

The Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods

Introduction

The investigations on the Mastos Hill in the 1930s and 1950s did not produce any evidence for settlement or other activity during the periods between the end of the Bronze Age and Late Antiquity. In the 1999 survey on the hill we found not a single Early Iron Age potsherd, while a total of 102 fragments datable to the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods were collected. Of these, 14 were taken to the Nauplion Museum for further study, and 10 are published here. Excepting fragments of roof tiles, no other artefacts even vaguely datable to the periods in question were recorded. The result is somewhat surprising if compared with the results of the large survey conducted in the Berbati valley from 1988 to 1990, and those of the excavations in 1994, 1995 and 1997.¹ Despite the fact that the valley was continuously settled from at least the eighth century BC onwards, one of its most advantageous locations, and the focal point of settlement during the Bronze Age and even earlier, was obviously unattractive until Late Antiquity. Possible reasons for this, as well as the significance of the meagre evidence, are discussed below.

Distribution of pottery

Given the methods applied in the Mastos survey, and the choice of field walkers (see Wells, this volume), the almost complete absence of finds datable to historical periods on the

hill and its immediate surroundings can hardly be explained away in terms of real or perceived invisibility of finds from certain periods,² but must be interpreted as very limited human presence at the site during the centuries between the end of the Bronze Age and Late Antiquity. However, if one were to push the evidence, the map of the distribution of pottery in *Fig. 89*³ would seem to suggest some degree of activity on the southern slopes of the Mastos Hill during the periods under analysis here, while a slight presence of material in unit 24 indicates that the top of the hill was at least visited (for the location of the individual units, see *Fold-out 2*). The pottery itself was in most cases very worn, and at times identified only by means of exclusion from the better known categories of prehistoric, Late Antique or Medieval pottery. The overall distribution of the pottery is reflected in the choice of fragments included in the catalogue below (*Fig. 90*), as eight of the ten fragments are from the southern units 40 and 44. The remaining two, nos. 293 and 302, found in units 25 and 57, can perhaps be characterized as chance finds, as both were the sole finds in their respective units, and also eye-catching pieces which may have been picked up and thrown away time and time again.

Nos. 293 and 302 are both fragments of large louteria, a shape that seems common in both domestic and religious contexts, and was probably used as a wash basin.⁴ No. 293, with its painted decoration, is unparalleled. The fabric qualifies it as a local product, whereas the decoration, consisting of multiple zigzags on both rim and upper body, possibly suggests an early date within the Archaic period, as this kind

¹ During the 1988–1990 survey 12 findspots dated to the Early Iron Age and the Archaic period were recorded in the Berbati Valley, see Ekroth 1996; 30 findspots were dated to the Classical and Hellenistic periods, Penttinen 1996a. An Archaic cult place next to the Late Bronze Age tholos tomb was excavated in 1994, see Wells, Ekroth & Holmgren 1996 (by Ekroth), and a rural site at Pyrgouthi in the central part of the valley in 1995 and 1997. This last site had occupational phases during the Early Iron Age, the fifth century BC, around 300 BC, and again during the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman periods, Penttinen 2005. For further information on the earlier investigations at Berbati, see Wells, this volume.

² Pottery of the Early Iron Age is often mentioned as an example of “invisible” pottery, see Cherry & Davis 1998, *passim*. During the Mastos survey, the absence of Early Iron Age material was taken as a virtual absence of activity during the period.

³ It should be noted that the dots in the distribution map of the pottery from the Archaic to the Hellenistic periods mark single sherds. It is therefore not directly comparable with the distribution maps of pottery from other periods.

⁴ Iozzo 1987; for louteria found in domestic contexts, see Penttinen 1996a, 275.

