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The topography of Hermione—A preliminary outline

Abstract

The preliminary results of a survey of ancient Hermione (epichoric Hermion) are presented in this paper. The survey was conducted during three short campaigns over the period 2015–2017, and focused on the urban layout and development of the ancient city. Because the ancient city area more or less coincides with modern Ermioni, the investigation was mainly restricted to the documentation and analysis of architectural remains that were both still visible above ground and accessible. However, the report also includes a thorough re-evaluation of previous scholarship, taking into consideration remains that are no longer visible. The author identifies three questions of particular interest, relating to the exact location, extent, and potential relocation of the ancient city, and points to the lack of a coherent interpretation. On the basis of present data, the author proposes that Hermione was indeed relocated to a new site, less than 1 km away from its original position, in the early 3rd century BC, and highlights the urban, social, and religious consequences of such an event. However, pending further evidence, the suggested scenario remains a hypothesis.*

Keywords: Hermion, Hermione, *polis*, urban topography, urban relocation

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Editorial note: The section on Hermione, published in *OpAthRom* 14, comprises six articles: Papadimitriou 2021; this contribution by Henrik Gerding; Blid 2021; Klingborg 2021; Kossyva 2021; Wallensten 2021.

Introduction

Investigations on the topography of ancient Greek cities were first carried out by early antiquarians in an effort to confirm and elaborate on the descriptions given by ancient literary sources, such as Pausanias.¹ In the late 19th century this pursuit was systematized and meticulously documented within the framework of large-scale excavations.² Due to the publication of often very detailed archaeological plans, partly based on a military cartographic tradition, it was possible to compare the layout of various Greek *poleis*. As a result, urban topography developed into a scholarly research field in its own right, intimately connected to the study of ancient monuments, domestic architecture, and city planning.

The significant shift towards regional studies and field survey from the 1960s onwards broadened the scope of Classical archaeology, beyond the rather narrow interest in nucleated settlements and sanctuaries. However, urban studies never fell out of focus; on the contrary, they were enriched by the new methodologies of intensive surface surveys,³ and later by remote sensing technologies. After the so-called “spatial turn” in the late 1980s and early 1990s,⁴ topographical studies became increasingly orientated towards social space, phenomenology, and the interaction between humans and landscape or built environment in general. With time, geographical information systems provided enhanced possibilities to integrate different kinds of spatially related archaeological data with the traditional topographical use of cartography. As a result of the most recent technical and methodological developments, the three-dimensional aspect of the urban landscape can now be more fully taken into account. This has also been one of the

¹ For a historical overview of the study and visualization of ancient Greek and Roman cities, see Piccoli 2017.

² E.g. at Pergamon, Assos, Ephesos, Priene, and Corinth.

³ See e.g. Bintliff & Snodgrass 1988; Alcock 1991. For more recent developments in intensive urban survey, see Lolos *et al.* 2007; Bintliff *et al.* 2017.

⁴ See e.g. Kent 1990; Parker Pearson & Richards 1994.

guiding principles of a recent project, *A Greek cityscape and its people—A study of ancient Hermione* (2015–2017), conducted by the Ephorate of Antiquities in the Argolid together with the Swedish Institute at Athens.⁵

The purpose of this paper is to summarize and assess previously published information on the topography of ancient Hermione in the light of the preliminary survey carried out within the framework of this project between 2015 and 2017. At the same time, the explication of the various trajectories and contrasting statements found in previous research will contribute to a better understanding of the results of the survey. Thus, old and new observations will be discussed in close connection. Hopefully, this review will provide a baseline for future interpretations of the urban layout, spatial organization, and development of Hermione. In addition, some topographical problems will be pointed out as relevant topics for further research, but also met with tentative solutions.

Brief description and history of the site

The ancient city of Hermione (or Hermion) was a Greek *polis* centre on the coast of the mountainous eastern part of the Argolid, known in antiquity as the Akte.⁶ It is located in the same place and covers, more or less, the same area as the modern town of Ermioni, which overlays the ancient remains (Fig. 1). The ancient (and modern) city area occupies a narrow peninsula, which extends roughly 1.2 km into the sea with the small Limani Bay to the north and the much larger Kapari Bay to the south, both providing good natural harbours. The western, landward, end of the peninsula measures approximately 250 m across from the north to the south harbour. About halfway towards the eastern tip, the distance diminishes to 115 m, before it increases again to a maximum width of c. 200 m. The narrow point at the middle of the isthmus also corresponds to a depression between two elongated hills, or ridges, which reach the maximum elevations of 19 masl (west ridge) and 23 masl (east ridge) respectively.

Whereas the western half of the peninsula is a densely built-up area today, the eastern half—known as the Bisti—has been turned into a recreational area, planted with pine trees.⁷

At the landward end of the peninsula, after another slump in the terrain, the city area rises steeply towards the west. These are the eastern slopes of the Pron, a ridge that extends inland for almost 1.5 km on the same axis as the peninsula, skirting the north shore of the Kapari Bay. Its western peak has an altitude of about 70 masl; the eastern one is only a few metres lower. To the north of the Pron a flat alluvial plain spreads out, reaching the inner shore of the Limani Bay.

Based on the scattered finds of pottery we may assume that the eastern part of the city area (the Bisti) was inhabited at least from the early Archaic (Sub-Geometric) period.⁸ Even if this allows us to hypothesize the presence of a settlement at least from the beginning of the 7th century BC, it should be noted that this settlement was not necessarily yet an urban *polis* centre. The Homeric catalogue of ships does mention Hermione, but the controversy regarding the origin of the catalogue makes it difficult to assess the chronological significance of this particular passage.⁹ However, we are probably safe in envisaging Hermione as an independent polity of some importance from the mid-6th century BC.¹⁰ The cult of Demeter Chthonia at Hermione is testified from the late 6th century BC,¹¹ and the sanctuary is mentioned in a play by Euripides c. 416 BC.¹² Hermione was a staunch ally of Sparta for the greater part of the Classical period, but may have been won over by Epaminondas in 369 BC.¹³ Shortly thereafter the *polis* started minting its own coins for a brief period, probably until its defeat in the revolt against Macedonia in 322 BC (minting was not taken up again until the 1st century BC).¹⁴ During the following decades Hermione seems to have been caught up in the Successor Wars.¹⁵ In 229 BC Xenon, a tyrant of Hermione, resigned and the city joined the Achaean League.¹⁶

the entire peninsula, but sometimes only the eastern half (as here).

⁸ Jameson *et al.* 1994, 584. Philadelphus (1909), who excavated on the Bisti, noted the complete absence of prehistoric sherds. However, Geometric graves have been found in the necropolis area outside the city (Papadimitriou 1994).

⁹ Hom. *Il.* 2.560. Cf. Hes. *Cat. frag.* 68.55–62, the date of which is even more controversial. For a summary of the scholarly debate, see Sammons 2010, 4–8.

¹⁰ Other early sources, pertaining to the early or mid-5th century BC, generally refer to “Hermionians” rather than to “Hermion(e)”, but still portray a full-fledged city state: Hdt. 3.59.1, 7.6.3, 8.43, 8.73.2, 9.28.4; *Syll.*³ 31 (the Delphic Serpent Column), 32 (dedication by the Hermionians to Apollon at Delphi from c. 480–475 BC); *IG IV* 683–684 (two dedications to Demeter [“cow-bases”] found in the “Venetian Wall” on the Bisti, and dated to c. 460–450 BC; Jeffery 1961, 178–179, 182). For a comprehensive list of sources, see Hansen & Nielsen 2004, 609.

¹¹ Lasos of Hermione mentions the cult in a poem (*PMG*, frag. 702). For an updated bibliography on this fragment, see Prauscello 2011.

¹² Eur. *HF* 615.

¹³ Thuc. 1.128.2, 2.56.5, 8.3.2, 8.33.1; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.16, 6.2.3, 7.2.2–3; Diod. Sic. 15.69.1.

¹⁴ Grandjean 1990. Cf. Diod. Sic. 18.11.2.

¹⁵ Diod. Sic. 19.54.4.

¹⁶ Polyb. 2.44.6; Strab. 8.7.3; Plut. *Arat.* 34.

⁵ The project has been led by Alcestis Papadimitriou, Ephor of Antiquities in the Argolid, with Jenny Wallensten, Director of the Swedish Institute at Athens, as responsible for the Swedish participation. It is followed by a new five-year programme: *Ancient Hermione—A model city?* (2018–2022). For the methodological approach of the project, see Landeschi *et al.* 2020 and Papadimitriou 2021 in this volume.

⁶ A general account of the geology and history of the region is provided by Jameson *et al.* 1994. For the history of ancient Hermione, see Papadimitriou 2021 in this volume.

⁷ The usage of toponyms adheres to that of previous publications, in order to facilitate cross-references. However, “Bisti” is sometimes used to indicate

Ample archaeological, literary, epigraphical, and numismatic evidence testifies to the continued existence of the city throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods. In particular, the combination of these sources with the results of an intensive regional survey has allowed scholars to explore the economy of a Greek *polis* in some detail.¹⁷ Datable archaeological evidence, including modifications to the basilica, mosaics, and finds of coins, suggest that the city flourished at least until the late 6th century AD,¹⁸ but in the following century it probably went into decline and was subsequently abandoned in favour of a new inland settlement at Kranidi.¹⁹ The later village of Kastri, first mentioned in documents from the 14th century AD and situated on the eastern slopes of the Pron, may have received its name from a medieval, Frankish, fortress located on the Bisti.²⁰ However, the visible remains of this castle are usually attributed to the (first) Venetian period, beginning in the late 14th century and lasting until the fall of Nauplion in 1540.²¹ The castle at Kastri fell into the hands of the Turks in 1537 and was destroyed, but the settlement survived. With time Kastri expanded onto the peninsula and resumed its original name—Ermioni.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON THE TOPOGRAPHY OF HERMIONE

The location of ancient Hermione has been known for a long time, thanks mainly to the testimony of Pausanias (2.34.4–2.36.3), who gives a detailed account of the city.²² One of the first modern scholars to visit the site was the epigraphist Michel Fourmont, who recorded numerous inscriptions during a stay in Hermione in 1729, unfortunately using rather destructive methods. In his letters, he mentions his demolition of Hermione and Troizen with some degree of satisfaction. After stating that he found many inscriptions at the former site, he adds “*Mais il en a couté le chateau, je l’ai totalement abattu, [...]*”.²³

During the 19th century several antiquarians and topographers passed by Hermione as they were tracing the path of Pausanias: William Gell in 1804, François Pouqueville before 1820, Abel Blouet and Émile Le Puillon de Boblaye in 1828, Ernst Curtius in 1840, Conrad Bursian perhaps in the mid-1850s, and Alexander Conze and Adolf Michaelis in 1860.²⁴ These early travellers were followed by the cultural geographer Antonios Miliarakis and the geologist Alfred Philippson towards the end of the century.²⁵ In the 20th century the most notable studies of Hermione were made by Alexandros Philadelphus (1909), August Frickenhaus and Walter Müller (1911), Virginia and Michael Jameson (1950), Efstathios Stikas (1955; 1956), Marian Holland McAllister (1969), Nikolaos Faraklas (1973), Vassilis Gkatsos (1996), and Alcestis Papadimitriou (1994; 2007; 2012).²⁶

In the early years, the numerous inscriptions of Hermione attracted the most interest,²⁷ and although many early reports testify to the presence of extensive (albeit poorly preserved) architectural remains, these were never recorded or described in detail. Some of the available reports are not based on personal observations,²⁸ and sometimes they indiscriminately relate unsubstantiated statements by others. As can be gathered, this has given rise to the circulation of spurious information and misunderstandings regarding the ruins of the city. However, it can be established from these reports that the remains of the ancient city once covered the entire peninsula, more or less, and that they were also to be found in the village of Kastri, clinging to the slopes of the Pron.²⁹

With the exception of an unpublished trial dig undertaken in 1860,³⁰ no archaeological excavations were carried out in

¹⁷ Jameson *et al.* 1994; Bresson 2016, 361–364.

