

**The Kastraki Peninsula. On the right, "clog" irons (soles). 500-475 BC. Archaeological Museum of Nafplion.**



ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

ARGOLIS

# ANCIENT ASINE

GEORGIA IVOU

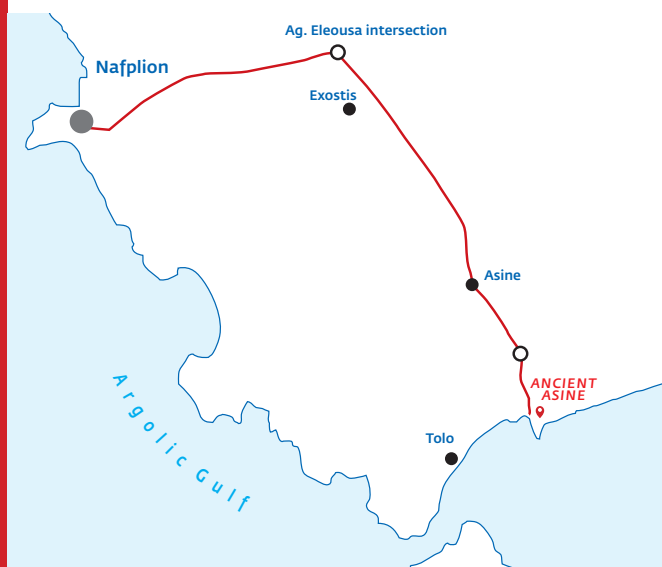
*Archaeologist*



→ **Ancient Asine is about 15 minutes by car from the town of Nafplion. From Nafplion we travel along Asklepiou Avenue and veer east as far as the Agia Eleousa intersection, where we take the exit towards Tolo/Drepano. After passing through the village of modern Asine, we take the exit to Kastraki/Archaia Asine.**



- 1 View of the Kastraki Peninsula from the west.
- 2 The main access to the acropolis before the NSRF works.



The route from Nafplio to ancient Asine.

## INTRODUCTION

The impressive natural landscape of the Kastraki Peninsula, the allure of the name Asine, due in no small part to the poem by the Greek poet and Nobel laureate Georgios Seferis, and the results of the archaeological investigations attract visitors in droves to the hill which is identified as the heart of ancient Asine. Decisive too is the site's proximity to popular tourist resorts of the Argolid, as ancient Asine is located barely one kilometre east of the holiday town of Tolo, between two popular beaches on the Argolic Gulf, Psili Ammos at Tolo and Plaka at Drepano.

Until a few years ago, due to the destruction of a large part of the antiquities during the Second World War, visiting the hill was mainly a pleasurable experience for nature-lovers, indeed rather an adventure, considering the precipitous points of the rocky terrain and the wild vegetation covering pathways, military earthworks and the scant ancient remains. Works carried out in recent years by the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolida, in the framework of the project 'Asine-Acropolis of Ancient Asine. Presentation of the Archaeological Site at Kastraki', with funding from the National Strategic Reference Framework, an archaeological site has been laid out, where the now faint traces of man's long presence in the area have been reconstituted by conventional and modern means. Conscious choice of the project was the equal presentation of the recent history of the archaeological site, with nodal points the Swedish excavations of the 1920s and the capture of the hill by Italian Occupation troops during the Second World War. Concurrently, the overall planning of the interventions included the incorporation of the necessary installations for the operation and safety of an archaeological site into already existing constructions, so as to avoid marring the natural landscape.

This guide endeavours to bring to life the history of the place over time, with epicentre the recently presented archaeological site of Ancient Asine, offering today's visitors a useful aid to its understanding. Human presence in the region, spanning millennia but imprinted haphazardly in the space, will be revealed in the course of wandering over the Kastraki headland.

### Name – Identification of the site

The hill named Kastraki or Paliokastro had been identified already in the mid-nineteenth century as the site of Homeric Asine. Ernst Curtius, in 1852, in his book *Peloponnesos: eine historisch-geographische Beschreibung der Halbinsel*, was the first to argue that the steep hill projecting from the sea, between the small villages of Tolo and Drepano, was the Asine 'that enfold[s] the deep gulf',



3 The fortification walls of Asine from the east.



4 The Kastraki Peninsula from the northwest.



5 View of the Lower Town at the time of the Swedish excavations.



6 The scientific staff of the excavation. Prince Fustaf Adolf (in the centre), between the directors of the excavation Persson and Frödin.

of the *Iliad* (II.561). This is also the sole reference to Asine in Homer, in the Catalogue of Ships, as one of the cities of the Argolid which participated with ships in the campaign against Troy, under the command of the king of Argos Diomedes. The identification of the site as ancient Asine was accepted and disseminated by Heinrich Schliemann. Today, Asine is the name of the village on the route from Nafplion to Kastraki, about one and a half kilometres north of the hill. During the Ottoman period the village was known as Tzaferaga.

### Features of the location

The Kastraki promontory is connected to the mainland by a spit about 100 m. wide. According to E. Zangger, the present form of the hill is the outcome of intense geological instability, which affected the coast of the Argolic Gulf until the end of the third millennium BC.

Today, almost half of Kastraki, 350 m long (N-S) and 140 m wide, is surrounded by sea. On the seaward side, to the south, the hill is virtually unscalable, with sheer cliffs up to 52 m. high. To the northwest, the rock is joined to the land by a smooth slope. This slope was named the 'Lower City' by the Swedish excavators, in contradistinction to the rocky summit of the hill, which was characterized as the 'acropolis'. These conventional names have been established in the international bibliography.

To the northwest stands Barbouna Hill, 92 m. high, which protects Kastraki from the blustery north winds. Natural protection from the winds blowing from the west is provided by the islet of Romvi opposite Tolo, so creating a safe haven in the small bay formed to the west of Kastraki. The doubly privileged site, naturally fortified and sheltered from the winds, seems to have played a decisive role in the choice of the area for settlement from as early as the third millennium BC, and determined its development in the ensuing centuries.

### Excavations

In the 1920s, Swedish archaeologists, in the course of an ambitious excavation programme, brought to light a complicated mosaic of multiple phases of habitation, a palimpsest of the history of the area for over three thousand years. Evidence relating to the daily life of the inhabitants of Asine continues to be revealed to this day, as result of the excavations but also of the study of the old and the new finds. Between 1970 and 1990, the Swedish Institute at Athens conducted excavations at selected points, while sporadic investigations were carried out also by the Ephorate of Antiquities of the Argolid. Last, the recent project for the presentation of the archaeological



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site was an opportunity for 'locating anew' and re-examining ancient remains that had been forgotten over the years, and in parallel to enhance monuments of the more recent history of the place.

The reason for the Swedes' involvement with Asine was a journey made by the then Crown Prince and later King of Sweden Gustaf VI Adolf, in the autumn of 1920. On this visit, the prince was accompanied by the Greek numismatist Ioannis Svoronos. A few months earlier, Svoronos had brought Asine to the attention of archaeologists of the French School at Athens, and they had proceeded to a preliminary recording and mapping of the site. After Prince Gustaf expressed interest in undertaking the excavation, the French withdrew. There is reference to an excavation of vague extent on the northeast side of the hill, in the late nineteenth or the early twentieth century, by the schoolmaster Ioannis Kophiniotis, but with no further written information.



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Almost two years after the prince's visit, in spring 1922 the excavation began. Preparations for it included among other things the necessary correspondence between the Swedish and the Greek authorities, the securing of funding, manning the scientific team, gathering together and transporting the equipment by the means of the time. The preliminary study of the site was entrusted to Axel Persson, a Classical archaeologist at the University of Lund, who was subsequently appointed co-director of the excavation, together with Otto Frödin, an archaeologist with significant excavation experience. Prince Gustaf became president of the Asine Committee in Sweden, took part in the excavation in the autumn of 1922 and made a decisive contribution to publishing the results in 1938, eight years after investigations were completed.