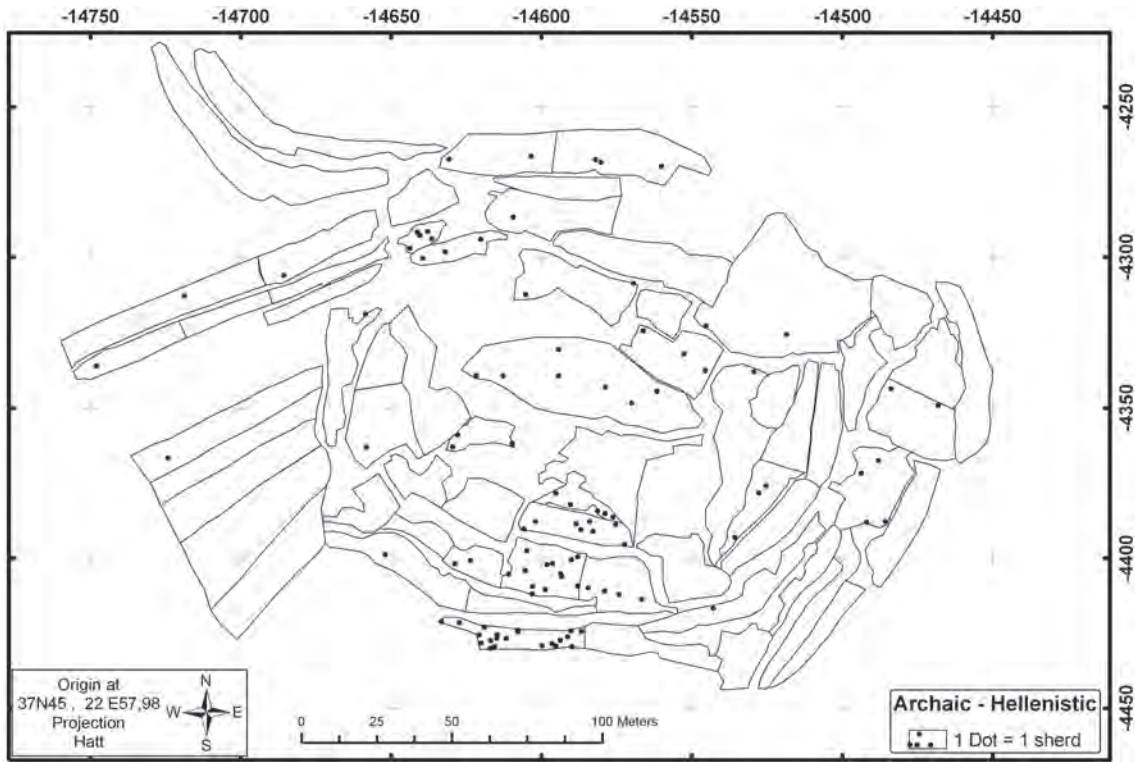


Fig. 89. Graphic (above) and tabular (below) distribution of Archaic to Hellenistic sherds between investigated units on the Mastos. Illustration by E. Savini.

Units	Area (m2)	Sherds	Sherds/10 m2	Units	Area (m2)	Sherds	Sherds/10 m2	Units	Area (m2)	Sherds	Sherds/10 m2
1	227	0	0.00	23	462	3	0.06	45	278	0	0.00
2	483	1	0.02	24	1357	7	0.05	46	265	0	0.00
3	555	0	0.00	25	624	1	0.02	47	434	1	0.02
4	374	1	0.03	26	463	0	0.00	48	188	0	0.00
5	189	0	0.00	27	663	0	0.00	49	319	0	0.00
6	176	0	0.00	28	999	0	0.00	50	223	0	0.00
7	161	0	0.00	29	647	0	0.00	51	326	0	0.00
8	254	1	0.04	30	18	3	1.67	52	268	3	0.11
9	400	1	0.03	31	218	0	0.00	53	322	0	0.00
10	623	1	0.02	32	340	0	0.00	54	329	0	0.00
11	967	0	0.00	33	321	8	0.25	55	745	1	0.01
12	670	0	0.00	34	157	5	0.32	56	222	0	0.00
13	263	0	0.00	35	406	0	0.00	57	500	4	0.08
14	457	2	0.04	36	230	0	0.00	58	392	0	0.00
15	659	3	0.05	37	135	0	0.00	59	521	2	0.04
16	92	5	0.54	38	181	2	0.11	60	400	0	0.00
17	184	3	0.16	39	711	0	0.00	61	525	0	0.00
18	500	2	0.04	40	409	13	0.32	62	339	0	0.00
19	254	0	0.00	41	417	4	0.10	63	284	0	0.00
20	510	1	0.02	42	170	0	0.00	64	1697	2	0.01
21	674	0	0.00	43	455	1	0.02				
22	186	0	0.00	44	279	21	0.75				