¹⁸ Modifications to the basilica: Sodini 1970, 707; Spiro 1978, 150–168. Mosaics in private houses: Jameson & Jameson 1950, 36–41; Stikas 1956; 1976; Sodini 1970, 707; Spiro 1978, 168–179; Jameson *et al.* 1994, 591; Sarri 1994. Coins: Jameson & Jameson 1950, 43.

¹⁹ Jameson *et al.* 1994, 113, 595.

²⁰ Jameson *et al.* 1994, 113, 121. The possibility of an early fortress on the Pron should also be considered.

²¹ See e.g. Gell 1810, 130; Curtius 1852, 457; Jameson *et al.* 1994, 121 n. 51.

²² The name may never have been completely forgotten (Jameson *et al.* 1994, 121 n. 51). Hermione figures on a map of the Peloponnese by Blaeu from 1659 and is correctly associated with the contemporary village of “Kastri” on another map of ancient Greece by d’Anville from 1792.

²³ Dodwell 1819, 408.

²⁴ Gell 1810, 123–130; Pouqueville 1827, 257–261; Blouet 1833, 173; de Boblaye 1836, 60; Curtius 1852, 457–460; Conze & Michaelis 1861, 7–11; Bursian 1868, 93–98.

²⁵ Miliarakis 1886, 250–252; Philippson 1892, 49–50.

²⁶ Apart from these dedicated studies, some influential summaries have also been published in major reference works: Bölte 1912 (*RE*); Wyatt 1976 (*PECS*); Hansen & Nielsen 2004, 609–610 (*LACP*).

²⁷ Among the many epigraphists who have published first-hand accounts, besides the above-mentioned scholars, are Baumeister 1854; Martha 1879; Jamot 1889. *IG IV*, edited by Fränkel and published in 1902, collects the main body of inscriptions from Hermione. Subsequent additions and republications can be found in Peek 1934, 45–52; 1941, 62–63, 68–70; Marcadé 1949; Jameson 1953; 1959; Stamires 1960. See also Wallensten 2021; Blid 2021 both in this volume.

²⁸ This seems to be the case with the accounts of Leake (1830, 457–462; 1846, 280–281) and Frazer (1898, 293–294), who refers to Bursian (1868) among others (cf. McAllister 1969, 170). Jameson & Jameson (1950, 18) also questioned whether Bursian ever visited the site.

²⁹ See e.g. Gell 1810, 129–130; Pouqueville 1827, 258; de Boblaye 1836, 60. A drawing by Gell (1810, pl. 27) shows the village extending from the inner shore of Limani Bay up on the slopes of the Pron, but not quite reaching its eastern peak, which is occupied by windmills.

³⁰ Conze & Michaelis 1861, 7–8. The authors excavated an apsidal building “*di bassi tempi*” with mosaics in the village.



Fig. 1. Satellite image of present day Ermioni and its immediate surroundings. By Patrik Klingborg, basemap by Google, ©CNES/Airbus, European Space Imaging, Landsat/Copernicus, Maxar Technologies, Map data 2021.

Hermione before the 20th century. By 1909 Philadelphus conducted archaeological work on various parts of the Bisti and studied the medieval walls.³¹ These fortifications consist mainly of reused blocks and *spolia* from ancient monuments, reinforced with heavily mortared rubble masonry. Philadelphus also excavated a considerable number of Classical and Hellenistic/early Roman tombs in the necropolis outside the city.³² Unfortunately, this excavation was never properly published. About the same time Hermione was also visited by Frickenhaus and Müller, who provided a brief account of some visible architectural remains.³³ They also published the first archaeological plan of Hermione (Fig. 2), which is probably based on the work of Philadelphus.

It took over 40 years before Hermione became the object of renewed investigations. In 1950 husband-and-wife team Michael and Virginia Jameson made an inventory of extant remains, documented in an unpublished paper held at the American School at Athens. However, many years later the paper formed the basis for Michael Jameson's description of Hermione in another publication.³⁴ In the late 1970s and

early 1980s Michael Jameson, Curtis Runnels, and Tjeerd van Andel conducted an intensive field survey in the southern Argolid, including the hinterland of Hermione. This work resulted in a highly influential publication, *A Greek countryside. The southern Argolid from prehistory to the present day*, describing the coevolution of the region's rural landscape and human settlement. The monograph provides an excellent synthesis of the history and archaeology of the southern Argolid. Unfortunately, Jameson's reuse of his earlier report allowed some mistakes to find their way into the later publication. However, up to the present date this is the only comprehensive investigation of the city of Hermione, apart from a brief topographical study conducted by Faraklas, and a sprawling compilation by a local lay historian.³⁵

Some targeted archaeological investigations have been undertaken, however. In the 1950s Efstathios Stikas excavated the remains of a large early Christian basilica (40 x 17.6 m) on the middle elevation of Ermioni, next to the present municipal office (Fig. 3.1).³⁶ The basilica, which had three aisles, a nar-

³¹ Philadelphus 1909, 172–179.

³² Philadelphus 1909, 179–182; Bölte 1912, 836.

³³ Frickenhaus & Müller 1911, 35–38.

³⁴ Jameson *et al.* 1994, 581–595.

³⁵ Faraklas 1973; Gkatsos 1996. In addition to these studies, the dissertation by Forsell (2001, 18–20) on the Roman Argolid, two publications by Papadimitriou (2007; 2012) and a paper by Lightfoot and Witmore (2019) should also be mentioned.

³⁶ Stikas 1955; 1956; Orlandos 1955; 1956; Hood & Boardman 1955, 13–14; Hood 1956, 12; Jameson *et al.* 1994, 110–111.

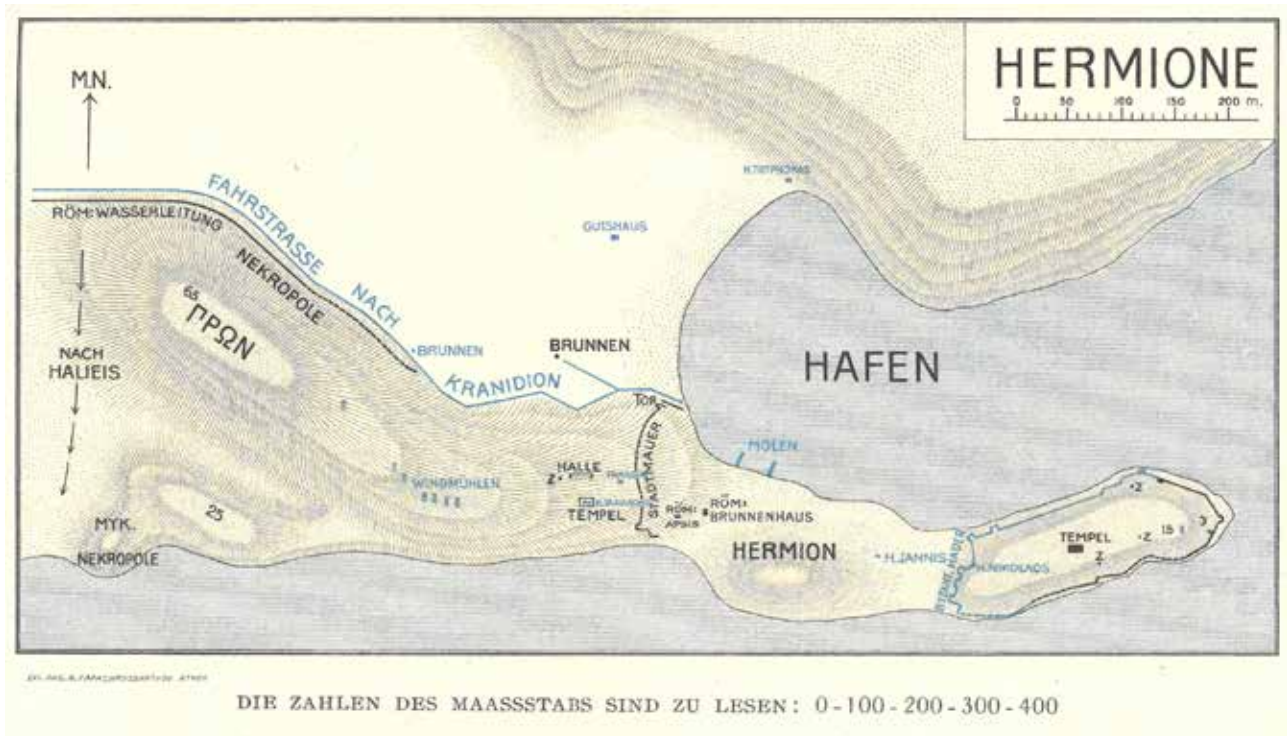


Fig. 2. Archaeological plan of Hermione, reflecting the situation in 1909. Note that the scale bar should read 400 m. Frickenhaus & Müller 1911, pl. 1.

thex, and an anterior atrium, displayed some well-preserved mosaics.³⁷ The building has been dated to the second half of the 5th century AD, but also shows some later alterations. An adjoining structure from the 6th century AD was interpreted as the bishop's residence, or a combined residence and baptistery. More recently the Ephorate of Antiquities in the Argolid has conducted several rescue excavations in Ermioni, as private plots were developed and public works were carried out, and as a result the remains of numerous buildings, burials, and monuments have been recorded. Three of these archaeological interventions were particularly rewarding. In 1989–1990 the base of a large Roman sepulchral monument was excavated, and another one was partly uncovered, on the OTE plot in the north-western outskirts of the town. A marble sculpture (sarcophagus lid?) portraying a reclining couple, which had been found nearby and is now displayed near the north harbour, seems to belong to the first monument (Papadimitriou 2021, figs. 6–7; Kossyva 2021, fig. 1).³⁸ In connection with the construction of a new school building outside Ermioni (the Gymnasium-Lyceum, Ermioni Secondary School), a group of

