

MIDDLE HELLADIC LACONIA: NEW EVIDENCE *

by EMILIA BANOU

This paper presents three new Middle Helladic sites discovered in Laconia during extensive surveys undertaken by the author between 1990-1994¹. It also adds to our knowledge of two already known Early and Late Bronze Age sites, which, on the basis of new sherd material collected, seem to have been occupied in the MH period as well. Finally, sherds from an already known MH site are for the first time presented here as supportive evidence for its importance in that time.

Despite its important geographic position, few systematic excavations have been so far undertaken in Laconia, a situation clearly reflected on any review of prehistoric Greece². It is hoped, that this paper will stimulate further research in that much neglected region³.

* *Acknowledgments.* I am indebted to Dr. C. Zerner for her insightful comments on MH pottery and her suggestions regarding the language. I also warmly thank Professor J. Rutter for his comments on both the content and the language of the paper.

¹ Results of these surveys are included in my dissertation focusing on Mycenaean Laconia, in Banou 1996, 12-23.

² See, for example, Rutter 1993, 782; note also the statement of Dickinson, 1992, 109: "...despite the much greater amount of information now available, especially from the Menelaion site, Laconia's prehistory remains so obscure that attempts at general survey are, except for the Mycenaean period, premature and even potentially misleading in their implications of an adequate and well-distributed sample of data".

³ Note the characteristic statement of Dickinson 1977, 91: "...but the state of the evidence (in Laconia) is such that a single new find could alter this picture", referring to the MH period, which, however, could be applied to all prehistoric periods. Very recently the second volume of the "Laconia Survey" has been published, including the sites and their finds (Cavanagh *et al.* 1996); the first volume concerning the interpretation of the finds is awaited. Among others, the "Laconia Survey" resulted in the discovery of twelve MH locations, of which nine can be named sites. This is an astonishingly large number for the researched area, which is mountainous and could be characterized as rather peripheral; it confirms how promising to further research Laconia can be.

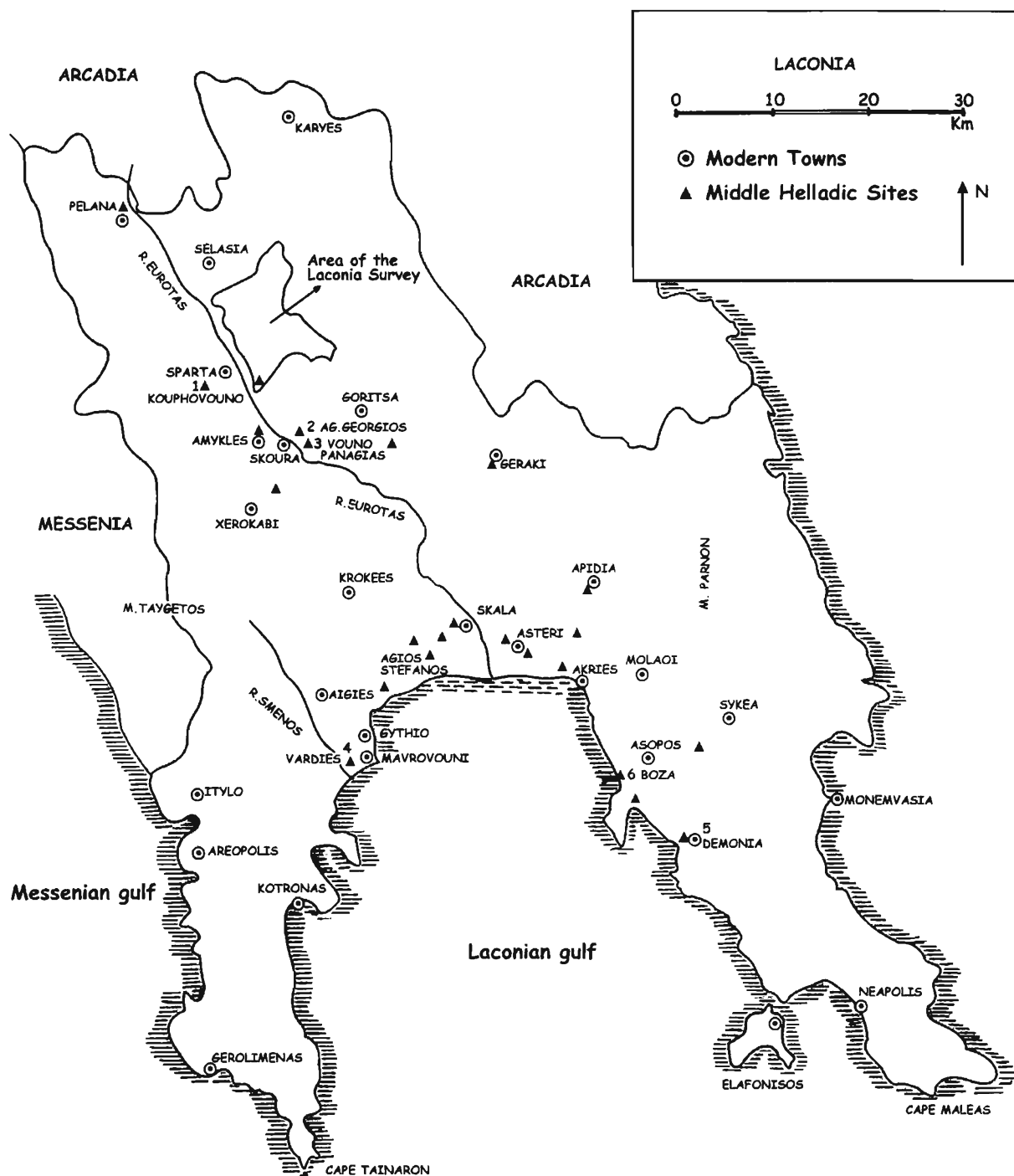


Fig. 1 – Map of Laconian Middle Helladic sites.



Fig. 2 – The passage of Taygetos to Anavryti as seen from Kouphovouno.

THE SITES

The sites are presented in a geographical order beginning with the Eurotas valley in the north, through the Mavrovouni valley on the Mani peninsula to the Maleas peninsula in the southeast.

1. Kouphovouno

Kouphovouno is a low mound covered by olive trees, lying about 2 km. southwest of Sparta, opposite the Menelaion and just before one of the main passes over Taygetos, leading to the village of Anavryti (fig. 1, site 1; fig. 2). From the north it is bordered by the stream of Parori.

Excavations undertaken by von Vacano during the Second World War brought to light house walls and graves dating to the Neolithic and EH periods⁴. All finds have been published recently by Renard⁵. Waterhouse and

⁴ A brief report is included in Walter 1942, 156-57. See also Demakopoulou 1966, 158.

⁵ Renard 1989.