### **Brief archaeological review**

The arrival of the first inhabitants in this area is dated to the sixth millennium BC, as deduced from Neolithic potsherds found in the deepest levels of the excavations at the foot of Barbouna Hill. During the third millennium BC (Early Helladic period) the settlement seems to have developed in the area of the Lower City and on terraces of the acropolis, while in the first half of the second millennium BC (Middle Helladic period) the settlement of the Lower City expanded, gradually occupying part of the south slope of Barbouna. East of Kastraki, where there is a campsite today, part of a Middle Helladic cemetery was excavated, in which the burials were organized in and around a circular stone-built tumulus.

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The finds from the cemetery and the settlement of Mycenaean times are befitting to the brief but telling





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- 7 Early Helladic clay jug. Archaeological Museum of Nafplion.
- 8 Clay pyxis of the Geometric period. Archaeological Museum of Nafplion.
- 9 Clay kantharos with representation of birds, from a Geometric grave. 730-690 BC. Archaeological Museum of Nafplion.
- 10 Terracotta female figurine from the Lower Town. 3rd c. BC. Archaeological Museum of Nafplion.

reference by Homer to Asine, as a city linked directly to the sea. The growth of mercantile activity during the Mycenaean period and the existence of the great palaces of Mycenae, Tiryns and Midea in the Argolid, apparently gave the inhabitants of coastal Asine the opportunity to play an active role in transit trade between the Argolic palaces and the Mediterranean centres. A small part of a cemetery of chamber tombs of these years was investigated on the east side of Barbouna Hill, yielding rich grave goods, often of exotic provenance. In contrast to the finds from the chamber tombs, the settlement contemporary with them is not particularly impressive. It developed mainly in the area of the Lower City, while remains of houses have been uncovered both on the south slope of Barbouna and in the flat area east of Kastraki.

Life at Asine continued after the demise of the Mycenaean world, without any disaster, abandonment or other kind of interruption in habitation evident in the archaeological record. In Submycenaean times and throughout the Geometric period, activity on and around Kastraki never ceased. During these years the economy of the settlement was based mainly on the fruits of labours on land and at sea. A small temple-like edifice excavated on the summit of Barbouna was in use from the late eighth to the early fifth century BC. Researchers have identified the sanctuary as that of Apollo Pythaios, mentioned a few centuries later by Pausanias. Today, the hilltop is occupied by the concrete base of an anti-aircraft machine-gun and fortification works of the Second World War.

At the end of the Geometric period, c. 700 BC, the site was abandoned by its inhabitants, after a siege laid by the Argives. According to Pausanias, the beleaguered residents were forced to leave their land when they were attacked by Argos as a reprisal for assisting the Lacedaemonians in a campaign in Argive territory. So, the people of Asine embarked on ships and, tradition has it, resettled in the area of what is now Koroni in the Messenian Gulf, where they founded a new city of the same name. Modern research has shown that ancient Asine was not totally deserted for the next four hundred years, as the first excavators had believed. Small cultic assemblages from the acropolis, burials of the early fifth century BC and fragmentary traces of settlement in Classical times, to the east of the hill, confirm the existence of a small population here during the centuries following its recorded 'abandonment'.

Around 300 BC, Kastraki was once again the epicentre around which life at Asine evolved. It was then that the fortification walls, which gird the hill to this day, were built. Houses, workshop installations, cultic

- 11 View of the Italian pillbox on the north side of the hill.
- 12 View of the Barbouna Hill from the acropolis.
- 13 Drawing of the chamber-tomb I of the Barbouna cemetery.



assemblages and graves are dated to this period too.

When Strabo visited Asine in the early first century AD, he beheld a small village, while one hundred years later, in the mid-second century AD, Pausanias saw only ruins on the site of the ancient city. In the fourth and the early fifth century AD, the Lower City was inhabited once again. New houses were built on top of the Hellenistic residential complexes, some of which utilized parts of the earlier buildings. Dated to this period are two small bathhouses: the first, now destroyed, stood extra muros to the east, and the second, still preserved, is in the east part of the Lower City.

Henceforth and until the recorded presence of the Venetians in the area of Tolo, during the Second Period of Venetian rule (1686-1715), the information we have on Asine is scant, making every attempt to trace its existence in Byzantine times difficult. The paved access to the central gate of the Hellenistic and Roman city should perhaps be dated to the Early Byzantine period, while small-scale repairs and alterations to part of the walls, mainly the northwest branch, could have been made in the Byzantine Age.

During the German-Italian Occupation, Asine was captured by the 433th Motorized Regiment of the Piemonte Infantry Division. Its strategic position and the fear of a possible landing of Allied Forces on the neighbouring beaches of Tolo and Plakaat Drepano led to the hill being turned into a modern fort, with pillboxes, arsenals, shelters, bunkers and ancillary buildings. Their construction destroyed to a large degree the ancient remains, which were moreover a ready source of building material. After the end of the war, the extent of the destruction became obvious, which in the words of the Ministry of Ecclesiastical and Public Education, was 'total, radical and absolute'.

In the ensuing decades, the in any case few surviving remains suffered even further from erosion, riotous vegetation, exposure to the elements and the lack of any measures of protection and conservation. These circumstances made it difficult for modern visitors to find their way around the ancient settlement. The tour suggested in this guide follows the paths laid out in the framework of the NSRF project for the presentation of the archaeological site, with halting points the extant ancient remains and the recent interventions. It offers visitors the possibility of understanding the specific characteristics and the long history of the place, from the remote past to the present.

### ***Access to ancient Asine***

Ancient Asine is about 15 minutes by car from the town of





Nafplion. From Nafplion we travel along Asklepiou Avenue and veer east as far as the Agia Eleousa intersection. This same intersection is reached by visitors coming from Athens, avoiding entering Nafplion, or from Epidauros. At Agia Eleousa we take the exit towards Tolo/Drepano. We pass by the village of Lefkakia on our left and continue straight ahead in the direction of Tolo. After passing through the village of modern Asine, at the next roundabout we take the road to Kastraki/Archaia Asine, 1,300 m. along which, to our left, is the archaeological site.