Classical and Hellenistic sepulchral monuments was discovered. These were excavated by the Ephorate between 1991 and 1994; additional work was carried out in conjunction with the present project in 2016 and 2017 (Papadimitriou 2021, fig. 1; Kossyva 2021, fig. 1).³⁹ Finally, in 2013 the floor of the Taxiarches Church (Aghioi Taxiarches) was opened up in connection with restoration work. Immediately beneath the modern floor lay substantial stone foundations, which can be shown to belong to a large peripteral temple of the Classical period (Fig. 3.20).⁴⁰ By 1836 de Boblaye had recognized that the church was built on the foundations of a temple, tentatively identifying it as that of Demeter (“Ceres”).⁴¹ This suggestion was repeated by William Leake and Curtius,⁴² and the finding of an inscription nearby, mentioning Demeter, Klymenos, and Kore, lent further support.⁴³ In autumn 1909 Frickenhaus and Müller once again observed the podium-like substructure of a temple under the Taxiarches Church.⁴⁴ Shortly after their visit (probably in 1910) the nave of the church was extended

³⁷ The mosaics, which are now in a very poor state of preservation, were also treated by Sodini (1970, 705–707; 1980) and Spiro (1978, 150–168).

³⁸ Catling 1988–1989, 30; Piteros 1991. See also Papadimitriou 2021 in this volume.

³⁹ Spathari & Papadimitriou 1991; Papadimitriou 1994; 2012. See also Kossyva 2021 in this volume.

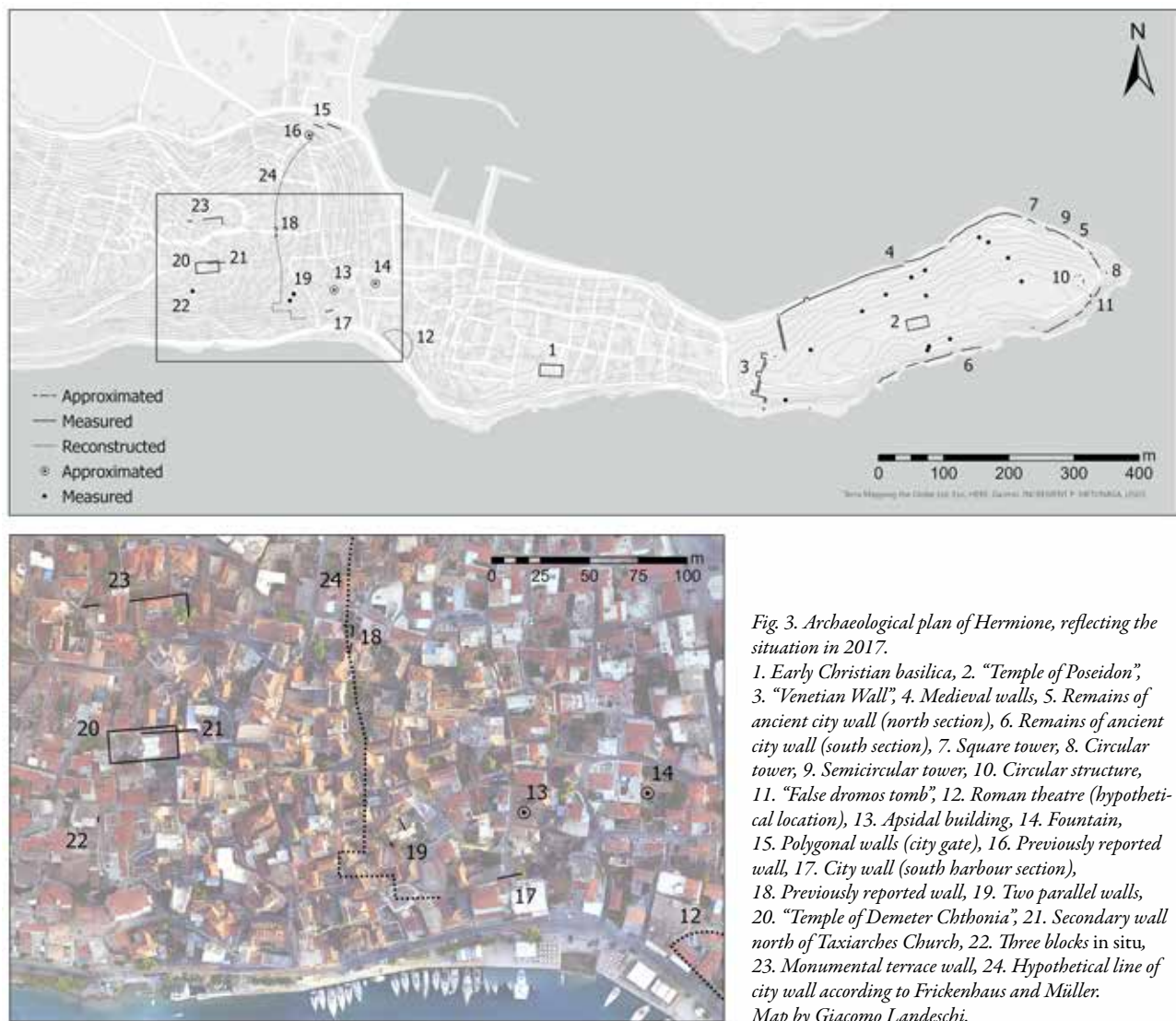
⁴⁰ See Blid 2021 in this volume.

⁴¹ de Boblaye 1836, 60. The identification was based on Pausanias' account.

⁴² Leake 1846, 280–281; Curtius 1852, 460. See also Miliarakis 1886, 250.

⁴³ Baumeister 1854, 179–180 (= *JG* IV 690).

⁴⁴ Frickenhaus & Müller 1911, 37.



and connected to the bell tower. After that, the temple foundations seem to have remained hidden until they were recently uncovered. Although Faraklas questioned the attribution of these remains to the Sanctuary of Demeter Chthonia, most scholars have adhered to it.⁴⁵

Archaeological remains

In this section all visible structural remains of ancient Hermione, which were still found *in situ* in 2015, will be discussed,

together with some that have been lost over the course of the last century. The necropolis, the supposed Temple of Demeter Chthonia, the Roman aqueduct, and the cisterns on the Bisti will only be treated very cursorily, as they are all discussed separately in other papers included in this volume.⁴⁶

THE BISTI

The earliest datable architectural remains belong to a late Archaic or early Classical temple with an estimated size of c. 15.0

⁴⁵ Faraklas 1973, fig. 18. Cf. Wyatt 1976.

⁴⁶ Kossyva 2021; Blid 2021; Klingborg 2021 all in this volume.



Fig. 4. The euthynteria of the so-called “Temple of Poseidon” on the Bisti (Fig. 3.2). View from the east. Photograph by Giacomo Landeschi.

x 31.5 m at stylobate level.⁴⁷ It is situated on the top of the ridge of the easternmost part of the peninsula (Figs. 3.2, 4; *Blid* 2021, fig. 11). Gell was the first to mention it in scholarly literature: “The pavement of a considerable temple, perhaps that of Neptune remains almost entire.”⁴⁸ Although some fragments belonging to the superstructure were observed at the site by Philadelphus,⁴⁹ by medieval times the temple was apparently destroyed down to the foundations and replaced by a church. The latter was also in a ruinous state at the start of the 20th century and was cleared away by Philadelphus. Today only the euthynteria of the ancient temple can be seen. However, this is rather well preserved and it was thoroughly described by McAllister in an article from 1969. The identification of the temple as the Shrine of Poseidon, mentioned by Pausanias (2.34.9–10), is plausible, and the most likely date seems to be about 500 BC.⁵⁰ Curtius speaks of the remains (“floors”) of *two* buildings, one immediately behind the other.⁵¹ The first is undoubtedly the temple foundation mentioned by Gell and studied by McAllister, but the nature of the second building is unclear.⁵²

⁴⁷ McAllister 1969. For the date, cf. Jameson & Jameson 1950, 28.

⁴⁸ Gell 1810, 130.

⁴⁹ Philadelphus 1909, 176–177.

⁵⁰ This identification was rejected by Philadelphus (1909, 177–179), who was followed by Faraklas (1973, fig. 18). For a critical discussion of his arguments, see Jameson & Jameson 1950, 28–30; McAllister 1969, 184.

⁵¹ Curtius 1852, 457.

⁵² Cf. Blouet (1833, 173), who calls the second structure an “enceinte”, giving the measurement of 18 x 25 m. There is no mention of this second structure after Curtius, but a row of five irregularly shaped upright-stand-

Pausanias (2.34.10) describes this part of the promontory as the site of the old city of Hermione, no longer inhabited in his time.⁵³ The accumulation of pottery and tile fragments in the topsoil, the contours of small terraces descending stepwise on the north side of the ridge, and the presence of numerous cisterns for the collection of rainwater all suggest that the Bisti was indeed once covered by dense urban habitation.⁵⁴ On the Greek Mainland, ubiquitous use of cisterns as the main water supply system was very rare before the 4th century BC, during which the phenomenon also reached its peak.⁵⁵ From the 2nd century BC the use of cisterns decreases dramatically. Individual sites may of course deviate from the general pattern.

The most substantial structure on the Bisti is the so-called “Venetian Wall” (Figs. 3.3, 5), which crosses the promontory from north to south.⁵⁶ It is constructed partly from *spolia*, including ancient building blocks and statue bases, and comprises a central projecting section with three rectangular towers and lateral curtain walls. The thickness of the wall, which

ing blocks/slabs, still visible on the site, could possibly be related to it (cf. Jameson & Jameson 1950, 27). However, since the front surfaces are flat and dressed with a pointed chisel (as if prepared for a bed joint), it is likely that the slabs were originally lying down. Furthermore, there are traces of mortar between some of the blocks, which also indicate a secondary use.

⁵³ “ἐνταῦθα ἢ προτέρα πόλις τοῖς Ἑρμιονεῦσιν ἦν.” “Here the Hermionians had their former city.” Transl. Jones 1918.

⁵⁴ For a discussion on the cisterns, see Klingborg 2021 in this volume.

⁵⁵ Klingborg 2017, 56–66, 140. Jameson *et al.* (1994, 595) propose a late Roman, or even medieval date for the cisterns.

