

III. THE EARLY HELLADIC POTTERY FROM THE “MASTOS” IN THE BERBATI VALLEY, ARGOLID

by

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The Swedish investigations of the hillock “Mastos” in the western part of the Berbati valley, ca. 3 km south of Mycenae, began in 1936. In this year Åke Åkerström started his excavations of “the Potter’s Quarter” on the eastern part of the hill. Åkerström had three seasons of work before World War II (1936–1938) and resumed fieldwork with a large excavation campaign in 1953, followed by a shorter and concluding season in 1959. Before turning to Åkerström’s EH finds I will mention the EH finds from another section of the hill.

On the south slope of the Mastos, another Swedish archaeologist, Gösta Säflund exposed architectural remains of an Early Helladic date during one excavation campaign in 1937¹. Roughly 825 m² were excavated² on a terrace on the south slope, where several rooms and at least two blocks of houses, alleys and a well-paved street, were uncovered.³ The central part of the settlement consists of buildings A, R and B, which correspond to each other not only in date i.e. EH II, but also in orientation and building technique. A is a rectangular “Megaron” with a large hall, in the middle of which was a round terracotta hearth, and an entrance hall.⁴

In EH III, after the inhabitation in the “Megaron” had ceased, a storehouse of trapezoidal form was constructed (Room N = the “pithos-store”) in the most easterly part of the excavation, bordered by a courtyard (Room P) with bothroi.⁵ The buildings of EH III date, including the so-called “pithos-store”, were destroyed by a large-scale fire and the excavator remarked that the data indicated that the entire excavated area was interrupted at one and the same time by a vast

¹ Säflund, G., *Excavations at Berbati, 1936–1937* (Stockholm studies in classical archaeology, 4), Stockholm 1965.

² Forsén J. 1992, 53.

³ Säflund 1965 (Fn. 1), General plan.

⁴ Säflund 1965 (Fn. 1), 93–106.

⁵ Säflund 1965 (Fn. 1), 117–120. See Pullen for details concerning the EH II and EH III fill found in House N/P (1987, 541–544).

conflagration, which separated the last EH stratum from the following MH strata.⁶

The comparatively “late” date of a destruction layer at Berbati and some other sites in the Argolide-Corinthia, compared to Lerna, was used to invoke a “second wave” of settlers to this area at the end of the Early Bronze Age.⁷ In Säflund’s view the excavated EH settlement on the Mastos, testified “to a high standard of housing and a highly developed social system...The standard of housing appears to advantage in the well-constructed house-foundations...in the excellent proportions of the Megaron, the attractive hearth-stones⁸ and, last but not least, the well made and beautiful pottery⁹. We encounter here a developed yeoman culture, which had nevertheless advanced a considerable way towards a genuine city-culture”.¹⁰

Säflund’s excellent study of the excavated finds, although written in 1937, but due to various reasons not published until in 1965, brought our attention with amazing accuracy, to two important facts regarding the chronological distinctions of certain Early Bronze Age pottery. First of all he concluded that there seemed to be a lacuna in the habitation of the Mastos during the early EH I period as there was no layer with only Class A Ware, i.e. unslipped and polished (A I) or slipped and polished (A II) ware, comparable to that which was found, for instance, at nearby Asine.¹¹ Moreover, he also reached the conclusion that a specific class of Grey Minyan ware existed, already during the EH III period, i.e. a predecessor to the well-known Grey Minyan of the Middle Helladic period, was identified by Säflund at the Mastos.¹² Both these conclusions were corroborated about 50 years

⁶ Säflund 1965 (Fn. 1), 101, 104 table 7, 130, 159.

⁷ Forsén J. 1992, 7, 53–54 with further references.

⁸ Wiencke 2000, 558–559 (of EH II:B-C date).

⁹ Wiencke has found comparable EH II pottery from each of the four sub-phases, as defined at Lerna (EH II:A-D), among the material published by Säflund in 1965 (2000, 533–534, 545, 555–556, 558, 573, 578 and 599).

¹⁰ Säflund 1965 (Fn. 1), 127.

¹¹ Säflund 1965 (Fn. 1), 157.

¹² Säflund 1965 (Fn. 1), 158–159. For further comments see Forsén J. 2002, 135.

later through excavations carried out at the Kefalari Magoula near Argos by Dousoughi¹³ and exemplary pottery research made by Rutter.¹⁴

Rutter identified the so-called Fine, Gray-burnished ware (the predecessor of Grey Minyan) belonging to the two sub-phases 2 and 3 of EH III, but none of sub-phase 1, among the material published by Säflund.¹⁵ Thus Pullen, in his doctoral thesis from 1985, postulated a short “hiatus” in the occupational history of the Mastos during the first sub-phase of EH III.¹⁶ I will return to this so-called “hiatus” in connection to the EH III pottery found by Åkerström on the east side of the Mastos.