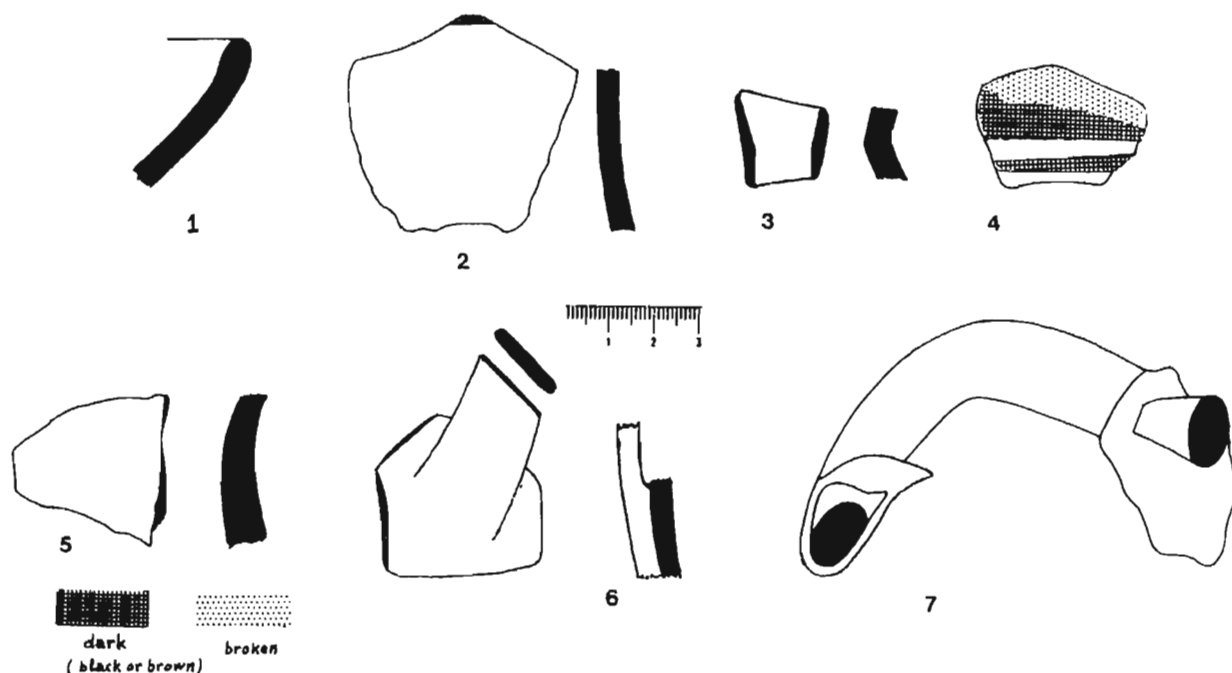


Fig. 3 – Middle Helladic pottery from Kouphovouno and Agios Georgios.

Hope Simpson observed and collected a fair amount of sherds and stone tools dated to the Neolithic, EH and LH III periods⁶.

Abundant sherds as well as wall stones are still to be seen today, strewn all over the mound, which must have been the center of the Neolithic settlement. Among them we observed and collected some sherds of high quality dated to MH period (fig. 3:1-5). During this period, the settlement was thought to have been abandoned⁷.

Given the location and size of Kouphovouno, the discovery of MH sherds at this site implies that Laconia might not have been scarcely populated in that period, as has been usually thought⁸. As research progresses indeed, it may provide a good opportunity for examining the settlement hierarchy and density in Laconia in all prehistoric periods.

⁶ Waterhouse and Hope Simpson 1960, 72-74; Hope Simpson and Dickinson 1979, 110, Site C6.

⁷ Renard 1989, 161.

⁸ Dickinson 1992, above, 110.

2. Skoura – Agios Georgios

Agios Georgios is a 230 meter-high hill rising in the middle of a little valley about 2 km. east-northeast of the modern village of Skoura, which lies on the east bank of the Eurotas river (fig. 1, site 2; figs. 4-6). It is named after a chapel built on its top. Ruins of an arcade, probably belonging to a monastery, stand on its upper east terraces. Terrace walls mark the west side and part of the east side of the hilltop. A stream runs along the east and south side of the hill to the Eurotas.

The flat top of the hill, 200×100 sq. m., is strewn with sherds and stones. The sherds date to all periods from EH down to Roman⁹ but those from EH and LH predominate. The MH period is represented by two sherds of Minyan ware (fig. 3:6-7)¹⁰. One of them was found in a pit, 1 m. deep, near the chapel.

Agios Georgios lies only 600 m. north of Vouno Panagias, where an important Bronze Age settlement was located (see below, Site 3). This suggests a settlement pattern of the satellite model, with small sites surrounding or accompanying larger ones. Such a pattern would differ from that found in other areas of Greece in the MH period, when small sites are thought to have been abandoned in favor of larger ones¹¹. However, the possibility of resettlement in the transitional phase from MH to LH cannot be excluded¹².

With the limited amount of evidence we now have from Laconia, it

⁹ Banou 1996, 78.

¹⁰ It may be argued that two sherds are insufficient evidence to assign the status of site to Agios Georgios. However, given the number of sherds of all periods that were observed and the character of the survey itself, it is possible that more MH sherds may be recognized in the future. In addition, such an assignment may be made if Agios Georgios is put in a wider perspective and criteria such as topography, location, occupation of the site throughout the Bronze Age and later periods are considered. On the relativity of density criteria, note also the statement of Mee and Forbes 1997, 35 concerning the Methana survey: "In theory we stipulated that there should be at least five artifacts per square meter but this criterion was not applied rigidly *since it was the contrast between the on-site and off-site density which we regarded as conclusive*".

¹¹ See, for example, Runnels and Van Andel 1982, 325, table 2, and Mee and Forbes 1997, 53, for a decline in MH habitation in the Southern Argolid and the Methana peninsula respectively; Wagstaff and Cherry 1982, 139, for a nucleated system of MC habitation following a dispersed EC one in the Cyclades. For an increase of dispersed MH settlements in Messenia, see McDonald and Rapp 1972, 132-33, maps 8-12 and 8-13, although continuity of settlement can only be claimed for the transition to LH (Davis *et al.* 1997, 483, although with reservations: "evidence is lacking for a marked oscillation between nucleated and dispersed settlement").

¹² Rutter 1993, 781 in the Argolid, Attica, Phocis etc.