⁵⁶ The fort, already in a ruined state, is schematically depicted in a plan from about 1700 (Andrews 1953, pl. 27).



Fig. 6. Section of the medieval wall on the north side of the Bisti (Fig. 3.4). View from the north. Photographs by Stefan Lindgren and Henrik Gerding.



Fig. 5. The so-called "Venetian Wall", crossing the Bisti behind Aghios Nikolaos Chapel. See Fig. 3.3. View from the south. Photograph by Henrik Gerding.

consists of two stone faces with a mortared rubble filling in between, ranges from 2.7 to 3.1 m (the greater thickness is found in the south, where the gate is likely to have been). There are also remains of defensive walls and towers along the water's edge all around the Bisti (Figs. 3.4, 6). These remains are heavily fragmented and represent different phases, ancient as well as medieval. The walls pertaining to the last phase, which is most likely contemporary with the Venetian cross-wall, is characterized by a mortared rubble core with a stone facing on one or both sides. The thickness is generally 1.90–

1.95 m,⁵⁷ but in many places the wall also sustains an earth fill on its landward side, creating a terrace. The lower courses of the outer facing include reused ancient blocks, sometimes more or less in their original positions (reflecting an irregular trapezoidal masonry) but with disrupted and partly mortared joints.

Very little of the earlier phases is preserved in its original state. One of the few sections that represent the aspect of the ancient wall is situated on the north side of the Bisti, c. 110 m from its eastern tip (Figs. 3.5, 7). This section (about 6 m long and preserved to a maximum height of 1.54 m) was also clearly incorporated in the later wall. The masonry style can be described as irregular trapezoidal, with some polygonal components. The blocks, which are made of the local limestone, are quarry faced and slightly bulging. The joints are relatively fine, but without systematic use of anathyrosis.⁵⁸ There are no traces of mortar. The wall probably belongs to the 5th or 4th century BC, most likely the second half of the 5th, although dating walls from masonry style is notoriously difficult.⁵⁹ On the south side of the Bisti we find two adjacent wall sections

⁵⁷ A section of the wall on the south side of the Bisti is only c. 1.55 m thick. This coincides with a very high and steep cliff, which renders the wall inaccessible from the sea.

⁵⁸ Some of the blocks only meet at the very edge of the vertical joints, whereas others abut along the full depth of the block.

⁵⁹ For earlier descriptions, see Jameson & Jameson 1950, 24; Jameson *et al.* 1994, 585. For the date, cf. Scranton 1941, 79–85; Winter 1971, 81. *LACP* (Hansen & Nielsen 2004, 610) suggests late 4th century BC, referring to Jameson *et al.* (1994), but it is unclear of which wall this quote actually speaks (Michael Jameson seems to lump all walls together).



Fig. 8. Remains of the ancient city wall on the south side of the Bisti (Fig. 3.6). View from the south. Photograph by Henrik Gerding, 3D rendering by Stefan Lindgren.

(7 and 9 m long respectively), which most probably also go back to antiquity (Figs. 3.6, 8). They are built of roughly shaped blocks, many of which are substantial, placed in irregular courses. Behind, and partly between, these blocks is a fill of large stone fragments (perhaps debris from the extraction and shaping of the larger blocks) laid in clay mortar. The style of masonry could be described as “cyclopean” or *rohpolygonal*, but to suggest an absolute date would be highly speculative. However, it is worth noting that similar masonry was used in other parts of the Argolid at least until the end of the Classical period.⁶⁰ The same kind of wall (although made with smaller blocks) reappears in several places further to the east, interlaced with sections of the medieval wall.

Based on the present remains, it is a highly reasonable assumption that an ancient city wall and a medieval fortification wall both surrounded the entire Bisti, following more or less the same course. However, whereas the western ramparts of the “Venetian Wall” are still visible (Fig. 3.3), the extension of the ancient wall towards the west cannot yet be determined. There is no indication that the medieval cross-wall coincided with the ancient one, and it is conceivable that the Classical city wall crossed the promontory somewhere else. If the cisterns that were reported on the middle elevation are contemporary with the ones found on the Bisti, this would suggest that the late Classical habitation of the Bisti also extended to this hill.⁶¹ Furthermore, archaeological plans made by earlier

⁶⁰ Schilbach 1975, 100.

⁶¹ Curtius 1852, 458. Between 1997 and 2010 the Ephorate of Antiquities in the Argolid carried out rescue excavations at six different locations on the middle elevation, encountering several structures that might have been domestic buildings. Some of them are clearly Roman, however, and the results from these excavations need to be further processed.



Fig. 7. Remains of the ancient city wall on the north side of the Bisti (Fig. 3.5). View from the north. Photograph by Henrik Gerding, 3D rendering by Stefan Lindgren.

scholars indicate that the walls along the shores of the Bisti did indeed continue beyond the Venetian cross-wall, although no such remains are visible today.⁶²

Apart from the fragmentary remains of the wall curtain, at least two ancient towers have been identified. The first one, which has a square plan, is situated on the north side of the Bisti, about 180 m from the eastern tip of the promontory (Figs. 3.7, 9), and seems to have guarded the inlet to the north (Limani) bay. Only a few massive blocks from the lowest courses remain *in situ*; others have been dislodged and tumbled down the slope towards the sea. The huge blocks are relatively finely worked, although quite irregular in size and shape. The masonry style is reminiscent of the north wall section (see above and Figs. 3.5, 7), although executed on a much larger scale. The tower measures 6.6 m on each side and is positioned just behind the line of the curtain wall, apparently without connecting to it.⁶³ The second tower has a circular, or semicircular, shape and is located at the very tip of the peninsula (Figs. 3.8, 10). Once again, only a very small part of the structure

⁶² The map published by Frickenhaus & Müller (1911, pl. 1, included here as Fig. 2) evidently shows the trace of the medieval wall (in blue). McAllister (1969, 170 fig. 1) presents a basic map of Hermione where a (hypothetical?) ancient cross-wall is indicated on the narrowest part of the peninsula, slightly west of the Venetian fortification. However, since this is a depression between two hills, it is a highly unlikely location from a defensive perspective. Faraklas (1973, fig. 18) had the Classical walls continuing all the way to the north/south harbours, but drew an (equally hypothetical?) Roman cross-wall over the east part of the middle elevation. Finally, Jameson *et al.* (1994, 582 fig. E.1) seem to suggest that the ancient wall on the Bisti continued at least 100 m west of the Venetian cross-wall, but without indicating its termination.

⁶³ Rectangular towers placed on the inside of the curtain wall can be found, for example, in the city wall of Hipponion, phase B1, which is dated to the second half of the 5th century BC (Iannelli *et al.* 2017, 475).



Fig. 9. Square tower on the north side of the Bisti (Fig. 3.7). Top projection of 3D model (Meshlab). 3D rendering by Stefan Lindgren.



Fig. 10. Circular tower at the tip of the Bisti (Fig. 3.8). View from the north-east. Photograph by Henrik Gerding.

has been preserved to the present day. It consists of roughly worked blocks, although some are slightly wedge-shaped, forming a curved line that once protruded from the city wall. Extrapolating this curve gives an approximate diameter of *c.* 7–8 m. Curiously, only one of these towers (probably the circular one) was noted by Curtius, whereas Bursian mentioned both.⁶⁴ There are also some faint vestiges of a third tower only a short distance from the north wall section (Figs. 3.9, 11). A few remaining blocks present the outline of a semicircular bastion (diameter 4.95 m). They do not seem to be bonded with the wall curtain, but this is uncertain since this part of the wall was reconstituted in the medieval phase. The lack of treatment of the blocks and the quality of the stone (layered and prone to fracture) are in common for both circular towers, and also for the ancient wall sections on the south side, which might indicate contemporaneity. Thus, we can very tentatively hypothesize two consecutive building phases of the ancient city wall, corresponding roughly to the second half of the 5th century BC (north wall section and square tower, Figs. 3.5, 3.7, 7, 9), and 4th century BC (south wall sections and circular towers, Figs. 3.6, 3.8, 3.9, 8, 10–11).⁶⁵

Situated about 35 m west of the circular tower, located well within the city wall and on somewhat higher ground, is another curved wall (Figs. 3.10, 12). The visible parts of the structure, four segments in one or two courses, present the

outline of a circle with a diameter of *c.* 16.5 m. The masonry closely matches that of the north wall section when it comes to the relative rate of trapezoidal/polygonal blocks (*c.* 4:1) and in the use of shallow horizontal notches to fit superimposed blocks. Another structure, often described as a “false dromos”, can also be found near the tip of the Bisti, 40 m south-west of the circular tower and slightly behind the line of the wall (Figs. 3.11, 13). It has been interpreted as a prehistoric tomb, but is more likely to be a cistern contemporary with the ancient city wall.⁶⁶ The masonry is more consistent with the suggested second wall phase. Both the circular structure and the “dromos” were initially uncovered by Philadelphus in the early 20th century.⁶⁷

THE PRON

By the third quarter of the 2nd century AD, when Pausanias made his visit to Hermione, the location of the city had shifted. According to him (2.34.11), Hermione was now situated about four stades (less than 800 m) to the west of the old city, occupying the low-lying area at the landward end of the peninsula and the eastern slopes of the Pron.⁶⁸ That this constituted the location of Hellenistic/Roman Hermione is

⁶⁴ Curtius 1852, 457; Bursian 1868, 96. Both towers were also recorded by Frickenhaus & Müller (1911, pl. 1, included here as Fig. 2). Other towers/bastions along the line of the wall, noted on this plan and still recognizable today, probably belong to the Venetian period. They were also interpreted that way by Frickenhaus and Müller, as indicated by the different colouring on the plan.

⁶⁵ Jameson *et al.* (1994, 585) compared the circular tower at the tip of the Bisti with the 4th-century towers of Halicis (see McAllister 2005).

⁶⁶ Jameson & Jameson (1950, 35–36) provide a short description and mention traces of plaster inside the structure. The plaster is still clearly visible. For further details, see Klingborg 2021 in this volume.

⁶⁷ Philadelphus 1909. Cf. Jameson & Jameson 1950, 20.

⁶⁸ “ἡ δὲ ἐφ’ ἡμῶν πόλις ἀπέχει μὲν τῆς ἄκρας, ἐφ’ ἣ τοῦ Ποσειδῶνος τὸ ἱερόν, τέσσαρας μάλιστα σταδίου, κειμένη δὲ ἐν ὁμαλῷ τὰ πρῶτα ἡρέμα ἐς πρόσαντες ἀνεισι, τὸ δὲ ἐστὶν ἤδη τοῦ Πρωνός: Πρῶνα γὰρ τὸ ὄρος τοῦτο ὀνομάζουσι.” “The modern city is just about four stades distant from the headland, upon which is the sanctuary of Poseidon, and it lies on a site which is level at first, gently rising up a slope, which presently merges into Pron, for so they name this mountain.” Transl. Jones 1918.



