Halos: preliminary report of the 2013-2014 trial trenches at Magoula Plataniotiki

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Abstract

This article offers a preliminary overview of the results of the excavations of four test trenches at Magoula Plataniotiki, near the Hellenistic city of Halos, by the universities of Groningen and Amsterdam and the 13th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities. The 2013-2014 report is introduced by a summary of previous fieldwork in the area, including a coring campaign in 1977-1978 which allowed a reconstruction of its historical geomorphology. After an overview of the new finds, which cover several occupation phases from the late 5th till the mid 3rd centuries BCE, and comprise remains of habitations and a more monumental structure, the historical implications of the excavation results are also discussed. In view of the size and dense occupation of the site, which have been confirmed by aerial photography and geophysical research, Magoula Plataniotiki seems to be the major centre of the polis of Halos in the Classical period, and possibly some time before that. Although definite proof is lacking, this makes Magoula Plataniotiki the best candidate to be the city of Halos mentioned by Herodotos in the context of Xerxes’ invasion of Greece and destroyed by Philip II’s general Parmenion in 346 BCE. As the latest habitation phase ended abruptly in the mid 3rd century BCE, it is as yet unclear, however, how this site relates to the larger city further inland, the likely polis centre from c. 302 to c. 265 BCE. Further study of the finds and additional field work are planned to clarify this and to answer other remaining questions.

Keywords

Previous work in the area and some unresolved historical problems

The ancient polis of Halos, near the town of Almyros in present-day Magnesia, Central Greece, has been the focus of archaeological and epigraphical research since the 19th century. The Halos area was also one of the first in Greece where Dutch archaeologists conducted fieldwork (studying inscriptions in 1904 and excavating in 1906). Since 1976, the University of Groningen has continued this work on behalf of the Netherlands Institute in Athens in cooperation with the 13th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities and, from 2011, the University of Amsterdam.

The best known archaeological remains related to ancient Halos are the impressive ruins of the heavily fortified Hellenistic polis centre of ‘New’ Halos which was inhabited between c. 300 and 265 BCE. Most excavation efforts in the area have focused on the houses, the fortification walls and gates of this short-lived city. Substantial efforts have also been dedicated to the Early Iron Age graves in the Voulokaliva area to the north of the city, and several smaller sites in the wider area, of which Magoula Zerelia is perhaps the most famous. A now anonymous fortified place in the mountainous area north of present-day Vrinena, which seems to be the largest late Hellenistic site of the area, has never been excavated.

This article offers a first brief report on the test trenches at Magoula Plataniotiki, a few kilometers to the northeast of New Halos (Figures 1–2), excavated in 2013 and 2014. Before the recent campaigns, this tell site on the coast of Sourpi Bay, then

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1 Since the winter of 2014 the Ephorate of Antiquities of Magnesia.
2 The name Halos has often been used for the short-lived Early Hellenistic city that we designate as ‘New Halos’ since it is clearly not the original polis centre. It should be noted that the use of the name ‘New Halos’ is purely conventional, since there is no evidence indicating the name of the city at this time. As long as it is not entirely clear whether the town on Magoula Plataniotiki was functioning or not during the existence of the large new city, we cannot even be sure whether ‘New Halos’ was the formal polis centre at the time. We encourage the use of the name ‘Halos’ both for the political entity which was formed in the Archaic period at the latest, apparently surviving into the Early Roman period, and, at least provisionally, for the town on Magoula Plataniotiki, which we think was the formal polis centre for most of this period.
3 For final reports on the Hellenistic city, see Reinders 1988; Reinders & Prummel 2003; Reinders et al. 2014; see also Malakasioti & Reinders 2001-2004; Haagsma 2010. A more complete overview of publications on the Halos area can be found on http://thessalika-erga.nl/publications/by-year/ (accessed October 2013). For information about the wider Halos area, see the article on the Halos survey elsewhere in this volume.
5 See Stählin 1906, 1924; Wace, Droop & Thompson 1907-1908; Wace & Thompson 1912; Malakasioti 2004; Reinders 2004.
6 A special word of thanks is due to the more than 40 participants in those two years of field work. A full list of names can be found at http://thessalika-erga.nl/participants/ (accessed October 2015).
thought to hide a sanctuary, had only briefly been tested by Wilhelm Vollgraff in 1906 (see below). However, when initial fieldwork at the Hellenistic city did not reveal any earlier urban remains, Magoula Plataniotiki came into the picture again as the likely location of the earlier polis centre of Halos. Nevertheless, the location of ‘Old’ Halos remained under discussion, and as recently as 2004 the Copenhagen Polis Centre classified its location as ‘unknown’.

One of the goals of the new excavations is to clarify the nature of the habitation on Magoula Plataniotiki, and how it developed through time. Meanwhile, even though definitive proof is still lacking, the available data already appears to support the hypothesis that the site located at Magoula Plataniotiki is in fact Halos, the harbour town of the 5th and 4th century BCE known from various ancient sources, perhaps going back to the Early Iron Age or even earlier. Before we come to that, we will briefly discuss previous work at the Magoula.

