; pottery was crushed, *pithoi* tops broken off and upturned, mudbricks dragged about, and even floor surfaces cut into. The deepness of the plough furrows would have obliterated the clean lines of the robber trenches, which did not become visible until after we had dug deeper than the reach of the plough blade.

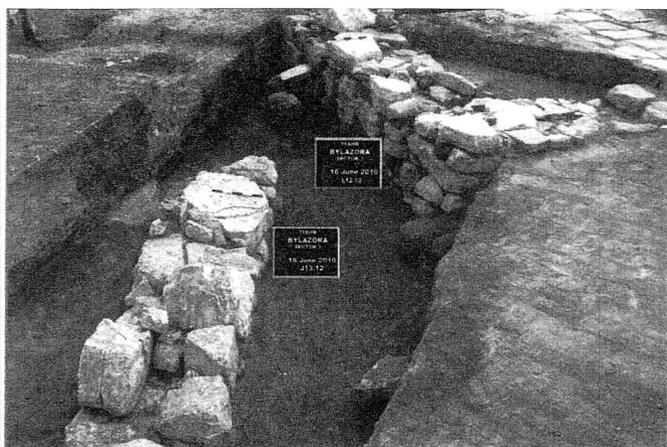
The Destruction of Bylazora.

The pottery of this last era (Second Squatter Period, Phase 6) indicates that habitation at Bylazora came to an end in the early second century BC. This was a period of continual warfare between Paionians, Macedonians, and Dardanians; the era culminates with the Roman conquest of the Balkans in 168 BC. Who actually delivered the death blow to Bylazora is uncertain. Bylazora was abandoned. But not forgotten.

What always struck us as odd in excavating the Bylazora acropolis was the lack of architectural debris around the site – there was little in the way of masses of fallen stone from the acropolis walls, for example. The reason why became obvious this season.

All across Sectors 3 and 6 are traces of robber trenches (Fig. 21). A robber trench is formed when stones from a wall have been quarried (or robbed) away and, subsequent to the quarrying operation, soil comes to fill in the trench, leaving the soil of the robber trench distinctly different (in texture or color) from that which surrounds it.

The ruins of this legendary, large (19.6 hectares), and now abandoned city must have remained visible for kilometers around and for quite some time (Fig. 22). What a convenient quarry! Someone came back to Bylazora after the city was abandoned and used the ruined and desolate city as a quarry. Large useable stones were pried up and carted away, hence no piles of stones fallen from walls. Smaller fashioned



stones were cut up and burnt down for lime to make mortar. Large amounts of quicklime and extensive signs of stone burning were found all across Sector 6. Since mortar is unknown at Bylazora, the limeburners must have come from elsewhere. Our guess: Roman Stobi.