Fig. 11. Semicircular tower on the north side of the Bisti (Fig. 3.9). View from the north-east. Photograph by Henrik Gerding.



Fig. 12. Circular structure on the Bisti (Fig. 3.10). View from the south-east. Arrows mark the use of notches and polygonal blocks. Photomontage by Henrik Gerding.

confirmed by the observations of early antiquarians, as well as by later finds.⁶⁹ Curtius and Bursian described the remains of a Roman theatre on the south side of the middle elevation, just at the water's edge, overlooking the south harbour.⁷⁰ Although the theatre is now completely lost, its approximate location can be established with some confidence (Fig. 3.12).⁷¹ The testimony of Curtius also indicates a relative rise in sea level since Roman times.

Several early scholars have reported the presence of submerged structures, probably belonging to the ancient



Fig. 13. The so-called "false dromos tomb" on the Bisti, currently interpreted as a cistern (Fig. 3.11). View from the east. Photograph by Henrik Gerding.

⁶⁹ Cf. Jameson *et al.* 1994, 584.

⁷⁰ Curtius 1852, 458 ("Hier finden sich unmittelbar über der südlichen Hafenbucht die Ruinen eines aus Backsteinen mit vielem Mörtel gebauten Theaters"); Bursian 1868, 96.

⁷¹ Faraklas (1973, fig. 18) places the Roman theatre ("odeion") on the south slopes of the Pron. However, it is unlikely that he actually found any traces of it, since Jameson & Jameson (1950) did not mention any.



Fig. 14. Polygonal wall by the supposed city gate on the north side of the Pron (Fig. 3.15). View from the north. Photograph by Henrik Gerding, 3D rendering by Stefan Lindgren.

harbour(s).⁷² These remains seem to have been lost in more recent time, and have possibly been covered by modern harbour installations. Remains of an apsidal building (Fig. 3.13) and a public fountain (Fig. 3.14) have also been reported by various scholars,⁷³ but are no longer visible. This fountain was probably supplied by the aqueduct that can still be traced outside the city (Klingborg 2021, fig. 1).⁷⁴ Finally, a large foundation of conglomerate blocks has also been observed in the same general area (“... near the base of the Bisti [i.e. the peninsula] ...”), but could not be located by the present author.⁷⁵

Further to the north-west, along the road from Kranidi, two sections of finely executed polygonal walls have been reported, one of which is still clearly visible and another one part-

ly preserved but hidden in a private backyard (Figs. 3.15, 14; Papadimitriou 2021, fig. 5).⁷⁶ The two sections are situated at different levels on the hillside and show no trace of an inner face. Both of them are orientated roughly in an east–west direction, facing north, but the western one, which is still almost fully exposed (length c. 18 m), seems to have turned south at both ends.⁷⁷ The polygonal blocks, which are slightly bulging, have been trimmed to fit closely, without the use of small filling stones or notches, which shows that a lot of effort has been spent on the appearance of the wall. The joints are relatively fine, with the front edges meeting along 4–6 cm wide bands (anathyrosis) dressed with a pointed chisel. The nearby presence of a third, much shorter, wall section (not necessarily of the same kind), which was reported by Jameson and Jameson but is no longer visible to present-day observers (Fig. 3.16), seems to indicate that the western end of the wall continued in a southerly direction. Again Curtius was the first to mention these remains,⁷⁸ which were later recognized as parts of a city gate by Frickenhaus and Müller.⁷⁹ The presence of Roman tombs just outside these walls confirms that the city once end-

⁷² Curtius 1852, 457 (blocks along the shore and a mole in the north harbour); Bursian 1868, 96 (remains in both north and south harbours); Philippson 1892, 49 (remains in north harbour). Cf. Frickenhaus & Müller 1911, pl. 1, included here as Fig. 2.

⁷³ Curtius (1852, 579 n. 47) mentions brick walls overlooking the southern bay (“where the village begins”), which probably belong to a fountain. Frickenhaus & Müller (1911, pl. 1, included here as Fig. 2) record a Roman apsis on the lower reaches of the Pron and a Roman fountain house about 60 m further east, right between the north and south harbours. The former structure could possibly be the apsidal building excavated by Conze & Michaelis (1861, 7–8) in 1860.

⁷⁴ For a discussion on the aqueduct with further references, see Klingborg 2021 in this volume.

⁷⁵ Jameson & Jameson 1950, 21. Further on (p. 30), the authors provide the following description: “They are on a rise of ground about 50 m. southeast of the quai, in the direction of the western hill of the Bisti. About 10 by 20 meters of solid pavement is visible outside, and there is more inside the adjoining house.”

⁷⁶ Jameson & Jameson 1950, 21–22.

⁷⁷ This can be deduced from photographs taken in 1978, when the Ephorate conducted work by the walls.

⁷⁸ Curtius 1852, 460. However, they are probably the same walls hinted at by Pouqueville (1827, 258).

⁷⁹ Frickenhaus & Müller 1911, 37. Jameson & Jameson (1950, 21) followed this interpretation.



Fig. 15. Section of a stone socle for a mudbrick city wall on the south side of the Pron (western part, Fig. 3.17). View from the south. Photograph by Henrik Gerding, 3D rendering by Stefan Lindgren.



Fig. 16. Section of a stone socle for a mudbrick city wall on the south side of the Pron (eastern part, Fig. 3.17). View from the south. Photograph by Henrik Gerding.

ed here.⁸⁰ Referring to the seminal treatises on Greek walls by Robert Scranton,⁸¹ Jameson and Jameson first suggested that these walls should be dated to the late 5th century BC. However, the section on polygonal masonry probably constitutes the weakest part of Scranton's chronological scheme, and has now been rejected by most scholars.⁸² A more thorough analysis shows that this masonry style most likely belongs to the late Classical or early Hellenistic period. Many of the closest parallels (found for example in Kydna and Asine) are dated to the first quarter of the 3rd century BC.⁸³

Another likely section of the ancient city wall is located on the south side of the Pron (Figs. 3.17, 15–16). The masonry style is rather crude, with horizontal beds but irregular and rough-fitting vertical joints. Some of the blocks have rounded corners and gaps are filled in with smaller stones. The low wall presents a rough exterior face, but a finely dressed and perfectly horizontal upper surface without pry holes.⁸⁴ Doubtlessly this is a socle for a substantial mudbrick wall, at least 2 m thick. City walls of mudbrick were built in Greece at least from the mid-6th century (Eleusis) until the end of the 3rd

century BC (Sparta).⁸⁵ This wall does not offer enough characteristic traits to allow stylistic dating, but it can very well be contemporary with the polygonal walls on the other side of the hill. However, whereas the southern wall is constructed in an economical way, the northern one is meticulously executed. The difference in masonry style could be attributed to their different functions, as retaining wall and wall socle respectively.⁸⁶ The choice of elaborate polygonal masonry in the north wall may also be aesthetically motivated, if the main entrance to the city was indeed located there.

Yet another wall section was reported by Frickenhaus and Müller and described by the Jamesons, but is no longer visible (Fig. 3.18).⁸⁷ According to their combined information it should be located in the cellar of a private house 23 m ("30 Schritt") east of Panagia Church. The wall, which could be traced for 15 m, was orientated in a north–south direction but turned west for 3 m at the northern end. It was visible to a height of 3 or 4 m and described as "solid". The masonry style, which was defined as irregular trapezoidal, was first dated to the 5th century BC by Jameson and Jameson, who quoted Scranton.⁸⁸ In Michael Jameson's later publication, however, he took a more careful stance on this issue. Unfortunately, the wall is currently inaccessible, in the basement of an abandoned and partly collapsed building. This particular wall section was used by Frickenhaus and Müller to reconstruct the line of the city wall across the slope of the Pron. Two other wall remains situated about 100 m further south (Figs. 3.19, 17–18), not

⁸⁰ Catling 1988–1989, 30; Piteros 1991. Other burials, closer to the presumed gate, were excavated by the Ephorate of Antiquities in 2003, but are as of yet unpublished.

⁸¹ Scranton 1941, 68–69.

⁸² Cf., e.g., Winter 1971, 81–82; Schilbach 1975, 101. Michael Jameson later also revised his proposed date to "Classical or early Hellenistic" (Jameson *et al.* 1994, 586).

⁸³ Adam 1982, 165 (Kydna); Frödin & Persson 1938, 437; Penttinen 1996, 166–167 (Asine). Leontion furnishes another pertinent example with polygonal walls dated to the beginning of the 3rd century BC (PECS, 1976, 498 s.v. Leontion). Cf. also Schilbach 1975, 119–120; Randsborg 2002, 216–227 (types 8, 9, 11).

⁸⁴ This wall has not been discussed in previous literature but is mentioned as "A low, perfectly flat platform of polygonal masonry ..." by Lightfoot & Witmore (2019).

⁸⁵ Cf. Winter 1971, 69–71. For the walls of Sparta, see Wace 1907.

⁸⁶ The specific use of polygonal masonry for terrace walls was noted by Winter (1971, 84).

⁸⁷ Frickenhaus & Müller 1911, 35; Jameson & Jameson 1950, 23–24. Cf. Jameson *et al.* 1994, 586.

⁸⁸ Scranton 1941, 98.

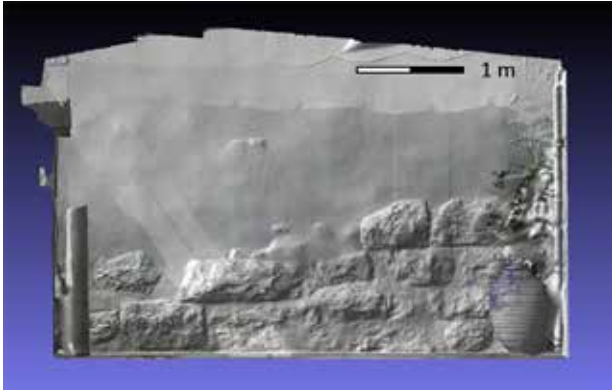


Fig. 17. 3D model of wall section visible in a private courtyard on the Pron (Meshlab) (Fig. 3.19). Orthographic view from the east. 3D rendering by Stefan Lindgren.

previously mentioned in the literature, appear to lend the idea some support. They are also orientated roughly in a north–south direction, but along parallel lines more than 10 m apart. Although both walls must have been quite substantial, they are too fragmentary to allow any firm conclusions about the nature of the structures to which they belonged.⁸⁹ Thus, until the hidden wall by the Panagia Church (Fig. 3.18) can be exposed again and restudied, we must remain cautious towards the proposed reconstruction, the main problem being that the suggested line of the wall completely disregards normal military considerations. The city wall would have been situated one third of the way up the slope of the Pron, leaving the higher ground outside the city defences. Furthermore, the area immediately to the west was occupied by a major sanctuary, with several monumental buildings. These would have provided both fighting platforms and shelter to an advancing enemy, allowing them to attack the city walls unassailed. An alternative interpretation of the wall and its relation to the sanctuary will be offered in the concluding discussion.