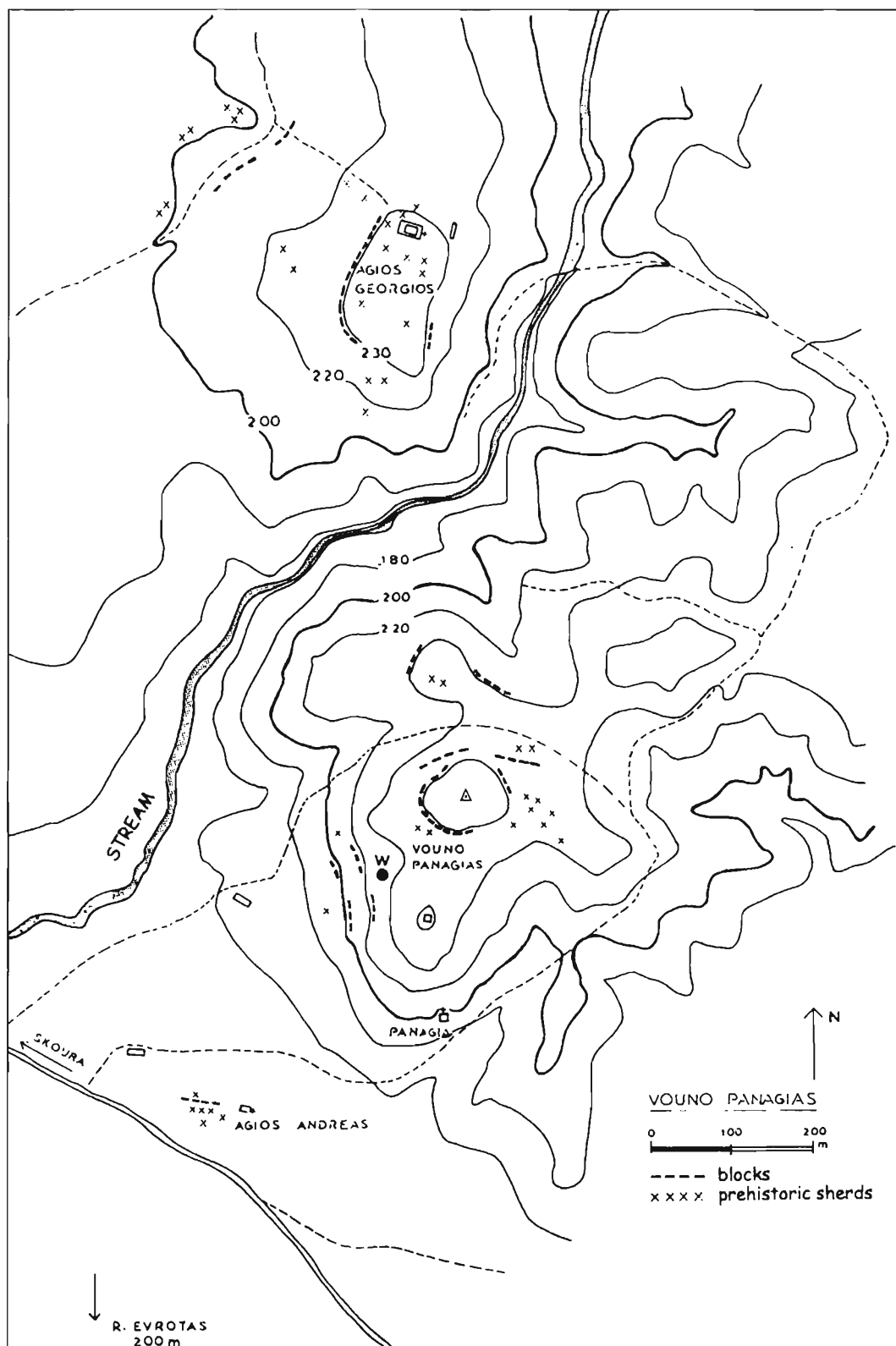


Fig. 4 – Plan of Agios Georgios and Vouno Panagias.

would be premature to elaborate on any of these possibilities. It may be said, however, that Agios Georgios is a good starting point for further research on settlement patterns in Laconia throughout the Bronze Age.

3. *Skoura – Vouno Panagias*

Vouno Panagias is a rocky, three-peaked hill, 240 m. high, ca. 2 km. southeast of the modern village of Skoura and no more than 300 m. north of the Eurotas bed. On the south, it borders the little valley where Agios Georgios lies. The hill is named after a chapel hidden in a natural cave on its southeastern side (fig. 1, site 3; figs. 4, 6 and 7).

Sherds dating from Neolithic to Roman times are abundant on the top of the hill, the rest of which is covered by bushes, and on the southern foothills extending to the Eurotas. MH Minyan and Matt-Painted sherds, as well as a sherd of Minoanizing ware, were observed and collected mainly on the top, especially around the second peak (fig. 8:8-17). It is possible that most of the prehistoric material has been washed away, down the steep slopes of the hill. The greatest amount of material of later date was found south of the hill, primarily around the chapel of Agios Andreas¹³.

There are many wall remains and stones strewn all around the top. A rock-cut path leads from the western foothills to a small plateau between the second and third peaks. To the right of this path there is an underground spring, today totally covered by bushes. Giving the impression of a natural fortress, the hill rises near the Eurotas where it turns towards the Helos plain and dominates the southeastern edge of the Sparta plain. A settlement on it would control the ancient road running along the left bank of the river between the two plains¹⁴.

The existence of a very important settlement here is indicated by the topography and the richness of the material observed and collected¹⁵. Its continuous occupation from at least as early as the EH period onward provides the opportunity to study not only the principles dictating settlement foundation but also settlement patterns and growth throughout prehistory. Paliopyrgi and Agios Vassileios, the other two most important prehistoric settlements of the Sparta plain, are well visible from Vouno Panagias and with it form an equilateral triangle. The discovery of a Minoanizing sherd shows that Minoan influence had at least in the

¹³ Banou 1996, 79.

¹⁴ Leake 1830, I, 193-94.

¹⁵ The site is identified with the ancient city of Pharis, Banou 1996, 80.



Fig. 5 – Agios Georgios from Vouno Panagias.



Fig. 6 – Agios Georgios and Vouno Panagias from a hill north of Amyklaion.



Fig. 7 – Vouno Panagias from the west.

transition to the MH period penetrated the heartland of Laconia, probably via Helos; it also reinforces the evidence of Minoan influence attested at the nearby Menelaion¹⁶.

4. *Mavrovouni – Vardies*

On the upper terraces of a hill named Vardies, about 2 km. south-west of Gytheion, Waterhouse and Hope Simpson located a Mycenaean cemetery of chamber tombs dated to LH IIIB-C¹⁷. The settlement associated with the cemetery was thought to be on a hill about 300 m. north-east of the hill of Vardies (fig. 1, site 4; figs. 9-10), where several sherds of EH, LH and Roman

¹⁶ The Minoan influence is attested in the form of some Late Minoan IB sherds (Catling 1974-75, 14-15, fig. 22; 1977-78, 30, fig. 7; 1998, 70-78), a series of female figurines (Catling 1974-75, 14 fig. 20; 1977-78, 31-32, fig. 13) and a fragment from the roof of a clay house – or sanctuary – model (Catling 1977-78, 17; 1989).

¹⁷ Waterhouse and Hope Simpson 1961, 117; Hope Simpson and Dickinson 1979, 120, Site C45.

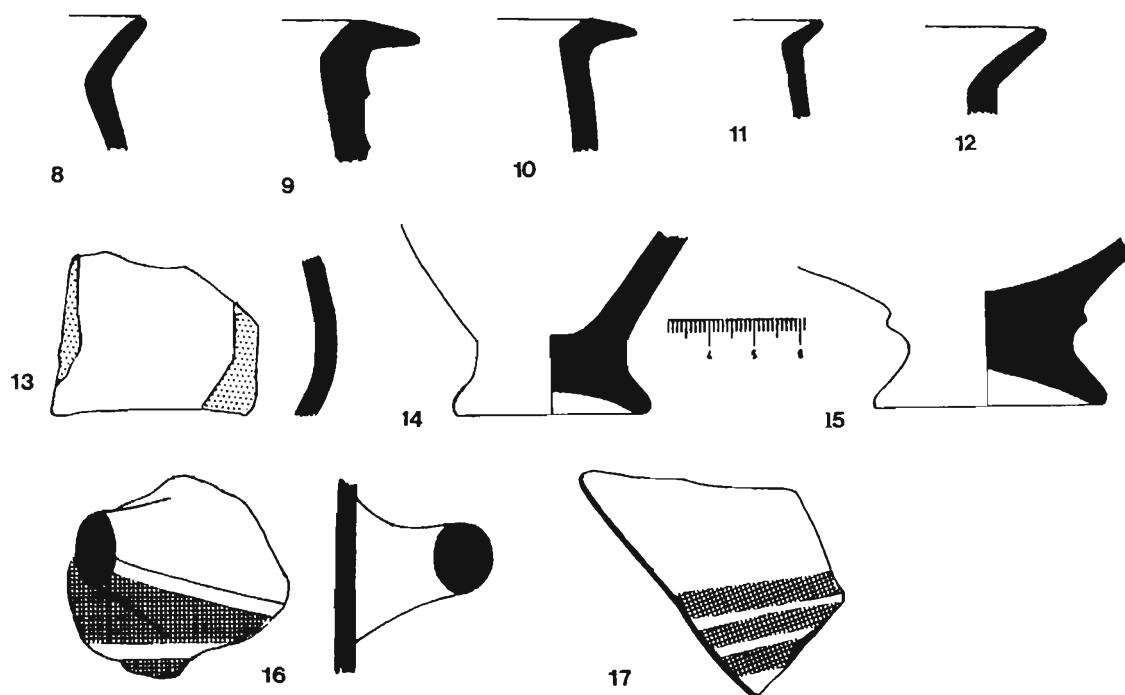


Fig. 8 – Middle Helladic pottery from Vouno Panagias.

date were collected. EH and LH sherds were also found in a well about 30 m. east of a low mound lying just opposite the hill of Vardies, on the other side of the national road, which passes by the southern foothills. The mound was thought to hide a Mycenaean tholos tomb¹⁸.

