THE ASINE SIMA

(PLATE 13)

THE SANCTUARY OF APOLLO PYTHAEUS at Asine in the Argolid is archaeologically documented as existing already in the third quarter of the 8th century B.C.[1] In the early period the architectural focal point within the temenos (Fig. 1) on the Barbouna hill was a simple, apsidal structure on a narrow stone socle. This building, B, had walls of pisé or mud brick, as indicated by burnt lumps of clay retrieved during excavation, and a thatched roof. Associated pottery dates the destruction of the building to around 720 B.C. Building A was erected slightly further east. Its early history is somewhat obscure, as pottery found in the trenches by the walls only gives a *terminus post quem* for its erection at the end of the 8th century. On the other hand, nothing contradicts its being an immediate successor of Building B. If we suppose that A was constructed at the end of the 8th century, it must have been rebuilt a number of times. In its later phase the socle, 0.8 m. wide (1.0 m. at the north end), carried mud-brick walls as shown by fragments of burnt clay.[2]

The excavators in the 1920's note in the diaries "large quantities of tile fragments" inside the structure and, underneath this layer, "black matter", the charred remains of the woodwork of the roof. Further, by the outer wall of the northern short end a deposit of tiles of different kinds, both roof tiles and sima fragments, is reported. Fragments of the sima lay by the door at the south end. Of the apparently vast amounts of terracotta pieces found during excavation, few now remain. Illustrations in the notebooks enable us to identify where some of the extant fragments were actually found (Fig. 1:T). Pieces of both Laconian and Corinthian tiles can still be found on the Barbouna terrace, but the question is how they should be related to the excavated structure A. Roofs were not necessarily laid consistently in one system or the other, or the Asine temple may have had an earlier, less pretentious,

[1] The remains on the top terrace of the Barbouna hill were investigated during two brief seasons in the 1920's, in 1924 and 1926. In the publication by Ö. Frödin and A. W. Persson (*Asine, Results of the Swedish Excavations 1922–1930*, Stockholm 1938, pp. 147–151) however, the material was not given quite the attention it deserves.

A complete study of the sanctuary and the related fortifications on the Barbouna hill is forthcoming as [Wells] *Asine* III, i in the *Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Institutet i Athen*, series in 4°. In 1986 an initial presentation of the material was made at the Α' Συνέδριο Αργολικών Σπουδών, held at Argos from May 30 to June 1. By mistake, however, the paper has appeared in Πρακτικά Γ' Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου Πελοποννησιακών Σπουδών, Καλαμάτα 1985, pp. 349–353.

[2] A remark in a recent article by Ö. Wikander (1988, p. 207) calls for a cautionary comment. I do not disagree with him in that tiled roofs certainly presuppose sturdy walls to carry their weight, but wide socles do not necessarily imply tile roofs. Early Greek buildings often present wide socles but certainly did not have these roofs. The instances are many and can most conveniently be studied in H. Drerup, *Griechische Baukunst in geometrischer Zeit* (*ArchHom* II, O). On the other hand, if Building A was constructed in the late 6th century B.C. we could argue that the tile roof, then in existence, called for a wide socle.

K. Fagerström, in his dissertation *Greek Iron Age Architecture. Developments through Changing Times* (*SIMA* 81), Göteborg 1988, p. 28, reaches the unfortunate conclusion that Building A was a stone-wall structure. The excavated remains belie such a contention. It should also be noted, as is evident from this paper, that the roof was gabled and not, as Fagerström suggests, flat.

