



Ithaca Beyond Homer: A Classical and Hellenistic Polis

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Abstract. Beyond the Bronze Age and Geometric Period through landscape analysis and the GIS, we can prove that the polis of Ithaca in the Classical and Hellenistic periods was characterized by the expansion of the settlements, and the construction of numerous fortifications, so that once this process had concluded, all of the cultivable land on the island was brought into play and all of the population centers would have been interconnected and visual surveillance would have existed throughout all parts of the island liable to be exploited. In short, Ithaca was an independent city-state community fully structured from a political, religious and economic point of view that was flourishing and expanding during the Classical and Hellenistic Periods.

Keywords: Ionian Islands; Ithaca; Classical Period; Hellenistic Period.

[esp] Ítaca más allá de Homero: una polis clásica y helenística

Resumen. Más allá de la Edad del Bronce y de la Época Geométrica y mediante un análisis territorial y a través de los SIG, podemos comprobar que la polis de Ítaca en los períodos clásico y helenístico se caracterizó por la expansión de los asentamientos y la construcción de numerosas fortificaciones, de modo que, una vez concluido este proceso, toda la tierra cultivable a lo largo de toda la isla fue puesta en explotación y todos los núcleos de población quedaron conectados visualmente entre sí. En suma, Ítaca fue una polis plenamente estructurada desde el punto de vista político, religioso y económico que floreció y se expandió durante las Épocas Clásica y Helenística.

Palabras clave: Islas Jónicas; Ítaca; Período Clásico; Época Helenística.

Summary: 1. Classical and Hellenistic Ithaca. 2. Territory. 3. Settlement during the Classical and Hellenistic periods. 4. Exploitation and visual surveillance of the territory. 5. Bibliographical references.

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1. Classical and Hellenistic Ithaca²

Ithaca, beyond the Homeric era, but equally enchanting, is now emerging.³

There is not, nor ever has been, a single traveller, either ancient or modern, who has addressed Ithaca without evoking the island of myth and legend, as sung in Homer's poems. There is not, nor has ever been, a single traveller, either modern or ancient, who has not thought of Odysseus, Penelope and Telemachus, and has not felt the nostalgia of absence or excitement of return, who has not wondered about or sought out the tangible places that served as the setting for one of the great epic poems of world literature. Before any other conception, be it geographical, archaeological or historical, Ithaca is a cultural construction, essentially the fruit of human imagination.

This fascination with Homer, which seeks to trace vestiges of a Homeric past in Ithaca, has characterised research regarding the island from the very beginning, to the extent in which, in the words of C. Morgan: "Archaeological research on Ithaca has been severely constrained by its Homeric focus and especially by the search for Odysseus' palace".⁴ This Homer-mania has another dimension, one in which improbable efforts have been exerted for scant returns: the relatively modest findings that could be attributed to a "Homeric" period have fuelled the long-running debate, one that has lasted to the present day, as to the site where the "real" Ithaca of the Poems could be found, with various proposals emerging over and above the island itself, such as Leucas or Cephallenia (the Paliki Peninsula or Lixouri).⁵ However, as we shall see, and this is what interests us here, it seems certain that the island we know as Ithaca today was known by this name from at least the fifth century onwards and, what is more, it was a polis.⁶

In view of this "Cnossian labyrinth", we can see that the fascination with "Homeric" archaeology has led to a serious imbalance regarding our knowledge of Ancient Ithaca, overshadowing the historical facts somewhat. This fascination has focused on archaeological evidence dating back to the Bronze Age and the Geometric Period (the supposed "Homeric" eras), whilst research has concentrated on the western part of the island, which is more susceptible to "Homeric" musings,⁷ which not only means that we have much less knowledge of the eastern part of the island, but the island's most important periods have been relegated to the background,

² This work has been carried out within the framework of the research project PID2019-105281GB-I00, financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation.

³ Livitsanis 2013, 124.

⁴ Morgan 2007, 75.