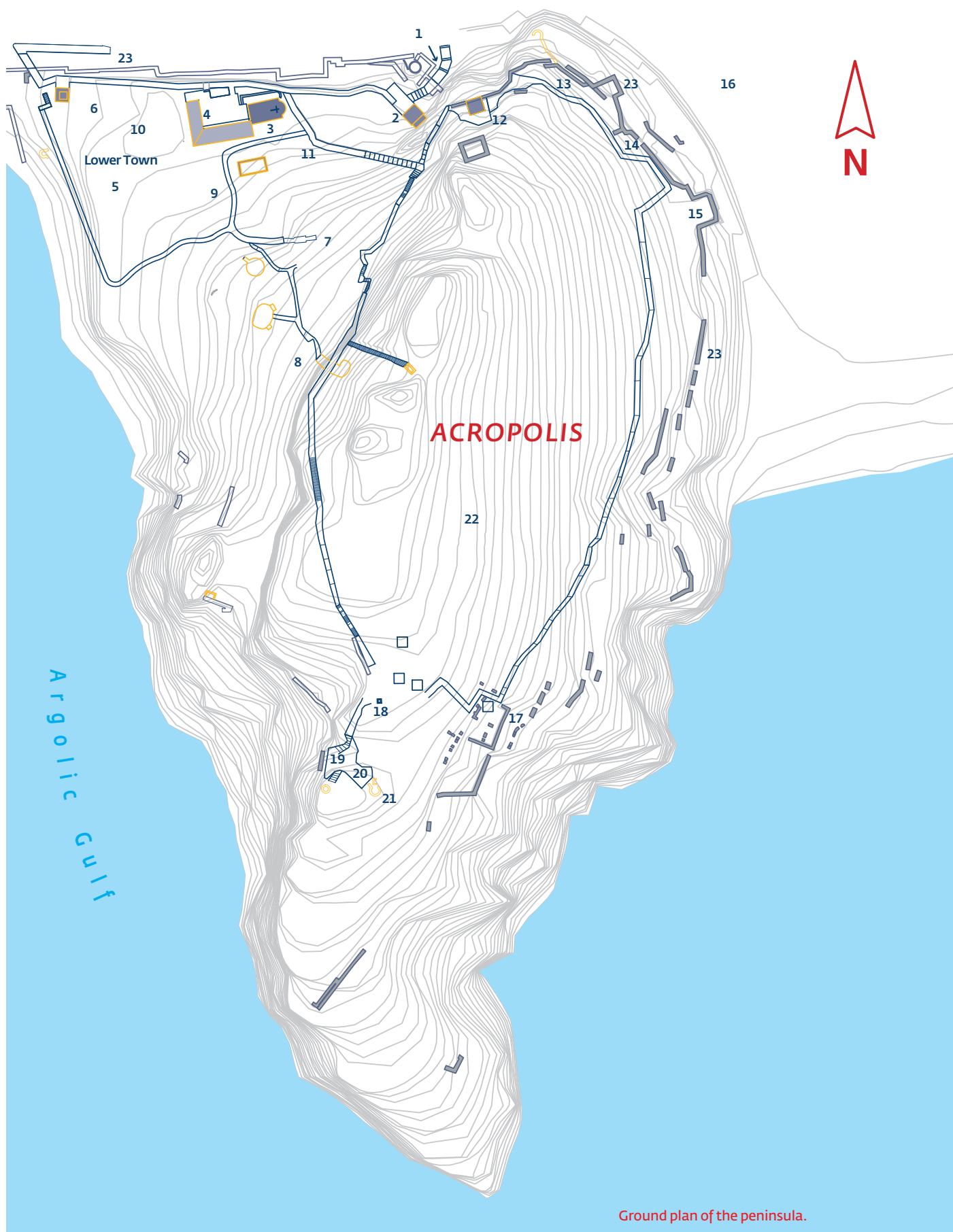
### BARBOUNA HILL

On our right, just before we reach the organized archaeological site, looms Barbouna Hill. At the top and on its south and east slopes, settlement, cultic and mortuary remains have been identified, dating from the sixth millennium BC into Roman times. Of these remains, today's visitors can see only part of the Mycenaean cemetery on the east slope, as the antiquities uncovered have either been destroyed in the past or are not accessible.

### MYCENAEAN CEMETERY

To the right of the road to Kastraki, about 650 m. beyond the roundabout at the exit from the village of Asine, a short cement-surfaced road leads to the area of the excavated chamber tombs in the Mycenaean cemetery at Barbouna. Just before the end of this side road, about 60 m. from the main road, a narrow dirt path leads off to the left. Some 180 m. along this path is a field under an expropriation order, in which





Ground plan of the peninsula.

- 1 Gate
- 2 Ticket office – shop
- 3 Church of the Dormition of the Virgin
- 4 Multimedia hall
- 5 Lower Town
- 6 House G
- 7 Cistern
- 8 Cavern
- 9 House B
- 10 Bath
- 11 Pressing installation
- 12 Exhibition of the excavations
- 13 Stoa
- 14 East Gate
- 15 East Tower
- 16 Karmaniolas plot
- 17 The Prince's Tower
- 18 Pressing installation
- 19 Terrace of a polygonal fortification wall
- 20 Early Helladic house
- 21 Italian pillbox
- 22 Pressing installation
- 23 Fortification walls



14 Rounded alabastron. 1500-1450 BC.  
Archaeological Museum of Nafplion.

the Swedish excavation of the chamber tombs was conducted. While touring the site, visitors must be particularly careful because of the steeply sloping ground and the wild vegetation.

The accounts of the first excavators speak about 50 identified chamber tombs on the east and north sides of the hill. Of these, only about a dozen have been excavated to date. The cemetery was in use from the LH IIB until the late LH IIIC period.

Of the tombs cut in the soft bedrock, particularly interesting is tomb 1. In its chamber and its lateral conches, at least six or seven dead had been buried, accompanied by an abundance of grave goods. Two sloping *dromoi*, which were cut in different phases of use of the tomb, led to the chamber. The north *dromos* seems to have been abandoned, perhaps because it was unsafe, and the south *dromos* then opened in its stead. In this phase, the central chamber was expanded towards the side where the new *dromos* ended. The central chamber, of irregular circular plan, was supplemented by two lateral conches.

This tomb yielded 80 vases, 41 of them decorated, seal-stones and beads made of raw materials from India, Egypt, Lebanon, the Black Sea, gold and bronze finger-rings, and other minor objects of glass, faience, bone and ivory. It was in use over a long period, spanning the duration of operation of the cemetery. A small sample of the rich grave goods recovered from the chamber tombs is exhibited in the first storey of the Nafplion Archaeological Museum.

## SQUAT ALABASTRON

The clay alabastron from chamber tomb 7 in the Barbouna cemetery is 11.5 cm high and 26 cm in diameter (fig. 14).

Its decoration is inspired by the marine world, after Minoan models. Depicted is a rocky seabed with marine flora and fauna. Over 50 intact or almost intact clay vases were found in the same tomb.

## TOUR OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

### 1.–Gate

We return to the main road, about 450 m along which we see to the left of a tight bend the hill of ancient Asine. The small taverna on the right is housed in the building used as the storeroom of the Swedish excavations in the 1920s.

We walk alongside the fortification walls to the east, for about 120 m, in order to reach the gate of the



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ancient city. After the works carried out in the recent NSRF project, the ancient gate is in use again, as the main entrance to the archaeological site, while the access ramp on the northwest side of the walls serves visitors with impaired mobility.

The main gate to the city was at the point where the walls met the rock face. A square tower to the north afforded additional protection. A large part of the interior of the tower was destroyed by the operation of a lime-kiln in Venetian times. The gate was formed during the Hellenistic period, when the ramparts ringing the hill were constructed. However, its final aspect is due to repairs and alterations with material in second use during Roman, Byzantine and Venetian times. In its final phase, access was along a paved ramp ending at a monolithic threshold 2.15 m long. The gate was closed by a double wooden door, which was secured inside by bolts slotted into the side walls. Visitors passed through the gate into an inner room and perhaps via some steps entered the walled city.

The gate was badly damaged during the Second World War. Today, the paved ramp has been reconstructed and a metal staircase beyond the inner room bridges the height difference to the archaeological site.

## 2.–Ticket office - shop

Just beyond the gate, on the left, is the ticket office and shop of the archaeological site. This is housed in a single-room stone building of the Second World War, which was reconstructed as part of the NSRF project. During the Occupation it served as a kitchen. In the recent works three stoves for cooking food were uncovered on the wall opposite the entrance. The yard in front of the building was paved.

