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NEKTARIOS-PETER YIOUTSOS

The last occupation of Asine in Argolis

> "Battlefields and war zones are no longer thought of as inert and empty backgrounds for the conduct of war, but as prime examples of socially-constructed landscapes – that is, landscape as ongoing process where individuals are redefined, or redefine themselves, by their experiences of place."*

Abstract **

Kastraki Hill on the eastern Argolic Gulf, with visible remains of impressive fortifications, has been identified since the mid-19th century as the position occupied by the acropolis of ancient Asine. The first systematic excavations were carried out by the Swedish Institute in the 1920s and revealed the continuous habitation of the site from the Early Helladic period (3rd millennium BC) up to the late 4th-early 5th century AD. Many additions and repairs on the acropolis were made during the Byzantine period and the 2nd Venetian Occupation of the Peloponnese (1686–1715). However, the most destructive interventions in the area are the works carried out by the Italians during World War II. Fearing an invasion of the Allies on this side of the Peloponnese, the Italians fortified the acropolis by making additions to the ancient walls and constructing auxiliary buildings, pillboxes, observation posts and trenches around the rocky outcrop using materials from buildings of the Lower Town. Their departure after the war revealed the extent of the destruction of the antiquities. During the past few decades we have seen interest in approaching sites of recent conflict using archaeological methods that could help researchers understand these transformations of matter in a deeper way. Such is the case of Asine, a palimpsest landscape with archaeological and historical remains of human activity extending from prehistoric to modern European times. This article will attempt to reveal this hidden side of contemporary history and offer a glimpse into the lives of the last inhabitants of the ancient city.

Keywords: archaeology of conflict, palimpsest landscape, Italian Occupation, coastal fortress, ancient Asine

* Saunders 2005, 8 and 16.

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Introduction

The wars of the 20th century were conflicts of mankind on an unprecedented scale and had an enormous impact on the lives of humans by remaking cities, nations and the landscape, and by provoking the extreme of human behaviours. Cities and shores became battlefields, many European states appropriated large areas of land for military purposes, the European economy collapsed, much of the industrial infrastructure was destroyed, and thousands of individuals were either killed or left homeless. "War is the transformation of matter through the agency of destruction, and industrialized war creates and destroys on a larger scale than any other human activity."[1] In the aftermath of World War II the landscape was filled with army and concentration camps, bunkers and pillboxes, trenches and minefields, mass burial pits, war graves and bombed cities, and the biggest tasks for the following generations were to rebuild Europe, which lay in ruins, and to engage with the many and varied materialities of war.

Fig. 1. Asine during the Swedish excavations (No. c7731, archive of the Swedish Institute at Athens).

Archaeologists should expect to find traces of conflict anywhere they work; such is the case of the archaeological site of Asine in the Argolis. In the 1920s excavations at the site were initiated by the Swedish Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf (later King Gustaf VI Adolf), along with archaeologists Axel W. Persson and Otto Frödin. Extensive investigations were carried out (1922–1930) on the acropolis, at the so-called Lower Town on the north-western slopes, and on Barbouna Hill at the north-west, revealing a palimpsest landscape full of history, in an area that has always been considered as a major strategic point regardless changing war technologies over time.[2] Sadly, shortly after the Swedish expeditions, Argolis was occupied by Italian and German troops during World War II and the ancient promontory was hurriedly transformed into a coastal fortress.[3] Conflict has left its traces over much of the area, in the ruined landscape and the abandoned field fortifications superimposed over disturbed occupation layers from much earlier periods (*Fig. 1*).

Although ancient Asine is a thoroughly excavated and fully documented site, there is a lack of knowledge on its recent historical past, despite the fact that there is an abundance of evidence of the Italian presence in the region. However, in the past few decades, along with developments in technology, there has been a development in disciplines and the philosophy of knowledge, combined with the emergence of new ways of engaging with the remains and consequences of conflict. The work of many anthropologists, historians, and archaeologists focusing on the different aspects of war and archaeology has now begun to deal with places, things and issues from the recent past as well as from the ancient world. This new field of 'archaeology of conflict' is not solely restricted to battlefields, and is as concerned with the aftermath – socially, culturally, and materially – as much as with the conflict itself. Also called the 'archaeology of the contemporary past' or 'archaeology of the recent past', this is a new interdisciplinary field of research that intersects with heritage studies, art, ethnography, and modern history.[4]

For earlier periods of time the archaeological remains clearly require the close attention of the archaeologist, in the conventional sense, carefully excavating remains, recording stratigraphic sequences, and conserving human remains associated with artefacts. Nonetheless, similar archaeological techniques can be applied to any material culture of the past, even for recording modern military installations, offering to researchers the opportunity to study a post-war landscape and investigate a period of conflict mostly known through historical sources.[5] Conflict archaeology is a multidisciplinary kind of archaeology that "sees objects and landscapes not as separate entities, but as complexly embedded and inter-connected

[1] Saunders 2005, 1. See also Moshenska 2012, 1.
[2] Frödin & Persson 1938.
[3] On the characteristics of landscapes of occupation, see Carr 2009, 35.
[4] Buchli & Lucas 2001; Schofield *et al*. 2002a; Klausmeier *et al*. 2006, 5; Saunders 2012a; 2013a, 42; González-Ruibal 2014, 1683 and 1688; Olsen & Pétursdóttir 2014. See also the concept 'archaeology of supermodernity' in González-Ruibal 2008.
[5] Pollard & Banks 2008a; 2008b. See also Harrison & Schofield 2010; Bleed & Scott 2011; Kirby *et al*. 2013; Pollard 2013; Christiansen 2014;Matás *et al*. 2014, 19.

materialisations of the human experience of conflict."[6] We should not forget, however, that these places were designed landscapes in their own right, often comprising various buildings and other features, often regarded not as heritage but as 'unsettling' disturbing' features, usually with restricted access and with little published information on their past activities.[7]

Ancient Asine

Ancient Asine is situated on a rocky peninsula, (330m long, 150m wide and 52m high), known locally as Kastraki or Paliokastro and located south of the modern village of Asine, 10 km south-east of the city of Nafplio and 1km east of the summer resort of Tolo in Argolis. The strategic advantages of the site and the natural, sheltered harbour played a key role in its development over the centuries. Asine is first mentioned by Homer in the 'Catalogue of Ships', a list in the *Iliad* of the authorities that have sent ships to the Trojan campaign, as part of the Argolic mission under the command of the Argive king Diomedes.[8]

Settlers appeared for the first time in Kastraki during the Early Helladic period (3rd millennium BC).[9] During the Middle Helladic period (1900–1600 BC) a dense and extensive settlement developed in the Lower Town and on the slopes of the hill opposite. Finds from the settlement and chamber tombs of the Late Helladic period (1600–1060 BC) show a thriving community, whose inhabitants had acquired power and wealth, due to their engagement in the trade between the great palaces of the Argolis and the centres beyond the Aegean Sea. The habitation in the area continued uninterrupted even after the decline of the Mycenaean citadels and continued to do so until *c.* 700 BC, when, according to Pausanias, the settlement was destroyed by Argos and its residents were forced to move to Messenia in the south Peloponnese. However, the discovery of Archaic and Classical votive deposits on the acropolis reveals that the area had not been completely abandoned after the raid of the Argives. At the end of the 4th century BC, Asine flourished once more and was fortified with strong walls, probably by the Macedonian ruler Demetrius Poliorcetes (the Besieger). Of the late 4th-early 5th century AD settlement only a small bath complex in the Lower Town is still visible. Limited repairs were made on the city walls during the Byzantine period, while in the late 17th century AD it was converted into a Venetian fortress (*Fig. 2*).[10]

After the success of the 1922–1930 Swedish archaeological expeditions and the large number of artefacts collected during the survey, few could have imagined the later fate of the monument. Just over a decade after the excavations, the site was occupied in 1941 by Italian troops due to its strategic position in the region. The soldiers used building material from the ancient ruins to fortify the rocky peninsula quickly and effectively, resulting in the destruction of a large part of the antiquities, mainly in the Lower Town. After the war, ancient Asine was abandoned for years and only sporadically visited during short day trips by locals and tourists.[11] During the 1970s and 1990s the Swedish Institute at Athens along with the Ephorate of Antiquities in Argolis resumed investigations at the ancient site; these were mostly small-scale excavations, not on the acropolis but on plots on the Barbouna Hill and east of the peninsula. As a result until recently the visitor could see a landscape of impressive beauty and rich history, both ancient and modern, which, however, could not be detected due to the poor preservation state of the ruins, dense vegetation, and the limited number of information signs (*Fig. 3*).[12]

During the project 'Asine, Ancient Acropolis of Asine: Reformation of the Kastraki Archaeological Site 2007–2015' funded by the European NSRF programme and supervised by the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis, several interventions were made in the archaeological site. These involved the creation of a new entrance, the construction of new footpaths exploring the acropolis and the Lower Town, the building of a multimedia information centre as well as a new shelter and ticket booth for guards, the placing of an adequate number of information signs at various points of interest, the organiza-

[6] Saunders 2012b, xii; 2013b, 18.