The excavations by Vollgraff

In May 1906 the Dutch philologist and archaeologist Carl Wilhelm Vollgraff (1876-1967), later to become professor at the universities of Groningen and Utrecht, conducted an archaeological campaign in the Almyros region. Vollgraff had stayed in Athens as a foreign member of the École française in the period between 1901 and 1904, and had started excavating at Argos in 1902, but kept on looking for other possibilities. Fragments of his diary of the 1906 campaign, which give more details than the brief article that was published about it, were made available to us by Gert-Jan te Riele.

Vollgraff came to Achaia Phthiotis to check topographical observations made by the young German scholar Friedrich Stählin, who was mapping much of Thessaly at the time. He was particularly interested in locating the sanctuary of Athena Itonia, which at the time was commonly associated with the town of Itonos which, according to Strabo (9.5.8), lay at a distance of 60 stadia from Halos. The local archaeologist Giannopoulos, as well as Stählin, had already suggested that Magoula Zerelia might be the site of the sanctuary, and this was where Vollgraff started his campaign on the 11th and 12th of May 1906. After two

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7 See Reinders 1988, 159-164; id., 54-57.
8 Decourt, Nielsen & Helly 2004, 714.
9 Vollgraff 1907-1908.
10 Gert Jan te Riele was the first director of the Dutch Archaeological School, later to become the Netherlands Institute at Athens. We were saddened by the news of his death in June 2014, which reached us while the excavations at Magoula Plataniotiki were underway. We hereby want to commemorate his contributions to Dutch archaeology in Greece.
11 Vollgraff 1907-1908, 224; see Giannopoulos 1891; Stählin 1906.
unsuccessful days at Magoula Zerelia, Vollgraff continued his quest at the nearby Kastro of Karatsadagli, on the 15th and 16th of May, again without finding what he hoped for.\textsuperscript{12}

The excavation that is most interesting for the purposes of this paper took place on the 17th of May 1906. Still hoping to find the sanctuary, Vollgraff started an excavation on Magoula Plataniotiki. Vollgraff writes in his diary: ‘the northwest corner of the foundation of a large oriented building is visible, that presumably lay within a \textit{temenos}. The building must have been c. 52 m long and 39 m wide.’ Eight workmen were employed for the cleaning of the foundation and a small excavation by means of test trenches. ‘Better cleaned the foundation, and dug at the eastern and northern side of the building, without result. Black Greek sherds’, Vollgraff writes, apparently disappointed by the failure of his quest for the temple of Athena Itonia.\textsuperscript{13} Although these notes lack detail, the presence of visible foundations of a large building on Magoula Plataniotiki is intriguing. In Vollgraff’s opinion, the building dates from Classical times and he concludes: ‘It seems to me that these can only be the remains of a temple belonging to the neighbouring city of Halos’. He continues: ‘It could have been the sanctuary of Zeus Laphystios, as Giannopoulos suggested.’\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{An old and a new Halos?}

Despite the ruins found by Vollgraff, and some later chance finds,\textsuperscript{15} Magoula Plataniotiki was subsequently left aside. All attention was focused on the impressive walled site near the Kefalosi spring, now known as New Halos, that was thought to be the polis centre of Halos during its whole existence, with older (Archaic-Classical) remains on the ‘acropolis’, and younger (Hellenistic) remains in the plain below. Indeed, this was the starting point for the field work programme which began in 1976 and was based on Stählin’s mapping of the site.

However, during the survey of the remains of the walls of the acropolis it soon became evident that Stählin’s ‘extension of the Altstadt’ could not be separated from

\textsuperscript{12} Reinders 1988, 155-156. This excavation was continued by Arvanitopoulos (Vollgraff 1907-1908, 224).

\textsuperscript{13} Reinders 1988, 161.

\textsuperscript{14} Vollgraff 1907-1908, 24.

\textsuperscript{15} The Magoula is known as the probable or certain source of several chance finds of coins and inscriptions brought to the museum of Almyros. Giannopoulos (1925-1926) also records the 1925 find of a small bronze figurine of a bearded man, possibly depicting Zeus and dated to the 7th century BCE, allegedly found on the purported site of the temple of Zeus Laphystios. Although this type of statuette is usually found in close association to sanctuaries, especially in the Archaic period, the evidence is too scanty to be certain that it represents Zeus Laphystios and comes from Vollgraff’s temple, as seems likely.
the upper town. The acropolis walls were connected to the circuit wall of the lower town and were clearly planned as such from the beginning. It further became evident that the Byzantine circuit wall on the acropolis was not built on older cyclopean walls of Halos; only a small part of the Byzantine wall was built on top of the remains of the large tower crowning the Hellenistic acropolis.16 To investigate whether the buildings within the circuit wall perhaps dated to Classical times, a trial trench was opened in one of the 17 rectangular buildings inside the Byzantine circuit wall. Only green-glazed Middle Byzantine ceramics were found. The buildings were in all probability the barracks and cisterns of a Middle Byzantine fort.17