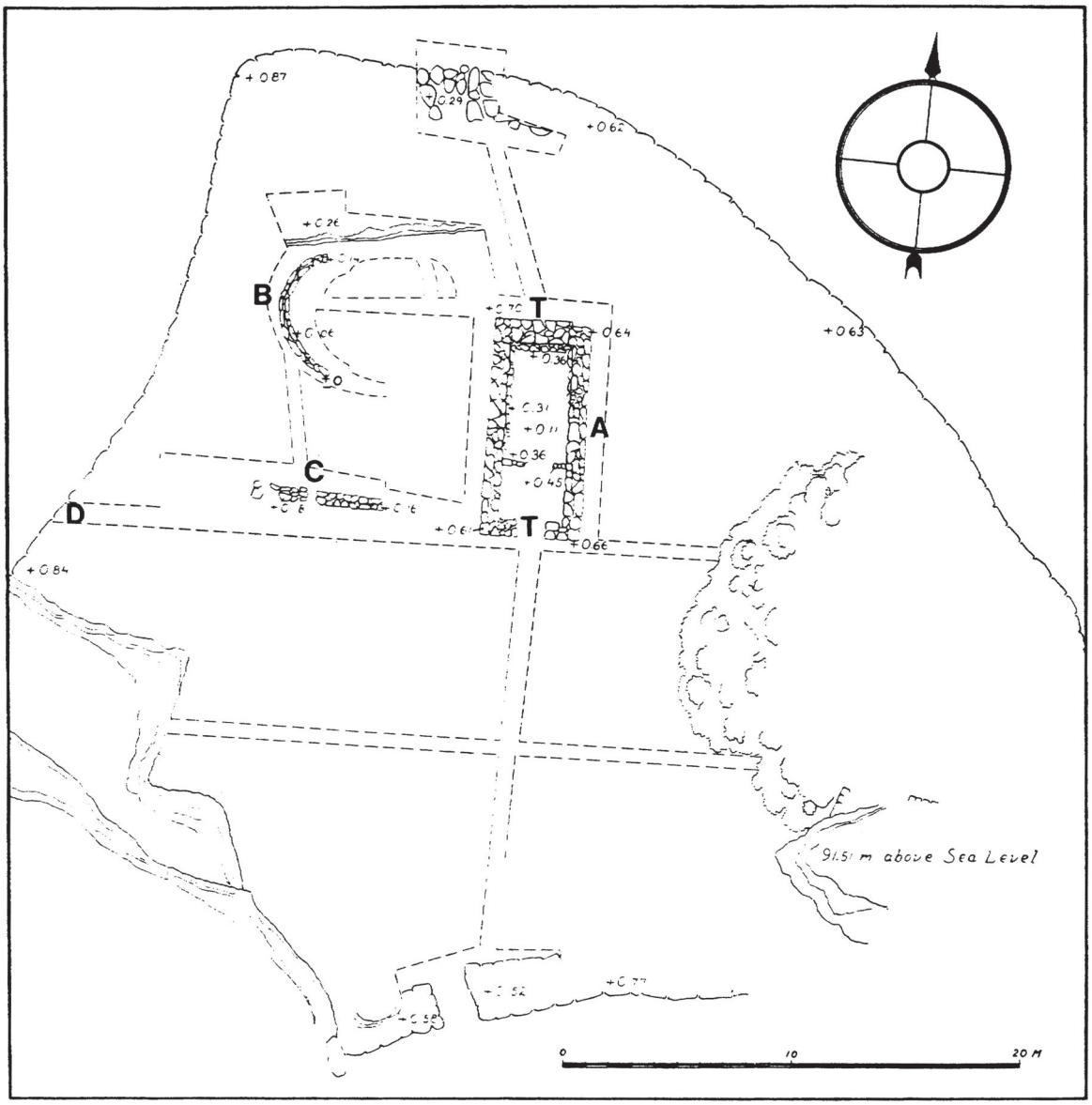

FIG. 1. Plan of the top terrace of the Barbouna hill. A denotes the 8th-century temple, the replacement of the apsidal structure B, with which a large vase deposit, D, is connected. T represents the findspots of the sima pieces discussed. C is a terrace wall. After Ö. Frödin and A. W. Persson, *Asine, Results of the Swedish Excavations 1922–1930*, Stockholm 1938, fig. 130