[7] According to locals access to ancient Asine during the war was strictly forbidden. See also Saunders 2002; Cocroft 2009, 18.

[8] Hom. *Il.*, 2.560.

[9] Some Late (?) and Final Neolithic sherds were discovered on Barbouna Hill and others were recognized by Michael Lindblom among the finds collected during the excavations east of the acropolis (Karmaniolas plot) suggesting that the earliest phases at Asine are Neolithic. The latter are not yet published. On the Barbouna Neolithic finds see Nordquist 1992, 59–68.

[10] On ancient Asine, and the results from the Swedish archaeological expeditions and their history see e.g. Renaudin 1921; Persson 1920–1921,1922–1923 and 1931; Frödin & Persson 1924–1925 and 1938; Mitsos 1935; Hägg 1965, 1974, 1983; Kelly 1967; Styrenius & Vidén 1971; Hägg & Hägg 1973–1978 and 1975; Hägg & Fossey 1980; Wells 1982, 1983, 1988, 1992 and 2002; Höghammar 1984; Nordquist 1987; Hägg & Nordquist 1992; Poulsen 1994; Zangger 1994; Penttinen 1996; Sjöberg 1997 and 2003; Santillo Frizell 1980; Ratinaud-Lachkar 2004; Voutsaki 2010.

[11] See also fn. 50.

[12] In 1995 the site was equipped with a small guards' shelter and ticket booth as well as a wooden ramp to provide easy access over its western wall and only two general information signs. On the recent archaeological expeditions at Asine, see Styrenius & Vidén 1971; Hägg & Hägg 1973–1978 and 1975; Styrenius 1975; Hägg & Fossey 1980; Hägg & Nordquist 1992; Wells 1992, 1983 and 2002; Poulsen 1994; Penttinen 1996; Westermark 1980; Backe-Forsberg *et al*. 2000–2001; Voutsaki *et al*. 2009.

Fig. 2. Drawing of the habitation layers in the Lower Town Red: Early Helladic; Yellow: Middle Helladic; Green: Late Helladic; Blue: Hellenistic; Purple: Roman; Orange: Late Roman (Archive of the Swedish Institute at Athens and archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

tion of an exhibition on the old excavations at Asine in one of the Italian buildings on the acropolis, and the conversion of a cave created during WW II into an exhibition space on the history of Asine and Argolis during the war. All the above offer the visitor an opportunity to familiarize him/herself with the site and learn about human activity in the region, starting from prehistory and ending with the Swedish excavations and the Italian Occupation.

Fig. 3. Drawing of the Lower Town; the darkened areas mark the surviving ancient ruins during enhancement work (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

Treating contemporary and ancient material

Although Asine was first excavated at a time when archaeology was still in its infancy, the Swedish archaeological expeditions painstakingly recorded and catalogued field data, drew detailed maps and ground plans of the monuments, and used state-of-art topographical and photography equipment in their documentation. By studying an extended archive of many written records, diaries, photographs, drawings, and maps belonging to the Swedish Institute at Athens and the local Ephorate, as well as various publications and articles on the old and recent excavations, the researcher becomes fully acquainted with the ancient history of Asine and its monuments in their former state. Nonetheless, most Italian and German military archives, such as maps, plans and photographs, which could have shed some light into the lives of the last occupants of Asine, were lost or destroyed during the war.[13]

Furthermore, in an attempt to understand the level of destruction and the preservation state of the ancient remains, a thorough investigation and detailed survey of the promontory were necessary. During the war the ancient ruins were almost completely destroyed, blocks from the ancient buildings were reused in modern constructions and field fortifications, caves were opened into the rocky slopes using dynamite, and an extensive network of trenches, dugouts, observation posts and pillboxes were constructed, later preserved just a few centimetres beneath the modern surface covered by thick vegetation or partly hidden by the rocky formations of the peninsula. A few ancient structures, such as the Bath and the Roman cistern in the Lower Town, suffered less damage as they were modified during the war to serve as shelters and storerooms.

Due to the secretive nature of this former defensive establishment, the loss of useful military archives, and the highly disturbed state of the monuments, ground and aerial photo-

[13] A few photographs and diaries, however, are present in the archives of the Australian War Memorial (AWM), relating to the evacuation plan of the Commonwealth forces in 1941. These are photographs (nos. P01345.008 and P01345.010) depicting troops arriving at Suda Bay, Crete, after being evacuated from southern Greece (Tolo or Nafplio) photographs in the memoirs of Donald Robert Jackson who was captured by Germans at Tolo in 1941 (file no. MSS1193); and William M. Frick's manuscript *Greece, April 1941: To Fight Another Day*, 1994 describing the fights on the plain of Argos and the evacuation from Nafplio (file no. MSS1516), https://www.awm.gov.au/research/infosheets/served_ww2 (accessed June 2016).

graphical documentation, followed by a topographic mapping and GIS analysis of the remains on the peninsula, were necessary in order to capture and manage all types of spatial or geographical data and detect evidence of WW II activity.[14] Detailed photographs were taken of all constructions in and around the site in their present state and during enhancement work. Furthermore, aerial photographs and videos were also taken using a quadrocopter with a built-in camera (drone) to detect significant architectural and landscape features and to investigate the relationship between structures and their surroundings. These were, afterwards, compared to older maps, photographs, historical documents and archaeological reports. In particular, the aerial photographs of Asine taken

Fig. 4. WWII minor objects discovered in Asine during enhancement work (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

by the German Reichsluftfahrtministerium (RLM, German Ministry of Aviation) in 1941, which were recently discovered in the archive of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut at Athens (DAI), proved to be a useful tool in recognizing the previous state of the monuments. Stereographic photography (a technique whereby two images are combined to produce a three-dimensional view) was also one of the most effective methods for locating trench routes on the promontory through aerial photographs taken by the Greek Geographical Military Service from the beginning of the 1950s to the end of the 1970s.[15]

During the recent enhancement work, several personal objects were discovered scattered among the ruins, some of which belonged to the military equipment of the Italian soldiers. A fork, a piece of metal with bullet holes, a uniform button, a part of a pistol, a piece of barbed wire, and a grenade are all mostly fragmented and shattered bits of history as well as potential memorabilia connected in the mind of their former owners with the special circumstances surrounding their acquisition. Few 'memory objects' were also found in the possession of locals, such as recruitment orders, photographs and letters from the front, photographs of Italian soldiers in Asine, requisition notes for a house in Tolo, and identity cards issued during the Occupation (*Figs. 4–5*).[16]

Fig. 5. Grenade discovered during enhancement work (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

Finally, another important source of information was the memories of people who survived the war.[17] By interviewing locals, in collaboration with the film director and producer Georgios C. Zervas, the project team attempted to collect all surviving bits of information on field fortifications in the area. Furthermore, the days of the Italians in Asine were brought to life through the eloquent stories of locals; stories about forced labour, dynamite explosions, the recruitment of domestic animals, accidental deaths in the minefields, and the atrocities of the German army, but also stories about the culture brought along with the Italian soldiers, their parties and cantatas, the donkey-racing games at the beach of Tolo, and the communal meals offered to local children etc. (*Fig. 6*).[18]

[14] Stichelbaut 2005; Cocroft 2009, 22; Persson 2014, 445.
[15] Archive of the Greek Geographical Military Service. See also fn. 28. For the use of aerial photography in conflict archaeology, see Cocroft 2009, 19.
[16] On WW II personal objects and objects of war in general, see Schofield *et al*. 2002b; Saunders 2005, 79-80; Moshenska 2012, 6.
[17] Cocroft 2009, 22; Moshenska 2012, 3.
[18] Persson 2014, 447–448. See also fn. 30.

Fig. 6. Ioannis Kotitsas with the Italian soldiers Grasso Giovani (Salerno), Manzini Vittotio (Roma) and Morelli Venturino (Sulmova) at the beach of Tolo in 1943 (Personal archive of I. Kotitsas).