In short, the archaeological campaign of 1976 proved that Stählin’s ‘Altstadt’ and ‘Neustadt’ belonged to a single town, dating to the Hellenistic period, now known as ‘New Halos’. Repeated archaeological investigations in New Halos between 1976 and 2011 have shown that its fortification walls were built in a single effort, probably around 302 BCE. The upper town was surrounded by a triangular enceinte, which was connected to the walls of the lower town. The impressive size of the fortifications and New Halos’ strategic location indicate that it was built primarily for military purposes. The houses inside the lower town were laid out in planned blocks, along an orthogonal street grid. The Hellenistic town seems to have had a short life span, as evidence from the houses shows that it was largely abandoned by 265 BCE. The abandonment may have been caused by an earthquake, as suggested by the archaeological remains and ongoing seismic activity in the area. There is some evidence for continued habitation in the Hellenistic period on the site, but not in its original form: the Southeast Gate of New Halos was transformed into a farm after the abandonment of the earlier city.18

Since the ancient literary and documentary sources provide evidence for the existence of a polis Halos and a town of that name from the Late Archaic until deep into the Hellenistic period, we have to conclude that the polis centre was not tied to a single location throughout this period.19 It seems that the town was

16 Stählin 1924, 178; Reinders 1988.
17 Reinders 1988, 175-178.
18 Reinders et al. 2014.
19 Halos is mentioned in Homer’s catalogue of ships (II. 2.682), but that does not necessarily imply the existence of an Early Iron Age town and/or an early version of a polis. Despite the impressive remains of the extensive funerary area in the Voulokaliva area, the question whether there was also an earlier Archaic and Early Iron Age town cannot be answered at the moment, considering the very scattered evidence of habitation of these periods (see Stissi 2011 for a recent overview). Residual and surface material suggests Magoula Plataniotiki was inhabited since the Early Iron Age and perhaps earlier, but the scale and density of the settlement remains unclear; the same holds for the habitation indicated by the scanty remains on the lower slopes of the acropolis of New Halos (Malakasioti 2004, 354-355).
relocated at least twice: there must be an ‘old’ Halos, or the Classical city mentioned by Herodotos and Demosthenes; a ‘New Halos’, which was inhabited as a city only between c. 300 and 265 BCE and is not specifically mentioned in any of our sources; and finally there is the centre of the Hellenistic polis that issued a proxeny decree in 183-182 BCE and was entangled in a dispute with Phthiotic Thebes around 145 BCE, which is mentioned by Strabo and other sources of the period – without offering offering any relevant topographical indications, however.20

Archaeological and geological fieldwork at Magoula Plataniotiki (1976-1990)

In contextualizing and locating ancient Halos the landscape is of particular relevance, as the name of the city seems to refer to either the saltiness of the soil on which the city was located, marshes in its vicinity, or to brackish water in the stream of the Kefalosi.21 Written sources moreover seem to imply that the Classical city was directly accessible by ship.22

Landscape

Magoula Plataniotiki is a distinct elevation in the drained part of an estuarine area at the transition of the Almyros and Sourpi Plains.23 To the north the Almyros Plain slopes down from an altitude of 300 m in the west to sea level in the east, where the plain borders on the Pagasitic Gulf. The Almyros Plain, in fact a huge alluvial slope, is intersected by three rivers: Cholorema, Xerias and Platanorema. Sediments from the Othrys mountains are transported by these rivers and deposited along the coast, forming a coastal flood plain.

20 Strabo 9.5.8; see also Diodorus Siculus 20.110.2, Apollonius Rhodius 3.192, Ovid Fasti 3.825-875, Pausanias 9.34, [Ps-Apollodorus] Bibliotheca 1.9.1.
21 The toponym Ἅλος may share the origin of the name of the town Almyros, which means ‘salty’ (ἁλμυρός; cf. Ussing 1857, 109, describing the area’s streams as salty; also Bursian 1862 I, 78). The name may also represent a dialectal form of Ionic-Attic ἥλος, ‘marsh-meadow’ (alternation between α and ε is rare, but not impossible for Northwest Greek: a form Δαλφοί for Δελφοί is attested, see LSJ s.v.). Magoula Plataniotiki is located in a marsh-meadow: streams from the Othrys empty into the Elos Sourpis (‘Marsh of Sourpi’). Two folk etymologies are also preserved by Stephanus Byzantius (s.v. Ἅλος), connecting the name with the mythical stories of Athamas and his children Phrixos and Helle. In Homer, the toponym appears as Ἄλος, without the aspiration; in many later Greek texts (e.g. Demosthenes, Strabo), the Attic aspirated form Ἅλος appears (note that the form in Homer and Herodotos may reflect an Ionic variation). In Antiquity, the toponym could either be masculine or feminine (cf. Strabo 9.5.8).
22 Demosthenes 9.164; id. 9.334; id. 11.1; Herodotos 7.197 describes how a Greek army of 10,000 landed at Halos on the way to try to stop Xerxes at Tempe, but this does not necessarily refer to disembarkment at the town itself.
From the south, the torrent Salamvrias flows through the Sourpi Plain in northern direction along the village of Sourpi. In winter and spring and during flash floods the Salamvrias and its tributaries transport sediments from the Othrys mountains to the plain. Coarse material is deposited at either side of the riverbed and finer sands are deposited in a wide fan at the spot where the torrent traverses the estuarine area before emptying into Sourpi Bay. This estuarine area lies behind a series of beach ridges which today almost close off the back swamp from Sourpi Bay (Figures 1-2). It is a small but beautiful nature reserve, which has however now been affected by the development of an industrial area in most of the coastal strip.

