

**Shala Valley Project
Final Report of the 2008 Field Season**

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With contributions by:

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INTRODUCTION

During the period June 23-July 7, 2008, and with the financial support of the National Science Foundation of the United States, Millsaps College, the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, and Colorado State University, we led a team of 16 archaeologists and historians (Table 1) to Theth, Albania, located in the Shala Valley in the remote north of the country. In 2008, the SVP functioned as a joint Millsaps College-UNC – Chapel Hill field school, instructing 10 undergraduate students in archaeological and ethnohistorical methods. Our primary goals for the 2008 field season were:

- 1) to produce a detailed digital map of the site, including the fortification wall, using a Total Station;
- 2) to better understand site chronology and construction phases through excavation of a unit (Unit 001) along the western, lowest terrace wall; and
- 3) to undertake targeted excavations in order to determine:
 - a) whether stone structures (ST001-005) were built in the Iron Age or later (Unit 002);
 - b) whether terraces were occupational or agricultural (Unit 003);
 - c) whether there might be a preserved midden outside the western fortification wall (Unit 004);
 - d) through chemical characterization analysis of pottery whether ceramics were made on site or off site and imported; and

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- e) patterns of subsistence and seasonality through analysis of faunal and botanical remains and trace residue analysis of pottery.

Our project's key theoretical question addresses the issue of isolation versus interaction: to what degree through time have the people of Shala been isolated from and/or interacted with the "outside world", and what factors might dictate isolation and/or interaction? Excavation results from Grunas allow us to compare modern (15th-21st century), tribal patterns of settlement and land use to those of the prehistoric period. It seems likely that Iron Age peoples sought refuge in the mountains for reasons similar to those of the current residents.

Table 1: 2008 Shala Valley Project Personnel¹

Nadia Al Hashimi, field school student, Millsaps College, Jackson, MS, USA
Matthew Black, field school student, Millsaps College, Jackson, MS, USA
Anna Cohen, trench supervisor, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA
Loren Cospelich, field school student, Millsaps College, Jackson, MS, USA
Greg Daddis, field school student, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, USA
Francois Dengah, trench supervisor, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO, USA
Sylvia Deskaj, trench supervisor, Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL, USA
Christopher Fisher, geoarchaeologist, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO, USA
Michael Galaty, project co-director, Millsaps College, Jackson, MS, USA
Katelin Koon, field school student, Millsaps College, Jackson, MS, USA
Wayne Lee, ethnohistorian, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, USA
Benjamin Ossoff, field school student, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, USA
Catherine Scott, field school student, Millsaps College, Jackson, MS, USA
Jeff Smith, field school student, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, USA
Caroline Stover, field school student, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, USA
Zamir Tafilica, project co-director, Shkodër Historical Museum, Shkodër, Albania

MAPPING²

In a winter trip to Theth in January of 2008, Galaty and Lee were able to trace nearly in full the fortification walls that bound Grunas on the east and west. At the same time, at least one clearly defensive flanking wall was found at the northwest corner of the site. This short wall runs perpendicular to the main western fortification wall and appears to have been designed to prevent easy movement from the path that runs to the river to the narrow path that runs along the length and at the base of the western wall.

¹ We also would like to extend our thanks to the people of Shala, in particular Gjovalin Lokthi, mayor of Theth, and most especially Fran Frashnishta and his family. Ols Lafe, who along with Galaty and Tafilica co-directs the SVP, could not actively participate in the 2008 field season, but provided tremendous moral and logistical support prior to and during.

² This section is the work of Wayne Lee and Michael Galaty.

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In order to produce a high resolution topographic map of the site and to properly map the site's fortification walls, a Trimble TTS 500 Total Station and data collector were brought into the field. 348 topo points were measured across the site; many of them traced terraces and fortification walls. These data were used to generate a digital elevation model using Golden's Surfer 7.0 software. Data interpolation was managed through application of a standard Kriging algorithm. The two- and three-dimensional maps thereby produced (e.g. Figures 1-2) demonstrate conclusively the defensive character of the site and clearly depict the secondary stream bed and gully that were blocked in prehistory in order to allow Iron Age engineers to build the terraces at Grunas.

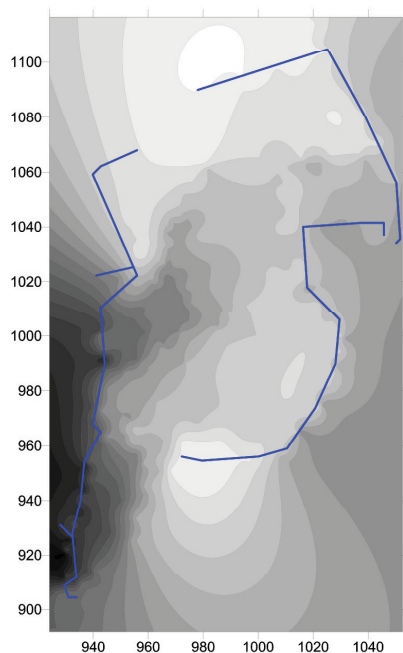


Figure 1: contour map, 1 m interval, north is up

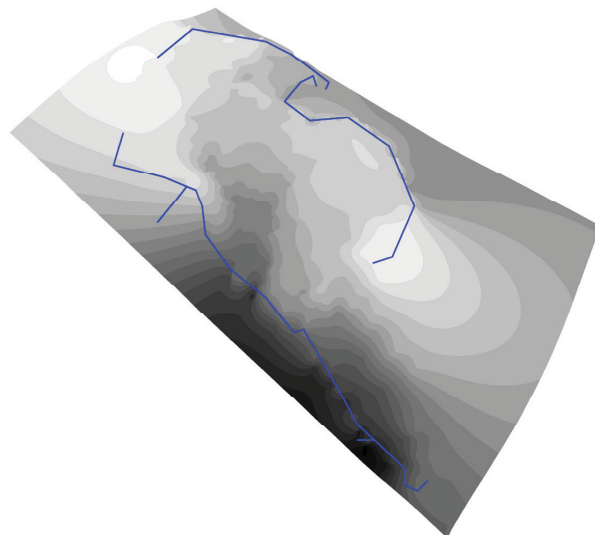


Figure 2: three-dimensional perspective map

(in both maps, white indicates highest ground)

EXCAVATION REPORTS³

Unless otherwise noted, in all excavation units we followed natural stratigraphy. When natural stratigraphy could not be followed, we dug in 10-cm arbitrary levels. All dirt was screened through ¼-inch mesh. In Units 001 and 003 one approximately one-gallon soil sample was taken from each level using the so-called pinch method. These soil samples were later bucket floated

³ The excavations at Grunas in 2008 were overseen by Michael Galaty, Zamir Tafilica, Chris Fisher, and Wayne Lee. Anna Cohen, Francois Dengah, and Sylvia Deskaj supervised excavation of units 001, 002, and 004, respectively.