Asine during WW II: The Occupation

The invasion of Greece by Germany during WW II, also known as *Operation Marita*, followed a previous, unsuccessful Italian invasion (*Operation Primavera*, 9-25 March 1941). The German attack was imperative due to the presence of British troops on Greek soil, which could threaten the rear of Germany's imminent attack on the Soviet Union. As a result Nazi forces invaded Greek territory in April 1941.[19] Sections of the SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte *Adolf Hitler* arrived in Argos and Nafplio on 27 April. That same morning, at the area known as Kaminaki, near Tolo's modern football field, the advancing army under the command of Colonel Sturm and Captain Gerhart Sirmer engaged in a short battle with British Commonwealth forces, who were trying to embark on warships off the coast of Psili Ammos. The battle was uneven and a few hours later approximately 2,000 Allied soldiers, who had not managed to embark on the ships, were captured.[20]

Somewhere around mid-June 1941, forces of the 8th Army Corps under Italian command settled in Argolis. The German and Italian High Command were based in Argos and Nafplio, while naval units of the Axis fleet were stationed in Tolo. The German forces scattered mainly in villages and took control of the airport at Koutsopodi, while the Italians proceeded to fortify all coastal areas of Argolis from Kiveri to the beach of Plaka at Drepano. Fearing an Allied landing on the nearby beaches, the Italian troops took draconian measures and decided to fortify the peninsula of Asine, an area that provided a good view over land and coast and could serve as a major defence point to any potential invader. Hence, they installed at the promontory the 433rd Mechanized Battalion under the command of Captain Bagniolesi from Pisa,[21] and thereafter the coastal zone was a restricted area, heavily mined and covered with barbed wire to prevent civilian and enemy access (*Figs. 7–9*).[22]

The use of dynamite and the destruction of the site by the Italian troops were first reported by the guard of the archaeological site Nicholaos Mpikakis by letter to the Archaeological Service on 10 March 1942 (*Fig. 10*). On 11 August 1943 Christos N. Petrou, at the time the supervisor of the Ephorate, informed the Ministry of Education, which in its turn notified the Swedish delegate of the Red Cross Axel W. Pers-

[19] On the Italian and German invasion in Greece, see Blau 1986; Bitzes 1989; Mazower 1995; Bradley & Buell 2002.

[20] See also Imperial War Museums (IWM) photograph E2733, which depicts lorries carrying RAF personnel on the road from Nafplio to Tolo during the retreat from Greece, 3 May 1941 (Archive of the Imperial War Museums, London). On the evacuation operation of the Commonwealth forces code-named *DEMON*, see Christopoulos 1946; Pridham-Wippell 1948, 3052b; Long 1953, chs. 1–9; McClymont 1959, chs. 6–22; Army History Directorate 1997, 236–240; Richter Heinz 1998, 566–567, 580–581, 584–585; Macdougall 2004, 195; Kotitsas 2009; Raffaelli & Gambarotto 2010, 140.

[21] The garrison of the fortress consisted of rifle companies, artillery batteries, and possibly a communication platoon. The name of Captain Bagniolesi is mentioned in the 1946 official report of the Greek Ministry of Religious Affairs and National Education (MRANE 1946, 65) and was still remembered by locals in 2015. Two requisition notes from Tolo preserve, however, the name of another Captain of the Battalion, Capitano Baroni Luigi, and also the name of the Captain of the 3rd Company of the Battalion, Capitano Fiorino Norcia (*Fig. 9*). In the *Orders of battle of the Italian Army*, issued by the US Military Intelligence Service in July 1943, the 433rd Battalion is mentioned among other Italian coastal battalions in Greece, Military Intelligence Service 1943a, 18, 262.

[22] MRANE 1946, 65. On *Operation Mincemeat*, the British disinformation plan during WW II, convincing the German High Command that the Allies planned to invade Greece and Sardinia in 1943 instead of Sicily, see Smyth 2010. for WW II in Greece and the Occupation by German and Italian forces, see Hondros, 1983; Mazower 1995; Bregantin 2008. On hunger during the Occupation in Argolis, see Savvaki 2004. See also the memoirs of an Italian soldier stationed in Argolis during the Occupation, Romano 2004.

Fig. 7. Italian soldiers from the 3rd Company of the 433rd Mechanized Battalion at the beach of Tolo in May 1943 (Personal archive of I. Kotitsas).

son, the archaeologist who had led the excavations at Asine, to issue demarches to the Axis Occupation forces. The later document mentions the official reply of the commander of the Italian Division in the area stated that "The situation is such that the safety of the army comes first and it is not possible to take account of the antiquities." The Italians remained at Asine until they signed a treaty with the Allies in September 1943. Most Italian soldiers and their commanding officer surrendered to the Germans, their former allies, while others fled and were hidden by locals.Soon after, the Germans developed significant forces in the region for a year until their retreat on 14 September 1944.[23]

The full extent of the damage was revealed after the Greek Liberation. In 1946 the Ministry of Religious Affairs and National Education prepared a thorough report titled Ζημιαί τῶν ἀρχαιοτήτων ἐκ τοῦ πολέμου καί τῶν στρατῶν κατοχῆς (Damage to antiquities caused by war and the occupying forces) and appointed a committee, which undertook the massive task of collecting and recording all disasters and thefts of antiquities that occurred during the war in Greece.[24]According to the official report "The German authorities through the archaeologist Dr von Schönebeck and Professor Kraiker suppressed and

[23] MRANE 1946, 65; Petrou's report (4th Archaeological Precinct of Nafplio, protocol no. 4490/1943); Minister's letter to Persson (Directorate of Antiquities, protocol no. 49318-1678/1943), Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis archive. Among the Italian soldiers who fled was Giacomo Zugliano from Vicenza (*Fig. 8*) who was hidden by Ioannis Kotitsas, resident of the modern village of Asine (personal communication). While the war destroyed in Asine the archaeological heritage with trenches and dugouts, in other cases it uncovered ancient ruins, e.g. the church crypt at Zonnebeke in Belgium, Saunders 2002, 102.

[24] MRANE 1946. The committee consisted of archaeologists C. Karouzos, I. Miliadis, G. Androutsopoulos, N. Zafeiropoulos and M. Calligas, while the important work of recording was mostly carried out by C. Karouzos and M. Calligas. The report is divided into seven chapters that include thefts, arbitrary excavations, destructions, damage due to acts of war, property damage, installation of military facilities in the vicinity of archaeological monuments, and abuses and cruelties. Each of these sections is in turn divided into three parts, which describe the actions of the German, Italian, and Bulgarian Occupation forces.

Fig. 8. Italian soldier Giacomo Guliano from Vicenza stationed in Asine during 1941–1942 (Personal archive of I. Kotitsas).

Fig. 9. Requisition note for a house in Tolo (Archive of the Cultural Association of Tolo).

crushed the Archaeological Service of the Greek state, either by protecting illicit antique traders, either by covering destructions caused by military groups or preventing the state from monitoring the accidental discovery of artefacts or the conduction of military works, or by denying the state the right to exercise ownership over the discovered antiquities."[25] Furthermore, the report states that the destruction of ancient Asine

[25] MRANE 1946, 'Prologue'.

Fig. 10. The guard of the archaeological site Nikolaos Mpikakis during the Swedish excavations (No. c8303, Archive of the Swedish Institute at Athens).

was "final, radical, and complete" and that it was designed and executed by the Italian Occupation forces and especially by those under the command of Captain Bagniolesi. The report also refers to the destruction of ancient graves, whose content has never been delivered to the Greek authorities, and records some Italian graffiti discovered at the site (see below).[26]

Asine during WW II: The Italian field fortifications

In 1941, just before invading Greece, the German Reichsluftfahrtministerium (RLM, German Ministry of Aviation) took six aerial photographs of the archaeological site of Asine. These are the last photographs taken before the Italian construction

[26] MRANE 1946, 65. The report (52) further states that the destructive work of the Italian soldiers was supplemented and completed afterwards by the Germans. For the destruction of antiquities by the Occupation forces during WW II, see Melas 1946 (newspaper article).

Fig. 11. Aerial photo of Asine before the war from the Reichsluftfahrtministerium (German Ministry of Aviation, no. 12383, copyright DAI-ATH-RLM, ASINE).

works on the promontory. They are in high resolution and one can easily discern the dense urban fabric of the Lower Town, the Hellenistic fortifications and other constructions on the acropolis. The excavation trenches were still intact and the ancient ruins were preserved in the state in which they had been left by the Swedish archaeologists just over ten years previously (*Fig. 11*).[27]

During the Occupation the Italians noticed the defensive potential of the area and they undertook an extensive project of converting the peninsula into an effective fortress capable of defending the nearby beaches from a possible Allied landing, conscripting locals for this purpose. Unfortunately, the recently excavated ancient ruins provided excellent and abundant building material for their constructions. Furthermore, by merging the form of their field fortifications into the natural shape of the promontory, they managed to camouflage the location of the defenders, maximizing the element of surprise. Moreover, they reinforced the ancient walls with dry-stone superstructures, converted the Hellenistic cisterns and other underground structures into supply storerooms and hideouts, built small auxiliary buildings and stone staircases, opened drill-and-blast caves into the rocky slopes and installed pill-boxes, observation posts and open artillery positions, which communicated through a complex network of trenches and passageways.