**Geology**

A coring campaign was conducted in 1977 and 1978 by Dré van Marrewijk and Paulien de Roever to investigate whether the back swamp east of the lower town of New Halos was open water in Hellenistic times, allowing for a harbour. The

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24 Reinders et al. 2014, Fig. 2.4.
answer was negative: New Halos was never located directly on the sea. The coring campaign also resulted in a detailed recording of the subsurface of a wide area around New Halos, including areas now covered by industrial buildings and the archaeological site of Magoula Plataniotiki.

The corings have shown that this area was part of an open bay until c. 5000 BP. From then on the postglacial sea rise was followed by a period of minor changes in the relative sea level. A spit was formed by a beach drifting from the north, which slowly extended southward, gradually separating the ‘inner’ part of the bay from open sea and creating a lagoonal environment.25 Around 1500-1000 BCE, the area silted up and was transformed in a salt marsh.

The present coastline consists of a narrow beach ridge. During the coring campaigns, however, a well-developed spit was encountered in the subsurface, which comprised a much larger area consisting of sand, as well as sandy gravel. North of Magoula Plataniotiki the width of the sandy subsoil is approximately 1.4 km, whereas it is only 0.5 km wide at the spot of the channelled course of the Amphrynos River (Figure 2). From there the sandy area widens again in a southeastern direction. The present beach ridge along the coast, where the sand reaches the surface, is rather narrow in the north, but gradually widens towards the south. Towards the southern end of Sourpi Bay two beach ridges can be distinguished: one extending along the coast until the former outlet of the Salamvrias River, and an older one more inland, still clearly distinguishable in the present landscape. New partly submarine ridges are visible beyond the outer beach ridge.

A west-east cross section from Hellenistic Halos to Sourpi Bay near Magoula Plataniotiki (Figure 3) shows that layers of sand and gravel, indicating old beach ridges, have been deposited at different depths, for instance from 5 to 9 m below the surface in a relatively small area situated mainly east of the Magoula. The lowest layer consisted of sand and sandy gravel and the upper one of sandy silt.

Magoula Plataniotiki is situated on a more recent spit, the deepest point of which lies 3.75 m below the surface of the surrounding area.26 Without a large-scale excavation, it is difficult to establish where the sediments of the beach ridge end and where the occupation layers start. We do have a few indications though. The heart of the spit consists of sandy gravel, its deepest point reaching a depth of 3.5 m below the surface of the back swamp, lying to the west of the Magoula. The top of this layer lies approximately 1.0 m below the surface. In a coring to the southwest of the Magoula no mollusc shells were found from surface level down to a depth of 2.7 m.27 This means that by the time this layer was deposited,

26 Reinders 1988, 41-46.
the beach ridge was so well-developed that the influence of the sea was limited. The absence of shells above 2.7 m depth and pollen analysis show that the uppermost layers had been deposited in a salt marsh. A sample was taken from a thick layer of organic material situated behind the beach ridge. This sample, from a depth of 2.35-2.60 m, was dated 3,400 + 90 BP (GrN 9055); calibrated date c. 1880-1530 BCE. We may assume that by 1500 BCE the beach ridge was sufficiently developed for habitation.

A cross section over the central part of Magoula Plataniotiki28 shows a thick layer with boulders – probable remains of habitation – below the top soil (Figure 4).

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28 See also Reinders 1988, fig. 15.
Figure 3. East-west cross section of the subsurface of the southern part of the Almyros plain, based on the 1977-1978 coring campaigns (Dré van Marrewijk, Paulien de Roever, Reinder Reinders)
Charcoal and sherds indicating another habitation layer were found on top of eroded material of the Pleistocene soil, at a depth of c. 5.50 m: probably these are the remains of a prehistoric site.

The spit at a depth of 3.5 to 1.8 m was possibly the result of longshore transportation of material from the mouth of the Platanorema in a period in which the sea level rose at a much slower rate than in previous periods. By the end of the 4th century BCE the lagoon had silted up to a depth of approximately 1.6 m below the present surface. The main part of the area behind the spit was taken up by a salt marsh, traversed by small streams that emptied into Sourpi Bay through small gaps in the beach ridge. Occasionally the salt marsh was flooded. The system of later beach ridges slopes upwards towards the east, which makes it difficult to establish the exact coastline in the 4th century BCE. It is clear, however, that it ran close to Magoula Plataniotiki.