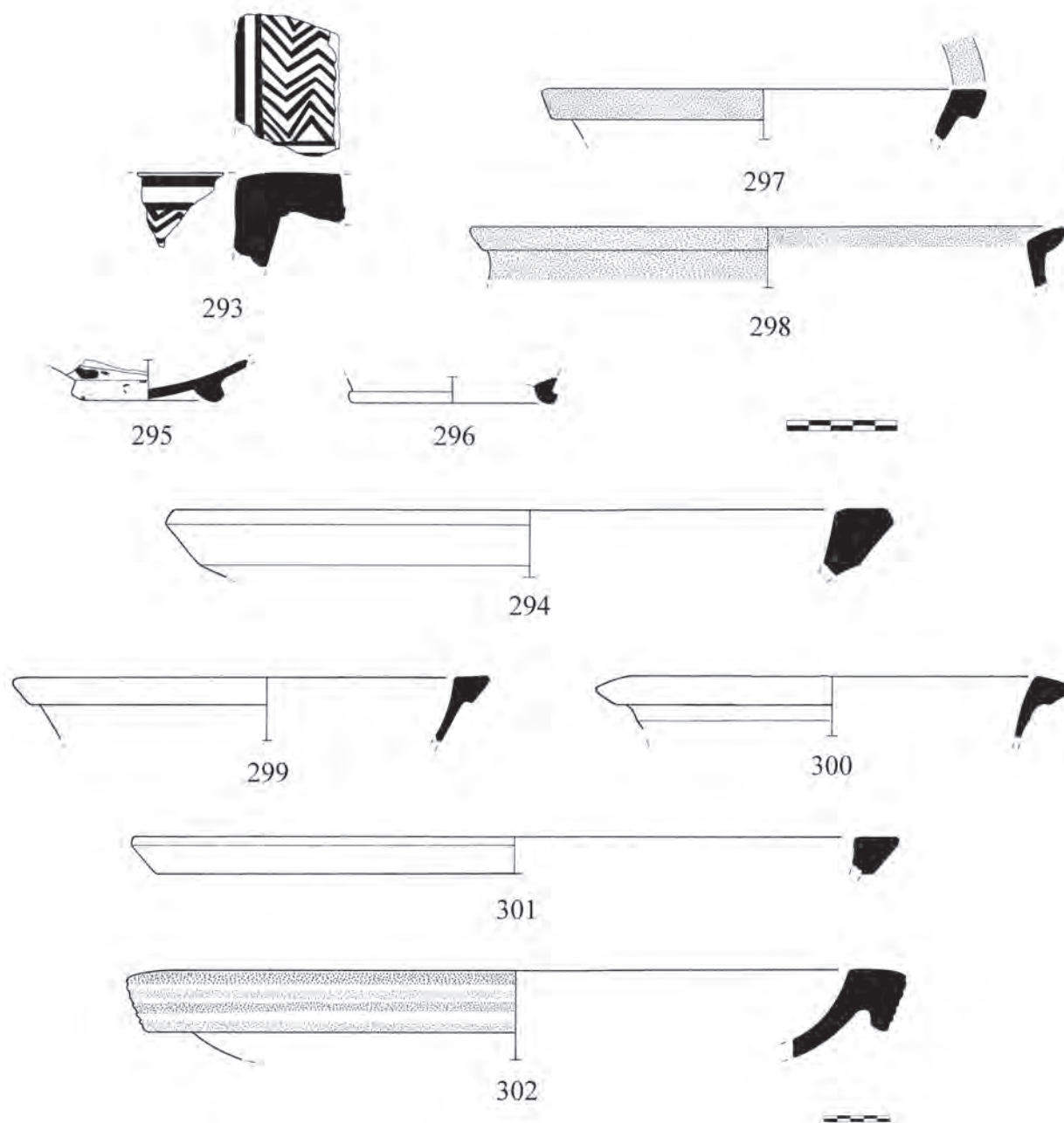


Fig. 90. Archaic to Hellenistic pottery found in units 25, 40, 44 and 57. Drawings by A. Hooton.