[27] These photographs are held in the photographic archive of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (DAI) at Athens: D-DAI-ATH-RLM nos. 12381–12384, 32846 and 32849.

These interventions can be divided into four main categories: the works at the Lower Town, those on the acropolis and those at the beach at Plaka and on Barbouna Hill (*Fig. 12*).

THE LOWER TOWN

The Lower Town, an area protected from east-south-east by the rocky mass of the acropolis, was used for the installation of the main facilities of the fortress. These were located on the smooth and level ground north-north-west of the Lower Town, the only part that had not been excavated by the Swedish. The area was occupied by the Church of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, which was built during the 19th century over the foundations of a previous church dating probably to the Byzantine era. Sometime around 1895 the locals constructed to the west three tiled roof outbuildings arranged in an L shape that formed a small courtyard.[28] Soon after their arrival the Italian soldiers commandeered the church with the surrounding outbuildings (I) and also the small house near the beach of Kastraki (II) and constructed two additional auxiliary buildings, one near the ancient gate to the Lower Town (III)and another east of the modern church (IV) (*Fig. 13*).[29] Surprisingly, the church complex does not preserve any evidence of the Italian presence, but according to locals it was converted into a dormitory for soldiers.[30]

The ruins south-east of the church (IV) belong to a low single-space structure with four entrances on its northern and eastern walls and a floor paved with large flat stones.[31] The building probably did not have higher walls, as no debris were discovered nearby.[32] This could indicate that the construction was probably used as a base to support a tent of some kind or other makeshift structure. The small house with tiled roof near Kastraki beach, which was used by the Swedish as an excavation storeroom and is today occupied by a modern seafood taverna, was converted according to locals into a kitchen preparing food for soldiers stationed on the Barbouna Hill to the west.

The Italians also constructed a one-room house near the ancient gate to the Lower Town (IIIa), which probably served

[28] Church's courtyard: 14.60x 8m.

[29] On these reports by locals see the short documentary film by G.C. Zervas *AndAsine...and Asine... Works and days of the Italians during the Occupation in ancient Asine*, 2015.

[30] It is interesting, however, that the Italians allowed the festivities to take place at the church on 15 August, as reported by locals (personal communication).

[31] Building (IV): 3.60 x 7.10 x 0.30-0.40m; entrance: 1m.

[32] A photograph taken by Walter Schröder in 1950 depicts the structure with walls no higher than today, fm1292969, Bildarchiv Foto Marburg. Available at http://www.bildindex.de/document/obj20371460?part=0&medium=fm1292969 (accessed October 2016).

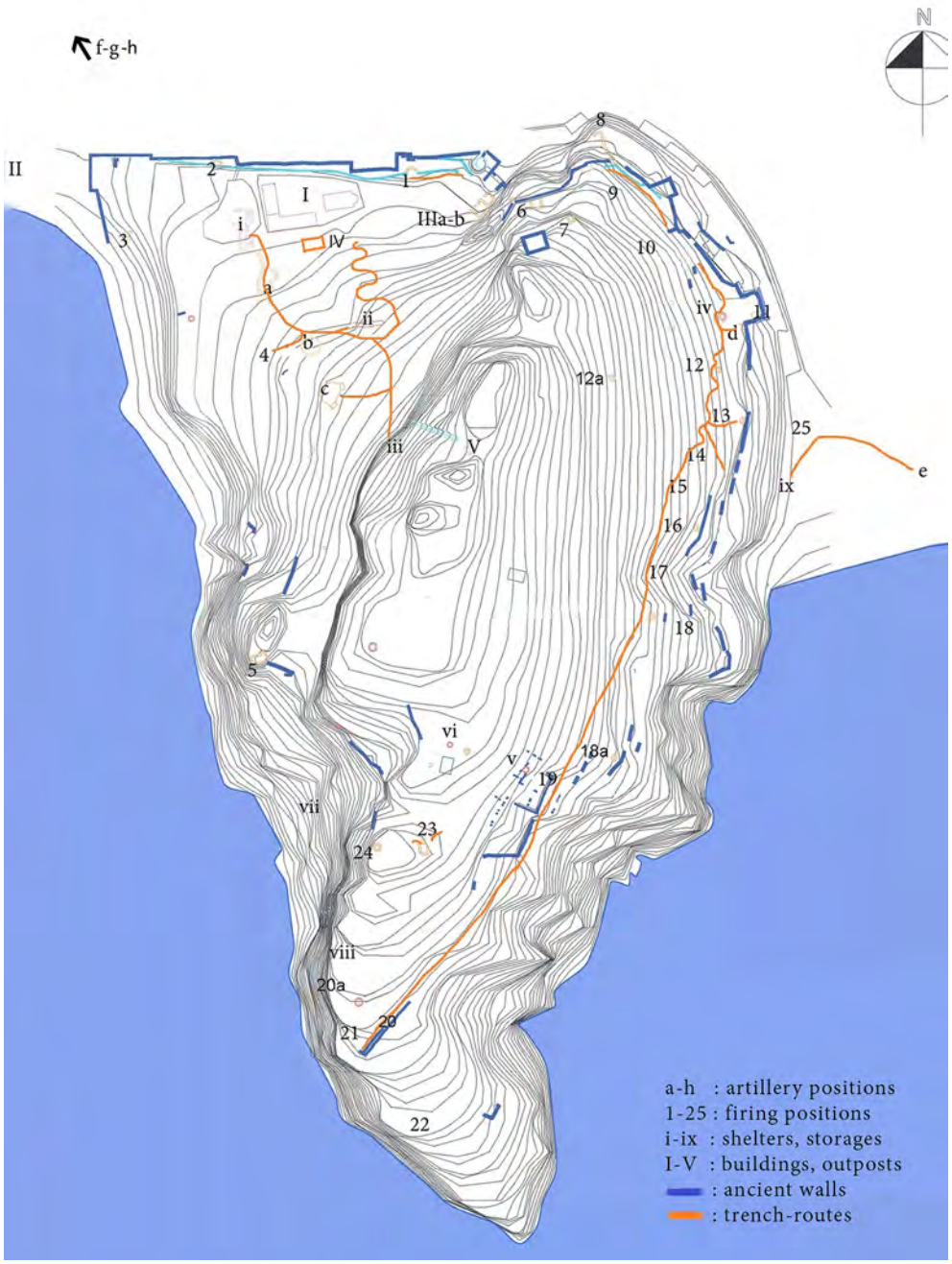

Fig.12. Topographic map of ancient Asine depicting the WW II fortifications (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities in Argolis).

as the fortress' kitchen. The structure was roughly built of stones and cement-based mortar and was covered by a makeshift roof, as no evidence of roofing material or roof support has been discovered in the area whatsoever. The structure was equipped in the interior with a long stone-built bench with four round brick ovens for cooking, some of which preserved traces of soot on their surface.[33] North of the building was adjoined by a smaller one-room building with separate entrance (IIIb), which collapsed around 2007, but can be viewed in photographs taken by the local Ephorate of Antiquities during that period. Two concrete steps south of the second building led to a narrow open space at the rear side of the kitchen house bordered to the south by the rocky slope and to the west by a concrete wall (*Fig. 14*).[34]

[33] Building (IIIa)-Kitchen: 5 x 4m; bench: 4 x 0.80 x 0.60m; ovens: diam. 0.36-0.50m.

[34] Adjoining building (IIIb): 3 x 2.10m; concrete wall: 3.82 x 1.54 x 0.35m.

Fig. 13. The single-space structure (IV) east of the Church (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

Interventions were also made at the ancient gate of Asine further north, where the substantial ancient wall meets the steep rock of the acropolis. In the Hellenistic period the gate was reinforced by a square tower, while various reconstructions

Fig. 14. The Italian kitchen house with outbuilding (IIIa-b) and detail of the brick ovens in the interior (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

and extensive mortar additions were made in later periods.[35] During the Occupation the soldiers removed blocks from the upper layer of the gate's northern sidewall, destroyed the upper layers of the paved ramp and a stone staircase west of the gate. They constructed wide paved steps to alleviate the access between the two different levels the gate and kitchen now stood (*Fig. 15*).