**Surface finds**

At the time of the visit to the site during the coring campaign of 1977-1978 a number of archaeological remains were visible at the Magoula. The fields on and directly around the Magoula yielded ceramics mainly dating to the Classical
and Hellenistic periods (5th-2nd century BCE). The nature of these surface finds seemed to indicate that the site was not an extra-urban sanctuary, but an actual settlement location. These results were first presented in 1983, but research at the Magoula continued only in 1990, with a first systematic survey. The settlement proved to occupy an area of c. 10 ha, one of the larger sites of the region. Based on the surface finds the site was dated to Classical and Hellenistic times and was subsequently registered as a protected area.

Archaeological fieldwork at Magoula Plataniotiki (2011-2014)

In reaction to extension plans of the adjacent industrial area, the 13th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities initiated a plan for further investigation of the site which would give a better idea of the preservation below the surface, also in the light of the ongoing agricultural use of the site. Several test trenches would be excavated with the purpose of obtaining a better picture of the site’s habitation history, and establishing a stratigraphical sequence that could help the ongoing study of the survey finds. Additionally, excavation would help clarify the connection between this Magoula and the Hellenistic city, but also the earlier cemetery in the Voulokaliva area. This preliminary report will discuss some first results of the extensive investigation of the site (2011-2015, survey, aerial photography, geophysical survey), as well as first results from the trial excavations (2013-2014).

Survey and prospection

Prior to excavation, in the summers of 2011 and 2012, parts of the Magoula were resurveyed in order to get a clearer picture of its extension and chronology. This showed that the site is indeed limited to the Magoula itself and has no ‘halo’ in the surrounding area, which was marshy until recently. A large terrace wall, running roughly east-west and one of the more notable features of the site, constitutes a sharp north border of the hill (see Figure 5). North of this wall, the low density and quick fallout in sherd density was notable. The extent of the site on the south was not investigated, since only the more elevated northern part of the Magoula was accessible.

Although the material still awaits further study, chronological results are not straightforward. As noted in the earlier surveys, by far most surface finds are Classical-Hellenistic in date (mainly 4th-3rd century BCE), which would be incompatible with a destruction of the city of Halos and expulsion of its population in

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Figure 5. Map of Magoula Plataniotiki showing its main features and the 2013-2014 excavation trenches (Jitte Waagen)
346 BCE, as suggested by the ancient sources. A few areas south of the top yield small but noticeable amounts of Bronze Age and Archaic sherds, while there is also a thin spread of Roman and some concentrations of Medieval material – none of this showing a clear pattern.

During both the 2013 and 2014 summer campaigns, aerial photographs were taken of the site with the help of a drone, operated by Ivan Kisjes. Although parts of the Magoula, most importantly the top plateau, are overgrown, cropmarks are well visible over much of the site, including the areas where the test trenches are located. Both these aerial photographs, processed into a photogrammetric model, and the Google image of the site, taken shortly after our summer 2013 campaign, give an exceptional impression of the sub-surface remains, particularly on the cultivated part of the site (Figures 6 and 7). They show an ancient settlement with a well-preserved regular city plan most of which appears to be of the same orientation as the architectural remains found in the upper stratum of our trenches 1, 2, and 4 (see below). This gives the impression that possible habitation remains, postdating the latest phase excavated, may have either been removed completely or were limited to the top plateau of the Magoula, where no cropmarks are visible.

The aerial images furthermore suggest a clear western border to the settlement, roughly 60 m from the westernmost edge of the field, where the Magoula starts to slope down towards the plain. The eastern border of the settlement, mainly visible on the Google image (Figure 7), appears less articulate, and can be located at a distance of less than 50 m from the eastern edge of the field. Interestingly, a part of the eastern area of the settlement appears to have been built in a different orientation than the rest.

This extensive image of the site was confirmed by the preliminary results of a short geophysical campaign that was undertaken by a Greek team led by Apostolis Sarris in the spring of 2015 (Figure 8). One of the results is that below the differently oriented cropmarks at the east end of the site, apparently some buildings are preserved in the same orientation that can be seen on the rest of the site. The prospection furthermore gives a clear indication that the architectural remains continue in the overgrown and partly fenced off fields to the south, with the settlement following the contour of the Magoula.