A new inventory of Åkerström’s Early Bronze Age finds from the east slope of the Mastos was carried out by the present author in 1995–1996 and a more detailed study of this material is presently being carried out.¹⁷ In 1953 Åkerström excavated a find complex called “Room X” in the southwest quadrant of the excavation area, adjacent to the so-called “North Trench”, which ran along the north wall of the potter’s quarter (Pl. 1). In this area Åkerström recorded that he, underneath some Mycenaean pottery, found a “compact fill of EH pottery of the most commonly found shapes in every strata down to stratum 15”¹⁸ (each stratum was a 10 cm thick artificial layer adding up to a ca. 1.5 meter thick EH layer in total).

The pottery from “Room X” (which is not a room *per se*) has, on closer inspection, revealed mostly EH II material, but also a fair amount of late EH I, or, Talioti pottery (Pls. 2–3) of well known types, e.g. different parts of fruit-stands and incised handles and rims of closed vessels. Large amounts of EH II pottery

¹³ Dousoughi 1987, 164–220. Maran is not convinced that Talioti pottery represents a late EH I phase in the Argolid (1998, 8–9), although it is becoming increasingly clear that there is not only an earlier EH I phase and assemblage of pottery in the Argolid, but that the Talioti phase pottery is distinctive for a region (Argolido-Corinthia), which is distinctly different from the later EH I pottery assemblage found at Eutresis in Boiotia or Perachora in Corinthia (see Rutter 1993a, 761 n. 60). Pullen even suggests that two different set-ups existed during the early EH I period, i.e. a southern and a northern Argive ceramic repertory (1995, 41). Moreover, I think it is likely that pottery evolve and change typologically over a period that is estimated to have lasted as long as 350–450 years (see Rutter 1993a, table 2).

¹⁴ Rutter 1983a, 327–355.

¹⁵ Rutter 1983a, 338.

¹⁶ Pullen 1985a, 77.

¹⁷ The present author is currently working on a publication of the EH material from Åkerström’s excavations, while other contributors are studying the Neolithic, Middle Bronze Age and Late Bronze Age finds.

¹⁸ Åkerström’s recording in “Berbati 1953. Stratifikationner II, 106.” Notation written 16/7/1966.

was found in different excavation units spread over the entire excavation area, but this material awaits further study before detailed chronological and/or functional differences can be ascertained. However, it is important to note at this preliminary stage that roof tiles of EH II date have been found in the northeast quadrant, in a unit called “Lenas room” (Pl. 1). Whether or not this implies another “corridor house” similar to those already known in Greece,¹⁹ is of course impossible to say without further excavations. It is clear, however, that a well-built “town” of highest order in any kind of hierarchy,²⁰ existed on the Mastos as evidenced by the “town planning”,²¹ terracotta hearths,²² an actual cylinder seal or roller of clay,²³ seal impressions,²⁴ “exotic” non-local pottery²⁵ etc.

Returning now to the possibility of a “hiatus” during the first sub-phase of the ensuing EH III period as suggested by Pullen,²⁶ some sub-phase 1 pottery of the EH III period has already been published, which would seem to refute such a hypothesis.²⁷ However, the find context is not always clear and these EH III sherds belong to the material, which has been mixed up due to the vicissitudes of World War II. This is actually true for most of the Early Bronze Age pottery emanating from Åkerström’s excavations, but not always because of the chaotic conditions prevailing during the war,²⁸ but because many years have passed since the pottery was unearthed and through the years much of it has either been discarded, misplaced, or, in one way or another, lost notations of its original find context. I think it is likely though that more EH III sub-phase 1 pottery will appear among the remaining pottery from Åkerström’s excavations, once the detailed study of this material has been completed.

¹⁹ Shaw 1987, 59–79; According to Wiencke other important buildings could have roof tiles, not necessarily corridor houses (1989, 498).

²⁰ For further references see Forsén J. 1992, 189–192; 1996, 119. In the latter study the Mastos is seen in a larger regional context including not only the Berbati valley but also the neighbouring Miyio valley and the Limnes area further east (Forsén J. 1996a, 117–120).

²¹ Säflund 1965 (Fn. 1), 127.

²² Säflund 1965 (Fn. 1), 98–100. Forsén J. 2002, 136–137, fig. 1.

²³ Dousougli 1989, 19–21. See also Wiencke, M. H., ‘Banded pithoi of Lerna III’, *Hesperia* 39, 1970, 94–110: 94–95 n. 4 (the size of the Berbati seal is comparable to S 102 from Lerna).

²⁴ Säflund 1965 (Fn.1), 100 fig. 83; Forsén J. 2002, 137 fig. 1.

²⁵ Säflund 1965 (Fn.1), 135 fig. 106:f-h, 149 fig. 114:b.