## 3.–Church of the Dormition of the Virgin

The small white church in the archaeological site is dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin (Koimeses tes Theotokou). It is a simple single-aisle church possibly built on the site of a three-aisle basilica. Remains of walls parallel to the long sides of the church, to north and south, perhaps belong to an earlier phase of the monument. In the recent works, two unfurnished burials were revealed between the church and the parallel wall to the north. In the course of digging trenches for laying utilities networks, outside this wall, pottery dating from the twelfth to the fourteenth century was brought to light, as well as plaster fragments which perhaps come

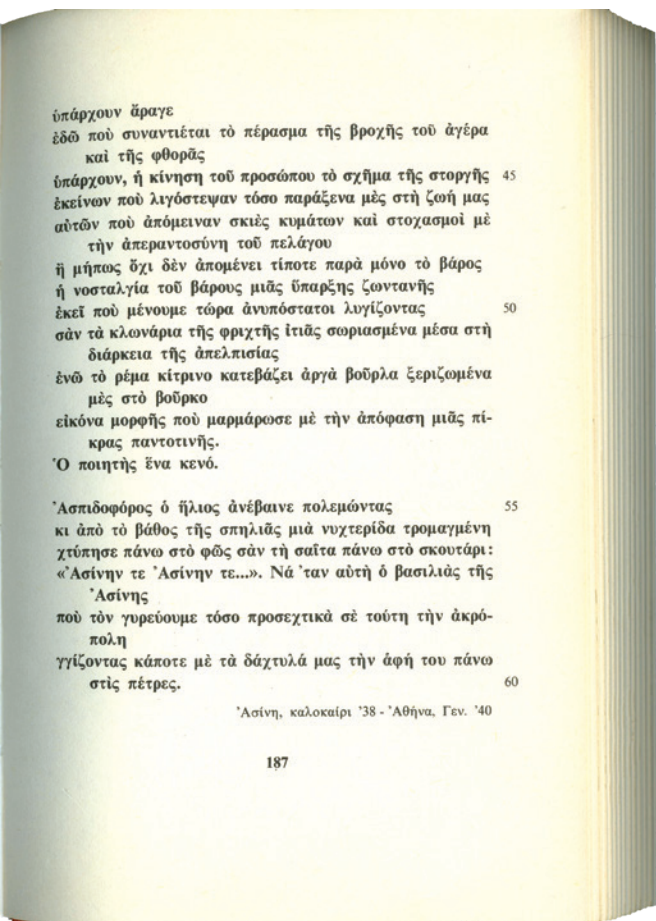


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- 15 View of the gate at the Lower Town at the time of the Swedish excavations.
- 16 The church of the Dormition of the Virgin within the archaeological site.
- 17 The courtyard of the church. In the background the multimedia hall.
- 18 Extract of the poem by G. Seferis "The king of Asine".



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from the coating of the walls of the earlier church.

On the feast of the Dormition, 15 August, people from the surrounding areas throng the forecourt. The church is a dependency of the church of St Demetrios in Asine.

#### 4.-Multimedia hall

The forecourt of the church of the Dormition of the Virgin was delimited to south and west by small rooms and semi-open-air spaces in L-shaped arrangement. The rooms served the needs of the church and of the local Ephorate of Antiquities, but were originally for accommodation of the faithful. In recent years the west wing had suffered considerable damage and some walls had collapsed.

In the framework of the recent NSRF project, part of the west wing was reconstructed to house the multimedia hall of the archaeological site, in which there are digital applications relating to the history of ancient Asine. On the site of the northernmost room of the wing, which had collapsed in the past, a sheltered space was created, open towards the Lower City and the Bay of Tolo. On this side, texts and illustrations inform visitors of Georgios Seferis's wanderings through Asine in the 1930s.

#### GIORGOS SEFERIS AT ASINE

Six drafts and two years of effort and rejection preceded the final version of Seferis's poem 'The King of Asine'. In the end, the poem was written in one night and included in the collection *Logbook I*, published in 1940.

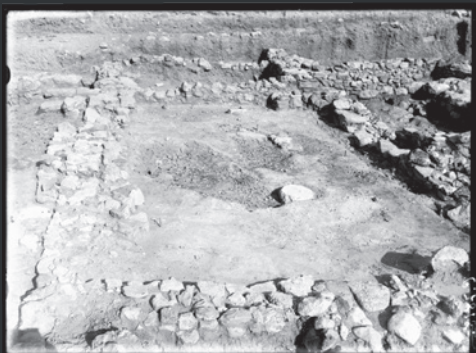
In the late 1930s, Seferis, a personal friend of A. Persson, spent together with his partner Maro part of their vacation at Tolo. The poet walked on the crag of Asine several times, wandering amidst the ancient ruins and pondering on the transience of human existence, occasioned by recalling its king, forgotten by all.

#### 5.-Lower City

From the shelter visitors have a general vista of the area dubbed the Lower City by the Swedish excavators. Today, in place of the dense remains of different building phases, standing to considerable height, which were uncovered in the 1920s, there is a large open trench in which only very few ancient remains are visible, a consequence of the Italian presence and the ravages of time. With the exception of the small Roman bathhouse in front of the multimedia hall, the rest of



19 View of the Lower Town at the time of the Swedish excavations.



20 The hypostyle hall of 'House G'.

the antiquities have been totally destroyed or survive at the lowest level of their foundations, presenting a piecemeal picture which barely corresponds to the diachronic habitation in the Lower City.

It was here that the Asine of Middle Helladic, Mycenaean, Hellenistic, Roman and Late Roman times developed. Very meagre traces of activity in Early Helladic and Geometric times have also been revealed. By following the path around the Lower City, visitors can now see a pilot restoration of the Mycenaean 'House G' to the north, the 'wellhead' of a Hellenistic cistern once incorporated in a contemporary house to the west, and remains of the Middle Helladic 'House B' and the Late Roman bathhouse to the east.

## 6.—House G

The largest house of the Mycenaean settlement of Asine, the so-called 'House G', was brought to light in the north part of the Lower City in the 1920s. The core of the house was a hypostyle hall with two central columns and an antechamber, features that class the building as of megaroid type. It acquired its final form with the addition of rooms around the central hypostyle hall, forming a complex of rooms with intensive use in the Middle and Late LH IIIC period. Indeed, the complex that extended to the east of 'House G', the so-called 'House H', is now considered – after recent processing of the plans and daybooks of the old excavations – as an extension of it, with continuous use into Geometric times.

The finds from 'House G' point to multiple activities in its interior. Numerous objects probably for cultic use were found in association with the built bench in the northeast corner of the hypostyle hall. Among these are a kernos, a stone axe, figurines and the famous clay head of the 'Lord of Asine'. The hearth located in the opposite corner of the room served both cultic and domestic needs, as did the many cooking vessels. Some of the spaces were storerooms. Last, the finding in the same context of a mould for casting dress pins points also to the practice of manufacturing activities.

## The 'Lord of Asine'

This is the head of a clay figurine, 12 cm high, which was found in 1926 in the hypostyle hall of 'House G', in the area of the built bench (fig. 22). It was the first example of a large clay figurine of Mycenaean times from Greece. In combination with the other objects found upon or near the bench, it led to the view that some cultic activity took place at this point.

21 Small stirrup jar. 12th c. BC. Archaeological Museum of Nafplion.



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In the publication of the results of the Swedish excavations, in 1938, the head was considered to come from a male figure, mainly due to the jutting chin, which was interpreted as a beard. However, a few years later it became widely accepted that the head is linked with a female figure. The excavation of Mycenaean shrines at Tiryns, Mycenae and Phylakopi on Melos, where several clay female figurines of large dimensions were found, contributed to this view. More recently it was proposed that the head belonged to some imaginary creature with animal body, parallels for which have been found in Crete and Cyprus and are dated to the twelfth century BC. On the basis of decorative details, the figurine is dated most probably to the Middle LH III C period.

### Stirrup jar

The small stirrup jar from 'House G' is 8.2 cm high and 6.5 cm in diameter (fig. 21).

Depicted on the belly of the vase is a ship with sail. The oars are rendered as parallel lines on the hull. The choice of a ship motif for the vase is indicative of Asine's relation with the sea.

### 7.-Cistern

Shortly before the tour around the large excavated part of the Lower City ends, to the southeast is a wooden staircase which leads towards the foot of the acropolis. To the left of it, a rock-cut passage ends at a tripartite underground cistern. The passage was opened during the Italian Occupation, when the cistern was used as a storage space for military equipment, in order to connect it to the neighbouring trench. The west wall of the cistern was destroyed, in order to create the access to the arsenal.

The cistern was 9.40 m long and of maximum width 1.70 m. It comprises three chambers, the central one of which, 5 m deep, is the largest. In the ceiling there was a 'wellhead'. The floor was laid with pebbles and sloped downwards into a settling basin, in which the sediment collected. Two smaller side chambers were added to the central one, increasing the capacity of the cistern to 23 cubic metres. Successive coats of hydraulic plaster on the walls waterproofed the cistern. On the surface near the 'wellhead', a rectangular basin had been built.