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and water screened through fine mesh. Artifacts found *in situ* were point provenienced using the Total Station. Large charcoal samples found *in situ* were likewise point-provenienced and collected for radiocarbon testing. A total of four units were excavated (see Figure 3).

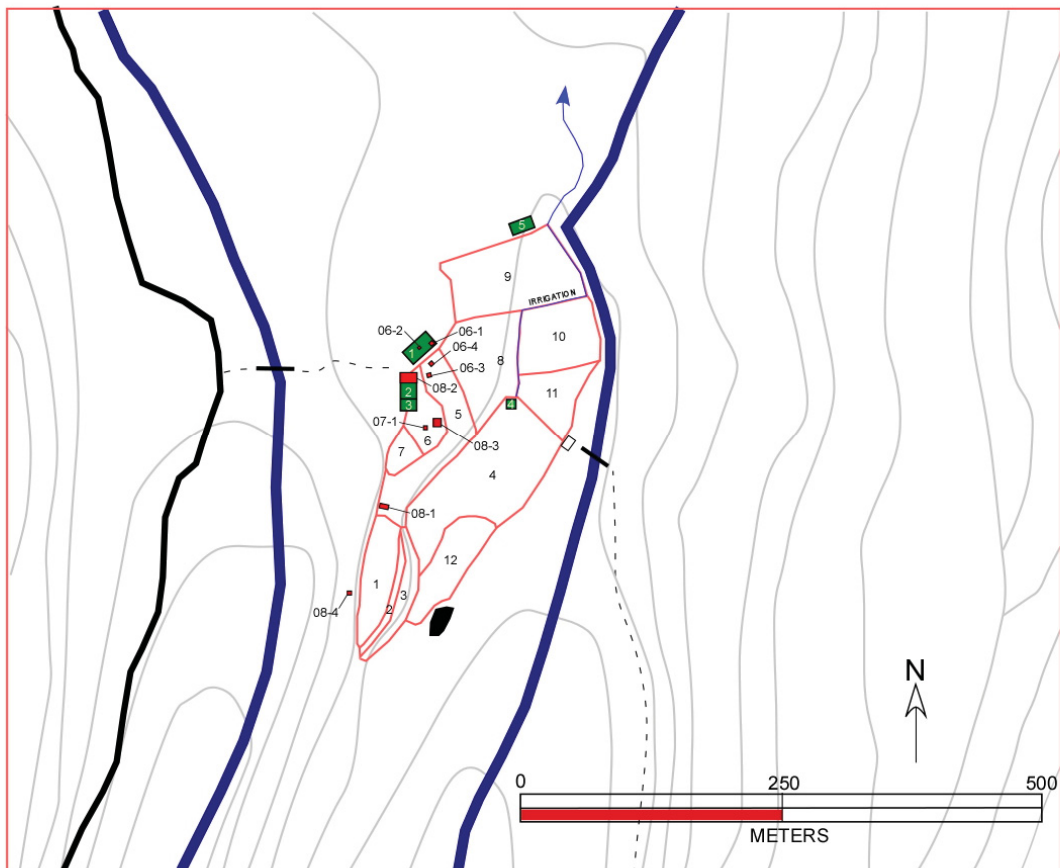


Figure 3: Map of Grunas showing terraces, structures, and units excavated, 2006-2008.

*Unit 001*⁴

Unit 001 was excavated in order to determine the construction sequence of the lowest, westernmost, and largest terrace wall at site S006. The unit measured 1x2 m, extending 2 m to the east from the interior face of the wall. The terrace walls at Grunas are of pseudo-Cyclopean construction, with large boulders comprising their base and with smaller rocks in the upper courses, perhaps, we thought, representing two distinct construction phases. The unit was placed

⁴ This section is the work of Francois Dengah.

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in order to allow us to view the internal face of the wall. The ground surface exhibited a downward east to west slope, towards the terrace edge, with a slightly raised southeast corner.

Excavation of Unit 001 lasted four days (June 23-26). First we cleared the unit of grass and moss. We uncovered small, smooth pebble inclusions on the surface and in the uppermost level of the unit. This was not unexpected since soil on this lower terrace probably formed as a result of seasonal flooding and erosion (a river is located up-slope, several hundred meters to the east). It is also quite possible that river sediments, including pebbles, were used in terrace construction; this was particularly evident in the lower levels of the unit. Next we excavated the unit in order to determine, if possible: (1) phases of terrace wall construction and reconstruction, and (2) when the wall was constructed through the recovery of associated diagnostic materials. We excavated the entire unit to a depth of 60 cm. The soil texture was silt clay loam, which changed to silt loam at a depth of 40 cm. No diagnostic materials were recovered. Small bits of charcoal were visible in the screens up to a depth of 50 cm. Beyond this depth, few if any bits of charcoal were found.

The most important result of excavations in Unit 001 was documentation of the changing character of rock inclusions in the unit from level to level (Figures 4-5). At 10 and 20 cm below surface we uncovered numerous small river pebbles. At 30 cm depth we identified horizontally stratified layers of pebbles and cobbles. Pebble accumulation increased at this level, with the largest, smoothest pebbles being located in the NW corner of the unit. This side was not only the lowest sloping portion of the unit, but backed up directly against the terrace wall. River flooding could account for the presence of both the smooth pebbles and cobbles, and the differential horizontal accumulation. The 50 cm and 60 cm depths contained a much larger number of smooth river cobbles. The density of cobbles was so high that these levels contained more rocks than soil (a 70/30 rock to soil ratio at 60 cm). Indeed, these levels were little more than a loose collection of stones. Additionally, the rocks became increasingly larger (+20 cm in diameter) and contained a mix of both smooth river stones and rough rocks. These strata tilted up to down from west to east across the length of the unit with distance from the terrace wall (Figures 4-5). As such, increasing size and density of rocks was first noticed in the western half of the unit.