The most severe interventions, however, were made in the excavated part of Lower Town. Following the removal of

Fig. 15. Aerial view of the gate during enhancement work (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

several thousand cubic metres of earth, the Swedish excavations had unearthed consecutive layers of occupation dating from prehistoric to historic times: the foundations of houses, graves, workshop installations of rural nature as well as wells and cisterns. These provided abundant building material to cover the needs of the extensive Italian construction project, resulting in the almost complete destruction of the ancient remains. Field fortifications were identified among the ancient ruins, especially in the area south-south-east of the Bath and the Roman cistern, where there was a dense network of trenches reinforced with firing positions and shelters (*Fig. 16*).

The intricate trench network has a total length of about 459m and consisted of a system of passages suitably organized to cover soldiers' movements at the fortress and protect them from enemy gun fire. While digging these, soil from their excavation was used to create raised parapets running along both sides and revetted in places by large stones, rocky blocks, and small dry-stone superstructures. These provided enough support to hold the soil in case of rain and to minimize the risks of injury from side fire or grenade fragments.[36] Some of these passages were dug in a zig-zag pattern so that the enemy, standing at one end, could fire for no more than a few yards down its length. However, no evidence of wooden planking, fire steps or a drainage system has been discovered, even though the bottom becomes muddy after a heavy rainfall.

[35] Frödin & Persson 1938, 48–57.

[36] Trench parapets: 1.20–1.50 x 1–1.50m. The sides of the trench could also have been revetted with sandbags, wooden frames, and wire mesh.

Fig. 16. Aerial photos of the Lower Town in 1941 and in 2014 (No. 12384, copyright DAI-ATH-RLM, ASINE and archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

The trench system comprises two main routes oriented north-south and east-west connected at regular intervals to a series of communications passages that were dug roughly perpendicular to them. These lead to three open artillery positions for heavy guns (a–c) to defend against a possible enemy assault and to three underground spaces that functioned as supply storerooms and hideouts: the Late Roman Bath, the Roman cistern, and the cave on the western slope (i–iii). These spaces could shelter large numbers of defending troops during an enemy bombardment and were also areas where the soldiers could withdraw in order to eat, rest or sleep.

The east-west trench route starts from the northern wall of the *caldarium* of the Bath (i), then goes along the north-western wall of the Middle Helladic House B, reaches the Roman cistern (ii) from the west and through a shallow upward crawl passage connects to the other main route. The north-south trench route starts at the plateau east of the church, approaches the Roman cistern from the north following a zig-zag pattern, then goes round it and merges with the aforementioned trench into one main passage leading to a drill-and blast cave (iii) at the western slope of the acropolis. Finally, from the cave the trench route– mostly a narrow path – runs along the rocky slope concealed by dense vegetation and leads to a pillbox (5) situated at rocky projection of the peninsula further south.

Fire position (a) is an open artillery position located south-east of the Bath, consisting of a round space with a concrete ring base for the support of the rotating base for a machine gun. The heavy gun was protected by a horseshoe-shaped embankment open to the north, which was constructed by two parallel walls built of stone and cement-based mortar and with soil filling in the space between them (*Fig. 17*).[37] In close proximity to the Roman cistern lies a circular mortar position (b). This was a round concrete ground base probably for an antiaircraft machine gun, which was protected by high curved sidewalls reinforced with stone blocks. It connected to the main trenchroute through a narrow opening to the west, while another to the south leads through a short communication passage (11m in length) to a foxhole (4).[38]

West of the main trenchroute that leads to the cave lies at a lower level an roughly oval plateau (c), surrounded by a thick deposit forming a bund with a low stone-built wall marking its inner perimeter.[39] This was probably another open artillery position equipped on its western side with two identical cube-like shelters built of stone and cement-based mortar and with a thin concrete ceiling reinforced with iron beams and covered by a thick layer of earth to complete the camouflaging of the structure. Due to their small size these probably sheltered supplies or other war material rather than military personnel. The plateau is connected to the main trench through a narrow communication passage (6.10m in length).

[37] Central space: diam. 2.90 m; ring: diam. 1.50 m; embankment: 1.30–2.10 x 0.70–0.80 m.
[38] Circular base (b): diam. 5.30m; side walls: height 0.60–2.70m; western opening: 0.60m; foxhole (4): diam. 3m.
[39] Plateau: 7 x 5.50m; bund: 2.50 x 0.40m; shelters: 1.50 x 1.36 x 0.83–1.10m.

Fig. 17. Artillery position (a) (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

Finally, pillbox (5) is a small irregular-shaped space located south-west of the promontory and is approached through a narrow passage from north-east. It is built of stone and cement-based mortar and equipped with two small loopholes offering a good view to the eastern Argolid Gulf to the south and to the beach at Tolo to the west. A narrow bench decorated with pebbles on its upper surface adjoins the western loophole, offering a comfortable shooting position, while a small rectangular space near its entrance was probably used for ammunition storage (*Fig.18*).[40]

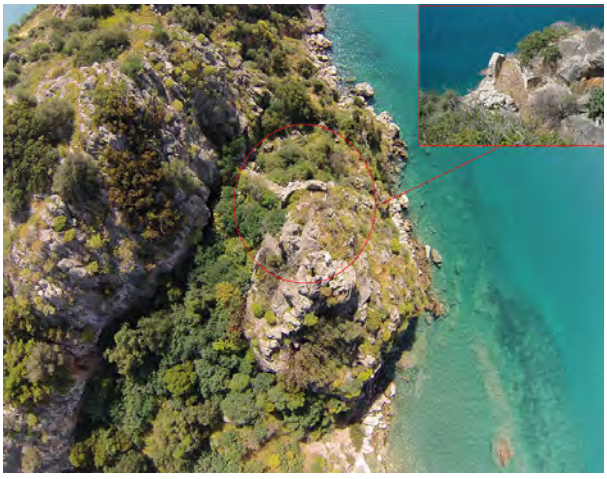

Fig. 18. Aerial photo of pillbox (5) and view from the east (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

The Bath of the Lower Town was built around 400 AD (i). It consisted of four small main rooms that were aligned along a north-south axis: the locker room (*apodyterium*), the cold bath room (*frigidarium*), the *tepidarium* and the hot bath (*caldarium*).[41] The building is the only structure in the Lower Town that was not completely deconstructed during the war. It provided the soldiers a well-built structure, which, after modifications, could serve as an excellent shelter. In order to make it possible for a person to stand upright in the interior, the tile floor of the *caldarium* and the rows of small piers that supported the floor (*hypocaust*) were destroyed and dry-stone superstructures raised the height of the walls of the *caldarium* to a suitable level. The hideout was probably covered by a makeshift roofing structure or some sort of netting. An entrance with two stone steps opened on its northern wall provided access to the east-west trench route.[42]

Fig. 19. The interior of the Roman cistern before enhancement work (Photo by E. Mpougiotis, archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

The Roman cistern south-east of the Lower Town (ii) was also modified during the Occupation to serve as a shelter for

[40] Pillbox (5): 6 x 2 x 1.50m; bench: 1.60 x 1.40m; storage space: 1.20 x 1.20 x 1m.

[41] Frödin & Persson 1938, 105–112; Höghammar 1984.

[42] Entrance: 0.77 x 1.60 x 0.60m.

Fig. 20. The mouth of cave (iii) on the western slope of the acropolis (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

Fig. 21. Firing position (3) at the elongated pile east of the Lower Town (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

the defenders. The structure is partly carved into the bedrock and consisted of three separate compartments covered with a thick layer of hydraulic mortar.[43] A large opening made during WW II destroyed the western narrow wall of the west side chamber, providing access to the main trenchroute through a short communication passage (7.50m in length). Unfortunately, these interventions in and around the Roman structure affected the pressure forces exerted by the overlying soil on the cistern, causing cracks in the walls that allowed the inflow of rain water, which gradually led to erosion and minor collapses in the interior (*Fig.19*).[44]

The cave on the western slope of the acropolis (iii) was used, according to the accounts of locals, as an ammunition store and also for the rest and protection of the military personnel. The cave is tunnel-like and has an L shape with almost curved walls and was opened by both manual labour and the use of explosives. Evidence of the drilling and blasting method used to cut rock is visible on the walls in the interior: small holes drilled into the rock for the placement of TNT cylinders. The debris excavated from the interior were deposited on the outer west side forming a large rocky talus deposit, while evidence of dynamite blasts and rocky debris are visible to the north of the cave from a previous unsuccessful attempt to open an underground shelter there (*Fig. 20*).[45]