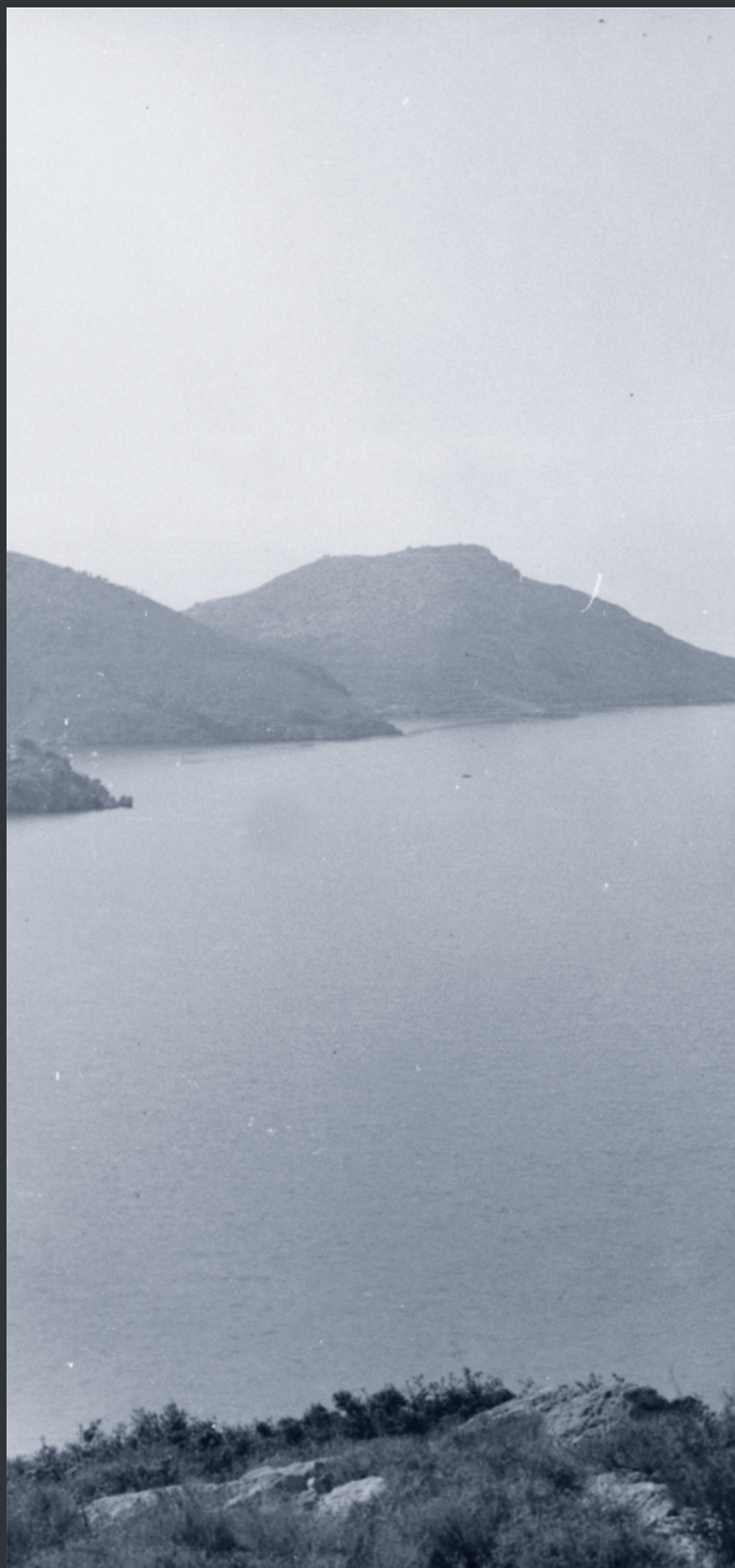
### 8.-Cavern

We continue up the wooden staircase, pass by the machine-gun emplacement on the right, and end up at the entrance to a manmade cavern at the foot of

- 22 *The "Lord of Assine", Mycenaean period.  
Archaeological Museum of Nafplion.*
- 23 *Tolo in the 1920s. View from the Barbouna  
Hill.*



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the rock of the acropolis. The cavern was created by Italian troops during the Second World War, in order to serve as a bunker and storage space. Its interior now houses a small exhibition about the Second World War in the Argolid, with informative texts, illustrations and mementoes of the period.

## 9.–House B

We return to the main pathway and to the southeast side of the Lower City. Preserved here to the level of the low foundation is a building representative of one of the most important periods of ancient Asine. This is 'House B', which is dated to the final phase of the Middle Helladic period. At the time of its discovery, its walls survived to a height in excess of one metre.

The house is of irregular, rather trapezoidal plan and has 13 oblong rooms. Its foundation/socle was strong, built of stones, while the superstructure was of mudbrick. The narrowness of the rooms meant that the building could be covered by a flat roof. In all probability there was an upper storey too. Indeed, it seems to have housed more than one families, as there are multiple entrances and several spaces inside the complex for food preparation and storage, so that each family kept a rudimentary degree of autonomy.

The house was part of a small coastal community of 380-500 inhabitants, which developed initially in the area of the Lower City and later spread to the foot of Barbouna Hill, due to the increase in population. The houses were independent units with narrow alleys between them and courtyards.

## Burial pithos

Clay vase, height 38 cm, found in the first year of the old excavations in the vicinity of 'House B' in the Lower City (fig. 27). It was used as a burial vase, placed on its side in a shallow cavity. The mouth was closed by the base of a shallow vase and the point of contact was sealed by clay. The surface of the pithos is divided by white bands into seven zones filled with repeating patterns, a decoration revealing influences from the Cyclades. Inside the pithos were skeletal remains of an infant, without grave goods.

## 10.–Bathhouse

The propinquity of the small bathhouse to the Middle Helladic 'House B', which is almost 2,000 years earlier, is just a small indication of the longevity of habitation in the Lower City of Asine, as the first excavators ascertained almost every day. The bathhouse was



26 View of 'House B' after the excavations, from the east.



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- 24 The interior of the tripartite cistern, with the settling basin.
- 25 The entrance to the artificial cave.
- 27 Burial pithos. 1900-1700 BC. Archaeological Museum of Nafplion.

built in the late fourth-early fifth century AD, in the same period as three other houses of the same orientation in the Lower City, which are no longer preserved. It comprises four main rooms, aligned on the North-South axis. The warmer chambers were to the south, so as to exploit to advantage the exposure to sunlight, particularly in the winter months. The complex had a rectangular hall to the north, which has been interpreted as a disrobing room (apodyterium). Next came the chamber for the cold bath, with two individual bathtubs, to the east (frigidarium). This was followed by the small chamber for the tepid bath (tepidarium), thus making a smooth transition to the last visitable space of the complex, the hot bath (caldarium), in which two individual bathtubs had been installed. Later, it seems that one more room was added to the west of the tepidarium, which has been interpreted as a chamber for dry-heat perspiration (laconicum).

The caldarium was heated by the usual system in Roman times of channelling hot air in the basement and the walls of the chamber. The fire was lit outside, to the south of the complex. The hot air circulated under the floor, between low pillars (*pilae*) supporting it (*hypocaust*) and behind the walls through ducts (*tubuli*) and the gap created by the tiles with corner bosses (*tegulae mammatae*), which were set at a distance from the main body of the wall.

The bathhouse is small and probably accommodated no more than five bathers simultaneously.

### 11.-Pressing installation

Having completed our tour in the Lower City, we can now make our way up to the rocky summit of the hill, the acropolis. Ahead of us is the monumental stone staircase, which was built by the Italian Occupation forces to facilitate access to the hill. Because the staircase was a safety hazard, it was reconstructed in the framework of the NSRF project, keeping as close as possible to the geometric characteristics of the Italian construction.

