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Shattered Ceilings: Roof Tile Analysis on Survey Archaeology Projects

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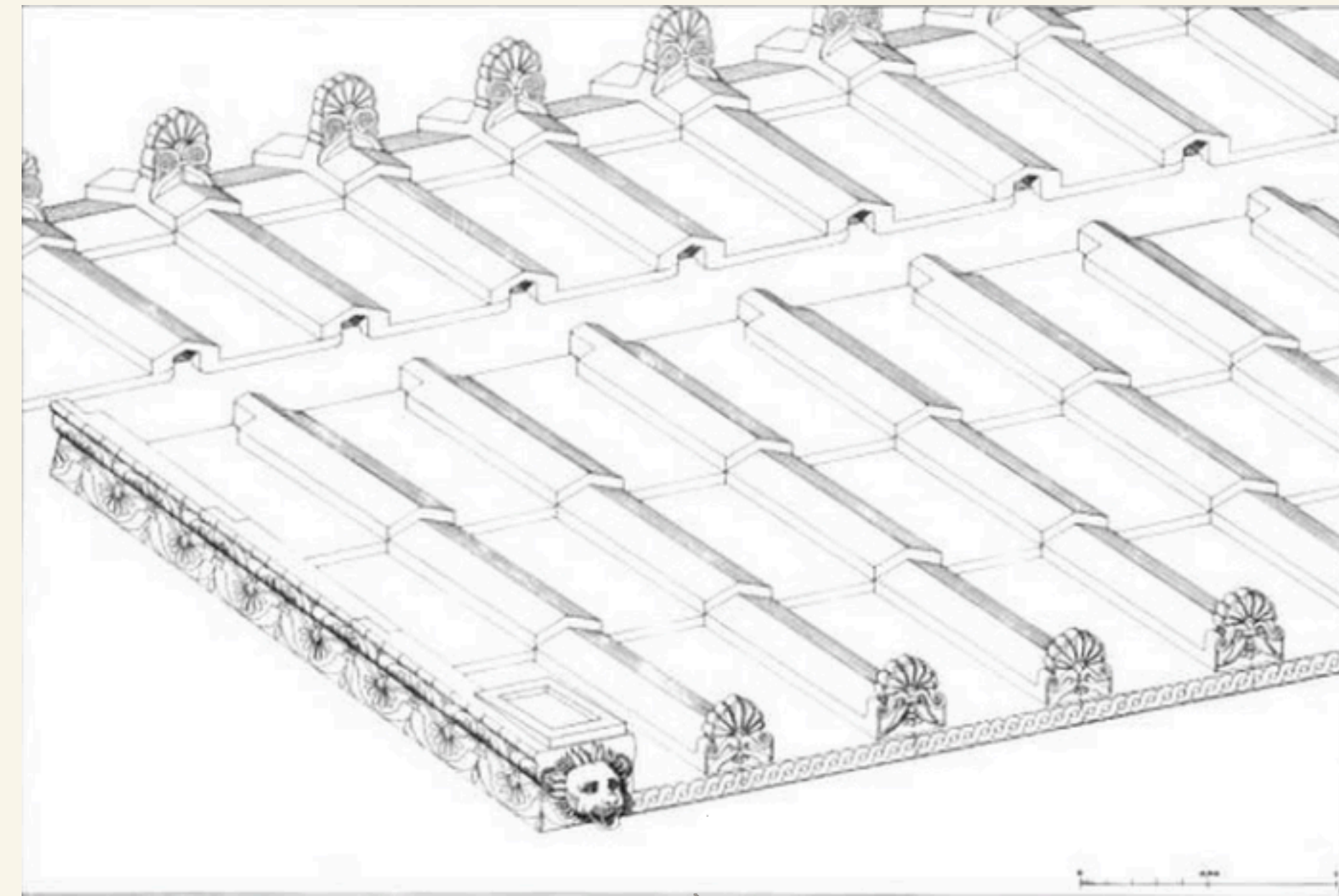
Introduction

Finding a roof tile on an archaeological survey demonstrates that a structure had previously stood nearby. Rarely found in their entirety, tiles are fabricated from terracotta, which, while durable when in its proper place, breaks when falling from a roof. The nature of these fragmentary finds has made tile analysis limited and tiles are often not included in publications or only a select few are included with ceramic finds. Additionally, unlike pottery with its typographic chronology, roof tiles have restricted dating potential. However, there are several specific types of tile that can greatly help with dating. Though limited, some of these identifiable tile types are: Early Archaic types, Laconian, Corinthian, and the characteristic swirls of the

Late-Roman to Byzantine tiles. Furthermore, specific features of tiles, such as their edges, stamps, engravings, or tiles of unique shapes can provide valuable insight into the structure adorned with tiles that previously stood on the landscape.