The sanctuary in question is most probably that of Demeter Chthonia, described in detail by Pausanias (2.35.4–11). The foundations of a large temple are now superimposed by the Taxiarches Church, which dates back at least to the 17th century AD (Fig. 3.20; *Blid* 2021, figs. 1–10). In the alley on the north side of the church a wall made by reused blocks has been incorporated in the adjoining modern houses (Fig. 3.21;

⁸⁹ The eastern wall fragment (Fig. 17) is incorporated in a modern building and only visible from a private courtyard. The wall is thickly white-washed and thus difficult to study. The masonry seems to have mainly horizontal bed joints, but also some polygonal features. The western wall fragment (Fig. 18) is resting on sloping bedrock in a back alley. It consists of just nine blocks, two of which have been disturbed. The masonry could be described as polygonal, but it is evident that this is mainly a result of the sloping ground.



Fig. 18. Wall fragment situated in an alley on the Pron (Fig. 3.19). View from the west. Photograph by Henrik Gerding.

Blid 2021, figs. 13–14).⁹⁰ The wall, which is observable for almost 30 m (corresponding to the entire length of the church) appears to turn south at the east end. It would then have passed just behind the apse of the church and joined with some large ashlar blocks protruding from a building presently used as the priest's office. These blocks seem to form another corner, which indicates that the wall once enclosed the site of the church. Some of the reused blocks are square slabs of friable reddish limestone with small inclusions, which are clearly robbed from the temple foundations. Thus, the wall must have been built after the temple had been completely demolished and cannot have served as a *peribolos* wall for the sanctuary, as suggested by William Wyatt.⁹¹ Other blocks are made of grey limestone with whitish veins,⁹² and have untreated faces but flat horizontal beds and finely worked joints with proper anathyrosis. Three blocks of a similar kind can be found *in situ*, standing directly on bedrock, 50 m south-west of the church (Figs. 3.22, 19).⁹³ They vary somewhat in size and are slightly dislodged but present a flat horizontal surface with a row of pry holes, suggesting a second course of quadrangular blocks. The three blocks could possibly be part of the same secondary structure as the wall by the church, but more likely they belong to the primary structure from which some of the building material has been scavenged. In the latter case, it could have well been part of the sanctuary.

The extent of the *temenos* area is perhaps indicated by an east–west orientated monumental retaining wall, situated

⁹⁰ Jameson & Jameson 1950, 32.

⁹¹ Wyatt 1976 (*PECS*).

⁹² Both these stones and the square slabs are locally quarried, whereas other blocks, originating from the superstructure of the temple, may be imported.

⁹³ The three blocks were mentioned by Piteros (1991, 106), together with a photograph. They measure (width x height x depth): 76 x 53 x 90 cm; 83 x 47 x 90 cm; 64 x 38 x 86 cm. The wall ran north–south and faced east.

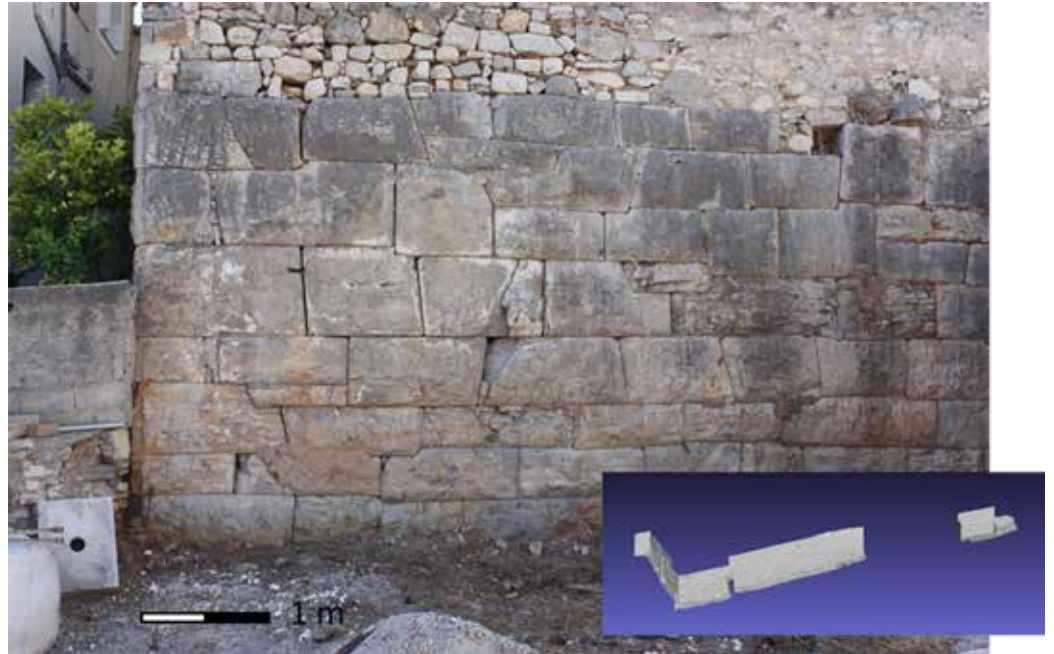


Fig. 20. Monumental retaining wall by the Old School on the Pron (Fig. 3.23). View from the north. Photograph by Jenny Walensten, 3D rendering by Stefan Lindgren.

about 70 m north of the church (Figs. 3.23, 20; Papadimitriou 2021, fig. 4).⁹⁴ The maximum preserved height of the original wall is 3.8 m, but it has later been added to and integrated into the substructures of a 19th-century building (the “Old School”). Today the wall is partly hidden from view by a modern house but clearly visible on either side of it. The two visible sections are 29.5 and 9.5 m long respectively and the total length of the wall is 53.7 m. The eastern end exposes a drafted corner where the wall turns south for at least 12.3 m (it probably continues behind the modern structures); the western end of the retaining wall is less well preserved, but shows traces of a possible return. Bursian described the wall as being only 50 feet long.⁹⁵ The discrepancy could be due to the presence of additional buildings obstructing the wall at the time.⁹⁶ Half a century later Frickenhaus and Müller reported the total length as 70 paces, or 100 cubits, and mentioned that the corners are preserved at both ends.⁹⁷ This approximate measurement agrees well with the above-recorded length.

Frickenhaus and Müller tentatively identified the structure as the “Portico of Echo”, also mentioned by Pausanias

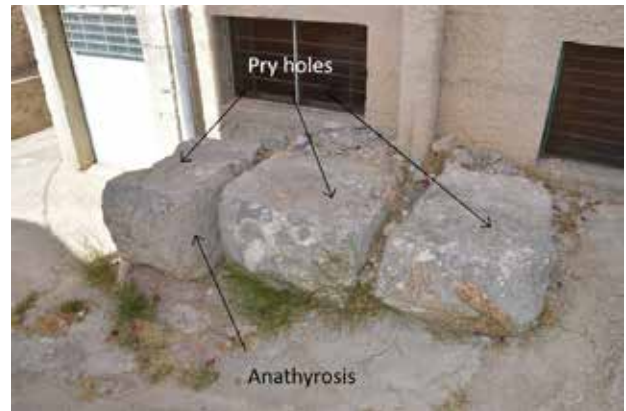


Fig. 19. Three blocks in situ south-west of the Taxiarches Church (Fig. 3.22). View from the east. Illustration by Henrik Gerding.

(2.35.10). It is more likely, though, that it constitutes a terrace wall, meant to level off the sloping terrain, either for construction purposes or to create a *Festwiese*—an open space for religious celebrations within the sanctuary.⁹⁸ Curtius, who first mentioned the wall, believed it to be part of the city wall. Jameson *et al.* suggested that it might have served as a precinct (*temenos*) wall.⁹⁹ It is of course possible that a monumental retaining wall, such as this, marked the limits of the *temenos*, and that it was later incorporated in the city defences.

⁹⁴ Not 25 m as stated by Jameson & Jameson (1950, 32), Wyatt (1976), and Jameson *et al.* (1994, 593).

⁹⁵ Bursian 1868, 97.

⁹⁶ It is not necessary to assume that Bursian did not visit the place himself, as implied by Jameson & Jameson (1950, 18), who themselves overestimated the total length of the wall as 95 m (1950, 33). Michael Jameson repeated the erroneous measurement over 40 years later: “close to 100 m long” (Jameson *et al.* 1994, 593).

⁹⁷ Frickenhaus & Müller 1911, 37. The corners are confirmed by Jameson & Jameson (1950, 33).

⁹⁸ The structure is comparable to the monumental terraces of the Argive Heraion.

⁹⁹ Curtius 1852, 460; Jameson *et al.* 1994, 593.

The retaining wall is built in the same general style as the north wall section on the Bisti mentioned above (i.e. irregular trapezoidal masonry with quarry faced blocks), but with some distinct differences. Although some continuous bed joints may have a very gentle slope, all blocks are decidedly trapezoidal; there are no polygonal components. There are several shallow horizontal notches, but also a large number of proper L-blocks. The rough faces have vertical (decorative?) grooves made with a pickaxe, whereas the sides have anathyrosis bands 3–5 cm wide, finely dressed with a broad chisel. The wall was dated by Jameson and Jameson to the late 5th or early 4th century BC.¹⁰⁰ Much later Michael Jameson changed the proposed date to the 4th or 3rd century BC, this time with a general reference to Scranton.¹⁰¹ However, Scranton actually dates this kind of masonry to the 5th century BC.¹⁰² Since there seems to be several instances of confusion between various walls in the latter text by Jameson, it is quite possible that the author was mistakenly referring to another wall.¹⁰³

Discussion

This preliminary survey of the topography of Hermione presents numerous questions meriting closer scrutiny. In the following discussion three fundamental, and closely interrelated, problems regarding the urban layout and development of ancient Hermione will be explored:

1. What was the trace of the ancient city wall(s)?
2. What was the physical extent of the city in various periods?
3. What was the nature of the relocation of the city, indicated by Pausanias?

Pausanias (2.34.11) describes the city as surrounded by a wall and also mentions a gate (2.35.11), from which a road led to Mases. However, he also indicates that Hermione was moved from the Bisti to the landward end of the peninsula, less than 800 m away. This means that the enceinte seen by Pausanias does not necessarily coincide with the city walls of earlier periods.