In the course of works on rebuilding the staircase and linking it with the routes in the Lower City, part of a Hellenistic press was uncovered. Research was limited to the area through which the walkway for visitors passes. It was decided to install a metal footbridge at this point, so that the workshop installation remained visible.

This press was a new addition to those that had already been found and excavated in the last century,



in the Lower City and on the acropolis, confirming the involvement of Hellenistic Asine's inhabitants with farming activities. Investigations in the building were limited to the southeast part of the room where the fruit was pressed. Preserved to the east is the slightly elevated pressing base, of semicircular plan, and to the west the circular tank, in which the liquid produced was collected, draining down a sloping plaster-coated floor between the two. The use of plaster on the floor and the absence of channels for the liquid to flow through into the tank lead to the hypothesis that the pressing installation was associated with wine-making. Found at a lower level to the north, was the stone base on which the wooden pressing mechanism was affixed. The entire area of the room was covered by terracotta tiles from the collapsed roof. The room extended further to west and north. The wall that gives the impression of bounding the space to the west is later, as it is founded upon the layer of roof tiles, as visitors can see for themselves when they view it from the east.

## 12.-Exhibition of the excavations

After ascending the monumental stone stairway, we take the proposed path to the left (north), in order





- 28 The Late Roman bathhouse from SE, as it is today.
- 29 View of the pressing installations before the removal of the destruction layer with the tiles.
- 30 The Italian building, which now houses a small exhibition.
- 31 Words, messages and slogans scribbled on the wall of the Italian building.

to start our tour around the acropolis hill. In front of us, over the metal bridge, is a small one-room Italian building which has been converted into an exhibition space. Part of the Venetian ramparts of the acropolis form the back wall of the building. The Italians imitated the crenellations crowning the Venetian walls in the height-wise addition of the new wall, so as to camouflage the new construction from the north.

The building now houses a small exhibition with a wealth of textual and visual material, entitled 'Excavating Ancient Asine'. This describes the excavation process through the example of the Swedish mission to Asine. Excavation tools and objects from the 1920s complement the presentation. Preserved on the back wall of the building are slogans-graffiti of earlier visitors to Asine. Outside the building, opposite the entrance, is one of the sieves used by the Swedish excavators.

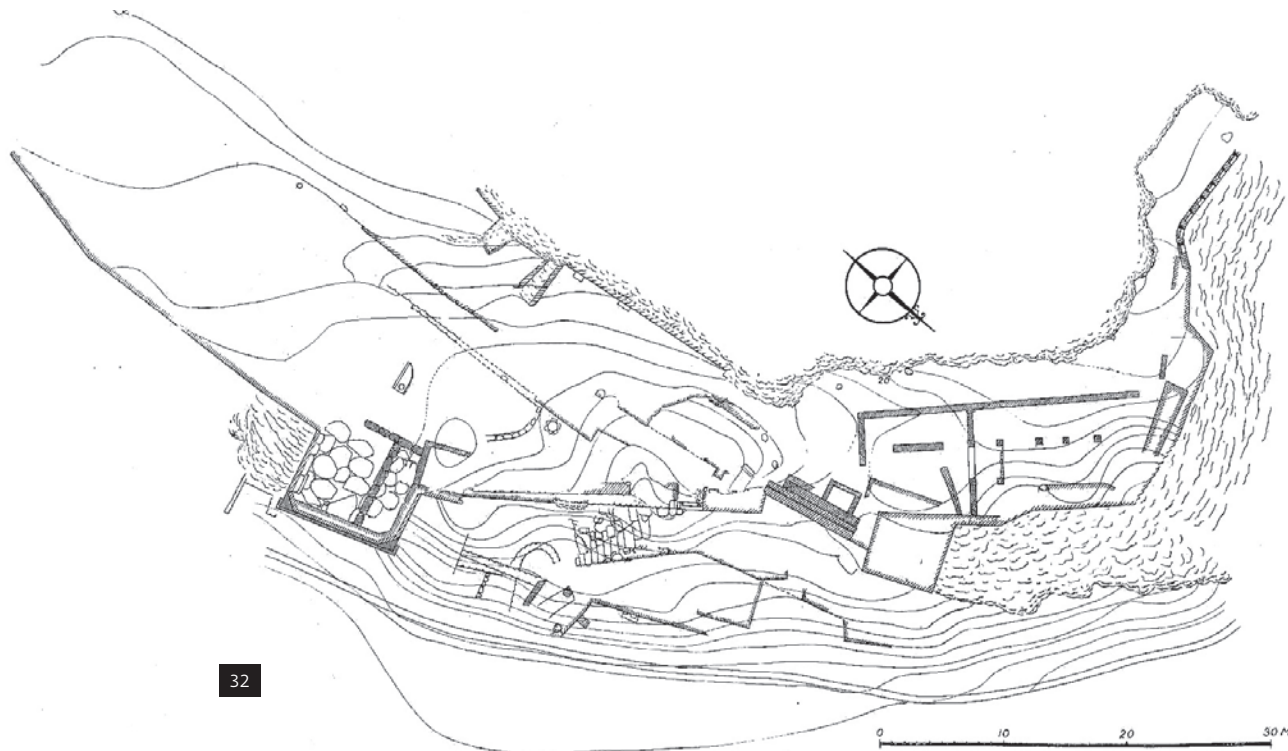
### 13.-Stoa

We come out of the small exhibition space and continue to the right, along the pathway circling the acropolis. Constantly on our left is the innerface of the fortification walls. The route leads us to the east side of the hill, passing first through the interior of a long and narrow building which has been interpreted as a stoa. When the Swedes unearthed this edifice it was in fragmentary state, as the northeast side had been destroyed during the construction of the Venetian rampart. The interior had most probably been damaged too, by undocumented excavations-digging which appears to have been carried out in the early twentieth century.

The building runs North-South for a length of over 23 m and is 9 m wide. It consisted of a square antechamber to the south and a main hall with two axial rows of four columns. The two rooms communicated through a doorway 2.5 m wide. The excavators characterized the building as a stoa or portico, probably of Roman times, open on the east side. All that remains today are sparse traces of the west wall and the cuttings in the bedrock essential for the construction of such a building.

### 14.-East gate

As we continue our way southwards, towards the sea, we are able to observe the differences in the manner of construction of the fortified enceinte of the acropolis, which looms to our left. In this section the Venetian addition can be clearly seen, with characteristic



- 32 Ground plan of the entrance area leading to the acropolis. The stoa at the north and the big tower at the south are also included.
- 33 View of the burial tumulus within the Karmaniolas plot.

structural elements the small stones, the inserted fragments of terracotta roof-tiles, and the mortar.

The point of the route at a lower level coincides with the area of the entrance to the acropolis. If we approach the walls carefully, we are able to make out that here is the terminus of a stone staircase, 3.5 m wide, which runs parallel to the outer face of the walls. Fifteen steps of this have survived. The staircase is underpinned by a handsome wall of polygonal masonry, which we shall have the opportunity to admire when make the tour extra muros.

In the first excavations it was ascertained that the staircase led to a threshold 2 m long and 50 cm wide, at one edge of which there was a socket for affixing the axis of the wooden door. During the Italian Occupation this section of the wall was restored height-wise with drystone masonry.

### 15.—East tower

In antiquity, the access to the acropolis was reinforced and protected by two quadrilateral towers flanking it to north and south. The south tower, which stands to a height of 9.5 m, is to this day the most emblematic monument of Asine. After ascending a few wooden steps beyond the entrance to the acropolis, we come to its upper side. On the right, we pass by the 'wellhead' of one of the city's many cisterns.

The tower was topped by a low parapet, very few parts of which remain in situ. Its floor was paved with large flat slabs of limestone. The sturdiness, the height,



features and details of its construction are visible from the external face of the walls. We shall return to these during the tour around the perimeter of the acropolis.