During our surveys on the hill of Vardies we observed and collected, among others, over thirty sherds of MH date (fig. 12:18-30). The sherds are from the main ceramic classes of the period best known from Agios Stephanos¹⁹. Unfortunately our surveys also revealed how seriously affected the site is by modern building activity which threatens to destroy all ancient remains including walls observed on the southeast slope.

The prominent hill of Vardies is favorably situated, as it projects from the range of hills rising in the middle of the small, very fertile plain of Mavrovouni and lies near a long beach some 300 m. to the south. It seems to have been the most important site on the west coast of the Laconian gulf

¹⁸ Waterhouse and Hope Simpson 1961, 118.

¹⁹ Rutter and Rutter 1976.

with close ties, as demonstrated by the ceramic finds, in the MH period to the coastal sites of the Helos plain²⁰. This is indicated by the discovery of several Matt-Painted sherds and also by the significant proportion of Micaceous Minoanizing sherds, compared with those found at Agios Stephanos and other sites of the Laconian gulf²¹.

5. *Daimonia – Kastelli*

Kastelli is a small hill on the western outskirts of the modern village of Daimonia, less than 1 km. from the sea on the eastern side of the Laconian Gulf. A narrow saddle connects it to the hinterland on the north but it is also easily accessible from the west through an old path cut in bedrock. It is naturally defensible: huge, natural rocks form a wall around the upper terraces with a gate on the northeast (fig. 1, site 5; fig. 11). Among the abundant sherds scattered on the upper terraces, we observed several dating to EH and LH along with ten MH sherds of Minyan, Matt-Painted and Minoanizing wares (fig. 14:31-32). None of these wares had been noticed during the survey of Waterhouse and Hope Simpson²², although the discovery of MH pottery is mentioned in later publications²³.

The discovery of MH sherds at Kastelli along with Early and LH suggests that the same sequence of Bronze Age occupation may be found at other sites around the Laconian Gulf where sherds of Early and MH periods have already been recognized²⁴.

6. *Asopos – Boza*

Boza is an oblong plateau on the western edge of the plain of Molaoi, 2 km. north of the acropolis hill of Goulas, at the southeastern foot of which lay the ancient city of Asopos²⁵. Rising ca. 30 m. above sea level, the plateau of

²⁰ Renard 1995, 87; Waterhouse and Hope Simpson 1961, for the EH period. Vardies is identified with Homeric Las, in Banou 1996, 94-96.

²¹ Rutter and Rutter 1976. For Matt-painted sherds from Daimonia and Boza see further below. Micaceous Minoanizing sherds were also found by the author in Pezoulia, halfway between Vardies and Agios Stephanos (fig. 1) and in Mezapos, opposite the Tigani peninsula, on the east coast of the Messenian gulf.

²² Waterhouse and Hope Simpson 1961, 141.

²³ Hope Simpson and Dickinson 1979, 118, Site C37; Hope Simpson 1981, 107.

²⁴ Banou 1996, 17-23.

²⁵ Goulas borders the western end of the beach at Plytra (fig. 1). For MH sherds found there, see Hope Simpson and Dickinson 1979, 116 Site C32. For its identification as the ancient city of Asopos, see Waterhouse – Hope Simpson 1961, 139-141; see also Banou 1996, 75-76 for the possible identification of Goulas with the ancient city of Kyparissia.

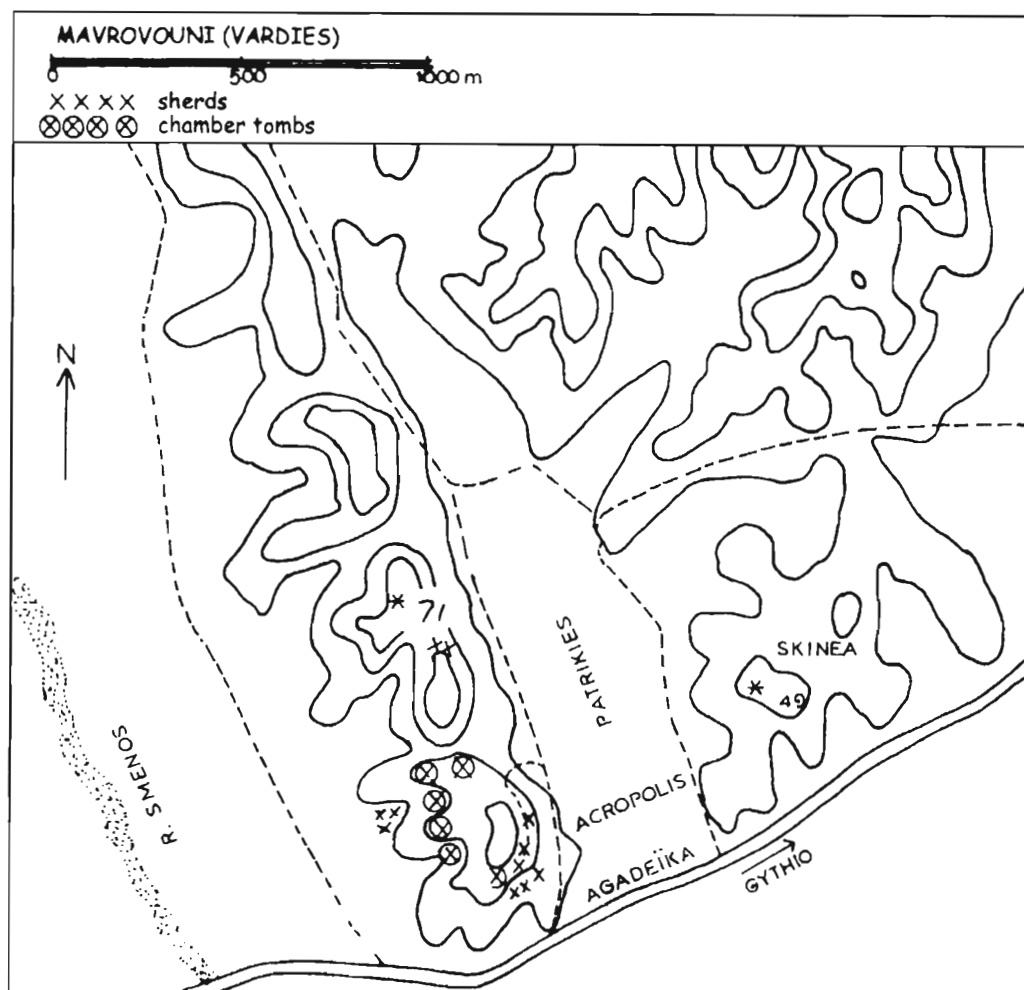


Fig. 9 – Plan of Vardies.