The perimeter of the Lower Town was also reinforced with pillboxes (Italian: *casammata*) and other firing positions especially the northern part along the ancient wall creating another line of defence (1–2). The north-western pillbox (2), halfway down the path that leads to the church plateau, stands alone, while the northern pillbox (1) is connected through a trench (12m in length) that goes along the northern wall to the main gate. The elongated mound of earth east of the Lower Town, a product of the Swedish excavations, has also been reinforced with at least one firing position (3); this is a half-buried cylindrical structure for one person built of stone and cement-based mortar with a thick rimand equipped with a small cube-like shelf for ammunition storage on its eastern side (*Fig. 21*).[46]

The northern pillboxes (1–2) are almost identical. These are battle positioned, half-buried in the earth up to the level of the loops. The principle followed was that of camouflage, merging with the background by eliminating any shadows and distorting the structures' silhouette. Most of these are made of materials from the surrounding ruins and are covered by thick vegetation in such a way that they are near-indistinguishable from the surrounding landscape.[47] They consisted of a semicircular front wall with three small loopholes, narrower on the outside and facing different directions towards the northern plain, and with a small rectangle space at the back for the movement of soldiers. The outer wall adjoins a low semicircular bench, which offers a comfortable shooting position for the defenders, decorated on its upper surface with pebbles and tiles forming the abbreviation *VM*, which probably stands for *Valor Militare*. The cement bases for the mounting of portable machine gun tripods still survive intact on the upper surface of these benches, while one of them bears the inscribed graffiti: *1943/2.7.* (now lost).[48] The rear rectangle space preserves

[43] Frödin & Persson1938, 113–114.
[44] Opening of the cistern: 1.50 x 2m.
[45] Cave (iii): 9 x 4.40 x 2.10–2.40m; drill hole: diam. 0.05m.
[46] Firing position (3): 1.50 x 1m; rim: 0.60m; ammunition shelf: 0.40 x 0.40 x 0.40m.
[47] On Italian army camouflage, see Military Intelligence Service 1943b, 417–421.
[48] The impressions left on the cement bases resemble the footmarks left by the tripods of the Fucile Mitragliatore Breda Modello 1937, or Breda

Fig. 22. View of pillbox (1) from south (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

Fig. 23. Cement masses for mounting tripods of portable machine guns on pillbox (1) (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

no flooring, but is equipped at the base of the western sidewall with a small rectangular opening, possibly for the drainage of rainwater. No evidence was discovered of the roofing of these structures whatsoever, but we should imagine some form of netting garnished with suitable local material, breaking all shadows and blending with the vegetation to complete the concealment from enemy sight (*Figs. 22–23*).[49]

THE ACROPOLIS

The acropolis was reinforced with heavily-guarded perimeter defence zones and outposts overviewing the northern plain and the coastal zone of Plaka in the east. For these field fortifications rocks and carved blocks from the nearby ruins were used as building material, resulting in the destruction of many ancient monuments, such as the Roman portico on the north-east slope, the Early Helladic, Geometric and Hellenistic settlements at the plateaus, and others.

To the northern defence zone belong the one-room house (6), firing position (7) and pillbox (8). The small building in contact with the Venetian wall (6) was probably used as a camouflaged firing position. Since this camouflaged house incorporated the Venetian battlements in its structure, the Italians constructed similar artificial concrete battlements on top disguising the building as part of the ancient fortification system and to serve at the same time as loopholes for machine guns. These were probably accessed by the defenders through a raised wooden platform that once stood in the interior. The northern wall preserves the square holes for the placement of the horizontal wooden beams that probably supported the platform. The house had a floor paved with flat stones and was equipped with side-windows narrower on the outer side, safeguarding the northern path. However, no evidence of any roof material was discovered, suggesting a makeshift structure. The walls were also covered with a thick layer of yellow ochre mortar still bearing the graffiti of people who visited the site after the war (*Figs. 24–25*).[50]

Fig. 24. View from east of single-space house (6) before enhancement work (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

M37, a machine gun typically used by the Italian army during WW II. On the Breda 37 and its specifications, see Pignato 1978, 42–43; http://www.comandosupremo.com/Breda37.html (Tactical and Technical Trends, no. 23, 22 April 1943, accessed May 2016).

[49] Pillboxes (1–2): 0.53–0.71 x 0.30 x 0.20m; rear space: 3.90 x 0.80 x 1.50m; bench: 2.80 x 1.60–1.90 x 0.80m; drain hole: 0.26 x 0.26 x 0.21m. On Italian WW II bunkers and other fortifications see also Boglione 2012.

[50] Building (6): 3.50 x 5m. Most of the graffiti names of locals, tourists and soldiers accompanied by the date of their visit or other symbols: "Β. ΜΑΝΕΤΑΣ 1952", "ΤΑΣΟΣ ΜΑΡΚΟΥ 1958", "ΠΑΥΛΙΔΗΣ ΠΑΝΑΓ. Αίγιον", "Ι 1959 ΓΣΜχ.", "23/9/62 ΤΡΙΖΗΝΑ ΠΟΡΟΣ", "J.M. 67", "Mike RED '81", "P/G '82", "Ι982 H. Titel", "94 A+E", "DYLEMMA '01", "CYCY '06", "RYAN", "VINIEV" etc.

Fig. 25. Graffiti on the northern wall of single-space house (6) (Photo by E. Mpourgiotis, archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

Perched on the rocky slope above the northern path, not far from the house, which itself was used as a camouflaged firing position, is a firing position (7). It is a small rectangular single-space structure built of stone and cement-based mortar and equipped with a loophole facing south-east. Further along the path towards the northern edge of the acropolis, the Italians installed an S-shaped stone staircase leading downwards towards pillbox (8) located a few metres below the ancient wall, similar in design to the northern pillboxes at the Lower Town. Moreover, a small stone-built platform over the top of the staircase offers another viewpoint to the citrus plain in the north.[51]

The eastern defence zone consists of several firing positions and shelters connected through narrow communication passages to a trench (326 min length) oriented north-south, that runs along the eastern slope, connecting the northern battle positions to the southern fighting positions of the peninsula (*Fig. 26*). While digging the trench, the soldiers destroyed several ancient ruins, such as the Roman portico and the Hellenistic well near the eastern gate, and unearthed at the same time others that were undiscovered during the Swedish excavations.[52]The main trenchroute is mostly straight and only its middle section follows a zig-zag pattern. At almost regular intervals along its wall, there are at least thirteen one-man firing positions overviewing the coast. These are either narrow foxholes (15–16) or cylindrical and rectangular structures (9–10, 12–14, 17–21) built of stone and cement-based mortar, some of which are equipped with small cube-like spaces for ammunition storage.[53]

In addition, the eastern wall near the gate was reinforced with dry-stone superstructures, while the south-eastern part of the eastern tower was converted into a small rectangular fighting position (11)with the openings of the low parapet offering ready-made loopholes. Moreover, a small Hellenistic cistern west of the tower was used as an underground shelter (iv). Additionally, at the point where the south corner of the tower meets the Hellenistic wall, the Italian soldiers removed one block from the lower layers of the wall to serve as loophole for a large machine gun (d), which according to locals was in-

[51] Pillbox (8): 2.30 x 1.30 x 1.50m; loophole: 1.10 x 0.90 x 0.30m; staircase: 20m; platform: 1.60 x 1.30 x 1.10m.

[52] Frödin & Persson1938, 27–33.

[53] Foxholes (15–16): 3–3.50m; cylindrical firing positions (12–14, 17–18, 21): 1.50 x 1m; rectangular firing positions (9–10, 19–20): 0.90 x 1m; firing position (20) – ammunition shelf: 0.55 x 0.30 x 0.50m. The numbers 12a and 18a on the topographic map of Asine (*Fig. 12*) correspond to additional firing positions on the acropolis that, although represented on earlier drawings, have not been located during recent enhancement work.