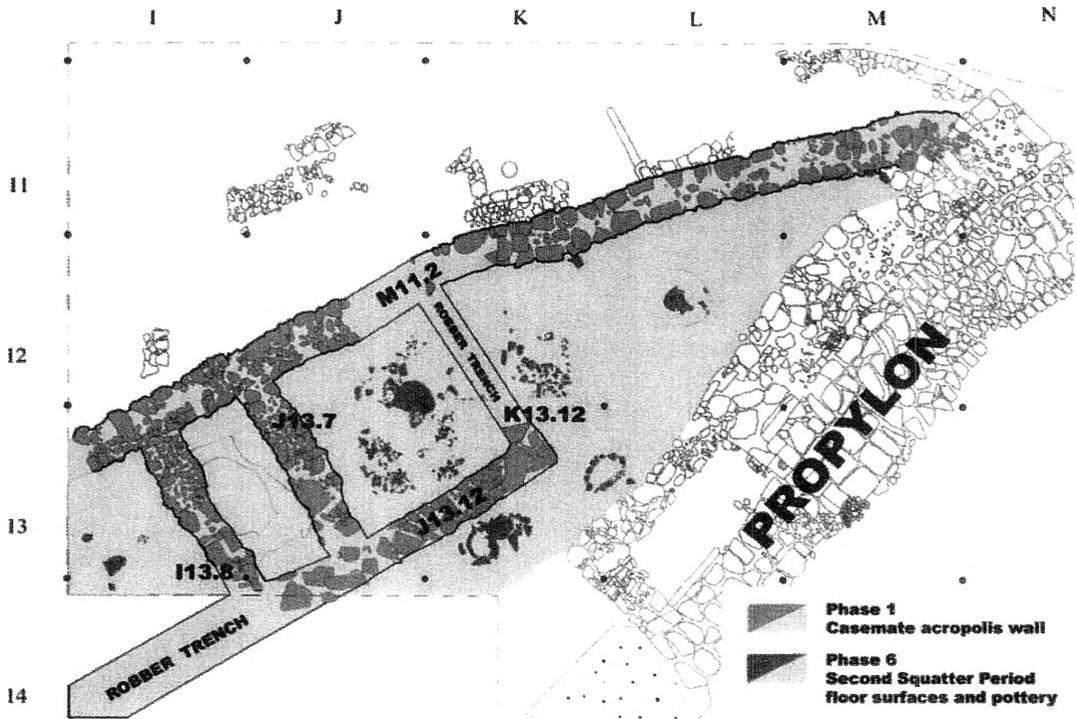
An ancient road bypassed Bylazora's ruins on its way to Stobi, about thirty

kilometers away (Fig. 6). Stobi started coming into prominence after Bylazora lay in ruins. Bylazora must have been a convenient quarry for Roman Stobi, both for stones and mortar material. In any case, by the time Ptolemy writes his *Geography* in ca. 135 AD, he lists Stobi amongst the cities of the region, but no mention is made of Bylazora.

The Question of a Temple

It is hard to excavate on the acropolis of an ancient city and not hope that somewhere nearby might rest the ruins of a temple. And several finds over the years fed that hope. First, there was the discovery of items that could have been votive gifts left at a temple: miniature vessels, figurines, loomweights with images of deities, a votive key, etc. (Fig. 23). Second, built into the Second Tower and also into a wall of the First Squatter Period were fragments of triglyph and metope blocks (Fig. 24). "Stones from a ruined temple," we mused. Finally, there was the matter of the propylon itself. Surely such a structure opened onto something important, like a temple. The ramp and threshold, we hoped, would lead directly to a temple. Then came the rectangular room and it, in turn, merely opened onto a large pebblepaved open area. Perhaps beyond the open area lay our temple; but a test sounding there unearthed nothing.

As a last resort, we sighted a line up the center of the ramp, through the center of the rectangular room, across the open pebble-paved area, and then across about 100 meters of the summit of the acropolis itself towards Sector 6 (Fig. 25). Interestingly enough, almost nothing ancient was uncovered in this trench: we discovered modern ploughed up debris from when the site was farmland, then fairly sterile undisturbed ancient soil with just a few potsherds and roof tile fragments, and then the sandy gravel that is the subsoil of the plateau of Bylazora. This probably means that the center of the acropolis was a large open area and that the buildings are going to be found along the fortified periphery of the acropolis. After about 100 meters of nothing and as the trial trench neared Sector 6, we hit several stones of a building of the Doric order (Fig. 26 and 30A), from a temple, we hoped. But in a subsequent article in this publication, Mr. Kyle Egerer presents evidence that the building from which the stones came was more likely some sort of stoa. Whether the building was actually located exactly where we found the stones is problematic. The "temple stones," as we came to call