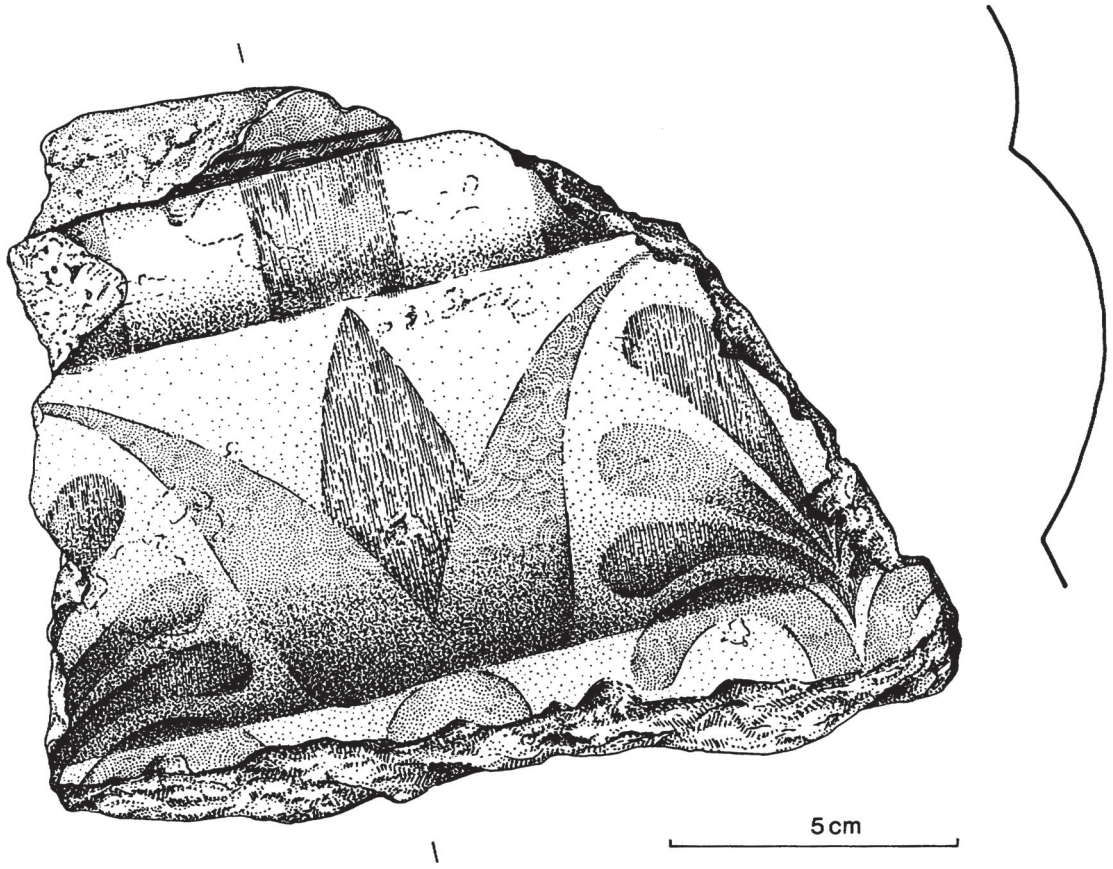

FIG. 2. As 5382 in the Asine Collection at Uppsala. Drawing A. Grenberger

Laconian tile roof and a later, more elaborate, Corinthian one. On the other hand, the Laconian tiles may once have been associated with an ancillary building of humble character on the terrace.[3] In the Nauplion Museum storerooms are kept a large piece of sima, 32.0 cm. long (Pl. 13:a) and several pieces of tiles from the later roof, all found in 1924 by the north wall of the building. Among the material found in the 1926 excavation and now in the Asine collection at Uppsala are two pieces of sima, both catalogued as As 5382, found lying in the doorway at the south end of the building.[4] The larger of these, 16.2 cm. long (Fig. 2, Pl. 13:b, c), is of crucial importance for the reconstruction of the roof of the temple.[5]

[3] This was suggested to me by Dr. Nancy A. Winter and could very well have been the case: a large portion of the terrace remains to be investigated, as is obvious from Figure 1.

[4] The Asine Collection at Uppsala was created in the 1930's from the material donated to Swedish universities by the Greek government; see, e.g., Frödin and Persson (footnote 1 above), p. 12.

[5] The identification of the structure, based on Pausanias, II.36.5, as the temple of Apollo Pythaeus was made during the excavation (Frödin and Persson [footnote 1 above], p. 149). I see no reason to question the attribution. My arguments and the debate concerning the issue are set forth in my forthcoming monograph (footnote 1 above).