The increasing rock composition of the unit levels made excavation increasingly difficult. As such, a sounding (60-120 cm) was dug at the easternmost edge of the unit. (The western side of the unit became increasingly unstable as rocks that had supported parts of the terrace wall were removed.) The rocks in the sounding increased in size with depth, with both rough and smooth small boulders (+35 cm diameter) and smaller rocks present.

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Figure 4: North profile of Unit 001 showing the rock buttress that supports the terrace wall.

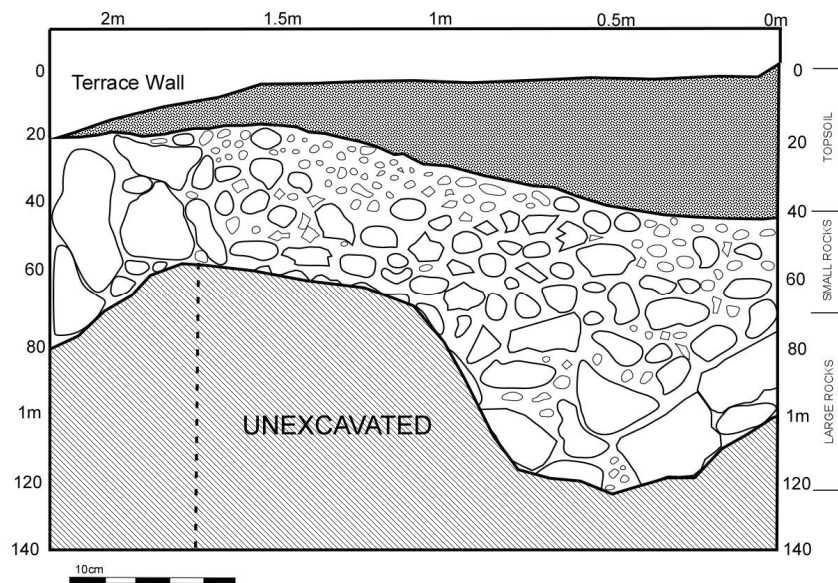


Figure 5: North profile of Unit 001.

Due to the presence of large rocks (both smooth and rough) at the lower levels of the unit, and given the west to east sloping stratigraphy, it appears likely that these rocks served as an internal, sloping buttress meant to support the slightly inward-leaning terrace wall from the inside (the rocks were likely brought to the site from both the mountain slopes and river valleys). Larger, rougher rocks (of the same material as the boulders and rocks used in the terrace wall) formed the base or lower levels of the buttress, with smaller rocks put on top. The lack of soil between layers of rock strongly suggests that the buttress, and very likely the wall itself, were built in a

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single construction phase, not two as we had surmised. Unfortunately, no diagnostic materials were found to provide an age for this particular terrace wall, but it was almost certainly, given the results of excavations in units 001 in 2007 and 003 in 2008, built in prehistoric times.

Unit 002⁵

Unit 002 was excavated in order to determine whether Structure 002 at Site 006 was constructed in recent and/or prehistoric times. Determination of the occupational sequence at Structure 002 helped to situate the results of excavations at S006 within the context of the previous research undertaken in Shala by the SVP between 2004 and 2007.

The unit measured 2.26 m by 4 m and was situated within the northern third of a large stone structure of unknown date and function (Figures 6-7). Large boulders were used to construct the original north, east, and west walls of the unit. A modern wall constructed with smaller, loose stones formed the south wall of the unit. The terrain exhibited a downward east to west slope with a slightly raised northwest corner. With the exception of some trace darker wet soil above bedrock, Munsell measurements taken throughout excavation remained at 7.5 YR 3/3 Dark Brown. Throughout the excavation of the upper stratum (called Level 000 – the only level determined), the soil included a significant number of rocks (pebbles, and medium- and large-sized rocks) and roots, making excavation difficult.



Figure 6: Unit 002, floor of structure 002, looking south.

⁵ This section is the work of Anna Cohen.

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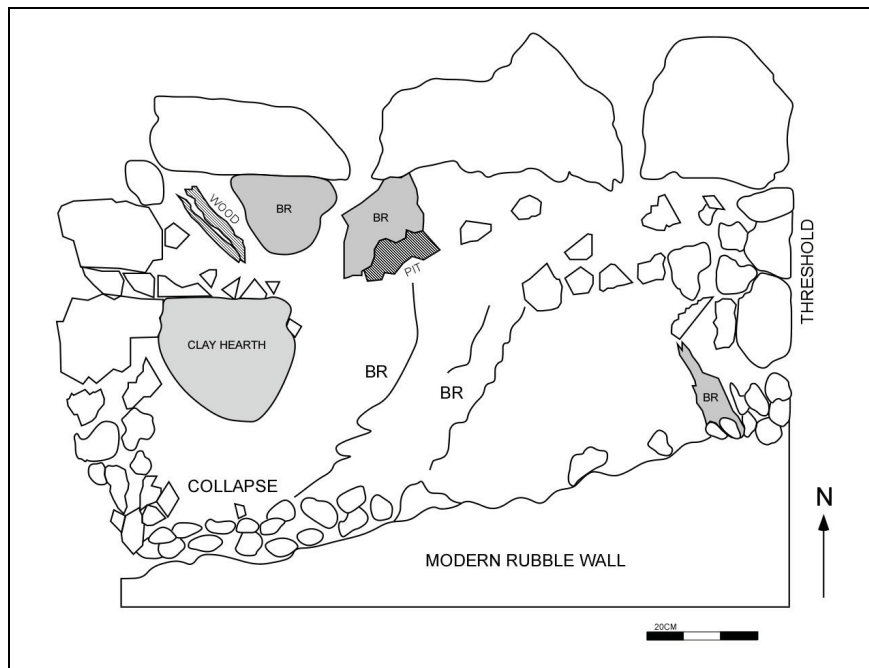


Figure 7: Plan view of Unit 002; BR = bedrock.