Boza has suffered badly from erosion on its southern side where it falls abruptly to the sea. Its southern slopes are covered with the remains of buildings probably belonging to an abandoned village of modern times. Boza is separated from Goulas by a narrow strip of land with a perennial stream running along it to a small, well protected beach (fig. 1, site 6; figs. 13 and 15).

On the southeast the plateau is surrounded by huge, natural rocks like those observed at other Laconian sites, especially in the Helos plain²⁶. A path

²⁶ Banou 1996, 49; also Daimonia (Kastelli) in this paper.



Fig. 10 – Mavrovouni – Vardies from the south.



Fig. 11 – Daimonia – Kastelli from the east.

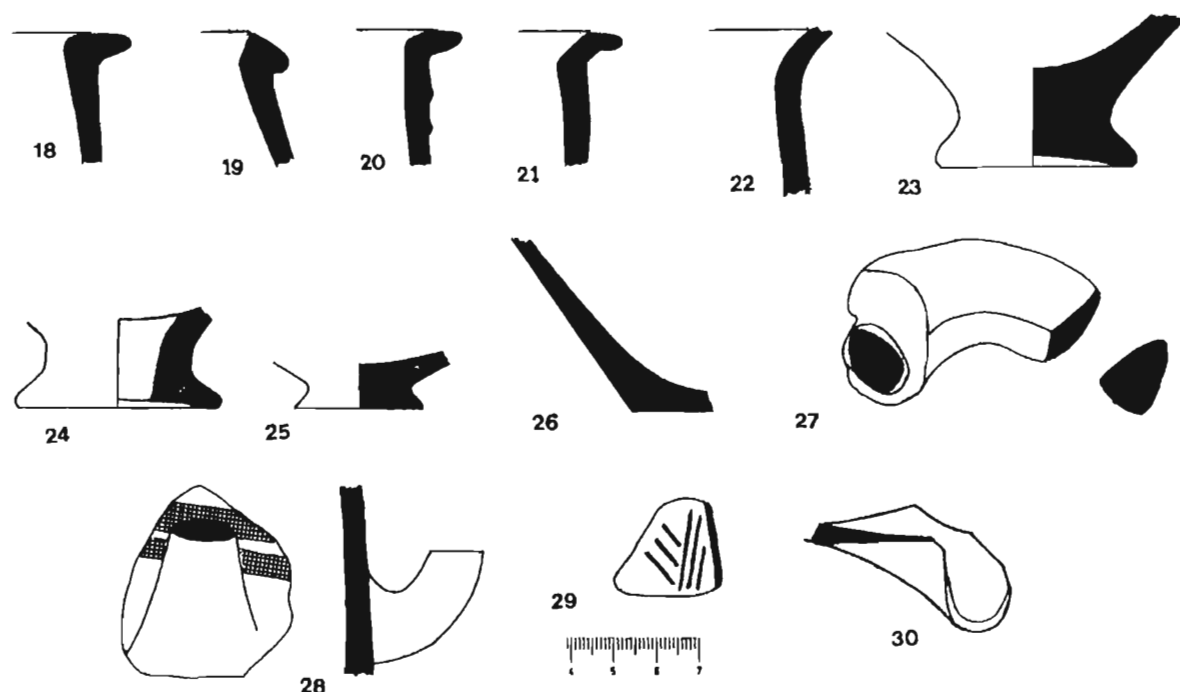


Fig. 12 – Middle Helladic pottery from Vardies.

at the southeastern end leads to the top of the plateau through these same fallen rocks. On the top and at the eastern side, sherds are abundant and date from EH down to Roman times, with the later periods being better represented. Prehistoric sherds were found on the eastern side where a bulldozer has uncovered remains of walls. Among them are ca. ten sherds dating to the end of MH, perhaps to the phase transitional to LH (fig. 14:33-34). Some recently published early LH vases were also found at Boza²⁷, probably on the southeastern edge of the plateau²⁸.

Although evidence for occupation in MH is slight, the abundance of Early and LH material and the presence nearby of Goulas make Boza a promising site for further study of settlement patterns during the Bronze Age in a remote and little researched coastal area.

²⁷ Demakopoulou 1992.

²⁸ According to information by the landowners.

THE POTTERY

In the following catalogue, a selected number of sherds from the sites described above are presented as evidence for occupation in the MH period. The sherds were recovered during surface exploration and are often too worn to allow them to be assigned to any specific phase of MH or to early MH when the same wares continue to be produced²⁹. Close examination of the most recent material we have collected and of the abundant material awaiting publication from the Menelaion, Agios Stephanos and Asteri will certainly result in the identification of more MH material as well as in a better understanding of the period throughout Mainland Greece.

The ceramic classification system used here follows that devised for Agios Stephanos by Rutter³⁰.

All sherds are illustrated in a scale of 1:2. Fabric color designations refer to the Munsell Soil Color Charts (Revised Edition 1994). Mineralogical identifications were made with naked eye by the author. All sherds are handmade unless otherwise noted. The finds are stored in the Museum of Gytheion.

CATALOGUE

Kouphovouno

1. Fig. 3. Bowl. Rim fragment, inturned. Hard, brown fabric (10YR 5/3) with gray (2.5Y 6/1) core; many very tiny silver mica and few white limestone grits visible both on the interior and exterior surfaces. Dark gray brown surface (10YR 4/2) with mottled appearance; highly burnished; soapy feel. A rib on the surface is rather accidental. Est. D. 0.28; est. H. 0.09.
MH Dark Minyan; cf: Cavanagh *et al.* 1996, fig. 12.2:16 (the rim from Kouphovouno is more rounded)³¹.
2. Fig. 3. Goblet. Body fragment. Hard, light gray (5Y 6/1) fabric, well-levigated. Highly burnished surface with soapy feel. Part of a facet is also visible.
MHII-III (or even later) Gray Minyan.
3. Fig. 3. Bowl or kantharos. Rim fragment, everted. Hard, light gray (5Y 7/2) fabric, well-levigated; a few very small white grits are visible on the interior and exterior surfaces; wheelmade. Gray (5Y 5/1) surface with mottled appearance and soapy feel. Est. D. 0.11.
MH Dark Minyan.

²⁹ Cavanagh *et al.* 1996, 26; Demakopoulou 1992, 65.

³⁰ Rutter and Rutter 1976, 8-14.

³¹ Cavanagh *et al.* 1996, 17-26.



Fig. 13 – Asopos: Boza from the south.

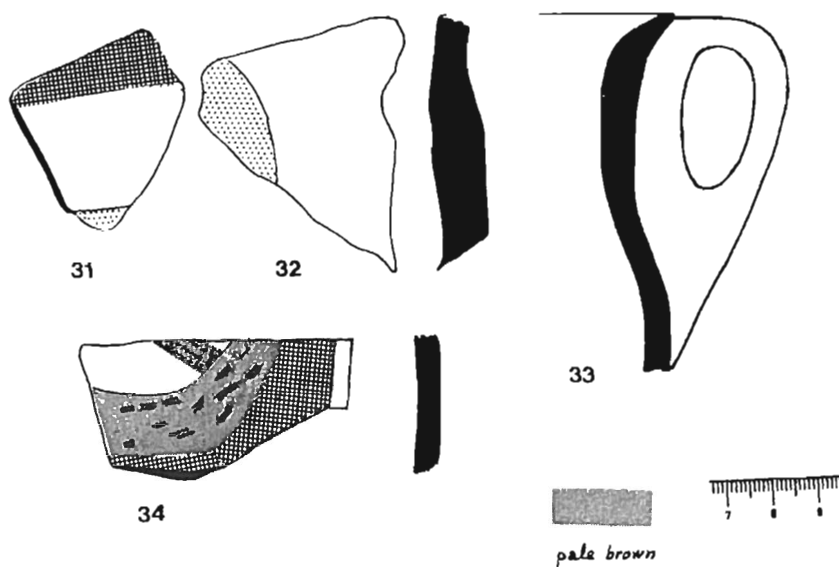


Fig. 14 – Middle and Late Helladic pottery from Daimonia and Boza.