**Test trenches**

In the summer of 2013 and 2014 four test trenches on the Magoula were excavated by the 13th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities and the universities of Groningen and Amsterdam, under the aegis of the NIA (Figure 5). Trenches 1, 2, and 3 were initially set out measuring 4 by 9 m, and trench 4 measuring 4 by
Figure 6. Photo mosaic of the northern part of Magoula Platanotiki based on aerial photos taken by the project drone during the 2014 campaign, showing cropmarks indicating ancient structures (Ivan Kisjes, adapted by Jitte Waagen)

Figure 7. Aerial photo of the northern part of Magoula Platanotiki taken on 23 October 2013 showing cropmarks indicating ancient structures (Google Earth, adapted by Jitte Waagen)
Figure 8. Combined results of GPR and Vertical Magnetic Gradient Survey in the area of the 2013-2014 trenches of Magoula Plataniotiki (A. Saris et al., GeoSat ReSearch Lab, Institute for Mediterranean Studies, Foundation for research and Technology, Hellas (FORTH), adapted by Jitte Waagen)
4 m, but trenches 3 and 4 were variously extended in order to deal with arising questions. Given the set purpose of collecting data from different settlement strata, test pits were excavated in restricted parts of trenches 1, 2, and 3, reaching a depth of around one and a half to two meters in some areas. During the 2013 campaign a total of around 30,000 sherds and 2,000 non-ceramic finds was recovered, and an even larger amount (still not fully counted) was recovered in 2014.

The processing and study of this material is still in an early stage. For this reason, the current report only offers a summary of our activities and main findings, and all dating and interpretation is preliminary.

Remains of several habitation phases were uncovered, often directly below the surface, and at times very disturbed. The exposed layers suggest an intensively inhabited and well-organised town, with a dense stratigraphic sequence. Despite the variously preserved and fragmentary nature of the evidence, we can propose a main sequence of strata, which we present roughly from young to old:

**Trench 4**

Preliminary study of the finds suggest that the upper stratum in trenches 1, 2 and 4 belongs to the mid 3rd century BCE, and may be either contemporary with the destruction of the Hellenistic city or a few decades later – implying ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Halos might have coexisted. This stratum, which also seems to form the source of most of the survey finds mentioned above, is most extensively explored in trench 4 (Figure 9). Here, a single large space was brought to light: two parallel walls roughly in east-west orientation have been exposed over a length of 6.00 m and 5.60 m (the northern and southern wall respectively), with a possible threshold at the western end of the northern wall. A cross wall is possibly indicated by a series of limestone blocks in the northeast. The inside of the space is fully covered with a destruction layer consisting mostly of tile fragments, lying on a floor consisting of stone slabs. Close to the north wall, a group of fallen pots has been found in situ: a lamp, a large Black Gloss plate with the letters AK inscribed under the rim, a handleless bowl, and two jugs (Figure 10). Lying upside down, these vessels seem to have fallen from a shelf on the wall. The total picture suggests that the area was destroyed by an earthquake.

This space might have served a utilitarian purpose: the stone-paved floor and the tile collapse suggest that this space might have been a (partially) covered courtyard, like some found in Olynthos and possibly New Halos. The tile collapse appears to end towards the west of the trench; however no wall on the west side of the space has been uncovered. As of yet, this is the only phase excavated in trench 4.
Figure 9. Ground plan of trench 4 of Magoula Platianotiki excavations after the 2014 season (drawing by Sophia Papamargariti)

Figure 10. The group of complete fallen pots encountered in trench 4, as found (Halos field team)
Trench 1

Trench 1 offers similar remains, although preservation here is more fragmentary (Figure 11). In the south of the trench, south of a fragmentarily preserved stretch of wall measuring c. 2 m, an area was revealed with some 15 near-complete pots, a few apparently in situ, others smashed and spread out over a sizeable area on a single level (Figure 12). The material forms an interesting combination of cooking pots, plain jugs of different sizes, small amphorae, a worn Black Gloss bowl and several unguentaria. Although additional architectural features are lacking in the trench, this appears to have been a utilitarian space of a domestic structure.

Evidence for two earlier potential floor levels was documented while excavating the eastern half of the northern square (1A). These floor levels were indicated by flat-lying tiles and some unidentified stone architectural features, a short stretch of wall foundation, a round stone feature belonging to the second stratum and a possible fragment of a stone pavement belonging to the deepest third stratum. These floors lacked a ceramic assemblage featuring complete pots. Dirt accumulations of circa half a meter were excavated on top of both floor levels, with the accumulations containing considerably older, residual material.

Trench 2

Finds belonging to the latest settlement phase were also encountered on the southern edge of trench 2 (Figure 13), extending into the profile, where large parts of storage and household vessels were found. Two walls were uncovered in this square, one roughly in east-west orientation, measuring c. 2.95 m, and abutting it in northern direction, a perpendicular wall preserved at a length of c. 2.30 m. In the southeastern corner of the room demarcated by these walls, a terracotta miniature offering table with objects shown on top of it was found in association with a bronze pin and a large bone, which may have been placed directly on the offering table. Although a leg seems to have been missing already in antiquity, the table was upright, indicating the fragmentarily preserved floor level of this area.