Excavation of Unit 002 lasted four days (June 23-26). First the unit was cleared of small and large vegetation and rocks ranging from pebble-sized to boulders. We located a few pieces of modern glass. We cleared the top level of the western wall of small modern rocks in order to expose the original course of boulders.

Next we excavated the entire unit. The soil remained at 7.5 YR 3/3 Dark Brown and fell through the screens easily. The soil included a significant amount of decomposed limestone mortar, in addition to medium-sized rocks, roots, and tiny rocks and sticks. In the screens, we continuously found mortar, a few seed cases, wood pieces, some pieces of charcoal, and one rifle bullet case. Unfortunately the base of the rifle case was too eroded to determine a date or caliber. Other artifacts found in the screens included flakes (of local material, probably by-products from the trimming of wall stones by masons), small burned rocks, and river cobbles.

On day two, we hit bedrock along the eastern wall, directly below a possible two-course 'doorway' and threshold. Our goal became to expose the bedrock throughout the unit. In this process, we determined that the soil directly above the bedrock was slightly darker and smoother than the preceding layers of soil. This darker soil continued to include rocks and various roots.

While excavating along the western wall, we located a mound of clay surrounded by rocks. We pedestalled the mound and worked around the placed rocks. It is possible that this feature is the remains of a clay hearth (see Figure 8). Two unfired bullets were found hidden between boulders in the western wall. Inscriptions at the base of the bullets reveal that they were meant

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for large caliber rifles (probably 30.6) and were manufactured in 1880 and 1886. We uncovered 30-50 cm long wood pieces in situ near the northwest corner and in the center of the unit. Artifacts recovered in the screens included three hand-wrought nails, a flat metal piece, two wire 'rings', two teeth (one cow, one sheep or goat), two metapodial bones (sheep or goat), two phalanges (sheep or goat), charcoal, burned and unburned wood pieces, river cobbles, mortar, glass, and flakes of stone.

Due to the presence of bedrock just below the surface level (000), and due to the presence of modern artifacts only (bullets, glass, wood, etc.), we can conclude that Structure 002 was not constructed in prehistoric times and was occupied through the late nineteenth and/or early twentieth century, before being abandoned. The presence of a few animal bones and teeth and bullets and current use of the land for sheep grazing suggest that Structure 002 was inhabited by shepherds or farmers attracted by the surrounding terraces and good grazing land. The care and permanence with which structures (001 and 002) at S006 were constructed suggests that they were houses, with an associated storage structure (ST003), probably occupied year around, not summer *stanës*. The recently-constructed south wall suggests a possible contemporary use of the land by local farmers, for penning and grazing sheep.

Whereas Structure 002 is at least 120 years old, Structure 001, which was test excavated in 2006 (see final report for 2006), is, based on its unusual architectural features, possibly much older. An abandoned structure similar to S006 ST001, built into a terrace wall, with niches, was found in 2007 in Shoshi, to the south of Shala, by the Extensive Archaeological Survey team (see final report for 2007). It was probably built in the Late Medieval to Early Modern period. These semi-subterranean stone houses were likely single-story and were replaced in modern times by the larger, two-three story stone houses common in Shala today. An old photo taken in the Dukagjin in the 1930s by Pici shows one of these old homes (Figure 8). That Grunas was occupied very early in the initial settlement of Theth makes sense given the neighborhood's far-southerly position. In addition, early inhabitants would have found the pre-existing prehistoric terraces ideal for construction of their homes and to support their subsistence activities.



Figure 8: Old-style traditional home located somewhere in the Dukagjin. Note the wall niches and clay hearth. Photo by Pici, 1930s. Used by permission of the Phototëkë Marubi, Shkodër.

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Unit 004⁶

Unit 004 was excavated June 24th by Zamir Tafilica and Sylvia Deskaj in an area immediately below the western terrace/fortification wall at S006. The unit covered an area of 1x1 m. This particular location was chosen due to the possibility of recovering potential midden remains. Bedrock was initially encountered at a depth of 20 cm. However, excavation continued until the entire unit was exposed to bedrock. This was achieved at a maximum depth of 48 cm.

A possible lithic was recovered from Level 001. Its close proximity to the surface suggests that it was deposited through erosion from upper terraces since additional artifacts were not recovered. The results of this excavation suggest that refuse was either not discarded within the vicinity of Unit 004, below the western fortification wall, or that it was washed away post-deposition.

Unit 003⁷

In 2007 we excavated a 1x1 m test pit to bedrock in terrace 6 at S006 (see 2007 final report; above, Figure 3). This excavation demonstrated that there were definitely three separate periods of prehistoric occupation at Grunas and that the terraces certainly were constructed during prehistory. A radiocarbon date on organic material from a buried A-horizon just above bedrock returned a date of 4000+ BC. Geoarchaeological study of the soils from the 2007 unit indicated that most of the fill used to construct the terraces, the clay strata in particular, must have been brought to the site from elsewhere, probably from fluvial deposits located closer to the Shala River. Laboratory analyses of the soil samples taken from each level in the 2007 unit are pending and expected in 2008-2009.

Generally speaking, the excavation of Unit 003 in 2008 confirmed all of the conclusions drawn in 2007. In 2007 we found the majority of imported flint tools in upper strata, primarily levels 002-004, and prehistoric ceramics in levels 6-7 and 10 (Tables 1a and 1b). The same pattern was repeated in 2008 (Tables 2a and 2b). It seems that the terraces at Grunas were constructed and first occupied in the early Iron Age, circa 800 BC (based on the radiocarbon date obtained in 2006). A second, later occupation, which has yet to be securely dated, occurred in the late Iron Age. A late Iron Age date for this occupation is indicated by a single, imported Hellenistic or Roman pot sherd. Finally, the chipped stone in the upper strata indicates a late prehistoric reuse of the site, perhaps as a temporary hunting camp. A long hiatus was followed by reoccupation of the site in Early Modern times, associated with construction of structures 1-3. Structures 4-5 and the irrigation canal that runs along the east edge of the site were built under communism.