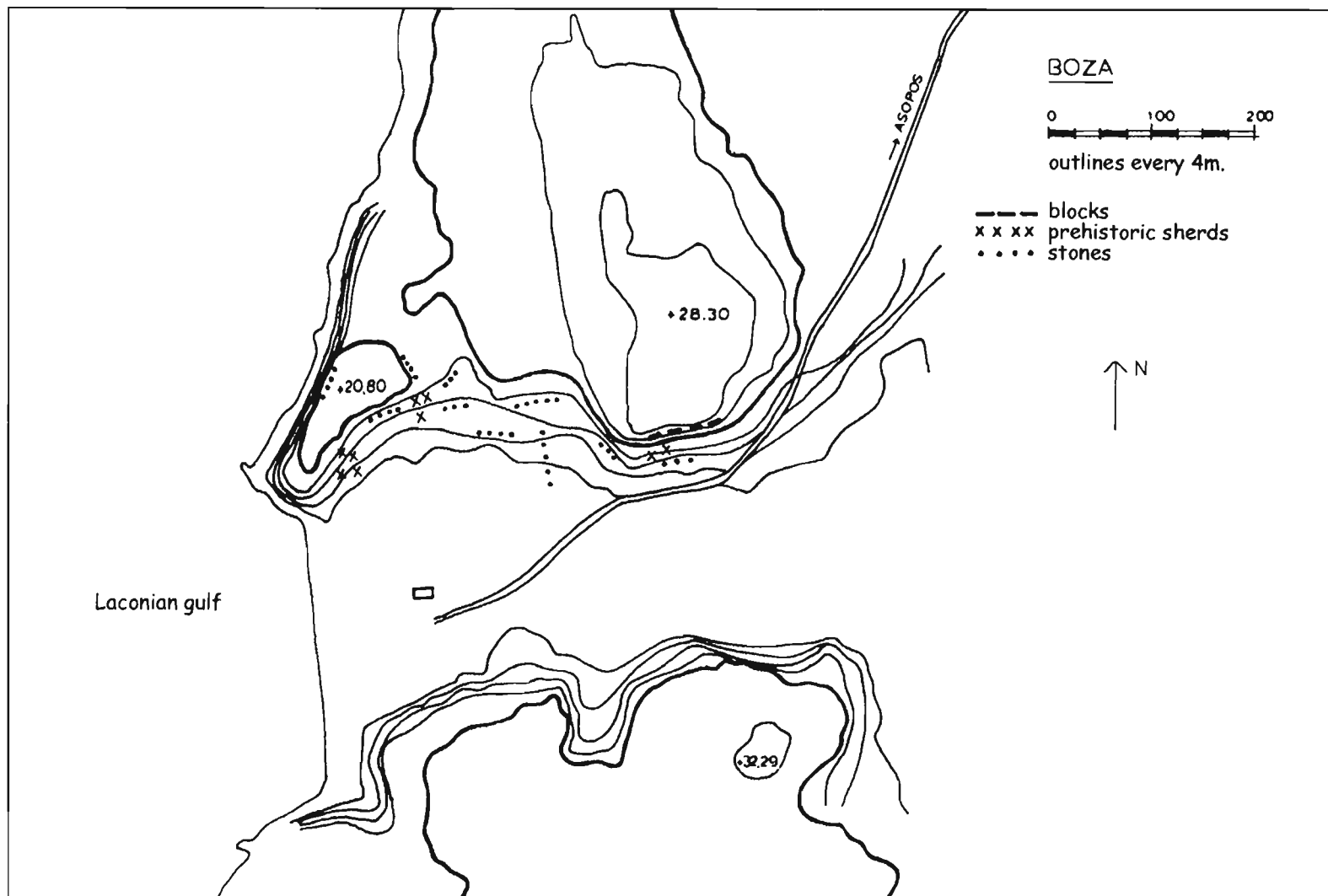


Fig. 15 – Plan of Asopos – Boza.

4. Fig. 3. Open vessel. Body fragment. Hard, unevenly fired, reddish brown (2.5YR 4/3) fabric; well-levigated; wheelmade. Surface: interior brown (7.5YR 5/3); deep, parallel grooving marks visible; exterior brown (7.5YR 6/4); burnished; decorated with a wide horizontal band in lustrous black (7.5YR 3/1 very dark gray) color thinning to brown (7.5YR 5/3) at the edge and another horizontal line over it in added lustrous dusky red (2.5YR 5/3); another line of the same color runs parallel to the band above it³².
MH, Fine Minoanizing?
5. Fig. 3. Bowl. Body fragment. Medium hard, reddish brown (2.5YR 4/4) fabric; well-levigated, with few, very tiny silver mica and red inclusions. Heavy black (7.5YR 3/1 very dark gray) slip on the surface; highly burnished on the exterior.
MH Dark Minyan.

Skoura – Agios Georgios

6. Fig. 3. Kantharos. Body fragment with strap handle. Hard, evenly fired, light brownish (2.5Y 6/2) fabric; several tiny mudstone and silver mica inclusions visible all over. Cf. Cavanagh *et al.* 1996, fig. 12.1:8.
MH Dark Minyan.
7. Fig. 3. Jug. Handle, pushed through. Hard, light brownish gray (2.5Y 6/2) to gray (2.5Y 6/1) fabric; numerous inclusions of various sizes and colors, the larger ones of marble and a purple stone protrude from the surface. Pale brown (10YR 6/3) slip on the surface.
MH III/LH I Yellow Minyan or Matt Painted, Gritty.

Skoura – Vouno Panagias

8. Fig. 8. Bowl with high, everted rim. Rim fragment. Hard; reddish yellow (5YR 6/8) fabric; numerous inclusions of limestone, quartz, schist and clay ranging in size from less than 0.001 m. to 0.003 m. giving the impression of intentional variation to achieve a decorative effect. Surface: interior reddish yellow (5YR 6/6); exterior light brown (7.5YR 6/4); smoothed; decorated with incised vertical lines. Est. D. 0.11.
MH Coarse Incised; cf. Cavanagh *et al.* fig. 12.4:8 (although this is thicker); French in Taylour 1972, 267, fig. 38:10 from Agios Stephanos; Waterhouse and Hope Simpson 1960, fig. 16:9 from Asteri-Karayiousi. For the decoration, see McDonald and Hope Simpson 1969, pl. 45:a and Howell 1992, fig. 3-60, P2662 from Messenia; Howell 1970, pl. 34:d from Dimitsana, Arcadia.
9. Fig. 8. Goblet with heavy, horizontal, spreading lip. Rim fragment. Hard, red (2.5YR 5/8) fabric; several very tiny mica and quartz inclusions visible (especially on the surface). Heavy black (10YR 3/1 very dark gray) slip on the surface, slightly burnished. Two facets preserved on shoulder. Est. D. 0.16.