The fabric of the sima pieces shows some variation, the Uppsala fragments being white (2.5YR 8/2) and the Nauplion one pale yellow (5Y 8/4), both with brick-red core and large, dark, brownish red grit and a white slip. A large tile fragment in Nauplion differs in that its fabric has a greenish tinge and black grit. The absence of visible mica is of significance. On the fascia and the ovolo are opposing friezes of lotus and palmette, and the astragal is stylized into squares, surface color alternating with blacks and reds, the colors of the friezes. The Nauplion sima preserves the complete height of 18.0 cm.

The two most important pieces of the sima here presented show features that reveal their positions on the gables. As we have noted, the Nauplion sima comes from the northern pediment, the flange indicating its placement on the slope at the spectator's right when facing the building. Greater interest, however, attends As 5382, found lying by the doorway at the south end and thus fallen from the south pediment. At the back of this sima piece (Pl. 13:b, c) are the remnants of the attached horizontal base into which the corner akroterion was sunk and nailed into place. The nail hole pierces the base and continues slightly diagonally into the ovolo. As 5382 therefore also reveals the slope of the roof as 25°. However high the temple once was, its squatness seems assured from the inclination of the roof in the manner of the many small chapels scattered over the Greek landscape today.[6]

Simas closely resembling the Asine one have been found in several places, for instance at Olympia, Athens, and Delphi.[7] The ovolos and astragals of the Olympia simas are more rounded than the Asine ones, while the ovolo of roof 45 from the tufa temple in the Marmaria at Delphi is a trifle flatter. The closest parallel to the Asine sima, however, is Nauplion Museum inv. no. 17282, which G. Hübner thought came from Tiryns.[8] The Tiryns piece is slightly less tall, 16.5 cm. high. Hübner's date of *ca.* 500 B.C. should also be valid for the latest roof decoration of the Apollo temple on the Barbouna hill.

The Asine sima is not of local manufacture. Although clay beds may vary considerably, even within a limited area, Asine pottery is micaceous whereas the Apollo temple sima lacks mica. The fabric both of the sima and of the tile fragments does, however, conform visibly with Argive products of similar date, and it therefore seems logical to seek the origin of the Asine sima in an Argive workshop.[9] In the early 5th century B.C. human activity was again increasing in the Asine area,[10] which had been under Argive control since the end of the 8th century.[11] But we may be fairly certain that the cult of Pythian Apollo was still highly

[6] I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to Dr. Nancy A. Winter for drawing my attention to the significance of the piece in the Uppsala Collection.

[7] *Olympia* II, pp. 194–195; Tafelband, 1896, pls. 118:4 and 119:2 and 4. A similar sima was also found on the Athenian Akropolis: *TdA* I, p. 16, fig. 16. Le Roy, 1967, pp. 101–102 and 219–221, pls. 38, 102, 109.

[8] Hübner, 1975, pp. 123–125 with fig. 4:b, pl. 66:2 and color pl. 8:1. Note that the piece is stored at Tiryns.

[9] This became obvious to me during the first excursion after the conference as we visited the Argos Museum.

[10] Tombs datable to Late Archaic and Early Classical times were excavated at Asine in the early 1970's: B. Rafn, *Asine*, II, *Results of the Excavations East of the Acropolis 1970–1974*, vi, *The Post-Geometric Periods*, 1, *The Graves of the Early Fifth Century B.C.* (*Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Institutet i Athen,* 4°, 24:6:1), Stockholm 1979.

[11] Asine was laid waste by Argos around 720 B.C., but even though the area no longer prospered or was densely populated, it certainly was not deserted, as archaeological discoveries in the 1920's led the excavators to believe: Frödin and Persson (footnote 1 above), p. 437.

popular in the first half of the 5th century, or the two fragments surviving of Bacchylides' paean to this god at Asine would make no sense.[12] After that, rapid decline may have set in. Except for a reference in Thucydides (v.53) to a conflict in the year 419 between Argos and Epidauros over Epidaurian failure to sacrifice to Apollo Pythaeus, our sources for the cult, archaeological as well as literary, become silent for the remainder of the Classical period.

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[12] W. S. Barrett, "Bacchylides, Asine, and Apollo Pythaieus," *Hermes* 82, 1954, pp. 421–444.