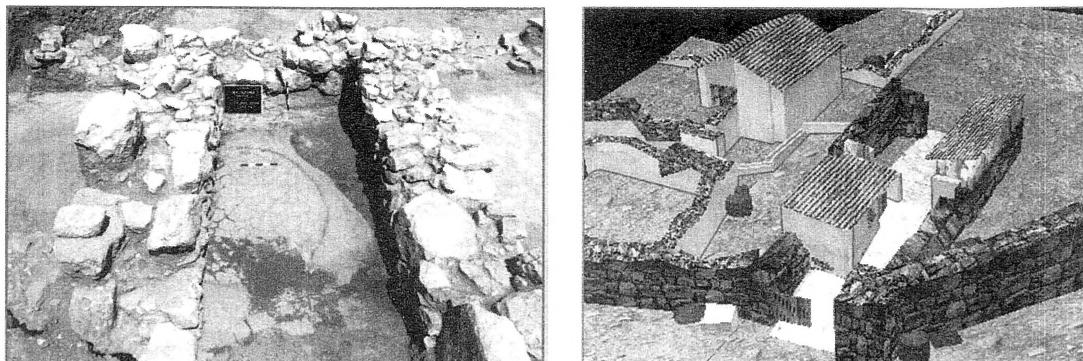


them, had clearly been cut up and were on their way to be burned down in a lime kiln. Evidence of burning is extensive in Sector 6 (see the last article in this publication by Mr. Danny McAree). Beneath the scattered “temple stones” are stones that might be part of the stereobate (leveling course) of the building (Fig. 27). But many of these stones have also been robbed out and only through further excavation will we be able to confirm if this is indeed the building’s foundation. The “temple stones” were part of a large dump. In the dump were pieces of pottery, roof tiles, human remains (at least three skulls), canine, bovine, and swine remains, and various other stones (Fig. 28). Possibly everything was on its way to being burned or this area simply became a refuse and “burial” pit after Bylazora was abandoned. Although there is extensive evidence of stone burning (ash, burnt stones, quicklime, etc.), an actual lime kiln has, as yet, not been unearthed. A volute from an Ionic capital was found in the vicinity of the stones (Fig. 29). Even a cursory glance informs one that this is not a weight bearing architectural fragment. Rather, it appears to be a part of an altar.