The proposed line of a city wall going in a north–south direction across the eastern slopes of the Pron, suggested by Frickenhaus and Müller in 1911 (Figs. 2, 3.24), has become

determining for all subsequent discussions on the ancient city wall. To begin with, it should be noted that several early visitors to Hermione refer to the (eastern) top of the Pron as being fortified. Philippson speaks about a citadel on the Pron and describes the village of Kastri as nestling itself against the old acropolis.¹⁰⁴ Both Gell and Curtius believed Roman Hermione to have been located on top of the Pron.¹⁰⁵ These comments may be the result of pure guesswork, based on an (over-imaginative) interpretation of Pausanias' text, but could also be due to the observation of architectural remains close to the eastern summit. However, with the publication of Frickenhaus and Müller a new stance was taken, excluding the higher reaches of the Pron from the walled city. Their suggestion was also adopted by subsequent writers, with few exceptions.¹⁰⁶ The obvious poliorcetic flaws of the proposed wall trace (mentioned above) were duly noted by Jameson and Jameson, who still chose to adhere to the proposition.¹⁰⁷

The alleged city wall section to the east of the Panagia Church (see above and Fig. 3.18) constitutes the linchpin of this hypothesis. However, the available information is very sketchy and cannot at the moment be verified or augmented. Thus, the possibility remains that the structure in question belongs to a monumental terrace wall, similar to the one by the Old School (Figs. 3.23, 20), and that it was framing the sanctuary towards the east. The wall was described as being 3–4 m high, but with only one side visible. In view of its considerable height, it does not appear to be a socle for a mud-brick wall, and pending further information a retaining wall seems to be the most likely alternative. Even if it did belong to a fortification wall, the probability is that this was directed towards the east, rather than the west. It would then be part of a *diateichisma*, a wall separating a higher city area (including the Demeter Sanctuary) from the lower city.¹⁰⁸

In this context it might be relevant to look more closely at Pausanias' account. It is clear that the interests of the periegete were highly selective and also shaped by literary considerations, but nonetheless his descriptions can be found to follow certain organizational patterns.¹⁰⁹ In the case of Hermione it can be noted that Pausanias first lists rural sanctuaries and notable places in the northern hinterland, towards the territory

¹⁰⁰ Jameson & Jameson 1950, 34.

¹⁰¹ Jameson *et al.* 1994, 593.

¹⁰² Scranton 1941, 79–85.

¹⁰³ E.g. Jameson *et al.* (1994, 586) mistakenly refer to fig. E.4 when talking about another wall section. On the same page they also confuse the monumental terrace wall by the Old School with the potential city gate, and incorrectly associate a photograph of the terrace wall (fig. E.6) with the wall seen in a basement.

¹⁰⁴ Philippson 1892, 49: "Die alte Stadt lag auf einer felsigen Halbinsel, welche sich von einem höheren Kalkberge, der die Burg trug, nach Osten in das Meer vorstreckt [...] Das heutige Dorf Kastri hat sich ganz von der Halbinsel zurückgezogen und schmiegt sich an die alte Akropolis an." Cf. de Boblaye 1836, 60; Bursian 1868, 96.

¹⁰⁵ Gell 1810, 129–130, 166; Curtius 1852, 458.

¹⁰⁶ Bölte 1912, 836; Jameson & Jameson 1950, 21; Faraklas 1973, fig. 18; Wyatt 1976 (slightly confused); Jameson *et al.* 1994, 586. *Contra* (possibly) McAllister 1969, 170 fig. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Jameson & Jameson 1950, 25.

¹⁰⁸ Troizen furnishes a pertinent example (Welter 1941, pl. 2).

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Lightfoot & Witmore 2019.

of Troizen (whence he is travelling). He then discusses the shrines in the area of the old city (on the Bisti), and thereafter the ones located within the walls of the contemporary city of Hermione (further to the west). Among them are the Sanctuary of Demeter Chthonia, which is awarded a lengthy description.¹¹⁰ It is clearly deemed the most important feature of the city, but does not constitute the last entry in this section. Instead the long digression is followed by a brief mention of the Sanctuary of Eileithyia, situated within the walls by the city gate. The account concludes with a list of rural shrines to the west of the *asty*, in the direction of the periegete's next destination. If we assume that the delimitations of city walls, old and new, are used as the main structuring principle of the text, this provides a strong indication that the Sanctuary of Demeter Chthonia was intramural at the time of Pausanias' visit.

Regardless of the discussion of the city wall on the Pron, it has been the understanding of almost all scholars that Hermione in some early period occupied the eastern half of the peninsula (corresponding to the Bisti).¹¹¹ After the shift to the Pron, this part was apparently left uninhabited, but still occupied by a number of shrines. In the late Roman and early Byzantine period, Hermione appears to have eventually expanded towards east again, but never reaching the Bisti. The location of the basilica on the middle elevation indicates that land was still available for construction here in the late 5th century AD (Fig. 3.1).

Turning to the circumstances of the relocation of the city, it can be noted that the only articulated interpretation of Pausanias' account that has been offered so far is the one forwarded by Jameson *et al.*¹¹² They regard the abandonment of the Bisti basically as a contraction of the city area, due to depopulation. This theory implies that the entire peninsula, including the lower slopes of the Pron, was part of the city area (and inhabited) at least from the Classical period,¹¹³ and that a gradual depopulation, starting in the 3rd century BC, affected mainly the eastern part of the city, until the Bisti was completely deserted by the 1st century BC. "At some point the eastern end of the Bisti peninsula was abandoned [...]"

This may have happened during the unsettled cent. II B.C." or "... in the "difficult last two centuries B.C." ¹¹⁴ Jameson *et al.* admit that there is no direct evidence for a decline of the urban population of Hermione during this time, but build their case on general trends in the regional settlement distribution, which can be summarized in the following way: in the 5th century the farmers of the east-central Hermionid lived mainly in the city.¹¹⁵ The expansion and opening up of the Greek world after the campaign of Alexander increased the international market for agricultural produce.¹¹⁶ According to Jameson *et al.*, this economic development partly explains the pattern of increasing dispersal and intensification of rural activities in the period 350–250 BC. However, the neighbouring town of Halieis and most small sites in its territory were abandoned c. 280 BC. By the second half of the 3rd century 50% of all small sites in the southern Argolid had been deserted, again as a result of a general economic shift, although in the vicinity of Hermione 80% of the small sites continued to be occupied. A majority of the (few) new sites are also to be found here.¹¹⁷ The population of Hermione "can only be guessed", according to Jameson *et al.*, but the decline in second-order sites is seen as significant. This "could be entirely the result of a change in settlement pattern", but "an absolute drop in population is much more likely." They suggest that some of the inhabitants of Halieis may have been relocated to Hermione, but insist that "Hermione and Halieis were not simply combined into a single town."¹¹⁸

This paper does not aim to contribute to the discussion on demographic trends, as inferred from intensive surveys, or the use of different interpretative models, but it can be noted that the idea of a general decline in Hellenistic Greece has recently been challenged in favour of regional and local causalities.¹¹⁹ In the case of Hermione, the scenario presented by Jameson *et al.* does not fit with Strabo's description of the city as an important community at the turn of the era, which is also confirmed by the exceptional reintroduction of local coinage in

¹¹⁰ Also Kahrstedt (1954, 188 n. 3) understood Pausanias to mean that the temple was located inside the walls. However, trusting the reconstruction of Frickenhaus and Müller, he concluded that Pausanias must be mistaken.

¹¹¹ Most recently Lightfoot & Witmore 2019. For the divergent view of Jameson *et al.* (1994), see below.

¹¹² Jameson *et al.* 1994, 551–552, 587. Most other scholars have simply accepted the idea that the city was moved from one site to another without further discussion. This stance was also adopted by *LACP* (Hansen & Nielsen 2004, 610), although the rendering of the changes in the size of the city follows Jameson *et al.* (1994), giving a contradictory impression.

¹¹³ Jameson *et al.* 1994, 549: "Archaic Hermion was most likely contained by the same line of walls as in the following centuries ..." Both Bölte (1912, 839) and Faraklas (1973, fig. 18) seem to have held a similar notion. The idea was criticized by Kahrstedt (1954, 188).

¹¹⁴ Jameson *et al.* 1994, 552, 587.

¹¹⁵ Jameson *et al.* 1994, 382.

¹¹⁶ Jameson *et al.* 1994, 393–394. This interpretative model has been contested (see e.g. Acheson 1997) and it is still not clear to what extent the conquest affected agricultural production and export on the Greek Mainland.

¹¹⁷ Jameson *et al.* 1994, 394–396.

¹¹⁸ Jameson *et al.* 1994, 395.

¹¹⁹ Shipley 2018, 191. Karambinis' (2018) argument for urban decline in Roman Greece is interesting but based on rather coarse-grained aggregated data (primarily estimated city sizes), which cannot be used to support the supposed development of a single settlement. It is noteworthy that Michael Jameson's estimate of the built-up area of Hermione, before and after the suggested contraction, is considered as one of the most reliable ones (Karambinis 2018, 285).

the 1st century BC.¹²⁰ The only indication of a decline in the population of Hermione is a general decrease in the number of second- and third-order settlements in the southern Argolid from the middle of the 3rd century BC. However, this pattern is partly related to the sack and following decline of Halieis in the early 3rd century BC,¹²¹ and the hinterland of Hermione was apparently less affected by desertion than other parts of the Akte. Although the depopulation of the countryside in Hellenistic Greece is generally seen to correspond to the abandonment and shrinkage of urban centres, in some cities, such as Phleios, there are signs of in-migration.¹²² If we regard the abandonment of farmsteads and villages in the Hermionid not so much as a general decline in population, but as a “nucleation” trend, that is, a concentration of people into first-order settlements and larger estates, and also take into account a potential wave of refugees from Halieis in the period preceding its final abandonment in 280 BC, we should rather expect the population of Hermione to have increased in the Hellenistic period.