## 16.-Karmaniolas plot

The campsite operating to the east of the acropolis, in front of the tower, is on the Karmaniolas property, where an excavation took place in the 1970s. On this plot, part of an important Middle Helladic cemetery was uncovered, consisting of a circular stone tumulus with burials in cist graves and in pithoi (enchytrismo). From this find it is concluded that in the later years of the Middle Helladic period there was a group of inhabitants at Asine who had the wherewithal to erect mortuary monuments of this size, thus setting themselves off from the rest of the community.

The results of the excavation on the Karmaniolas plot are significant for two additional reasons. Also brought to light were houses of the end of the Mycenaean period, which continued to be inhabited by the succeeding generations, without any sudden break due to a violent event or abandonment, as happened at other sites, after the collapse of the Mycenaean palaces. Furthermore, in the upper levels of the excavation a few traces of settlement in the period 500-225 BC were found, as well as a number of cist graves of the first half of the fifth century BC. This evidence overturns earlier research findings, according to which Asine had been deserted after the attack by Argos in 700 BC.

The antiquities revealed were backfilled for their preservation.

## Double vase

This double vase with horizontal strap handle is 12.8 cm and 17.8 cm wide (fig. 34).

It was a grave good accompanying the burial in grave 1971-2 from the tumulus IQ on the Karmaniolas plot. The bodies of the vase are decorated with a representation of three birds, painted in dark brown on the light ground, while their body is filled with red pigment.

## 'Clog' irons

A pair of iron soles from a female burial (fig. 35). Found together with several vases in cist grave 1971-9 in the Karmaniola splot. Visible are the nails with which they were affixed to part of the sole of the footwear of perishable material.

- 34 Double vase. 1700-1600 BC. Archaeological Museum of Nafplion.
- 35 Iron soles. 500-475 BC. Archaeological Museum of Nafplion.
- 36 View of the Prince's Tower during the Swedish excavations.
- 37 View of the beach of Plaka at Drepano from Asini. In the background, the 'Nisi' peninsula.
- 38 Aerial view of the pressing installation.



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## 17.-The Prince's Tower

As we continue our ascent to the acropolis, along the wooden walkway, we see on our left the beach of Plaka at Drepano, spreading as far as the 'Nisi' peninsula on the opposite side. According to Zangger, in the sixth millennium BC the coastline extended some 700 m further north.

From this point and as far as the 'Prince's Tower', the path was laid out inside the old Italian trench bunker. On the left, about 70 m beyond the viewing point, a square tower of the Hellenistic fortification wall stands for a height of four courses. It is built in the polygonal system, of local grey limestone. In contrast to the east side of the acropolis, which is easily accessible, the rocky and precipitous west slope of the hill had no need of robust constructions. Here the defensive walls are low and the towers reinforcing them are small. The Swedes named the tower in front of us as the 'Prince's Tower' because Prince Gustaf had participated in its excavation. On its north side, the 'wellhead' of yet another cistern is covered by a glass shelter.

## 18.-Pressing installation

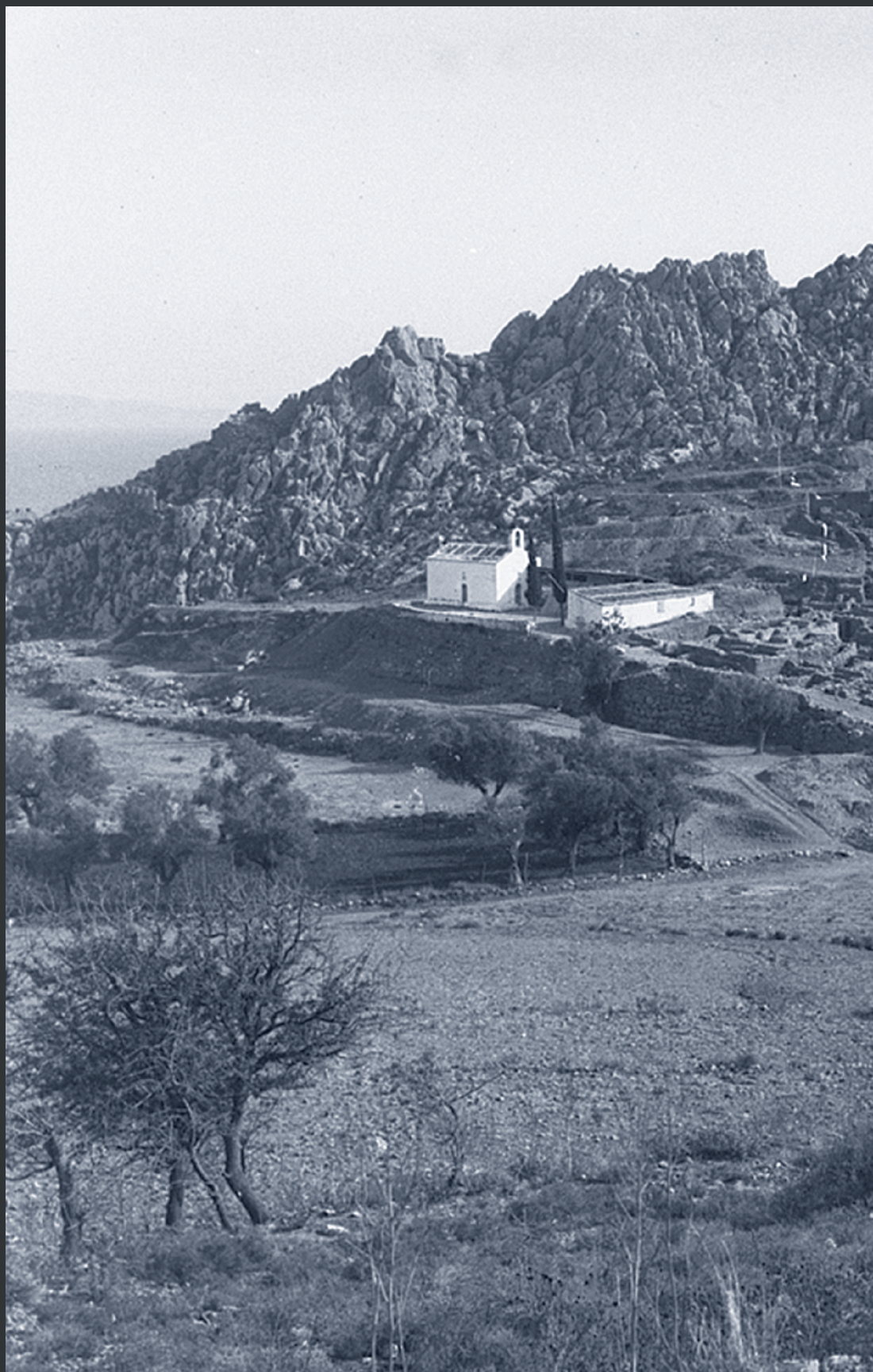
We reach the lowest point of the organized route, where we encounter the ruins of a rectangular room measuring 3.5x5.5 m. In order to construct it, the bedrock has been levelled and was actually part of its floor and walls. Where necessary, the floor was filled in with flat stones and coated with plaster. At about the centre of the room a raised circular surface of bedrock has been left, with a rectangular cutting. The floor of the room slopes down towards two rock-cut tanks, 57 cm and 50 cm deep, the first close to the east wall and the second in the southeast corner of the room. Their walls were completed by small fragments of tiles and plaster. Fragments of large unpainted vases were recovered from the bottom of the tanks.

The room is dated to Hellenistic and Roman times. It functioned as a pressing installation for processing agricultural products. In all probability a wooden mechanism for pressing the fruit was affixed to the base at the centre of the room. The liquid released drained down the sloping floor into the two tanks.