³² A very similar sherd from Palaiokastros, Arcadia is displayed in the Tripolis Museum.

- MHI-II³³ Dark Minyan; cf. Cavanagh *et al.* 1996, fig. 12.1:13; French in Taylour 1972, fig. 37:6 from Agios Stephanos; Waterhouse and Hope Simpson 1960, fig. 16:8 from Asteri-Karayiousi.
10. Fig. 8. Bowl with everted rim. Rim fragment. Hard, evenly fired, very pale brown (10YR 7/3) fabric. Traces of burning visible on interior and exterior surface. Est. D. 0.25.
MHII (or even later) Coarse; Cf. Cavanagh *et al.* 1996, fig. 12.1:15; Waterhouse and Hope Simpson 1960, fig. 16:2 from Asteri-Karayiousi.
11. Fig. 8. Cup with everted rim. Rim fragment. Hard, red (2.5YR 5/8) fabric, with few very tiny silver mica inclusions. Heavy, black (7.5YR 4/1 dark gray) slip on the surface; fingertip impression visible on the exterior rim. Est. D. 0.07.
MH Dark Minyan; cf. Rutter and Rutter 1976, ill. 7:6-8.
12. Fig. 8. Cup with everted rim. Rim fragment. Hard, reddish yellow (7.5YR 6/6) fabric with a gray (2.5 Y 6/1) core, well-levigated. Heavy, very pale brown (10YR 7/3) slip on the surface; highly burnished; soapy feel, striations running in different directions visible on the interior. Est. D. 0.08.
MH Brown Minyan; cf. Cavanagh *et al.* 1996, fig. 12.1:9; Rutter and Rutter 1976, ill. 7:6-8.
13. Fig. 8. Two-handled goblet. Handle. Medium hard, light red (2.5YR 6/6) fabric, with a gray (5YR 4/1 dark gray) core; numerous very tiny silver mica inclusions. Heavy, dark gray (10YR 4/1) slip on the surface; soapy feel.
MH Dark Minyan; cf. Rutter and Rutter 1976, ill. 7:4; Taylour 1972, fig. 6.
14. Fig. 8. Goblet with low pedestal foot, concave underneath. Base fragment. Hard, pink (7.5YR 7/4) fabric with a gray (10YR 6/1) core; numerous very tiny silver mica and a few dark medium-sized (0.001-0.004) inclusions. Very pale brown (10YR 7/4) surface; unburnished. Est. D. 0.04.
MHIII/LHI Gritty Yellow Minyan/Matt-painted; cf. Taylour 1972, fig. 31; Rutter and Rutter 1976, nos 221-223, 246, 297, 620.
15. Fig. 8. Goblet with low pedestal foot, concave underneath. Base fragment. Soft, evenly fired, pink (7.5YR 8/4) fabric with several very tiny silver mica and red and dark medium-sized (0.001-0.003) inclusions. Very pale brown (10YR 8/4) surface; unburnished. One plastic ring visible around waist of foot; worn. Est. D. 0.045.
MHIII/LHI Gritty Yellow Minyan/Matt-painted; cf. Rutter and Rutter 1976, ill. 10.223³⁴.
16. Fig. 8. Jar with horizontal handles. Body fragment with one half of handle preserved. Sandy, partially burnt, unevenly fired fabric, red (2.5YR 5/8) near exterior surface, reddish yellow (7.5YR 6/6) near interior surface; many tiny

³³ According to C. Zerner, faceted shoulders are common on Dark Minyan and other variants of burnished wares throughout the MH period.

³⁴ For the rarity of foot rings in the sherd material of Agios Stephanos see Rutter and Rutter 1976, 37.

limestone and clay inclusions, few very tiny silver mica and red inclusions scattered throughout. Surface: thin, light yellowish brown (10YR 6/4) slip; exterior burnished. Light-on-dark decoration: upper part of vessel coated with paint ranging from red (2.5YR 4/6) to dusky red (2.5YR 3/2) to black (10YR 3/1 very dark gray); two horizontal bands in added white (2.5Y 8/2 pale yellow), one continuing along top of handle; lower body, below handle zone, undecorated.

MH Oatmeal Minoanizing; cf. Taylour 1972, 234, HS 32. 63-52, pl. 45:c, d; Rutter and Rutter 1976, ill. 8:114; Zerner 1986, fig. 37:54.

17. Fig. 8. Jug/jar. Body fragment. Hard, fired pink (7.5YR 7/4) fabric near interior surface, pale brown (10YR 6/3) near exterior surface, grayish brown (10YR 5/2) core; numerous limestone and dark inclusions of different sizes. Heavy, very pale brown (10YR 7/3) slip on the surface. Three horizontal bands in dull brown (7.5YR 5/2) paint on the exterior. Wall thickness: 0.003 – 0.005 m. MHIII/LHI Gritty Matt Painted.

Mavrovouni – Vardies

18. Fig. 12. Bowl with everted rim. Rim fragment. Medium hard, gray (2.5Y 5/1) fabric with a brown (7.5YR 5/4) core; numerous mica inclusions that are also visible on the surface making it glisten and several bits of rock of various colors and sizes that also protrude from the surface. Red (2.5YR 6/8 light red) slip on the surface, smoothed. Est. D. 0.16.
MHIII to LHI Micaceous Minoanizing.
19. Fig. 12. Hole-mouthed jar. Rim fragment. Hard, evenly fired, reddish yellow (5YR 6/8) fabric; numerous silver mica inclusions of different sizes visible all over. Worn surface. Est. D. 0.09.
MHII-III Micaceous Minoanizing; cf. Harding *et al.* 1969, fig. 14: 22 from Pavlopetri.
20. Fig. 12. Goblet with everted rim. Rim fragment. Hard, evenly fired, grayish brown (10YR 5/2) fabric; few small limestone inclusions, very tiny particles of silver mica visible all over fabric and surface. Dark gray (10YR 4/1) surface. Two facets preserved on the shoulder. Est. D. 0.095.
MHI-II³⁵ Dark Minyan; cf. Waterhouse and Hope Simpson 1960, fig. 16:4 from Agios Stephanos; Rutter and Rutter 1976, ill. 7:2.
21. Fig. 12. Goblet. Rim fragment. Hard, brown (7.5YR 5/6 strong brown) fabric with a red (2.5YR 4/6) core. Slipped with a brown (10YR 4/2 dark grayish brown) slip all over; highly burnished. Est. D. 0.08.
MHI-II Dark Minyan; cf. Rutter and Rutter 1976, ill. 7:4.
22. Fig. 12. Jug or jar. Fragment of neck and shoulder. Hard, pink (7.5YR 7/4) fabric with numerous very small clay, stone and silver mica grits. White (10YR 8/4 very pale brown) slip on the exterior. Dark brown (7.5YR 4/1) band painted around neck.

³⁵ See above, fn. 9.