²⁶ Pullen 1985a, 77.

²⁷ Forsén J. 2002, 137–139.

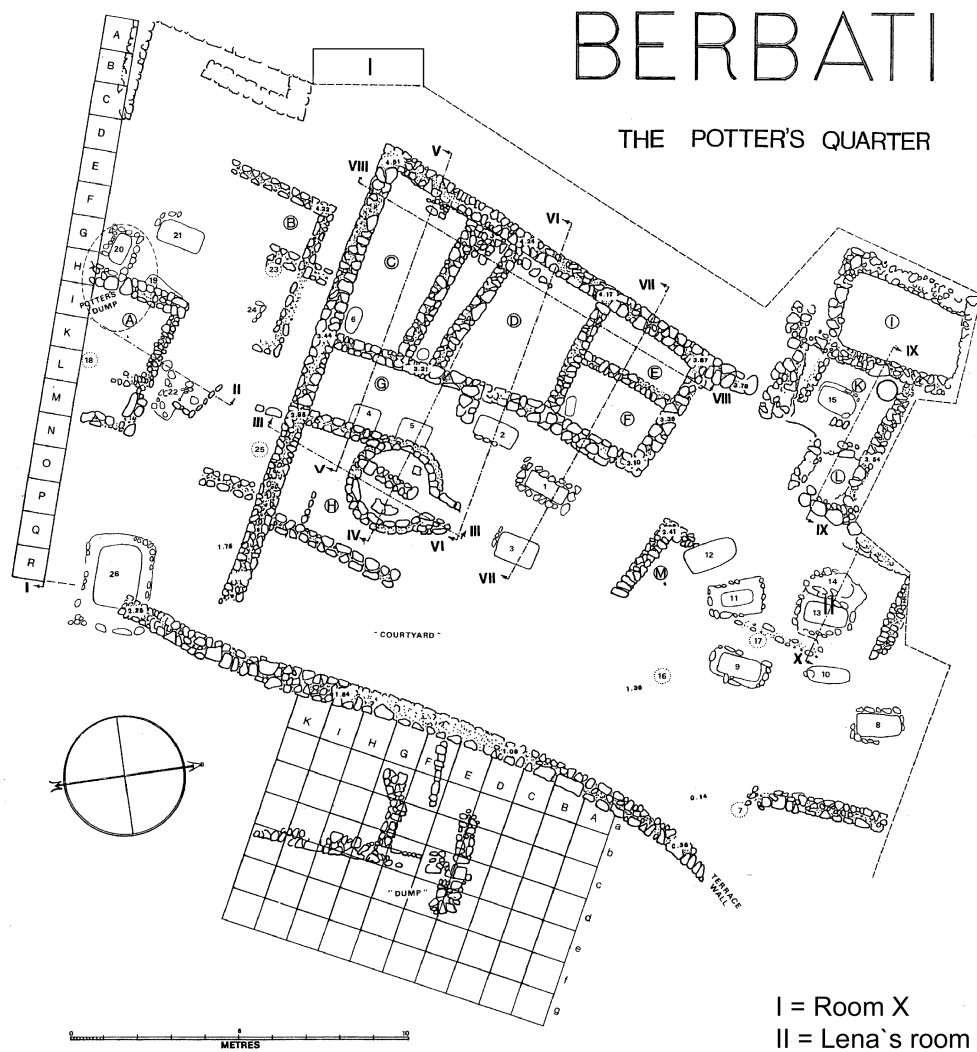
²⁸ Åkerström, Å., *Berbat 2. The pictorial pottery* (ActaAth-4^o, 36:2), Stockholm 1987, 24.

In 1999 a detailed surface survey was carried out of the entire hill in order to learn about how it was used in different periods.²⁹ It was once again confirmed that the EH settlement extended all the way from the south slopes to the east terraces.³⁰ The Early Bronze Age finds from the surface survey in 1999 included hearth fragments and pottery spanning the entire EH I-III period.³¹

²⁹ Wells, B., ‘Berbati, Mastos’ in Blackman D., (ed.), *Archaeological Reports for 1999–2000*, 34–35.

³⁰ Forsén J. 2002, 136.

³¹ This material is subject to a detailed study by M. Lindblom at Uppsala University.



Berbati: Potter's Quarter after: Akerström A, Berbati, vol. 2, The pictorial pottery, Stockholm 1987.