⁶ This section is the work of Sylvia Deskaj.

⁷ This section is the work of Michael Galaty, Zamir Tafilica, Christopher Fisher, and Wayne Lee.

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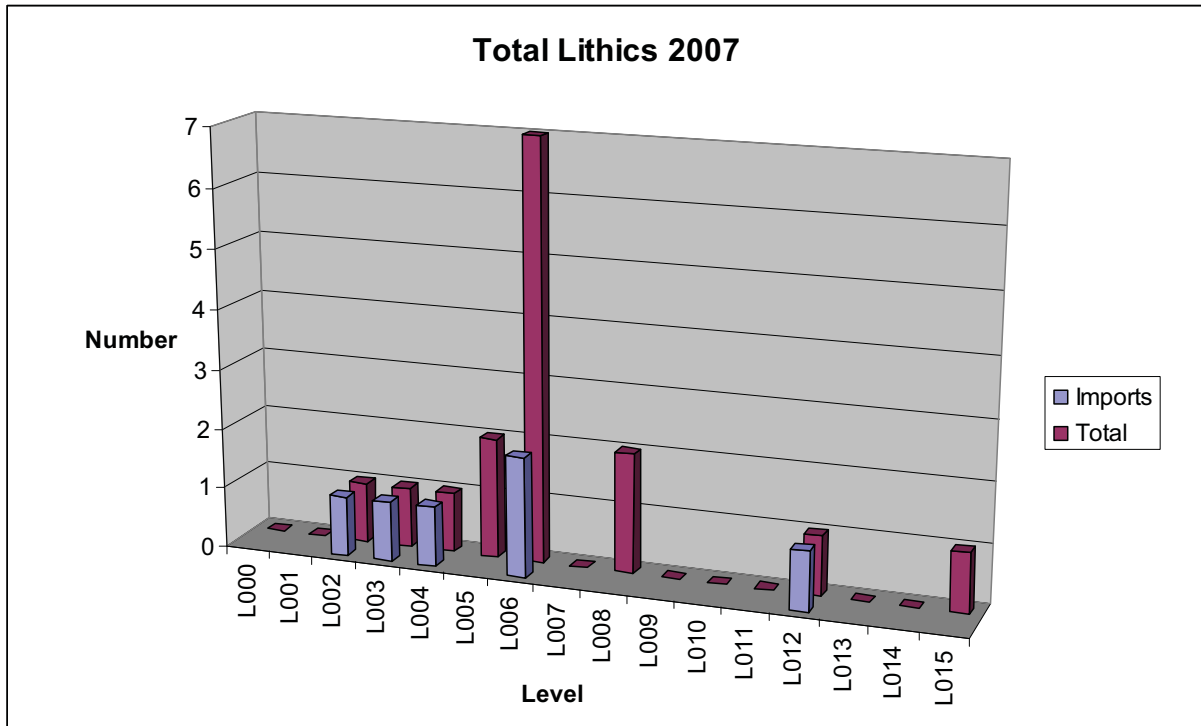


Table 1a: Total lithics and imports by level from Unit 001, 2007.

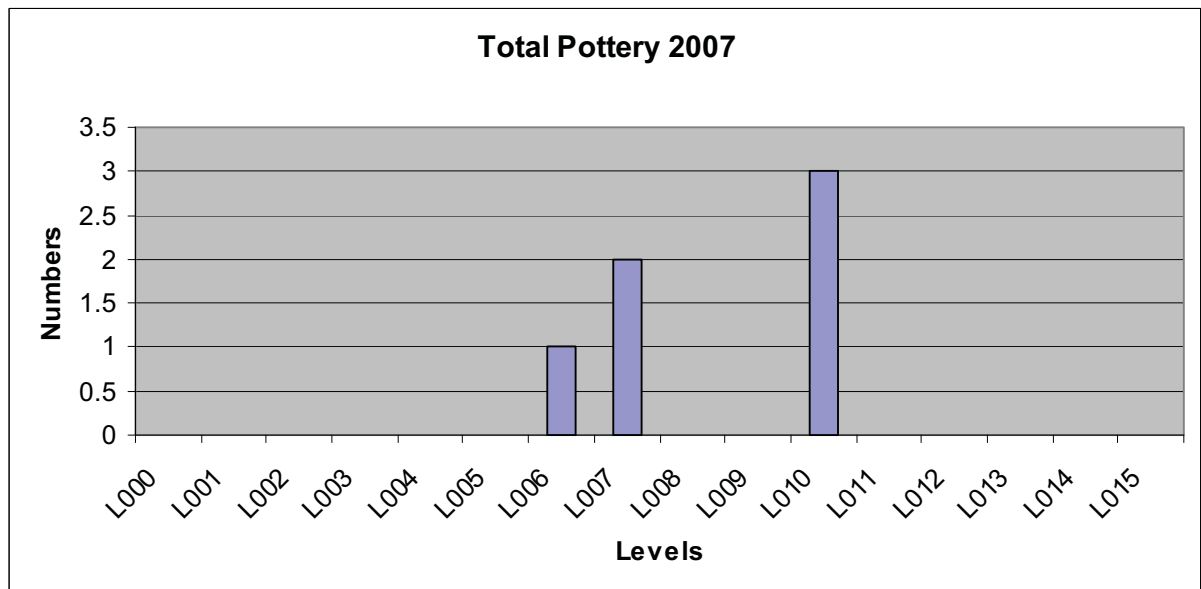


Table 1b: Total pottery by level from Unit 001, 2007.

