

## Soldiers and Archaeologists at Chauchitza

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The archaeological site of Chauchitza is located in a ridge of hills running south west from Lake Doirani. Located about 4km to the south of the modern village of Pontoirakleia, it overlooks an area of rich agricultural land. When the site was discovered in 1917, this area looked very different. A railway line ran along the edge of the marsh that has now been reclaimed for agriculture. A small station, Causica, was located near a British army camp consisting of white tents gathered around a low mound (Fig.1). The camp at Causica was a few kilometres behind the front line at Doirani where fierce battles were fought in 1917 and 1918 between the Allies and Bulgarian forces. During this period this area was part of one of the major fronts of the First World War. As soldiers dug fortifications in the Greek landscape, it was inevitable that archaeological finds would come to light. Chauchitza is a good example of this: as British troops established their camp they discovered finds from the Iron Age, Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Finds from Chauchitza are now divided between the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, the British Museum in London, the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki and the Archaeological Museum of Kilkis. One miniature pot is in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. The story of how these finds were dispersed is a complicated one. When tens of thousands of British and French soldiers arrived in Thessaloniki in the autumn of 1915, Greece was a neutral country. The Army of the Orient was led by a French general, Sarrail, but the British and French each established their own zones of control. The dividing line was the river Vardar (Axios): the British controlled the area to the west of this (Fig. 2). An agreement was made with the government in Athens that Greek antiquities laws would be respected, with finds made by soldiers gathered in Thessaloniki. The British established a museum in the White Tower, later moved to the Papapheion Orphanage (Fig. 3), while French finds were put on display in the Rotunda. The British Salonika Force Museum was

initially curated by Lieutenant Ernest Gardner, an archaeologist who had been director of the British School at Athens before the War. He was succeeded by Captain Stanley Casson (Fig. 4), an archaeologist from the University of Oxford and a student of the British School at Athens, and Major Alexander Wade, who was not a professional archaeologist but had an amateur interest in the subject. All of these men were actually engaged in intelligence work in Thessaloniki. After the end of the War, Major Wade made a request that the British finds be transferred to Britain, against the wishes of Gardner and Casson, and also the Greek Ephor in Thessaloniki, Eustratios Pelekides. Nevertheless, the request was granted by the Greek Government in 1919. It seems likely that the Greek prime minister Eleutherios Venizelos was keen to avoid any diplomatic disputes with his allies while they were negotiating the peace agreement at Versailles.

The finds at Chauchitza had first come to the attention of Stanley Casson in 1917. Reports had come in that antiquities had been found during the construction of dugouts. Casson visited the camp and collected the finds, which came from graves around the central mound. Some of these were Iron Age, with characteristic bronze jewellery (fig. 5). Iron Age pottery was also recovered, including a fine grey ware cup (fig. 6). There was also a series of seven Greek and Roman graves which contained a variety of objects including a Hellenistic bronze kantharos (fig. 7) and a hoard of Roman coins from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century. Photographs of these finds were taken in Thessaloniki by the Royal Air Force, who were usually employed to photograph enemy trenches from above. As Casson reported, the camp was under constant shell fire and so it was not possible to undertake any systematic archaeological excavation at this point. It was these finds which were transferred to London with the remainder of the British Salonika Force collection: 93 objects in the British Museum can be associated with Chauchitza. The kantharos is now on display in Room 20 of the British Museum. These finds were published in the *Annual of the British School at Athens* in 1919, establishing Chauchitza as an important archaeological site.

The camp at Causica was not only inhabited by British soldiers. The YMCA is a Christian charity which supported soldiers during the First World War by building recreation huts in army camps. Casson noted that it was the YMCA who had found many of the objects he collected. One of the YMCA volunteers at Causica, Robert Gaddie, donated other archaeological finds to the National Museum of Scotland in

Edinburgh. Most of the 163 objects from Chauchitza in Edinburgh came from three Iron Age grave groups which Gaddie recorded (Fig. 8). The most important find was an antenna sword with an iron blade and bronze hilt, which dates to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Fig. 9). After the War, Casson tried to have them transferred to the British Museum to join the rest of the British Salonika Force collection, but his request was refused.

Although Gaddie had recorded three grave groups, the wartime excavations at Chauchitza were not properly documented. It was for this reason that Stanley Casson decided to return to Chauchitza in 1921 in order to conduct new excavations, with the assistance of the Ephor, Eustratios Pelekides. By this time Casson was Assistant Director of the British School at Athens. He brought a few students from Oxford and also employed a number of local workers who had arrived in the area as refugees from the Caucasus (fig. 10). In the first season of excavations Casson excavated a further 18 Iron Age graves in a low mound to the south of the camp. He returned in 1922 to excavate more of the cemetery, uncovering a further 22 graves of the same period. He then turned his attention to the larger mound, which he identified as the acropolis of the site. Here he and his team dug a trench through the various layers of the mound in order to understand the settlement which was associated with the cemetery (fig. 11). Here they discovered Bronze Age, Iron Age and Hellenistic levels. They did not find traces of Roman occupation despite the Roman coins discovered during the war. Nevertheless, Casson decided to finish excavating at Chauchitza and moved on to excavate at the nearby site of Kilindir. There have been no more excavations at Chauchitza, meaning that the finds from the First World War and Casson's excavations remain the only objects known from the site.