OR = 16



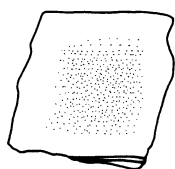
Str.6



IR = c. 13



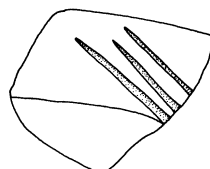
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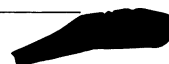
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Str.14

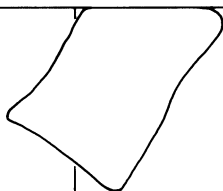


OR = c. 20



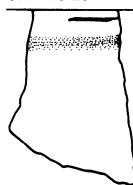
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OR = 8

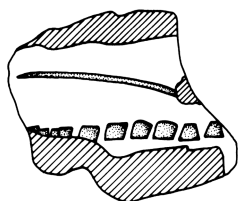


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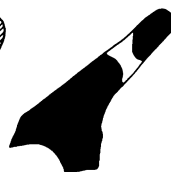
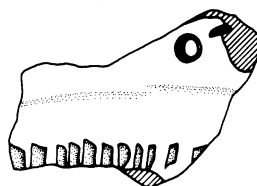
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Str.13



Str.11

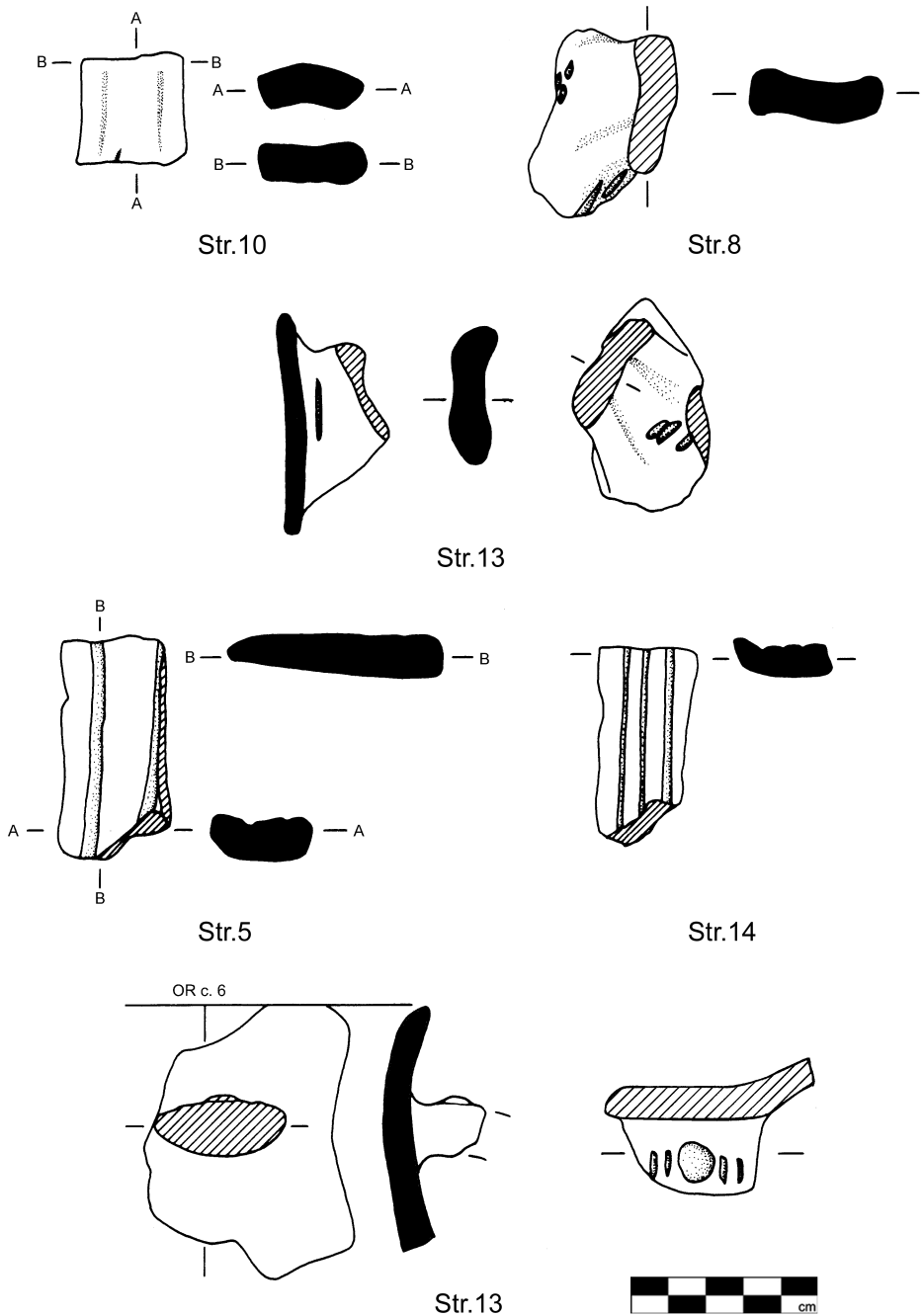


Str.13



Berbat: Pottery

Plate 3



Berbati: Pottery