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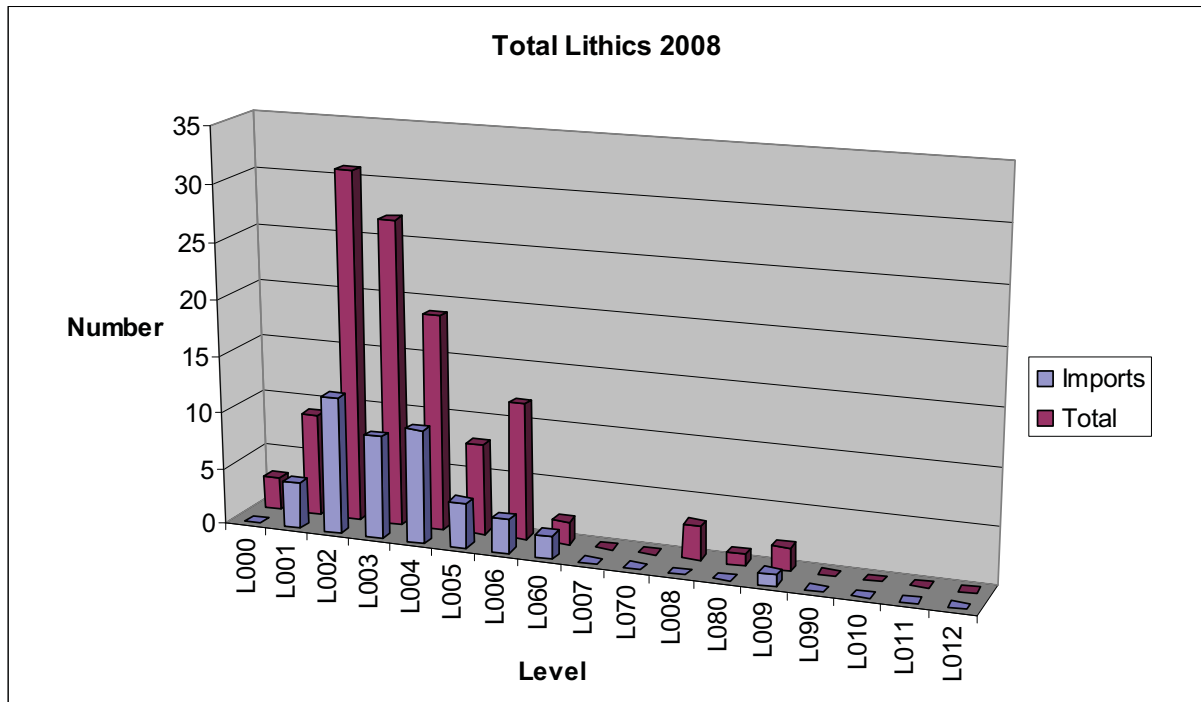


Table 2a: Total lithics by level from Unit 003, 2008.

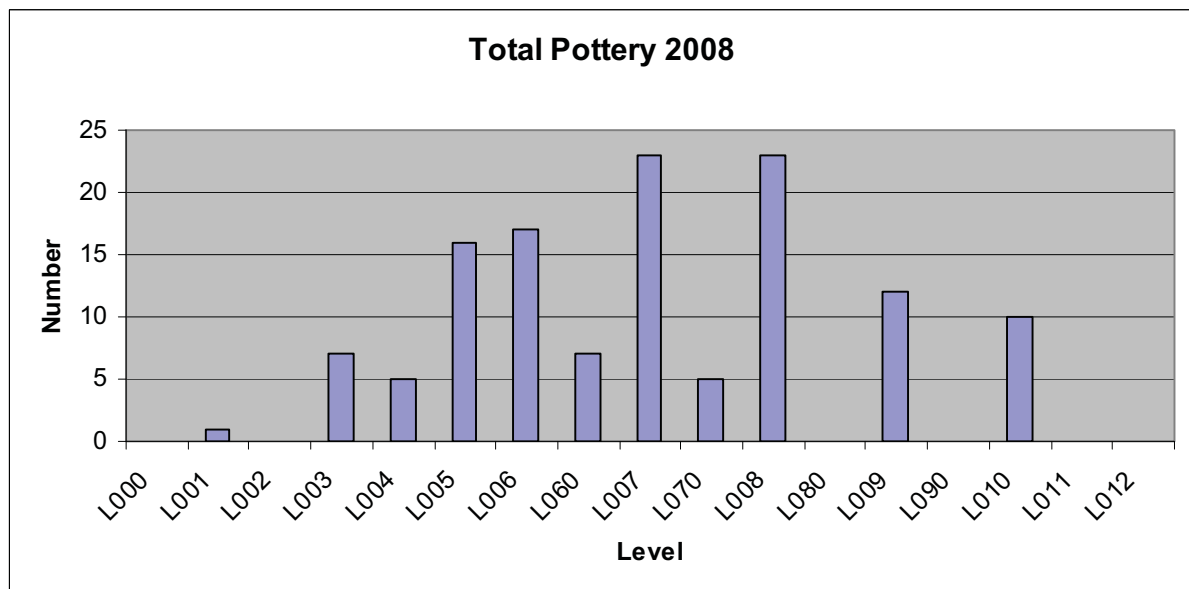


Table 2b: Total pottery by level from Unit 003, 2008.

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The 4 x 4 m Unit 003 was excavated following natural stratigraphy, or, when necessary, in 10 cm arbitrary levels (Figures 9-16). We are now relatively certain that the site was plowed during the Early Modern and Modern periods, but not deeply. During these periods northern Albanian farmers used light wooden plows or ards drawn by animals or humans (Figure 17). Such plows rarely penetrated more than 20-30 cm below the surface. As a result Unit 003's first two-three levels are plow zone.

In levels 002-004 we recovered the majority of chipped stone, including the bulk of lithics made from imported, high quality flint (Table 2a).⁸ We are relatively certain that these stone tools are indicative of a late prehistoric re-use of Grunas, perhaps as a hunting or shepherd's camp. The majority of the pottery was recovered from levels 005-009. As in previous years, pot sherds were generally small, friable, burnished, typically reduced, rarely slipped red, and sometimes incised. Forms were only very rarely identifiable, but in 2008 we did recover several rims and a few bases, primarily of small and large cups and bowls.⁹ We found almost no bone, and what bone we did find was very fragmentary.¹⁰ In 2007 and again in 2008, we found many pieces of charcoal and carbonized wood.¹¹ When found *in situ*, large pieces of charcoal were kept for possible radiocarbon dating.¹²