Besides a mere contraction, which leaves many questions unresolved, we should also consider the alternative, that the city was physically moved, including its houses, inhabitants, and institutions. The presence of city walls in the western part of the city area, datable to the early 3rd century BC,¹²³ indicates that the shift may be connected to such an event.¹²⁴ Of course, there may have been an earlier wall along this line, which is now lost, as suggested by Jameson *et al.* and Faraklas,¹²⁵ but this remains hypothetic. Moreover, regardless of *when* the western part of the city area was fortified, the natural solution would have been to take advantage of the topography and include the highest point of the ridge within the trace of the wall. A good example is provided by New Halos in Thessaly, perhaps founded by Demetrios Poliorketes at the end of the 4th century BC.¹²⁶ Here great efforts were made to secure the apex of an adjacent hill, even though it extended the length of the circuit wall considerably. In a recent study of urban *akropoleis* in Thessaly and Boeotia, Robin Rönklund recognizes this arrangement as a recurring feature (“Type b”). Although it is only represented by four cases in his particular study area (Atrax, Vlochos, Melitaia, Orchomenos), there are

several late Classical or early Hellenistic examples from other parts of Greece.¹²⁷ More interestingly, Rönklund also associated the frequent establishment of fortified *akropoleis* in this period with garrisoning of cities.¹²⁸

This brings us back to why Hermione would have been moved to a new location, only a few stades away from the old one. Purely practical reasons, such as defensive considerations and failing water supply, cannot be supported in the case of Hermione, at least not based on current knowledge.¹²⁹ Thus, a more likely explanation would involve some kind of political reconstitution of the city. In the early Hellenistic period we find plenty of examples of this phenomenon, related to the exercise of autocratic power.¹³⁰

There were several reasons for Hellenistic rulers to found or refound cities; strategic foresight and the desire to magnify his/her own fame being two;¹³¹ economic advantages being another.¹³² It has also been suggested that the act of founding cities represented a civilized and fundamentally Greek behaviour. Naturally, many new cities were founded in areas where urbanization had previously been slow, or on strategically important sites.¹³³ We also have examples of subdued peoples being deported to other regions and the establishment of military colonies, both of which facilitated royal control over conquered territory.¹³⁴

A majority of Hellenistic foundations west of the Taurus Mountains, however, were refoundations of existing cities, entailing the current population rather than people from the outside. In some cases refounded cities were merely renamed. The fact that most of them very quickly resumed their old name indicates that the foundation act had merely been a formality with symbolic implications.¹³⁵ In other cases whole cities were

¹²⁰ Strab. 8.6.12; Grandjean 1990, 50–51. For local coinage as an indicator of wealth and size, see Karambinis 2018, 299.

¹²¹ Jameson *et al.* (1994, 394) date the final abandonment of Halieis to c. 280 BC, but this was probably preceded by a period of decline, following a sack of the city around 300 BC (McAllister 2005, 83–84).

¹²² Alcock 1991, 461.

¹²³ Several early Hellenistic mudbrick walls provide comparanda, e.g. at Dion and Pella (late 4th century BC).

¹²⁴ That the shift occurred at an earlier date is highly unlikely, due to the presence of numerous cisterns on the Bisti (see above).

¹²⁵ See above note 113.

¹²⁶ Reinders 2009.

¹²⁷ Rönklund 2018, 83–84.

¹²⁸ Rönklund 2018, 123.

¹²⁹ Gell (1810, 130) clearly finds the change of location puzzling: “It does not seem easy to account for the removal of the inhabitants from the promontory to the hill, unless the ancient city, which was better situated, had been ruined by some public calamity.”

¹³⁰ Three studies in particular have been dedicated to relocations of ancient Greek cities: Demand (1990) focuses on long-distance relocation and *synoikismos* c. 800–325 BC, excluding punitive relocations and gradual settlement shifts. The study is primarily based on historical evidence, bolstered with some archaeological examples. Logistics, land distributions, and other spatial aspects are only treated in summary fashion. Mackil (2004) treats the destruction/abandonment of cities and the relocation of populations to other *poleis* during the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Again the author mainly discusses historical sources; spatial aspects are not addressed. More recently, Boehm (2018) has crafted a rich synthesis on the topic of royal *synoecisms*, taking into account all kinds of sources but focusing on the early Hellenistic period.

¹³¹ Shipley 2000, 75.

¹³² Fraser 1972, 3–4.

¹³³ Grainger 1990.

¹³⁴ Cohen 1983.

¹³⁵ Tschirikower 1927.

destroyed and rebuilt, either in the same place or some small distance away. Several settlements may also be united and transformed into a larger urban conglomerate (*sympoliteia* or *synoikismos*). A refoundation could take place with or without the consent of the inhabitants. Astakos, for example, was razed to the ground by Lysimachos in the 280s BC and the population was later transferred to another city.¹³⁶ Whether forced or not, such a move would constitute a dramatic event in the life of the city, uprooting the inhabitants from their accustomed environment and creating a profound transformation of the physical and mental landscape. This would have had long-term implications, not only for economic structures and social hierarchies, but also for the collective memory. If a *sympoliteia* was involved, the most significant changes pertained to citizenship, franchises, and land distribution, but the disruption of the physical environment (homes, public spaces, boundaries, landmarks) also had major repercussions. Old configurations were suddenly broken up and new ones were formed almost overnight. The acceptance of the new conditions, essential for the population to get on with their lives, was intimately connected to the construction of new traditions, embedding the legitimacy of the new arrangements. These could be in the form of new cults or redefinition of old ones.¹³⁷

We are probably correct in stating that the essence of a Greek *polis* consisted of its body of citizens and political institutions, rather than its built environment.¹³⁸ However, to uproot this body of citizens together with its institutions and replant them again probably changed their character and outlook to the core. The old city of Kardia on Thracian Chersonesos was refounded as Lysimacheia in 309 BC, allegedly for military reasons. Those reasons are difficult to grasp. Kardia already had the strategic location that Lysimacheia is ascribed. Naturally, the defences of the peninsula could be strengthened, but that does not explain the destruction of Kardia. Lysimacheia was certainly built with regard to monumental display, but the existing urban fabric of Kardia already provided a setting for extravagant public building, in the same way that other cities did. Lysimachos wanted a capital with loyal and dependable inhabitants; a city that would not defect or turn its back on him in troubled times. By reorganizing the spatial configuration of the city, he might have achieved just that in Lysimacheia.

Demetrios Poliorketes is also known to have prompted several refoundations. Apart from the move and refoundation of Sikyon, Halos, and Demetrias in the late 4th and early 3rd centuries BC, he probably also ordered the recolonization

and fortification of Asine around 300 BC.¹³⁹ About the same time, Halieis may have been destroyed and partly evacuated (to Asine and Hermione?) as Demetrios Poliorketes fought to regain control over the Peloponnese after the Battle of Ipsos. The cities of Akte had previously given him their allegiance,¹⁴⁰ but then deserted him. Halieis could have been attacked either by Demetrios or the Spartans, since the city had strategic importance, controlling the inlet to the Argolic Gulf, and neither side wanted the other to have control of it.¹⁴¹ The incentives to fortify and install garrisons in key sites would also have been particularly strong during this period.¹⁴²

If Hermione was controlled by a garrison at this time, as indicated by a local inscription dated to the 3rd century BC,¹⁴³ this would require a citadel (*akre* or *akropolis*) that allowed the foreign troops to defend the city in the most efficient way, but also to safeguard themselves from the inhabitants of the city. These strategic considerations, together with the possible enfranchisement of former citizens of Halieis, would furnish sufficient reasons for a physical relocation of Hermione. I believe that this scenario has to be taken into account when interpreting early Hellenistic material in Hermione, both epigraphic and archaeological. We should also be attentive to changes in religious life and burial practices at this time. In the Classical period we see a tendency, both in Hermione and Halieis, to locate new tombs in close proximity with old ones and underline the connection by surrounding them both with a *peribolos* wall (Kossyva 2021, figs. 5–6).¹⁴⁴ This could be a way to emphasize ancestry and strengthen claims on heredity.¹⁴⁵ In the early Hellenistic period, however, we see in Hermione the introduction of built funerary monuments, divided into numerous compartments (e.g. Burial Enclosure Δ), which are intended for future interments. This might indicate a shift towards other kinds of collective identity, but possibly also constitutes an expression of permanence and belonging, based on connections to coming generations rather than preceding ones.

A relocation and refoundation of Hermione could also be the reason for the exceptionally large number of shrines listed by Pausanias. If nothing else, it would explain how space was made available for new temples within the city area. Another possible major consequence for the religious landscape of Hermione would have been the transformation of the Sanctu-

¹³⁶ Strab. 12.4.2.

¹³⁷ Cf. Alcock 1997; Parker 2009.

¹³⁸ Tschirikower 1927, 112; Ma 1999, 150.

¹³⁹ Cf. also Leontion, which was moved and refounded on a strategic site by Demetrios or Antigonos II Gonatas.

¹⁴⁰ Plut. *Dem.* 25.1.

¹⁴¹ McAllister 2005, 84.

¹⁴² Schilbach 1976, 131–132; Shipley 2018, 54–56, 105–106.

¹⁴³ IG IV 729; Guarducci 1935. Also note that Hermione was ruled by a tyrant up to 229 BC (Polyb. 2.44.6).

¹⁴⁴ For Halieis, see Schlehofer 2013. For Hermione, see Kossyva 2021 in this volume (e.g. Burial Enclosure ΣΤ).

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Shepherd 2014, 124.

ary of Demeter Chthonia from an extra-urban shrine to an intramural one (*Fig. 3.20*),¹⁴⁶ concomitant with a renegotiation of the status of the cult. An investigation of sanctuaries dedicated to Demeter has shown that these could be found both inside and outside city walls.¹⁴⁷ However, only in three cases were they to be found immediately outside the wall. As can be expected, these constituted small open-air shrines. More monumental shrines were always located some distance from the walls. Most interesting are perhaps the cases of Halikarnassos and Pergamon, where the extramural sanctuaries of Demeter became intramural as the cities expanded in the late Classical and Hellenistic periods.¹⁴⁸

These questions require further investigations: evidence of the abandonment of cisterns on the Bisti may be significant for dating the move of the city; osteological studies could shed light on demographic changes; a comprehensive analysis of the cults of Hermione might reveal transformations in the religious configuration of the city. Finally, a high-resolution digital elevation model is important for understanding the built environment of Hermione. It can help us assess defensive aspects of the city layout, analyse remains of large-scale terracing, and visualize the continuously reshaped appearance of domestic and monumental architecture within the urban landscape. All of these undertakings are part of the ongoing investigations at Hermione, which have the potential to shed further light on the topography and urban development of ancient Hermione.

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¹⁴⁶ The interpretations of both McAllister (1969, 170 fig. 1) and Faraklas (1973, fig. 18) suggest that the Sanctuary of Demeter Chthonia (although Faraklas does not call it so) was at some time intramural.

¹⁴⁷ Cronkite 1997, 99–100. Hinz (1998, 49–50) points to a preference among the western Greeks to place Demeter sanctuaries outside the city, but usually only a small distance away from it. For sanctuaries and cults of Demeter in Sicily and Magna Graecia, see also Di Stephano 2008. For the Aegean area, see Leventis & Mitsopoulou 2010; Schipporeit 2013, 245–250.

¹⁴⁸ Cronkite 1997, 101; Schipporeit 2013, 246.

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