In the north of the trench two walls were exposed, one in an east-west orientation (c. 2.80 m), and one oriented north-south (u2001/2102, see Figure 15; c. 2.50 m), with a potential opening (Figure 13). A partly in situ plaster facing was preserved on both sides of the north-south wall, entering the northern profile. Connected to this wall was a rather empty floor indicated by flat-lying tiles (under u2010/2100). An association with the Hellenistic remains in the south of the trench might be possible, but due to the fragmentary nature of the features, the lack of any well-datable material on the floor, and the sloping of the terrain, this remains a hypothesis. In any case, it is clear that we are dealing with elements of a fragmentarily preserved domestic structure.
Figure 11. Overview (orthophoto with added details) of trench 1 of Magoula Plataniotiki excavations after the 2014 season. (Ivan Kisjes and Jitte Waagen)
Under this floor in the northern half of the north square of the trench (2A) a clear destruction layer was revealed, consisting of very large tile fragments mixed with large fragments of amphorae, a lekane and other pottery (u 2111a; Figure 14). Some of the tile fragments were lying together in a way suggesting that they had fallen down from a roof. This may be an indication of an earthquake destruction. Initial study pointed out that, compared to the material from the stratum above, the tiles are of a different fabric and finish; also the pottery is clearly pre-Hellenistic.

Directly below this destruction layer, there is another layer with many large tile fragments and pottery (u2111b). Whether this is a fill or another destruction is not yet clear: initial study suggests that the finds are more fragmented and mixed up than in the layer above. Also, the tiles in this lower stratum of debris appear different in fabric, finish and shape details than those in the layer above it. The pottery, however, appears similar, suggesting that there is no great time lapse between the two phases. The distinction between the two layers can be clearly observed in the northern profile (Figure 15). An additional stratigraphical distinction might be offered by two associated walls (u2114 and u2129), oriented in a slightly different angle than the architectural remains of the upper stratum, and preserved along the west and north profile (c. 2 m, resp. 1.60 m). The wall along the west profile appears to be imposed over the other, although their direct relation is unclear.
Figure 13. Overview (orthophoto with added details) of trench 2 of Magoula Plataniotiki excavations after the 2014 season (Ivan Kisjes and Jitte Waagen)
Figure 14. Remains of the collapsed roof covering a late Classical destruction layer in the northern part of trench 2 of Magoula Plataniotiki excavations (Halos field team)
Figure 15. The northern profile of trench 2 of Magoula Plataniotiki excavations after the 2014 season, showing the late classical levels, including the collapsed roof (2111a) and walls associated with it (2114 and 2129) (Halos field team)

Figure 16. Remains of the late Classical levels in the southern part of trench 2 of Magoula Plataniotiki excavations, showing some large amphora parts, during the 2013 season (Halos field team)
In a sounding in the south-west of the trench (square 2B), we excavated a sequence of two similar layers, with the upper one containing complete tiles and large parts of amphorae that were crushed by the foundations of the superimposed wall (Figure 16). Preliminary study of the material suggests that this destruction dates to sometime in the first half of the 4th century BCE; a more precise dating is not possible yet. Further under the lower debris layer, fragmentary remains of a floor with a large burnt area were partially uncovered. With it two well-preserved skyphoi (dating to the late 5th/early 4th century BCE) were found, and a large collection of loomweights, 17 of which were recovered so far. This stratum thus appears to have preceded the debris layers. Although the limited size of the test pits where remains of these lower settlement phases were uncovered does not allow for a clear understanding of the space, the rich ceramic assemblages appear domestic in nature. More detailed study will enable a better understanding of the chronology and nature of these remains.

Trench 3

Unlike the apparently domestic finds elsewhere on the site, the remains uncovered in trench 3 (Figure 17) appear to belong to a rather monumental structure, that probably dates to the Classical period. The trench is dominated by a single wall, or rather façade (Figure 18), exposed over a length of c. 5 meter, which consists of two courses of neatly joining large limestone blocks, laid out in a pseudo-isodomic style. These blocks rest on a footing of flat limestone slabs and are supported by a reinforcement at the back, built of crushed limestone. This so-called ‘Bruchstein Hinterstützungs-mauer’ is stepped, and consists of two tiers, which have the same height as the two courses of the facing. The wall faces a street or an open area to the south. A probable street level, made up of small pebbles in various colours, was encountered slightly below the top level of the footing; some flat slabs may be remains of a stone pavement that was mostly removed.

The type of masonry of the façade is similar to that at the West Gate of Eretria (5th-early 4th century BCE), where it served as the substructure to a mud-brick gate tower.\(^{31}\) Our wall seems to have been a retaining wall for a platform that was built around a loose stone heap with virtually no finds. The fill of the space between the wall and the heap contained large tile fragments and waste, and was apparently dumped on top of a thin layer of chipped stone which covered the foundation level, suggesting that the (back) facing of the wall was finished in situ, with the refuse left on the spot or dumped in the void, under the fill.