- MHIII/LHI Gritty Matt Painted; cf. Rutter and Rutter 1976, ill. 15:674-675, 677-684.
23. Fig. 12. Goblet. Base fragment. Hard, gray (10YR 5/1) fabric up to the surface; numerous mica inclusions that are also visible on the surface making it glisten and several bits of rock of various colors and sizes that also protrude from the surface. Light red (2.5YR 6/8) surface; smoothed. D. 0.045.
MHII-III Micaceous Minoanizing.
24. Fig. 12. Bowl. Base fragment. Medium hard, dark gray (5YR 4/1) fabric up to the surface; many tiny silver mica inclusions visible all over. Reddish brown (5YR 5/3) surface; smoothed. D. 0.043.
MHII-III Micaceous Minoanizing.
25. Fig. 12. Cup with low foot, flat underneath. Base fragment. Hard, evenly fired, grayish brown (10YR 5/2) fabric; few, very tiny silver mica inclusions visible all over. Burnished surface with soapy feel. D. 0.031.
MH Dark Minyan.
26. Fig. 12. Jug or jar. Fragment of lower body and base. Soft, evenly fired, very pale brown (10YR 7/4) fabric; numerous inclusions of various sizes and colors visible all over. Smoothed surface. Rather dull reddish brown (2.5YR 4/3) band painted around base. Est. D. 0.07.
MHI-II Dull Painted; cf. Rutter and Rutter 1976, 13.
27. Fig. 12. Jar with horizontal handles. Horizontal, ledge handle fragment, pushed through the body wall, end protruding into the interior of the vessel has been neatly cut off³⁶. Fabric and surface: soft, light and porous; evenly fired; whitish slip on the surface (2.5Y 8/3 pale yellow).
MH Dull Painted.
28. Fig. 12. Jug. Body fragment with lower third of handle. Hard, very pale brown (10YR 7/4) fabric with a gray (2.5Y 5/1) core; many very tiny white and dark inclusions and some silver mica visible. Thin white (2.5Y 8/2 pale yellow) slip on the surface. Two matt brown (10YR 4/2 dark grayish brown) bands encircle the handle.
MH III/LH I Gritty Matt Painted; cf. Rutter and Rutter 1976, ill. 15:676.
29. Fig. 12. Cup or bowl. Body fragment. Soft, evenly fired, gray (2.5Y 6/1) fabric; few small white and black inclusions. Incised decoration: two opposed groups of diagonal lines, three preserved.
MH Dark Minyan.
30. Fig. 12. Hole-mouthed jar. Spout fragment. Soft, evenly fired, very pale brown (10YR 8/4) fabric; numerous medium to large dark grits visible. Black (10YR 3/1 very dark gray) paint, easily flaked off, partially coats the sherd.
MH Oatmeal Minoanizing; cf. Rutter and Rutter 1976, 10-11.

³⁶ The method of manufacture and attachment of the handle is characteristic of Dull Painted and Matt Painted wares from Laconia (Cavanagh *et al.* 1996, 24; Zerner, personal communication).

Daimonia – Kastelli

31. Fig. 14. Jar. Body fragment. Soft, evenly fired, brown (7.5YR 5/4) fabric; many dark and limestone inclusions. Pale yellow (2.5YR 7/3) slip on the surface. Dark-on-light decoration with a wide horizontal band in lustrous black (2.5Y 3/1 very dark gray) paint, easily flaked off. Wall thickness: 0.008.
MH Oatmeal Minoanizing; cf. Rutter and Rutter 1976, 10-11.
32. Fig. 14. Bowl. Body fragment. Hard, grayish brown (10YR 5/2) fabric; well-levigated; evenly fired.
MH Gray Minyan; cf. Rutter and Rutter 1976, 6.

Asopos – Boza

33. Fig. 14. Cup or bowl. Body fragment. Hard, reddish yellow (5YR 6/6) fabric with a reddish brown (5YR 5/4) core; well-levigated, wheelmade. Very pale brown (10YR 8/4) slip on the surface; burnished int., ext.; striations running in different directions visible on the interior. Dark-on-light, black (2.5Y 3/1 very dark gray) paint, almost all flaked off, leaving a light reddish brown “negative” wide curvilinear line, diagonal line inside and tangent.
LHI
34. Fig. 14. Bowl. Rim fragment with handle. Hard, evenly fired, dark gray (2.5Y 4/1) fabric with numerous, very tiny silver mica inclusions and some limestone inclusions. Highly burnished surface with soapy feel. Est. D. 0.15.
MHIII Dark Minyan; cf. Rutter and Rutter 1976, ill. 8:69 (Period II).

CONCLUSIONS

From the evidence presented above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. MH occupation is now attested at five more prehistoric sites in Laconia, raising the total number known to 36 (including seven of the nine sites of the Laconia Survey)³⁷. Of those five, three are new: Agios Georgios, Vouno Panagias and Boza. At two sites, Kouphovouno and Vardies, MH occupation is attested for the first time. The discovery of ten MH sherds at Daimonia augments earlier, meager evidence.

2. All six sites seem to have been inhabited in each of the three periods of the Bronze Age, although perhaps not continuously. Most of the MH material collected dates to the later part of the period (II-III) and to the beginning of LH. However, given that those sites were only extensively surveyed, there is a possibility that intensive survey or excavation will reveal earlier MH material³⁸.

³⁷ The remaining two, Menelaion and Aphissou, were already known.

³⁸ Note, however, that a similar picture was recently gained for Messenia (Davis *et al.* 1997, 483).

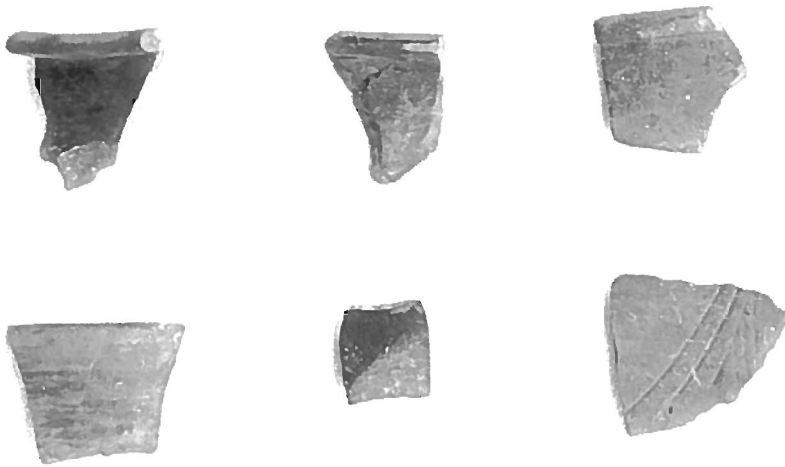


Fig. 16 – Middle Helladic pottery from Asteri – Karayiousi.

3. As far as settlement patterns are concerned, Agios Georgios points to a nucleated model of settlement hierarchy. Of special interest in this respect is Boza, which seems to have been equally important to the nearby site of Goulas. Until further research is undertaken, however, nothing can be said with certainty.

4. The pottery recovered from sites situated well into the heartland of Laconia – Kouphovouno, Vouno Panagias – is similar to that recovered from coastal sites. It must be pointed out however, that the best Minyan pottery observed so far comes from Asteri-Karayiousi, a former coastal site in the Helos plain (fig. 16)³⁹. This suggests that the Laconian gulf might have played an important role in the introduction of new pottery styles and might have given impulse to trade and communication with other regions of the Aegean⁴⁰.

Many prehistoric Laconian sites are seriously threatened by modern building and cultivation. This is especially true for two important sites of the

³⁹ Sherds collected during my survey. According to C. Zerner (personal communication), MH sherd material from Agios Stephanos – another previously coastal site in the Helos plain – is of very good quality too.

⁴⁰ Note, however, that Gray Minyan pottery from Agios Stephanos is dated in the last phase of the MH period (Cavanagh *et al.* 1996, 26 note 39, citing Zerner's personal communication).

Laconian gulf mentioned above, namely Vardies and Asteri-Karayiousi. We hope that this paper will stimulate further research in Laconia before valuable evidence is lost forever.

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