At the top of level 006, in the eastern half of the unit, we hit hard-packed clay, an artificial platform, perhaps the floor for a structure of some sort. For this reason we began excavating the unit in two halves, eastern (floor) vs. western (fill/midden): level 006 vs. level 060, level 007 vs. level 070, 008 vs. 080, and 009 vs. 090. Levels 010-012 took the whole unit down to bedrock. We think the clay "floor" deposit to the east and the midden levels to the west date to the late Iron Age. In level 010, there seemed to be evidence (see Tables 1-2 and Figures 9-16) for an earlier, initial occupation associated with construction of the site, including the terraces, which may be early Iron Age (based on radiocarbon dates taken in 2006 and 2007), but should be confirmed by the 2008 radiocarbon dates. Study of the artifacts from Unit 003 (lithics and ceramics) reveals differential patterns of discard for the "floor" versus the fill deposits. Many more lithics, made from imported and local material, were found in the fill (n = 17) than in the floor (n = 3). One of the few lithics found in the floor deposit, in level 060, was a grey flint, "pencil-shaped" blade core, about 35 mm long, that had been pushed vertically into the packed clay matrix of the floor (Figure 18). Of the total number of ceramics found in these levels (n = 87), 75 were found in the fill and only 12 were found in the floor (7 in level 060 and 5 in level 070). These patterns constitute good evidence that the clay platform was without doubt an artificial construction, made from clay brought to the site from elsewhere, that levels 060 and 070 were the actual living/working surfaces, and that they were regularly swept clean.

⁸ All of the chipped stone collected by the SVP is being studied by William Parkinson of the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago.

⁹ These sherds are currently being drawn by Adnan Bushati, in Shkodër.

¹⁰ All of the bone collected by the SVP is being studied by Marcus Tellkamp of Millsaps College.

¹¹ Carbonized wood is being studied by Michelle Elliott of Arizona State University.

¹² As in years past, radiocarbon dating will be performed by Beta Analytic, Inc. Results are pending.

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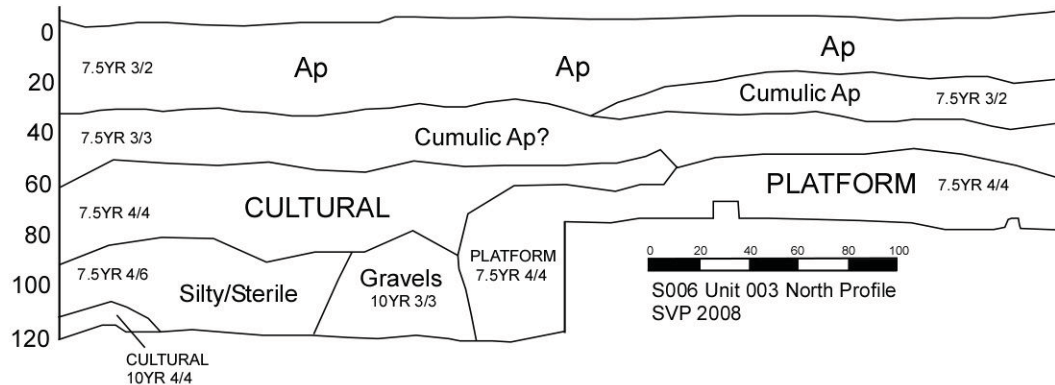


Figure 9: North profile of Unit 003 at Grunas, 2008.



Figure 10: Photograph of North profile of Unit 003 at Grunas, 2008.

We took one-gallon flotation/wet sieve samples from each level.¹³ These were pinch samples taken from throughout the whole unit. Separate samples were taken for levels 006 versus 060, 007 versus 070, and so on. We hope that study of the botanicals from the float samples will give some indication as to whether crops were being grown at Grunas in prehistory and/or indications as to environmental context. Analysis of the heavy fractions recovered by wet sieving the samples through fine mesh following flotation indicates that very few micro-artifacts were missed when fill was dry screened on site through ¼ inch mesh. No bone fragments or micro-faunal skeletal elements were recovered. A few small chert flakes were retrieved through wet-sieving, including a few possible trimming flakes. Only a few small pieces of daub were found. Many small pieces of charcoal were recovered, the most from level 008 (n = 175).

¹³ Float samples are being studied by Susan Allen of the University of Cincinnati.

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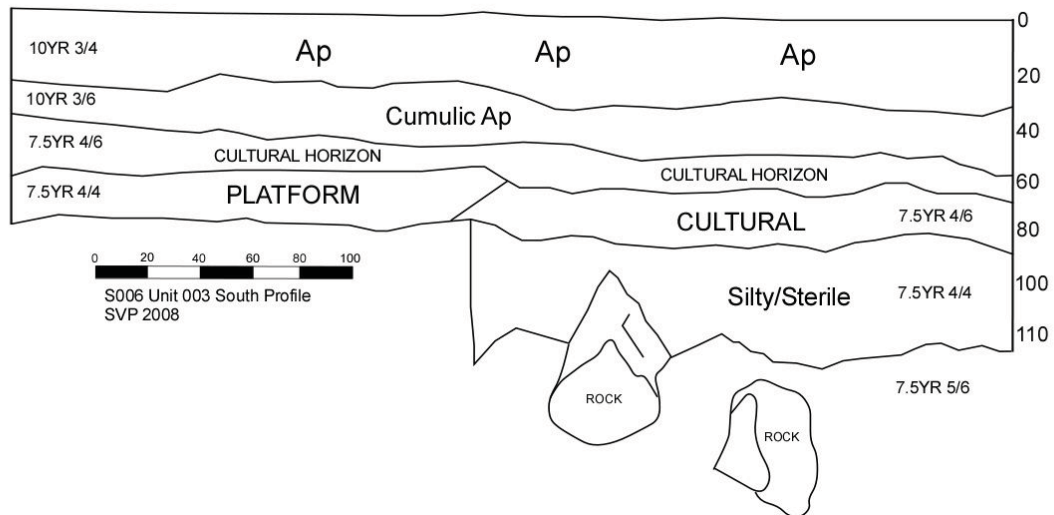


Figure 11: South profile of Unit 003 at Grunas, 2008.



Figure 12: Photograph of south profile of Unit 003 at Grunas, 2008.