Fig. 26. Part of the oblong trench route on the acropolis near the eastern tower (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

stalled there.[54] For the same reason they dug a large trench-like pit on the inner side of the wall to aid the moving of the heavy weapon (*Fig. 27*).[55]

There are many shelters and firing positions scattered across the rocky promontory, forming various lines of defence around the main observatory located at the top. Notable among these are three cisterns converted into shelters (iv–vi), two L-shaped drill-and-blast caves, one on the south-west slope (vii) and another shaft cave to the south near the Hellenistic wall (viii), a roughly made dry-stone firing position near the cape of the promontory (22), another one (24) protected by a large rock a few metres west of pillbox (23), and also staircases made of semi-shaped ancient blocks providing access to the uneven plateaus. The main observatory (V) lies a little lower than the summit of the rocky mass to the north and can be approached from the western slope via a steep staircase (26 in length) leading upwards. It is built of stone and cement-based mortar, with an entrance on its western side and a small

Fig. 27. Loophole for a heavy weapon on the eastern ancient wall (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

opening facing east, and offers good views on both sides of the promontory.[56]

At the southern plateau of the acropolis lies pillbox (23). This structure resembles to the pillboxes at the Lower Town, but has a more elaborate ground plan. It is equipped with a semicircular front wall with two loops facing south and east and an adjoined low semicircular bench built of stone and cement-based mortar. The bench is decorated on its upper surface with pebbles and ancient tiles forming a five-spoke asterisk, twice the abbreviation *VV*, and the fragmentary word *IL...*, which probably could be restored as *VV(Viva) IL RE* or *VV(Viva) IL DUCE*. Two stone-built passageways on its southern and north-western sides provide access to the rocky slopes, while a separate space on its rear western side served probably as a storeroom. The storeroom has incorporated a once free-standing rock in its structure, which has a hole drilled on its upper surface, possibly for the installation of the support pillar of some sort of netting or other makeshift roofing structure. Alas, most building materials came from the nearby Early Helladic House, of which today only the lowest layer of the foundation survives (*Fig. 28*).[57]

The pillbox was also decorated with four concrete frames hanging on narrow wall spaces between loops bearing graffiti. These provide important information about the occupants, offering, at the same time, an insight into their culture, mentioning among others the date of completion of the works on

[54] Locals describe it as a 'large cannon', documentary *And Asine... and Asine* (fn. 29 above).

[55] Firing position 11: 3.30 x 2–1.30 x 1.20m; machine gun loophole: 0.90 x 0.60 x 0.60m; trench-like pit: 3 x 1.50m.

[56] Observatory (V): 2 x 5 x 1.70m; entrance: 0.95m; opening: 0.80m; stone steps: 1.60–0.80 x 0.35 x 0.25m; cave (vii): 6.30 x 2.30 x 2.10–3.20m; shaft cave (viii): 6 x 1.80 x 2.60m; firing position (22): 1.60 x 1.30m; firing position (24): 0.70 x 1m, covered by a rocky mound 1.30m high.

[57] Pillbox (23): 3.20 x 4 x 1.50m; bench: 1.20 x 0.80 x 0.70m; S-N passageways: 4 and 2.10m; storage space: 1.20 x 1 x 1.50m; pillar hole: diam. 0.20m. Frödin & Persson 1938, 43, fig. 24.

Fig. 28. Pillbox (23) at the southern plateau of the acropolis (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

Fig. 29. Photo of graffiti (1) (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

the promontory, the identification number of the military unit installed there, and various war slogans. Unfortunately, they survive in a fragmentary state, but were partly recorded in the 1946 official report of the Ministry and captured intact in a photograph by Robert McCabe who visited the site in 1950s (*Fig.29*):[58]

1)	*LAVORI*	*COMPLETION*
	TERMINATI	*OF WORKS*
	9 – 5 – 42 XX_°	*9 – 5 – 42 XX_°*
	CAPORALE	*CORPORAL*
	CONTINOU	*CONTINOU*
2)	*NOI*	*WE*
	TIREREMO	*WILL GO*
	DIRITTO	*AHEAD*
	VINCERE	*WE WILL WIN*
3)	*W [VIVA] IL RE*	*LONG LIVE THE KING*
	W [VIVA] IL DUCE	*LONG LIVE THE DUCE*
	PER NOI	*FOR US*
	NON CE	*THERE IS NO*
	OSTACOLE	*OBSTACLE*
	W LA CLASSE	*LONG LIVE CLASS*
	1911 F.	*1911 F*
4)	*433 Btg. T. M. [BATTAGLIONE TERRITORIALE MOBILE]*	*433rd MOTORIZED BATTAGLION*
	1a COMP. [COMPAGNIA]	*1st COMPANY*
	4o PLOTONE	*4th PLATOON*
	1a SQUADRA	*1st SQUADRON*

PLAKA BEACH AND BARBOUNA HILL

The straight coastline of Plaka, with its fertile citrus plain inland, stretches from Kastraki to the peninsula of Drepano to the north. Additional archaeological surveys, conducted by the Swedish Institute during the 1970s in the area occupied today by a camping establishment, have revealed a cemetery organized in and around a Middle Helladic tumulus and the remains of a small settlement with continuous use from the Mycenaean period until 700 BC.[59] Along with the beach at Tolo these areas provide easy access by small beachable boats and during the Occupation they favoured a possible Allied landing. In anticipation of a possible landing, the Italians fortified both beaches with pillboxes and heavy gun posts, and deployed extensive minefields on both land and sea (*Fig. 30*).[60]

At the foot of the rocky promontory near the beach, the Italians installed another heavy-guarded battle position, and on the rocky slope near the beach they dug a long tunnel (ix) (30m in length) with a zig-zag plan and almost curved walls, which was probably used by the gun crew stationed in the area for rest and storage. A nearby outpost (25), partly built into the rocky slope to the north, safeguarded the cave, while an S-shaped trench, with vertical walls built of stone and cement-based

[58] MRANE1946, 65; McCabe 2014, 275; Cocroft et al. 2006; Cocroft 2009, 24. The Latin number XX (20) after the year 1942 corresponds to the fascist dating system, that gradually spread during Mussolini's rule, as it became a habit to tally years from the March on Rome in 28 October 1922, Bosworth 2007, 201. The graffiti were translated in to English by Lida Kitsaki, member of the NSRF project at Asine.

[59] Wells 1983; Poulsen 1994; Voutsaki *et al*. 2009.

[60] At Tolo beach there used to be a pillbox opposite the Dolphin Hotel. Three or four more are mentioned by locals near the road leading to the rubbish dump area south-west of Tolo.

Fig. 30. The Italian pillbox opposite the hotel Dolphin in Tolo during the 1980s (Archive of the Cultural Association of Tolo).

mortar (15m in length), connected the cave's mouth to an advanced artillery position near the beach (*Fig. 31*).[61] The latter, artillery position (e), is a pillbox-type underground construction, which once was partly covered by a man-made mound, but now stands unearthed and collapsed due to ground erosion. It is a cylindrical structure built of stone and cement-based mortar and was approached through an underground opening on its northern side. The soldiers equipped the concrete roof with a round shaft for the installation of a heavy machine gun (*Fig. 32*).[62]

Apart from the promontory of Asine and the beaches, the Italian Occupation forces also fortified Barbouna Hill,

Fig. 31. Artillery position (e) at Plaka beach (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

in particular on the north-eastern slope near the top, where they constructed two open artillery positions for mounting heavy naval guns (f-g) equipped with L-shaped side crypts for ammunition storage, and a third a little downslope in the direction of Kastraki (h). In this latter structure blocks from the nearby ancient ruins belonging to a small archaic temple, perhaps that of Apollo Pythaios mentioned in ancient sources, were used as building material.[63] These three artillery positions have large circular mortar bases surrounded by a shallow channel, which allowed the machine gun to rotate on wheels while taking position (*Fig. 33*). In addition, according to official reports, some rock-cut chamber tombs from the cemetery of the Mycenaean settlement of Asine, which extended over the east and north slopes of the hill, were used for ammunition storage and suffered many collapses and damage as well.[64]

Fig. 32. Photo of the trench at Plaka beach during the 1970s (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

[61] Mouth of the cave (ix): 3.30 x 2.10m; outpost (25): 3 x 1.40 x 1.80m; entrance: 0.60 x 1.70m; curved bench: 5 x 0.50 x 0.50m; retaining wall: 1.70 x 3.20m. Videos and photographs from the 1970s depict a well-built trench in the area (*Fig. 31*). Today it survives buried beneath the levelled ground and is used by bathers as a car park, see e.g. a documentary on the Swedish excavations at Asine in the 1970s by G. Eriksson (1972): *Vetandets värld* (*World of knowledge*, TV series), Sweden (SVT).

[62] Pillbox (e): 2.10 x 2.50m; shaft: 0.80m; shaft's rim: 0.20m; underground entrance: 1.10 x 0.60m.

[63] Frödin & Persson 1938 141–151; Barrett 1954; Wells 1987–1988; Billot 1989–1990.

[64] Petrou's report (4th Archaeological Precinct of Nafplio, protocol no. 4490/1943), Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis.

Fig. 33. Artillery position (g) on Barbouna Hill (Copyright D. Michalopoulos, http://www.dimitrismichalopoulos.com)

Last occupation of Asine

Operation Mincemeat proved to be an Allied success during the war, convincing the Occupation forces in Greece to reinforce all southern coastal areas with multiple defence zones, pillboxes, artillery positions, and minefields. The field fortifications and other buildings constructed by the soldiers of the 433rd Mechanized Battalion on the promontory were part of that defence project that was quickly planned and executed, but which destroyed in the process many of the antiquities and reformed the landscape, transforming it for a short period into a contemporary coastal fortress. Unfortunately, the Italians' top priority was the safety of the Occupation army and the effective defence of the peninsula from an Allied landing, and not the protection of the ancient ruins, which were unhesitatingly sacrificed on behalf of that goal.