Sector 6

The Western Acropolis Wall

The discovery of the stones led us to shift our efforts from Sector 3 to Sector 6. In hopes of finding more of our “temple,” we quickly expanded the area to be excavated from about 25 m² to about 400 m², moving thereby into the trench dug by the Yugoslav army in 1983. But no more stones were discovered, and whether we are actually on a stereobate course or not awaits further clarification next season.



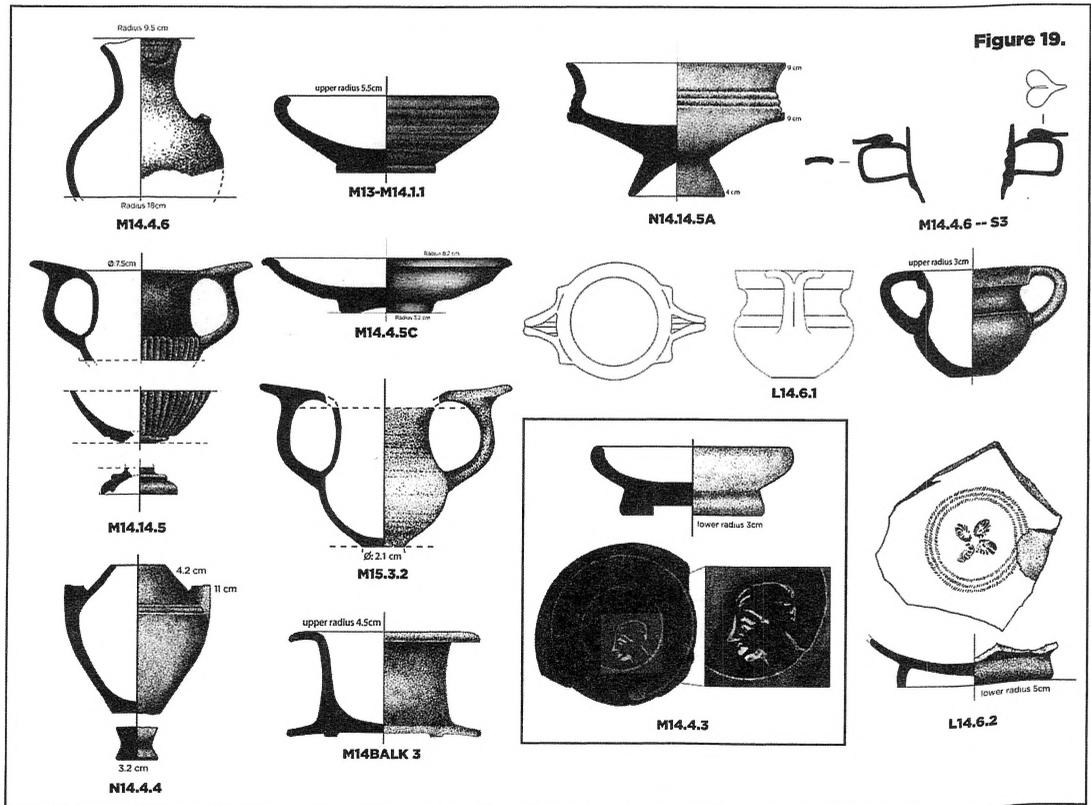
What is beyond doubt is the discovery of the western acropolis wall (**Fig. 30** on page 18). Parts of it are 3 meters thick and preserved to a height of nearly 3 meters (**Fig. 30B**). At several points we dug along the foundations of the wall. At one stretch there are projecting foundation stones which also may have served as a splashboard to protect the base of the wall from erosion (**Fig. 30C**). By the end of the season we had not reached the lowest course of foundation stones at any point in our trenches.