The objects from Casson's 1921-22 excavations remained in Greece, and were deposited at the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki. Some have since been moved to the Archaeological Museum of Kilikis, which was founded later. Casson announced his findings in the Illustrated London News in 1924, realising that there was still interest in archaeological findings made during the First World War (fig. 12). He also rapidly published a number of academic articles about the site and included it in his 1926 book, *Macedonia Thrace and Illyria*. He used Chauchitza as one of the key sources of evidence for the Dorian Invasion, attributing the Bronze Age

destruction level to the Dorian invaders, who then remained at the site for a period, and were responsible for the Iron Age graves. Although few archaeologists would accept such a direct correlation between Iron Age graves and Dorians today, it provides an interesting insight into Casson's way of thinking. Having served in Greece during the War, defending against an attack from the north, it made sense to Casson to interpret these archaeological finds from near the front line in similar terms. In his memoirs he reflected poignantly on his experience of excavation; "As I found the graves of these well-armed warriors I could not but reflect on the progress of civilisation, for above those graves I had first before excavation to clear away countless shell fragments, cartridges and other oddments of modern war, before I could arrive, a few feet lower down, at the armaments of our ancestors." Stanley Casson also served in the Second World War, returning to Greece in an Intelligence role. He died in a military plane crash in 1944.

Casson's excavations at Chauchitza were influential in other ways. Among his excavation team was Walter Heurtley (fig. 13), who went on to excavate at other sites in the region which formed the basis for his important book, *Prehistoric Macedonia*, published in 1939. Here he included the finds from Chauchitza, establishing it as one of the main type sites for the Iron Age in this region (fig. 14).

In the decades after the Second World War, many more sites were excavated, on either side of the Greek border. Characteristic Iron Age bronze ornaments of the type found at Chauchitza have become known as 'Macedonian Bronzes'. Advances in bioarchaeology have shown that these ornaments were often interred with powerful women. The objects Casson interpreted as shield bosses were in fact large belt buckles (Fig. 15). The miniature bronze pyxides worn as pendants were probably used to contain opium for medicinal purposes (fig. 8). Instead of the remains of Dorian warriors, some of the graves discovered at Chauchitza in fact reveal a society when women had important roles as healers and priestesses.

As the centenary of the First World war approached there was renewed interests in these finds made by British soldiers fighting in northern Greece. Several exhibitions were organised, including Αρχαιολογία στα Μετόπισθεν. Στη Θεσσαλονίκη των Ταραγμένων Χρόνων (1912-1922) in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki in 2012. Here Casson's finds were shown in their wartime context (fig. 16). Chauchitza

was again featured in the exhibition «Αρχαιολογία εν καιρώ πολέμου στο Κιλκίς. Από τα χαρακώματα των μαχών... στα σκάμματα των ανασκαφών» organised by the Archaeological Museum of Kilkis in 2018-2019. In the UK these significant finds from the First World War trenches are largely not on display; those that are tend to be displayed as Greek antiquities rather than products of the excavations of soldier-archaeologists. They are, however, increasingly well known through publications and through the online catalogues of museums. They are an important reminder of the connections between Britain and Greece during some of the most difficult periods of the twentieth century.

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## Figure captions

Figure 1. Causica camp from the north looking towards the railway station. © IWM Q 111893

Figure 2. Fig. 4.1. Map of the British Frontline (Gardner and Casson 1918-19, pl. I)

Figure 3. The BSF Museum in the building built next to the Papapheion Orphanage. Finds from Chauchitza are visible of the left-hand shelf. British School at Athens photographic archive (SPHS 8510).

Figure 4. Stanley Casson in military uniform. © IWM HU 119699

Figure 5. Bronze objects from Chauchitza. Photograph taken by Royal Air Force. SPHS Image Collection, British School at Athens.

Figure 6. Iron Age cup from Chauchitza, now in the British Museum (GR 1919,1119.243). Photograph taken by the Royal Air Force. SPHS Image Collection, British School at Athens.

Figure 7. 4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE bronze kantharos from Chauchitza, now in the British Museum (GR 1919, 1119.7). Photograph taken by the Royal Air Force. SPHS Image Collection, British School at Athens.

Figure 8. Grave Group C from Chauchitza, National Museums Scotland. © National Museums Scotland.

Figure 9. Antenna sword from Chauchitza (A.1923.110). Length: 31.4 cm. © National Museums Scotland.

Figure 10. Photograph from the excavation of Chauchitza. © Casson Archive, Classical Art Research Centre, University of Oxford.

Figure 11. Plan and schematic section of the site of Chauchitza. Heurtley 1939: fig. 29-30

Figure 12. Illustrated London News article about Chauchitza. Published 22 November 1924.

Figure 13. Walter Heurtley excavating at Chauchitza, 1921. © Casson Archive, Classical Art Research Centre, University of Oxford.

Figure 14. Catalogue of Iron Age pottery from Chauchitza. Heurtley 1939, p. 235.

Figure 15. Iron Age belt buckle from Chauchitza. AMTH 5251. © Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

Figure 16. The finds of Casson's Chauchitza campaign (1921-1922) in the Archaeology behind Battlelines exhibition. © Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.