of decoration is more often seen on pots datable to the Early Iron Age. No. 302 is of the common type of louterion, and of Corinthian manufacture, judging from the fabric. It should be dated to the fifth or fourth century BC on the basis of dates given by Mario Iozzo to louteria found at Corinth.⁵

⁵ E.g. Iozzo 1987, 374, fig. 2 and pl. 67:35.

Nos. 297 and 298, both found in unit 44, are of similar fabrics to the louterion no. 293 above. Since the brownish paint, which adheres well to the fabric, is also similar, local provenance and an Archaic date are suggested for these vessels as well. Nos. 295 and 296 are base fragments from fine ware vessels, found in the same cultivated field to the south of the southern slope of the hill. The torus base of no. 296 is characteristic of the drinking vessels of the fifth and fourth

centuries BC. The more splaying ring base of no. 295, as well as the fact that its paint is probably the result of dipping, suggests a date in the Hellenistic period.

The remaining items in the catalogue are rim fragments from undecorated lekanai, all except no. 294, found in unit 44. Such lekanai in various sizes were exceedingly common in the Classical and Hellenistic farmstead sites defined in the Berbati Valley during the 1988–1990 survey (*Fold-out 1*).⁶ Lekanoi of reddish and calcareous fabrics with a horizontal, protruding rim, such as nos. 299 and 301, seemed common at sites dated to the fifth century BC, whereas lekanai with bevelled rims, such as no. 294, or with slightly overhanging rims, such as no. 300, were considered Hellenistic, especially if they were of micaceous fabrics.⁷ This classification does not work very well here, as the bevelled no. 294 is of a fabric which is more common in Archaic and Classical pots.

Among the sherds not included in the catalogue, as their shapes could not be reconstructed, a couple of fragments notably from the top of the hill and immediately below it are worth mentioning, as they obviously come from rather small fine ware vessels datable to the Archaic or Classical periods. An amount of tile fragments was also found in the topmost unit 24, where they may have been re-used in the Byzantine or Medieval structures.

Discussion

During the 1988–1990 survey, findspots were defined from concentrations of artefacts recorded in the terrain, as in most surveys. The absolute number and density of artefacts were not considered defining factors, as they were seen as parameters that vary in accordance with the date and the function of the site.⁸ Looking at the numbers of finds from the Mastos Hill, unit 44 could possibly be defined as a farmstead site, especially as fragments of roof tiles were also recorded in the field. However, as there was no clear concentration of pottery and roof tiles in any particular part of the field, even this remains doubtful. In this case it seems possible to suggest that the artefacts ended up where they were found as a result of manuring in antiquity or later, i.e. when refuse from households or animal pens was spread on fields under cultiva-

tion.⁹ Unit 44 was a recently ploughed field at the time of the survey, similar to some of the units in the northwestern part of the surveyed area, where not a single artefact belonging to Archaic, Classical or Hellenistic times was recorded. The visibility of surface artefacts was therefore as close to perfect as could be. The conclusion would thus seem to be that the Mastos Hill and its immediate surroundings were simply not utilized for settlement in the periods after the Late Bronze Age, despite obvious advantages, such as an easily defensible position, and proximity to water sources and nearby fertile soils. These are the kind of factors often cited in survey literature as explanations for settlement, or the lack of it, at a certain location. In the case of the Mastos Hill in the Berbati Valley, we obviously need to look elsewhere for an explanation for the disinterest in the hill during the periods in question.