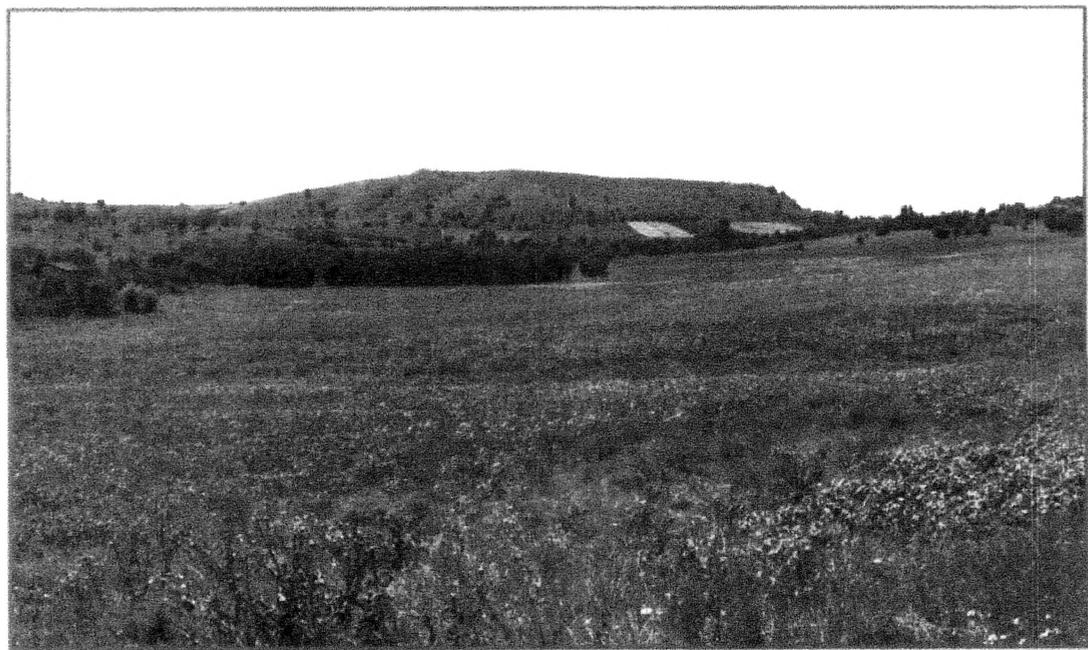
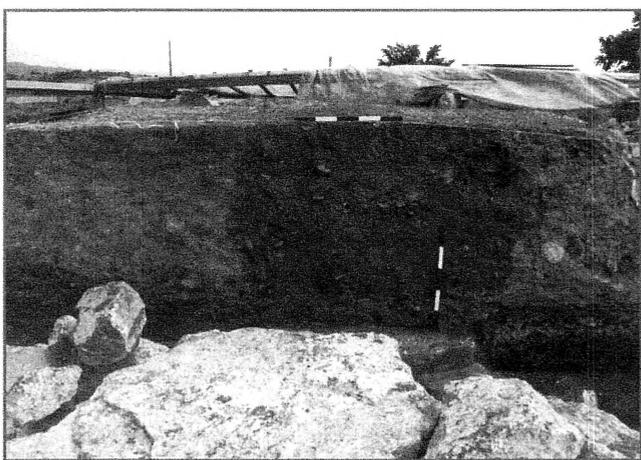
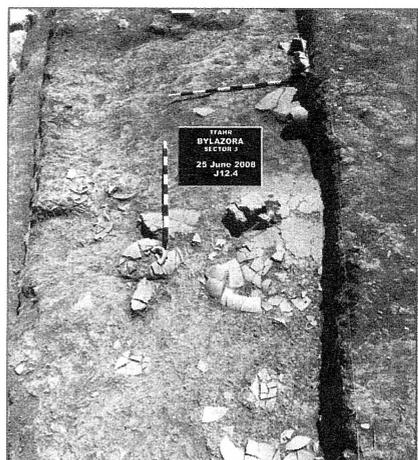
Why was the wall so thick at this spot, three times as thick as the acropolis wall in Sector 3? It may be because the main gate to the acropolis is here. The propylon was certainly a ceremonial entrance way. The western gate may have accommodated everyday traffic, up this, the gentlest slope leading up to the acropolis of Bylazora. On the afternoon of the last day of the dig we uncovered what may be one flank of this gate; a socket was cleared which may have held a locking beam (**Fig. 30D**). Next year