The fortress of Asine was mostly an observation point stationed to detect enemy movements in the eastern part of the Argolic Gulf. Through the intricate system of defence zones and outposts, the Asinaean fort was also a defensive point guarding the nearby beaches to hinder any attempt by locals or foreigners to leave or approach the area. The Occupation forces acknowledged the possibility of an enemy landing in the sandy-gravel beaches of Plaka and Tolo, as these were the areas from which only two years previously British Commonwealth forces had almost successfully evacuated from Greece.

Like the Swedish archaeologists in the past, the Italian soldiers also intruded on the landscape, but unfortunately in a destructive way. By blasting, digging and deconstructing the ancient ruins, they managed to re-use all available materials efficiently, in order to carry out their extensive building programmes. Traces of hasty work are visible all around the peninsula. We do not know how much time the Italians spent on planning the project. It proved to be effective, though, as they managed to fortify the peninsula by incorporating or re-using the available elements of the landscape to conceal and disguise their fortifications in quite a short period of time.

The main facilities of the Italian fortress were stationed at the plateau near the church. These probably included headquarters, dormitories for military personnel, storerooms and two kitchens, one for the military personnel of Asine and another for the gun crews stationed on Barbouna Hill. No modern water tanks were discovered in the area whatsoever, leading to the assumption that water, petrol and other liquid supplies were probably stored inside barrels or other containers in the shelters. The command post was probably equipped with a central radio station, as radio transmissions were a reliable way of communication during the war. This was possibly installed near HQ, while portable, battery operated transceivers were probably distributed to the fighting positions and outposts scattered across the peninsula and on the naval artillery positions on top of Barbouna Hill. The radio and communications equipment were mostly used to deliver orders and coded messages from High Command in Nafplio to Asine and from the Asinaean HQ to the observatories – and vice versa – and possibly for the transmission of even more personal messages to soldiers. However, no radar station or other object-detection system has been found at Asine or the surrounding area.

The main observatory and other observation posts at the top of the peninsula provided the Italian commanders with important information on nearby movements by air, land, and especially sea. When a possible enemy movement was detected from the observers/spotters on the acropolis, a coded message was probably sent to HQ in the Lower Town. All information was stored and processed there, to be distributed later to the gun crews stationed at the perimeter and other nearby defensive posts.

The rest of the site was reinforced with defence zones in case of enemy attack, and hideouts which provided shelter from possible air or naval bombardments. In sum, the fortress' defence system consisted of seven pillbox-type battle stations equipped with loopholes, three foxholes, and seventeen firing positions/outposts for one person, four drill-and-blast caves and five re-used ancient constructions converted into shelters, three artillery positions in the Lower Town, one near the eastern tower and one at Plaka beach, three naval artillery positions on Barbouna Hill, and one main observatory at the top of the acropolis. These were connected to a dense system of trenches, which allowed the transportation of food, ammunition, fresh troops, mail, and orders, and also the maintenance and further expansion of the network.

As they were working in haste the Italians needed to use a fast method to dig their trench network and complete their field fortifications. However, the use of many soldiers

equipped with shovels and picks to dig a large portion of trench at once left the diggers dangerously exposed, especially during the day. So most construction works and entrenchment (digging in a row) took place probably at night, when the diggers were less vulnerable. Still, the trench along the difficult-to-access and exposed eastern slope of the acropolis was in some parts dug by sapping (digging at the end face); this was a much safer method, but also time consuming, as only one or two men could fit in the area simultaneously to dig.

During their stay at Asine the soldiers were mostly preoccupied with their extensive construction programme. However, they probably participated in a number of military drills testing alternative defence strategies in case of heavy bombardment or enemy landing and the combat readiness of the garrisoned forces. These drills were probably performed during the night, when the cover of darkness hid all movements of the defenders inside the trenches. As a result the organization of an effective communication network between observers and gun crews was probably Captain Bagniolesi's primary concern.

The Italian battalion occupied Asine soon after April 1941 and they concluded the extensive reformation project on 9 May 1942. This must have been such an important event in the daily routine of the soldiers that Corporal Continou thought it was an event worthwhile commemorating with a dedicatory inscription on the walls of the pillbox on the southern plateau of the acropolis. For more than a year the soldiers were probably working day and night to achieve their goal and this must have been tedious and exhausting. The thriving morale of the soldiers of the 1911F class after the completion of construction works is reflected in the war slogans accompanying Continou's inscription, but it did not last long. On 8 September 1943, after having spent one year preparing to defend in case of enemy attack, Italy finally capitulated. Soon after, the soldiers abandoned their brand new fort and surrendered along with their Commander to the Germans, while others fled to the countryside. The inscribed date *1943/2.7.*, once preserved on one of the northern pillboxes at the Lower Town, is probably the last written record left from the last occupants of the ancient promontory, possibly inscribed by an unknown Italian soldier a couple of months before delivering Asine into the control of their former allies (*Fig. 34*).

Fig. 34. Inscribed graffiti "1943 2.7" on one of the cement masses of pillbox (1) (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis).

Conclusions: Conflict as destruction and construction

War is a destructive force and a creative one at the same time. War has destroyed nations, states and even empires, but has also reformed them. World War II was total and impacted everywhere it reached by destroying political and social systems, configuring and reconfiguring borders between states, and by leaving its indelible traces in the landscape and memories of people along its way. Ancient Asine is an archaeological site with successive habitation extending from prehistoric to recent historic times and thus has been continuously experienced through millennia. It is a unique palimpsest landscape in Argolis that expresses both physical and human processes at work under different spatial and temporal conditions over a long period of time. It is also a site which has seen forces of war and which preserves recent memories of the years of conflict. It displays materialities of war which are directly linked to the environment and to the history of the site.[65]

Archaeology should treat these sites, whether ancient or not, with the aim of preserving and respecting these remnants of recent conflict, some of which are still not identified with the concept of monumentality, but rather with the idea of an unpleasant memory, 'an aesthetic disturbance'.[66] However, through the analytical methods of archaeology the researcher can easily distance him/herself from any attachment to any distressing objects he/she may encounter in the material world, in an attempt to fill the gaps in the historical record and to increase our understanding of the history of WW II, a period that remains ambiguously 'recent' in our minds.[67] The Italian interventions at ancient Asine are an integral part of local history, but they are also interventions from the past into the present, as well as intrusions to the area's pre-war archaeo-

[65] On materiality and the social aspect of material culture, see Persson 2014, 436–437.
[66] Péturdóttir & Olsen 2014, 4.
[67] Buchli & Lucas 2001, 9–10; Moshenska 2012, 8; Saunders 2013b, 20.

logical record, and as such they may be constantly unwelcome reminders of errors of the past or signs of human struggle that must be respected. Furthermore, all these remnants of the past scattered across the promontory, whether ancient or recent, demonstrate that despite the different technologies and geopolitical significances, Asine in Argolis is a landform that has retained its importance as a major strategic point over a time period of several millennia, suitable both for habitation and defence. In this light, it is an expression of local identity and sense-of-place, which preserves buildings, fortifications and other structures that can be interpreted and reinterpreted as changing expressions of relations of culture and power over time.[68]

During the past decades modern archaeology has undergone rapid change, which is beginning to dissolve traditional disciplinary boundaries and encourages researchers to go beyond the science of excavation. Furthermore, it suggests that scientific methodologies should be integrated to archaeological research, in an attempt "to develop a modern, scientific, and anthropologically informed archaeology of the war that created us and affected so many different peoples around the world".[69] Thus, an inclusive anthropological approach is required in order to investigate these palimpsest landscapes from several angles and to consider the numerous interpretations and meanings they embody.[70] As a result, material remains of the contemporary past should be studied alongside those of much earlier periods in an attempt to preserve and share our cultural and natural heritage.[71] Moreover, a reorientation of archaeology is needed in order to find new ways of preserving the material culture of modern technological war and mediating and presenting the recent past and the social dimensions and cultural meanings of a post-war landscape[72]Only then can we understand the archaeological and historical physiognomy of a site in a much deeper way and the site can act as a vehicle for both knowledge and memories and become an important example of combined management of natural and archaeological wealth.

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[68] Klausmeier *et al*. 2006, 7; Saunders 2013b, 22.
[69] Saunders 2013b, 18, 26–27.
[70] Matás 2014, 21. See also Geertz 1973, 5–6, 9–10.
[71] Klausmeier *et al*. 2006, 5.
[72] Péturdóttir & Olsen 2014, 5.

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