Analyzing the lack of settlement on the Mastos, it should be kept in mind that the Mycenaean remains on the eastern slopes of the hill (see Klintberg, this volume) were certainly very much in evidence when the Berbati Valley was resettled during the Early Iron Age and later,¹⁰ and the same slopes would have been as full of ancient, awe-inspiring artefacts as they still are today. Catherine Morgan has pointed out that there does not seem to be any consistency in attitudes towards Bronze Age remains in later, historical periods.¹¹ Some of the Bronze Age sites were used for settlement, some as cemeteries, whereas many others were altogether ignored. A more consistent pattern emerges, however, if one looks only at the most elevated parts of some of the other Mycenaean sites in the Argolid.

The citadel at Midea, for instance, remained unsettled till Late Antiquity. A small number of Archaic pots and a house model, found during the extensive excavations of recent decades, indicate religious use of the acropolis, but hardly settlement.¹² For the citadel at Mycenae, some settlement during the Early Iron Age and the ensuing Archaic and Classical periods has been claimed, but the evidence is far from substantial.¹³ Cult, on the other hand, is very much in evidence in the form of a succession of temples, possibly to Athena.¹⁴ At

⁶ For a discussion of functions of the Classical and Hellenistic sites recorded in the 1988–1990 survey, see Penttinen 1996a, 278f.

⁷ Penttinen 1996a, 275. For Hellenistic lekanai in general, see *Agora* XXXIII, 108–114.

⁸ For the methodological approach of the 1988–1990 survey, see Wells, Runnels & Zangger 1990, 214–216, and Wells 1996a, 15–22.

⁹ Alcock, Cherry & Davis 1994, *passim*. In fact many of the tracts on the valley floor surveyed in 1988–1990 produced artefacts in equal or greater numbers than unit 44, but no findspots or sites were defined due to the lack of clear concentrations of pottery and roof tiles. This, of course, was before the “manuring hypothesis” was acknowledged.

¹⁰ The resettlement of the Berbati Valley took place during the eighth century BC. For diverging accounts of the phenomenon, see Ekroth 1996, 219–222, and Penttinen 2005, 105–106.

¹¹ Morgan 1999, 376–377.

¹² Kosmetatou 1996; 1998. Nys pers. comm. 10.2 2009.

¹³ For a survey of evidence during the Early Iron Age, see Penttinen 2005, 101, esp. n. 319; for the Archaic and Classical periods, Taylour 1981, 11.

¹⁴ Klein 1997, 277–279.

Asine, at the other end of the Argolid, tradition has it that the Early Iron Age settlement above the Bronze Age remains was destroyed by Argos around 700 BC, and the site was not to be settled again until the Early Hellenistic period.¹⁵ This view has been challenged lately, and it now seems more likely that Asine was continuously settled from the end of the Bronze Age to Roman times. The finds from the acropolis, however, again point more to cult than settlement.¹⁶

Seen in this light, the absence of finds from historical periods on the Mastos does not seem very surprising. The very nuclei, or at least the more elevated parts of the Bronze Age sites, may have been generally reserved for religious uses until the beginning of the Hellenistic period. Speculating on the reasons behind such behaviour, ideological motives such as veneration (or fear) of ancestors naturally spring to mind. The well-documented awareness of a heroic past in the Argolid during the Archaic and Classical periods perhaps rendered the very centres of the Bronze Age sites untouchable; an attitude that somehow changed in the Hellenistic period. There is also a concept in Iron Age Greek religion that mountain tops and other elevated locations were not the property of the emerging *poleis* but reserved for communal and inter-communal gatherings.¹⁷ Such gatherings do not necessarily leave much trace in the terrain.