we need to clarify the relationship of the acropolis defensive wall and gate to the wall running beneath the “temple stones.”

Dating the western acropolis wall and gate is difficult at this point in our investigations. Some datable ceramics (third century BC) were found outside the wall in a small dump (Fig. 31). But the pottery only dates the dump, not the wall. Careful digging into the wall’s foundations needs to be done next season in order to obtain a secure date for the construction of the wall.

* Published in: Eulah Matthews and William Neidinger, *The Acropolis of Bylazora*, The 2010 excavation Bylazora, Republic of Macedonia, A Publication of the Texas Foundation for Archaeological and Historical Research, September 2010, Canyon Lake, Texas, 8-16, 25.





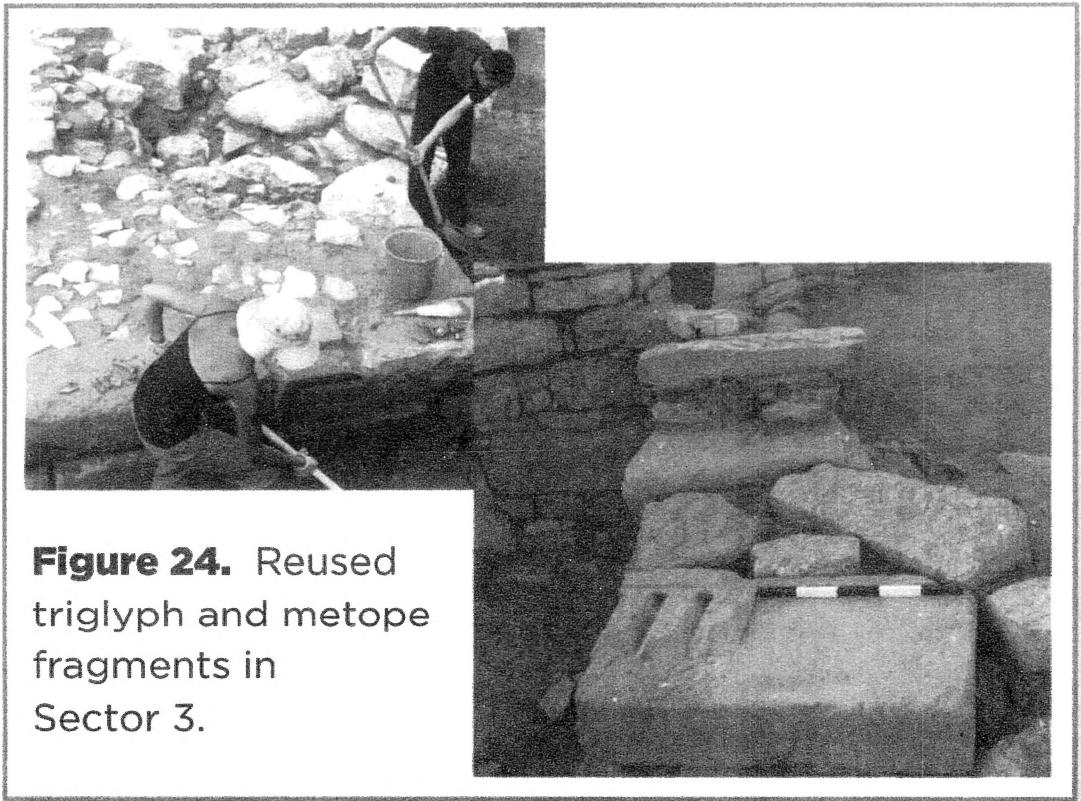


Figure 24. Reused triglyph and metope fragments in Sector 3.