\(^{31}\) Krause 1972, 47-49, 61.
Figure 17. Overview (orthophoto with added details) of trench 3 of Magoula Plataniotiki excavations after the 2014 season (Ivan Kisjes and Jitte Waagen)
The platform probably served as the foundation for a large building, as is perhaps also suggested by a stretch of wall, perpendicular to the retaining wall, resting on the stone heap and fill. Some slight indications of a floor and perhaps even use-level west of this latter wall are puzzling, also because they seem to lie below the level reached by the stone heap. Any space here must have been very narrow. Assuming the façade indeed supported a platform, nothing of the superstructure is preserved, although more remains could be hidden towards the top of the Magoula, directly west of the trench. Some material of the first half of the 5th century BCE gives a terminus post quem for the building of the platform, although further study of the finds is needed also here. Whether the platform once extended to the north of the trench where the current surface slopes down is difficult to judge. Some slabs of different make and material placed perpendicular to the wall on its south side may indicate a secondary use of the area directly south of the monumental façade. In 2016, trench 3 will hopefully be extended in order to address some of the problems regarding interpretations of this context.
Conclusion

The quick succession of three or four phases, probably ended by destructions, in a time span of some 150 years, is an intriguing phenomenon. Supposedly, the area of ancient Halos underwent regular earthquake destructions. Yet, the (roughly) consistent general orientation of the walls in different trenches and possibly different periods, suggests a high degree of continuity in habitation on the Magoula. The preservation of a relatively tight sequence of Hellenistic and Classical houses, including household assemblages, is one of the more promising characteristics of this site.

Whether one of the phases can be interpreted as indication for the destruction of Halos by the Macedonian general Parmenion in 346 BCE, as suggested by the ancient sources, will have to follow from a closer analysis of the ceramic assemblages. Currently, we cannot conclusively confirm the historical record. The exact chronology of the Hellenistic phase in relation to New Halos is another issue that needs further study. As it is now, it seems quite likely that the settlement on the Magoula coexisted with the new city, but only further study of the finds may tell us whether both settlements were destroyed simultaneously, or a possibly renewed settlement on the Magoula continued after the destruction of New Halos.

What we do know, is that the archaeological stratigraphy continues below the levels revealed up to now. It is interesting to note in this regard that some layers contain a very large proportion of residual material mainly belonging to the Early Iron Age and early Archaic period. The pre-Classical survey finds may be a part of the same phenomenon, although the Hellenistic upper stratum of the excavation yielded relatively few residual finds. Whether substantial remains from these earlier periods are preserved in lower strata can only be pointed out by future excavation.

Another interesting phenomenon to be noted is that no later Hellenistic, Roman or Post-Roman remains were uncovered in any of the trenches, notwithstanding material from the topsoil and survey finds of these periods. Just as with the early sherds just mentioned, surface and topsoil finds only partly seem to offer a reliable picture of what is below.

Historical conclusions

Although there is sufficient epigraphic and numismatic evidence to attest the existence of Halos as a political entity throughout the Classical and Hellenistic periods, and literary and historical texts suggest an Archaic or even earlier origin, this gives no information as to the location of the polis centre, which cannot be securely pinpointed yet. However, even though epigraphic evidence is lacking, in our opinion Magoula Plataniotiki is the best candidate for the site of the city of Halos in Classical times, and possibly earlier and even later. Crop marks and
geophysical research clearly show a regular city plan and the test trenches have proven the existence of houses as well as monumental architecture. Clearly, this is the site of a Classical-Hellenistic town. Also because other candidates are lacking, it seems very likely this was the polis centre until 346 or possibly the mid 3rd century BCE, and may have had a ceremonial role as such for at least another century, even though it is unclear whether it remained inhabited in this later period. Arguments in favour of these hypotheses are: the size of the site, which with its c. 10 ha is larger than all other habitation centres in the area, excepting New Halos; the dominance of 5th to 2nd-century ceramics on the surface, and the substantial amounts of earlier pottery in the excavated trenches; the absence of other large sites in the area dating to the Archaic and Classical periods; the literary sources that indicate that Halos was located close to the shore; and possibly the inscriptions indicating the continuing institutional existence of Halos after the apparent abandonment of Magoula Platanioniki.

Whatever the precise status and name of the town on Magoula Platanioniki, it should be noted that at least for the moment there is no clear archaeological evidence for a polis centre of Halos in the periods from 346 to c. 300 BCE and from c. 250 BCE onwards; moreover the location of the town of Halos on Magoula Platanioniki before 480, and between 480 and c. 400, is for now only based on historical references and residual finds. In any case, the absence of a major urban centre in the area in the centuries before and after the existence of New Halos is an intriguing phenomenon, considering that Halos seems to have functioned as a polis, with the associated political and religious structures. The long-lived concentration of habitation on a series of small village sites, mainly on hilltops or tells (magoules) visible in the survey, suggests that these were the real backbones of the polis, which thus seems to have been polycentric in practice, even if the somewhat larger site on Magoula Platanioniki was most probably the formal central place till at least the early Hellenistic period, and perhaps even longer. The presence of (sometimes substantial) Bronze Age remains on most of these village sites might suggest that not only the general settlement pattern, but also at least parts of the social and political structure were very stable over a long period.

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