Mycenaean Mastos, although not in the category of the major citadels, can certainly be seen as an important Bronze Age settlement in the Argolid. In analogy with the sites mentioned above, it would therefore not be surprising to find a shrine or some other type of religious structure there during historical periods. The two louteria, cat. nos. 293 and 302, are of types commonly encountered at sanctuary sites. Yet they do not define a location as a cult site *per se*, as such louteria have also been found in purely domestic contexts. However, if one wished to search for a historical cult place on the Mastos, the first location to look would obviously be the top of the hill, where indeed some activity is attested in historical periods, despite the poor visibility in Unit 24 at the time of the survey. It is also possible that whatever was there during Antiquity was obliterated by construction in the Byzantine and Medieval periods (see Hjohlman, this volume). In the Early Hellenistic period, which saw major construction work and resettlement at some other Bronze Age sites in the Argolid, the focal point of settlement at Berbati had already moved to the eastern part of the valley, where a cluster of towered

farmsteads as well as a shrine to an unknown deity close to the *kontoporeia*, which was the main route of communication between the Argolid and Corinthia, have been identified in earlier investigations (*Fold-out 1*).¹⁸ Summing up the hypothesis presented here: ideological rather than pragmatic reasoning would explain the lack of settlement on the Mastos during the Early Iron Age and in the Archaic and Classical periods, whereas proximity to routes of communication rather than a safe location would have been the determining factor when deciding where to settle in the Hellenistic period.

Catalogue (Fig. 90)

Unit 25

293. Louterion. Fragment of overhanging rim preserved. D. more than 40.0; H. 4.9; pres. W. of rim 4.6. Pink (7.5YR 8/4), well fired, somewhat calcareous fabric, slipped very pale brown (10YR 8/4). Reddish brown paint. Multiple zigzags on top of rim and on exterior.

Unit 40

294. Basin or lekane. Fragment of protruding, bevelled rim. D. 54.0; H. 4.8; W. of rim 3.5. Light grey (10YR 7/2) with lime, gravel and other impurities characteristic of the “Corinthian tile fabric”.¹⁹ Very pale brown (10YR 8/4) slip.

Unit 44

295. Bowl. A complete ring base. D. 6.0; H. 1.8; Th. of wall 0.3. Pink (5YR 7/3), semi-coarse fabric. Black paint on interior and splashes of black on exterior.

296. Skyphos. A minuscule fragment of torus base. D. 9.0; H. 1.2. Light reddish brown (5YR 6/4), well fired, somewhat calcareous fabric.

297. Bowl (?) Fragment of protruding rim. D. 20.0; H. 2.3; Th. of wall 0.4. Very pale brown (10YR 8/4), soft and somewhat calcareous fabric. Brownish paint on rim.

¹⁵ Frödin & Persson 1938, 437.

¹⁶ Wells 2002b points to evidence of cults to at least Demeter, Artemis and Heracles on the acropolis of Asine during Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic times. The evidence for settlement on the acropolis before the Hellenistic period is still scanty, see e.g. Penttinen 1996b, 166 and n. 15.

¹⁷ Langdon 2000, *passim*.

¹⁸ Penttinen 2005, 113–114.

¹⁹ Whitbread 1995, 293–294.

298. Bowl. Fragment of everted rim. D. 27.0; H. 2.6; Th. of wall 0.5.

Pink (7.5YR 8/4), soft and somewhat calcareous fabric. Brownish paint on top of rim and on exterior. Same fabric as in 297.

299. Lekane. Fragment of protruding rim. D. 38.0; H. 4.5; Th. of wall 0.6.

Red (2.5YR 5/6), well fired and calcareous fabric, slipped somewhat lighter.

300. Lekane. Fragment of protruding rim. D. 35.0; H. 4.5; Th. of wall 0.5.

Light reddish brown (5YR 6/4), extremely hard, calcareous fabric.

301. Lekane. Fragment of protruding rim. D. 54.0; H. 3.5; W. of rim 1.6.

Grey (7.5YR 5/1), hard and calcareous fabric with bright red core.

Unit 57

302. Louterion. Large fragment of overhanging rim and of upper wall of bowl. D. 55.0; H. 6.0; Th. of wall 1.2; W. of rim 3.5.

Very pale brown (10YR 8/4) with lime and plentiful red mudstone. Red and brown paint on ribbed exterior of rim.