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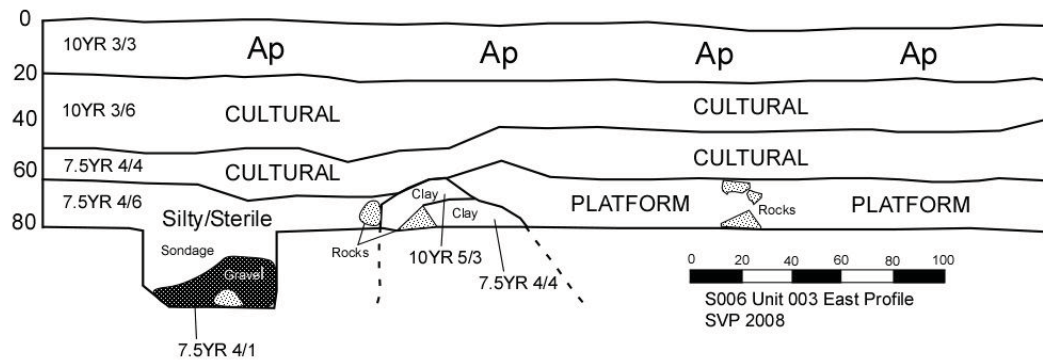


Figure 13: East profile of Unit 003 at Grunas, 2008.



Figure 14: Photograph of east profile of Unit 003 at Grunas, 2008.

In the coming year a small sample of ceramics from S006 will be subjected to residue analysis. It is hoped that if pottery at Grunas was used to store or process dairy products, these will have left behind identifiable fatty acids (lipids).¹⁴ Evidence for dairy products at Grunas raises the good possibility that its occupants were pastoralists, possibly seasonally transhumant from the coast to the mountains. This hypothesis will be tested by chemical characterization of pottery from Grunas and from the prehistoric village site of Zagorës, located much closer to the coast and at lower altitude, near Shkodër.¹⁵

¹⁴ Residue analysis will be carried out by Hanneke Hoekman-Sites of Florida State University, who has had some success extracting fatty acids from Hungarian Copper Age pottery.

¹⁵ Ceramic sherds will be subjected to ICP AMS analysis at the Keck Laboratory at Millsaps College.

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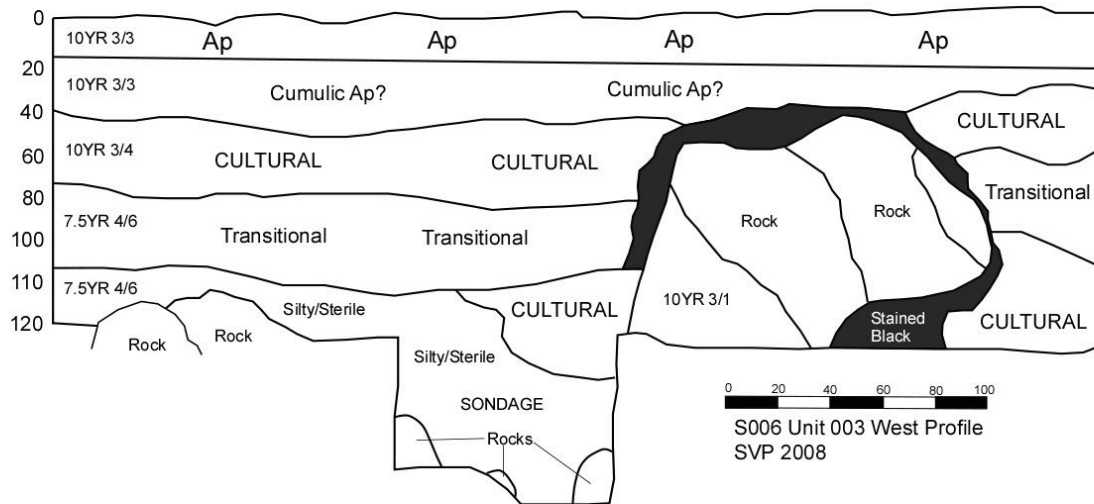


Figure 15: West profile of Unit 003 at Grunas, 2008.



Figure 16: Photograph of west profile of Unit 003 at Grunas, 2008.

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Figure 17: Man from the Dukagjin with plow. Photo by Pici, 1938.
Used by permission of the Phototëkë Marubi, Shkodër.

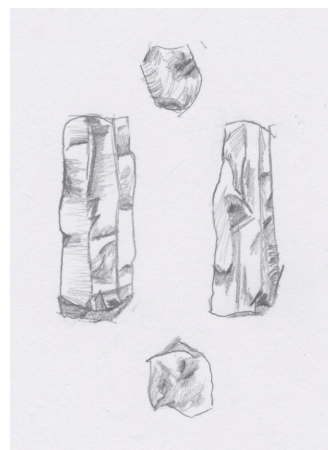


Figure 18: L202, “pencil”-shaped blade core from Unit 003, Level 060, Grunas
(drawing by N. Al Hashimi; scale 1:1).

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the research carried out at Grunas by the SVP in 2008 demonstrated that the settlement, including terraces and fortifications, was built in one construction phase during the early Iron Age. No midden is preserved outside the western fortification wall. Excavation of Unit 003 indicated three phases of occupation: early Iron Age, followed by a later phase (possibly late Iron Age) during which the terraces were densely occupied, perhaps by long houses, and a final post-abandonment reuse, perhaps as a hunting or pastoral camp. Excavation in Structure 002 indicated an Early Modern re-occupation. It is likely that of all of Theth's neighborhoods, Grunas was the first settled. These Early Modern ancestors of Theth's current inhabitants would appear to have followed a path first blazed in the Iron Age.

It is hoped that ongoing analyses will help add detail to the settlement history sketched through excavation. Radiocarbon analysis should pin down the dates of the various prehistoric settlement phases. Analysis of flotation and carbonized-wood samples should help us to reconstruct the site's environmental context. Additionally, float samples may help to determine whether or not crops were grown at Grunas in the Iron Age. Study of faunal remains and residue analysis of pottery may indicate whether dairying was practiced, perhaps pointing to seasonal transhumance. Finally, chemical analysis of pottery may help us to determine whether pots were made locally or were brought to the site from elsewhere.