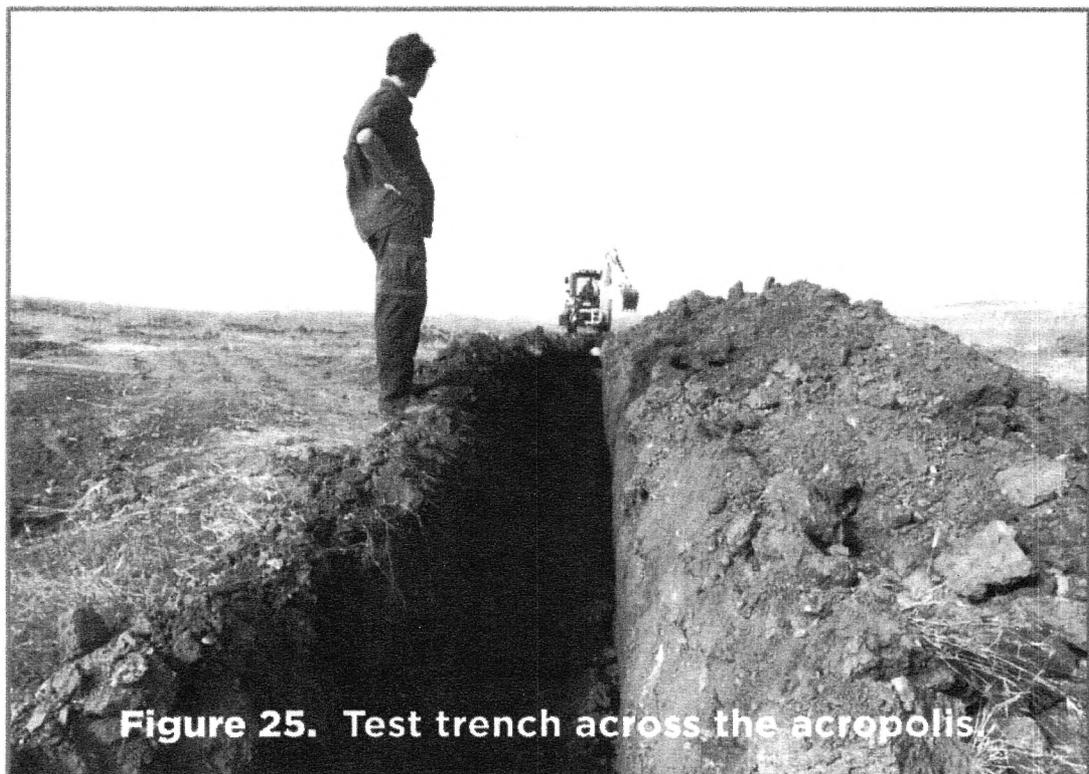
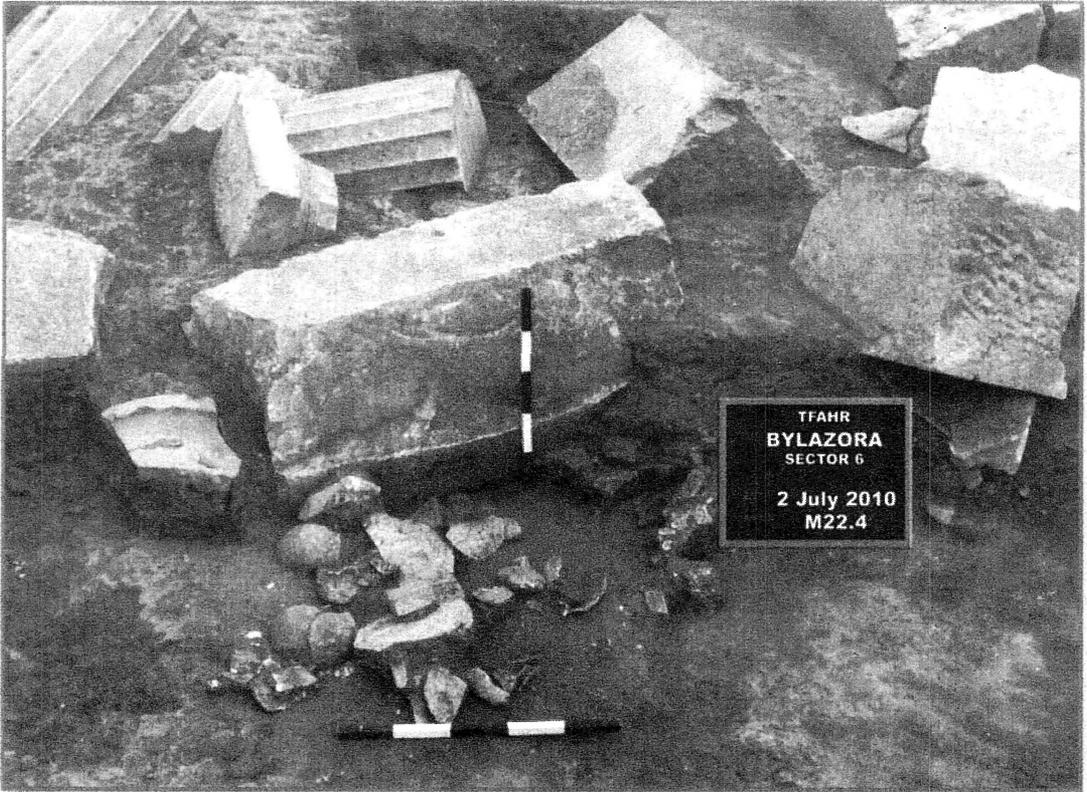




Figure 27. Corner of the Doric order building.