Contemporary made tile. Modern tile should also be counted and considered on surveys as it indicates modern use.



Corinthian tile roof from the Temple of Apollo, ca. 550-540 BCE. Winter 1993, fig. 3.



Two Laconian pan tiles found on MAP. Left tile has black paint and the right has a dark red paint.

The Mazi Archaeological Project (MAP)

Through both an archaeological and geomorphological survey, the Mazi Archaeological Project investigates the history of the Mazi Plain from prehistory to present. This particular region is of great interest as this area was and continues to be the borderland between the regions of Attica and Boeotia. This borderland situation led to an exchange of cultural material and traditions, as well as shifts in the dominant trends in the region. Prior to the Mazi Project, the significant sites of Oinoe, the Fortress of Eleutherai, and the Mazi Tower had been explored, although little else is known about the political geography and history of the plain. Innovative in its recording, the Mazi Archaeological Project uses digital recording methods to eliminate paper records and reduce the time spent entering data. This is extremely beneficial as it creates more accurate and quantifiable data, in addition to a greater ease in visualizing the results. For further information see: www.maziplain.org.



Location of the Mazi Archaeological Project in Greece.

Survey areas and key locations of the Mazi Plain.

MAP provided an excellent opportunity to work with tile on a survey archaeological project. As part of their methodology and permit allowances, MAP collects representative and rare artifacts from surveyed units. During the 2016 field season, I worked with the two prior season's collections and the incoming finds from the current season. Working on the field survey myself I was able to learn survey procedures which helped me tremendously to develop guidelines and recommendations for the ensuing tile collection on the project. Additionally, several distinct sites were identified on MAP that have large quantities of tile. This provided opportunities to determine what methodologies for collection or recording would be suitable for site specific circumstances.

Roof Tiles in the Field

Despite the challenges, great strides were taken during the 2016 season of MAP to incorporate roof tile analysis into the survey project. During the second week of the project I gave a presentation covering what samples found in the field would be most beneficial for later analysis. While surveying a unit, surveyors already counted the number of tiles seen and a few samples were collected. Expanding on this the presentation presented the following guidelines:

For Survey Unit Tile Collection & Recording:

- Count all tile fragments seen while walking a transect
- Collect one fragment of each fabric present
- In the collection of the fabrics, try to retain tiles that contain part of the tile's edge
- Collect all fragments with paint, groves, and/or etchings
- Collect all fragments of unusual shape
- Collect all tiles with relative completeness



Tile fragment with engraved π or λ .

For high concentrations of tile, forming a grid over the area is most effective for documentation and collection. For each grid:

- Gather all tile fragments within the specific grid section
- Photograph the collected pile for record
- Take GPS point for location
- Count the fragments
- Find the total weight for all tile within the grid
- Collect a few representative tiles and any diagnostic tiles for further analysis



Antefix collected from the Temple of Dionysus.



Two piles of gathered tiles from the gridded collection of tile at the Velatouri Tower.

Conclusions & Future Work

Though still developing in practice and execution, roof tile analysis on survey archaeology projects can be seen as an integral part of such studies. As a great deal of tile is seen and collected on survey projects these guidelines can be used for what should be collected for further analysis and what should be left in the field. As this method develops further the collected material will not only be more representative, but also more informative and telling about what was present before us.

In June of 2017 MAP will be having a study season to process, catalogue, and begin publishing the findings from the three years of field work. I have been invited back to the project to work further with the tiles. Processing the tiles will include measuring, drawing both the tiles and their profiles, photography, and identifying fabrics. When this is completed I hope to produce a catalogue of the tile from MAP and a short article on the tile specifically from the Temple of Dionysus. Additionally, the data and images of the tiles will be available for all members of MAP who are working on other research questions.



Reassembled Late-Roman to Byzantine pan and cover tiles. Photographed at the Thebes Museum.

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