## 19.-Terrace of a polygonal fortification wall

A few steps down to the west of the pressing installation is the so-called 'Terrace of the polygonal wall', a large – by the standards of the acropolis of Asine – flat area, thus named after the well-built polygonal fortification wall of Hellenistic times. This was built





*Ancient Asine after the completion of the first Swedish*



*excavations. View from the Barbouna Hill.*



- 40 View of the fortification from the sea.
- 41 The Early Helladic house, as it is today.
- 42 Clay seal impression. 3rd millennium BC. Archaeological Museum of Nafplion.
- 43 The Italian pillbox, as it is today.
- 44 The pressing installation at the time of the Swedish excavations.



between two crags in order to retain the fill that forms this man made terrace. On the same side a high metal railing has been placed, to protect visitors. The Hellenistic wall is visible only from the road between Kastraki and Tolo. In all likelihood it replaced a pre-existing retaining construction, as remains dating from the Early Helladic and the Middle Helladic period have been found on the terrace.

## 20.–Early Helladic house

Preserved on the south east side of the terrace is the outline of a small room, which belonged to a larger Early Helladic house. In Middle Helladic times, two cist graves had been opened in the floor of this house.

## Seal impression

The clay seal impression (fig. 42) was found together with sherds of Early Helladic pottery in the area of the 'Terrace of the polygonal wall'. It preserves two intact sealings and two parts of an impression with the representation of a spider surrounded by a meander pattern. The motif attests contacts between Asine and Crete. Seals of assorted materials and seal impressions have come to light at various points in the area of the Early Helladic settlement, pointing to the existence at Asine too of a system of controlling the making, storing and trading of products.

## 21.–Italian pillbox

On the south side of the terrace, one more pillbox was built during the Italian Occupation. Incorporated in the rocky environment, the building secured full surveillance of the Argolic Gulf. It has a pebbled floor and traces of incised Italian inscriptions (graffiti) are still visible.

Written on the right was the name of the regiment that encamped at Asine and on the left the date on which the pillbox was built, 9 March 1942. Characteristic is the accompanying of this date with that in the Fascist system of reckoning time, according to which 1942 is the year XX (20), with starting point the year of Mussolini's march on Rome. Trenches running around the hill and connecting various military installations ended at the pillbox.

## 22.–Pressing installation

Before we begin our descent from the west side of the acropolis, we shall make a detour from the main route, in order to visit one more pressing installation of Hellenistic times. Just beyond the viewing point



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with the semi-circular bench, a dirt path, of steep gradient at the start, leads southeast to the pressing installation, about 70 m away.

When it was discovered, it comprised consecutive spaces at different levels on the hill slope, extending for a length of over 13 m.

Today, the space where the pressing process took place can be seen on the uppermost level. The arrangement of the permanent installations – the pressing surface, the tank and the two rectangular mortises in which the pressing mechanism will have been inserted – resembles that of the press we passed before the staircase up to the acropolis. The floor of the space consisted of small pieces of tiles, assembled and coated with plaster. The gradient of the floor led the liquid into the small quadrilateral basin, 55 cm deep, through two holes opened in its raised rim. The part with the mortises for fixing the pressing mechanism is in a straight line with the pressing surface, 20 cm lower than the floor of the room. The complex was entered from the south, where a stone threshold (1.35 m long) has been found, with two cuttings at its ends, for affixing the axes of the door.

The existence of pressing installations on the acropolis of Asine, in a rocky area difficult of access, to which the bringing of the agricultural products will have demanded much time and effort, is puzzling to say the least. According to B. Wells, in Hellenistic times Asine was a walled village in which there could have been some cultivation intra muros. In this case, the fortification walls will have functioned also as retaining walls to hold back the earth for growing olive trees, vines and cereals. The many water cisterns found in the city will have played their role in tending the crops.

## TOLO

We return from the press to the main path, in order to complete our tour around the acropolis. On the way down we take the path laid by the Italians, in some places paved and in others stepped, the greater part of which has been restored. From this side we have a superb view of the sheltered Bay of Tolo, which is closed to the west by the islet of Romvi and behind that Daskaleio. Visible inside the harbour is rocky Koronisi.

It was in the Bay of Tolo that the fleet of Admiral Morosini mustered in 1686, before embarking on the campaign to recapture Nafplion (Napoli di Romania) from the Ottomans. After the Venetians' departure, the region reverted again into Ottoman hands, in which it remained until the Greek War of Independence.



45 *View of Tolo in the 1920s.*



46 *The retaining wall of the staircase leading to the acropolis during the excavations.*

With the founding of the Greek State, the deserted place was settled by Cretans, refugees of the Cretan Uprising, after the decrees of Ioannis Kapodistrias and the Regency, in 1831 and 1834 respectively. At that time the village was named Minoa, but was renamed officially as Tolo in 1916. The barren land led the inhabitants to turn to the sea as a source of livelihood. With the growth of tourism, the small fishing village has developed into a vacation venue.

### 23.-Fortification walls

After completing the tour intra muros of Asine and exiting the ancient gate of the city, visitors can follow the road to the east and then head to the south to reach Plaka beach. From there they can behold the mighty Hellenistic fortification, the entrance to the acropolis, and admire the impressive east tower. At the same time, they can easily make out the different constructional phases of the fortification wall.

Just beyond the gate and turning to gaze high on the rock, at the point where the Italian building with the small exhibition space is located, the observant visitor will ascertain that there are three different building phases in the wall. In the lower part the large courses in the polygonal system of masonry were built in the Hellenistic period and belong to the first phase. During the Second Period of Venetian Rule the height of the wall was increased by adding small stones, tiles and mortar. In this phase the wall was crowned with crenellations. In the time of the Occupation, when the Italian building was erected, the height of the wall was increased further. For the effective concealment of the construction, the Italians imitated the masonry and the crenellations of the Venetian phase.

The road continues to skirt the rock of Asine, passing outside the walls. On the east side, outstanding is the robust retaining wall of the staircase which led to the gate of the acropolis. It is built of large limestone blocks in the polygonal system. The lowest part of the staircase has not survived. In this area the first excavators refer to the existence of a Roman *thermae* with hypocausts, but give no further information. The bathhouse was destroyed at some moment after it was revealed, perhaps when the road was opened, replacing an earlier narrow path.

In front of the staircase looms the large east tower of the wall. Today the tower stands to a height of 9.5 m, which must be quite close to its initial one, as the existence of only one further course is proposed. At its base, the tower projects 5.5 m and 7 m from the face

- 47 View of the acropolis fortification wall in the area of the Italian building. One can see the three different building phases of the wall.
- 48 View of the retaining wall of the staircase which led to the acropolis.



of the walls, to the north and south respectively, while its east side is 10.3 m long. It comprises 14 courses of polygonal blocks. The two lowest courses are in stepped arrangement. Above these the corners of the tower have been cut diagonally and incised on the salient angles is a vertical taenia. This formation is followed on eight successive courses. The stepped arrangement of the lower courses contributes to the static adequacy of the tower, in the interior of which is a large volume of earth. The diagonal formation of the points where the sides of the tower join is considered to have been intended for the effective confrontation of battering rams, as possible damage to the cornerstones leads to more rapid collapse of the whole construction. The carving of the vertical taeniae helped the masons during the building works.

The fortification walls of Asine were built in the late fourth century BC. Several scholars have suggested that their construction was part of an ambitious project of Demetrios Poliorketes, son of Alexander the Great's general Antigonos Monophthalmos, who dominated the Aegean in the years around 300 BC.

The dirt road leads to the beach at Plaka, completing our tour of ancient Asine. Before us spreads the tranquil Gulf of Argos with the uninhabited islets of Plateia and Ypsili. This was the horizon on which the inhabitants of Asine looked out, sometimes waiting to see the merchant ships with their cargoes of goods appear, and sometimes awaiting the arrival of would-be conquerors, in the hope that their precipitous rock would protect them.

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\* Photographs nos 3, 4, 5, 6, 13, 15, 19, 20, 23, 26, 32, 33, 36, 39, 44, 45, 46 are from the Archive of the Swedish Institute at Athens.

Photographs nos 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 21, 22, 24, 27, 29, 31, 34, 35, 38, 40, 42 and the plan on p. 122 are from the Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolida / Ministry of Culture and Sports - Archaeological Receipts Fund.

49 The east tower.



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