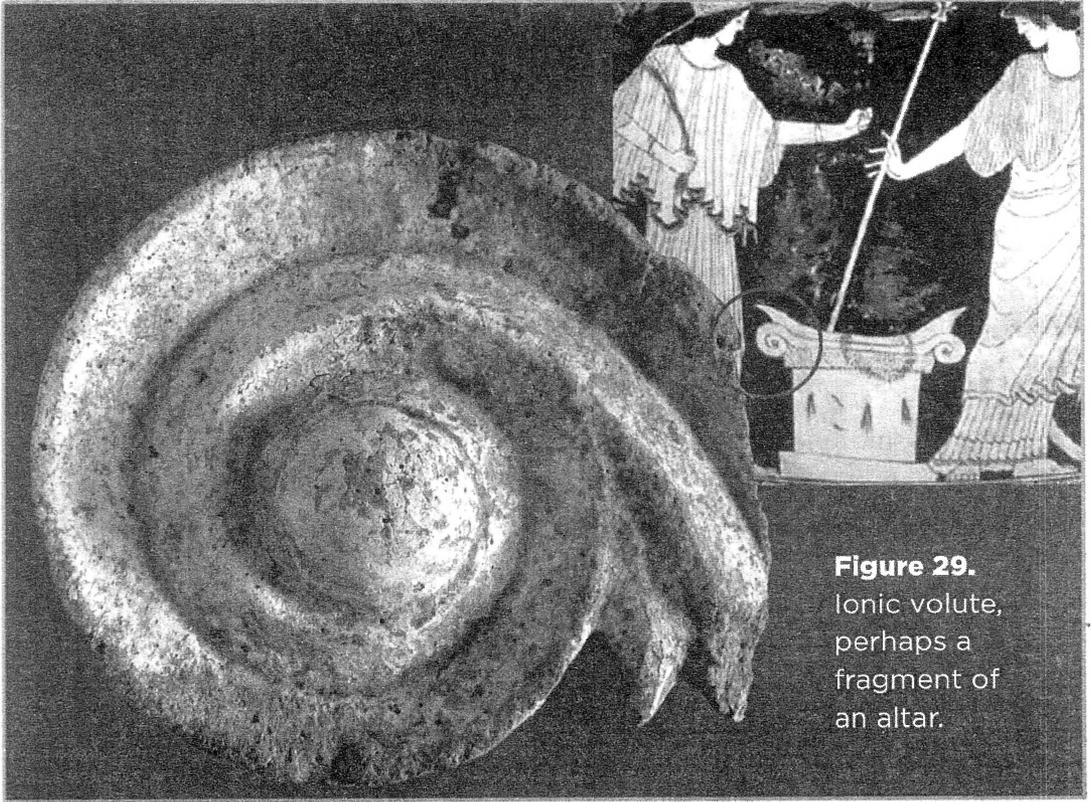


Figure 29.
Ionic volute,
perhaps a
fragment of
an altar.

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Резиме:

Акрополата на Билазора

Во 2008 продолжени се ископувањата на Билазора започнати во 1980-тите и 1990-тите, искористувајќи ги претходните тест-сонди и случајни откритија. Беа отворени 6 сектори, од кои 4 беа на акрополата. Првите два сектори беа со рецентна почва, додека третиот откри околу 25 м од западниот фортификациски ѕид на акрополата и пропилонот. Четвртиот сектор беше случајно откриен во 1994 и претставувава церемонијален басен. Петтиот сектор е всушност стара сонда отворена на средната тераса на Билазора во 1990-тите, а пак шестиот сектор, според информациите на населението од блиското село Кнежје е канал ископан во 1983 година за време на воените вежби.

Со овие ископувања создадена е и одредена хронологија на Билазора, која е потврдена и со ископувањата од 2010. Вкупно се 7 фази; од кои првата датира околу 400 г.п.не, а последната фаза е одбележана со војните помеѓу Пајонците, Дарданците и Македонците и со римското освојување во II-иот век п.н.е. Од откритијата ставен е акцент на акрополискиот пропилон; еден фортификациски ѕид изграден во техниката емплектон и можното постоење на антички храм, на чие постоење укажуваат движните артефакти издвоени како вотивни дарови: минијатурни садови, фигурини, тегови за разбој со претстави на божества, како и фрагменти од триглифи и метопи вградени како сполии во Втората кула.

Датирањето на досега откриените објекти се покажа како тешкотија, бидејќи освен керамиката од III век п.н.е најдени во отпадна јама надвор од ѕидините, нема друг хронолошки осетлив материјал. Предизвикот за точната датација останува за следната археолошка кампања.

Еула Метју и Вилијам Нејдингер