⁵ Leucas: Dörpfeld 1927. Cephallenia or Ithaca: Souyouzoglou-Haywood 2018, 145-148 and Table 1: "To date, fourteen hypotheses among those published at great length have identified Kephallonia with Homeric Ithaca" (148). Another eleven hypotheses have identified Homeric Ithaca with present-day Ithaca. Sieberer (1990, 149-150) has highlighted the somewhat vague knowledge of the geographical environment of Western Greece in Homer's poems. Even the realm of historiography has debated the possibility that Homeric Ithaca was only identified with the present-day island in a subsequent period, when more precise knowledge was acquired (Souyouzoglou-Haywood 2018, 154).

⁶ Thucydides (2.30, 66) does not name Ithaca, but describes the location of the other islands of the Ionian Sea so precisely that Ithaca can only have meant the island opposite Cephallenia.

⁷ See Livitsanis 2014, 12: "One of the still dark periods of Ithaca's archaeology is the Late Archaic and Classical (500-323 BC)".

namely the Classical and Hellenistic periods. In the pages that follow, our aim is to approach the Ithaca of Classical and Hellenistic times, in an attempt to define its history and understand the way in which a polis occupied, exploited and defended its territory, bringing together the scarce, diffuse and fragmented information we possess in a single historical account and employing the Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to a great extent.

2. Territory

Ithaca is located in the southern part of the Ionian archipelago, very close to Cephallenia, from which it was separated by a narrow strait measuring only two nautical miles in width, the Ithaca Channel or the Strait of Cephallenia,⁸ hence its vital and overwhelming importance, since all sea traffic from Italy into the Aegean passed through this Strait.⁹ The island presents an area of 107 km² and a perimeter measuring 114 km.¹⁰ The distance N-S is 23 km and E-W, at its narrowest point, at the Bay of Molos (Mt. Rachi Gero Mavrou), the island measures less than one kilometre across, whilst it is 6.5 km across at its widest point (**Fig. 1**).¹¹ Leaving to one side the small islands that make up the archipelago of the nearby Echinades, this is an island of modest size in comparison with others throughout the Ionian region; in fact, it is the smallest island in the Ionian. Cephallenia measured some 760 km², a significant size by Greek standards,¹² but it was a *tetrapolis*, with each polis encompassing an average surface area of 190 km². The other islands all consisted of a single polis. Corcyra measured 593 km², Zacynthus 406 km², and Leucas 303 km². That is to say, Ithaca was three times smaller than Leucas. Nevertheless, this modest size reached the average in terms of the size of the *póleis* throughout the rest of the Greek world.¹³ Therefore, the main problem with Ithaca was not really its size, but its long and precipitous profile and the arid conditions throughout a good part of the island.

In effect, the ratio between area and perimeter comes to nearly 1:1 (1:1.07), which reflects a territory that is not very compact, in view of the long N-S profile of the island, which meant that it could not be exploited from a single centre, but required numerous settlements so that the different areas susceptible to agricultural exploitation could be used. With regard to the relationship between surface area and altitude (**Table 1**), some 32 km² can be found between 0 and 100 m in altitude (approximately 30% of the total size of the island), 23 km² are located between 100 and 200 m (22%), 10 km² are situated between 200 and 300 m (9%), 16 km² between 330 and 400 m (15%), 14 km² between 400 and 500 m (13%), 7 km² between 500 and 600 m

⁸ Ps. Scylax *Per.* 34; Str. 8.3.26, 10.2.13.

⁹ See Livy (37.13.11-12), when the strait of Cephallenia was infested with pirates, and the passage was shut against the convoys from Italy (*clausumque iam mare commeatibus Italicis erat*); Sotiriou 2010, 97-98.

¹⁰ Measurement carried out through GIS. Partsch (1892, 5) assessed the surface area to be barely 104 km²; Morgan 2007, 84, n. 95: between 100 km² and 114 km²; Livitsanis 2014, 20: 120 km². Strabo (10.2.11) talks about a perimeter of 80 stadia (14.8 km), which must be the diagonal distance running N-S.

¹¹ Goodison 1822, 139: 15 miles in length; Morgan 2007, 91.

¹² Ps. Scylax (*Per.* 114) places it between Casos and Naxos in terms of size.

¹³ In terms of size of territory, it has been classified as size of territory Class 2 of 5 (50-100 km²), although it only just enters this category (Gehrke – Wirbelauer 2004, 360-361). Actually it would be Class 3.

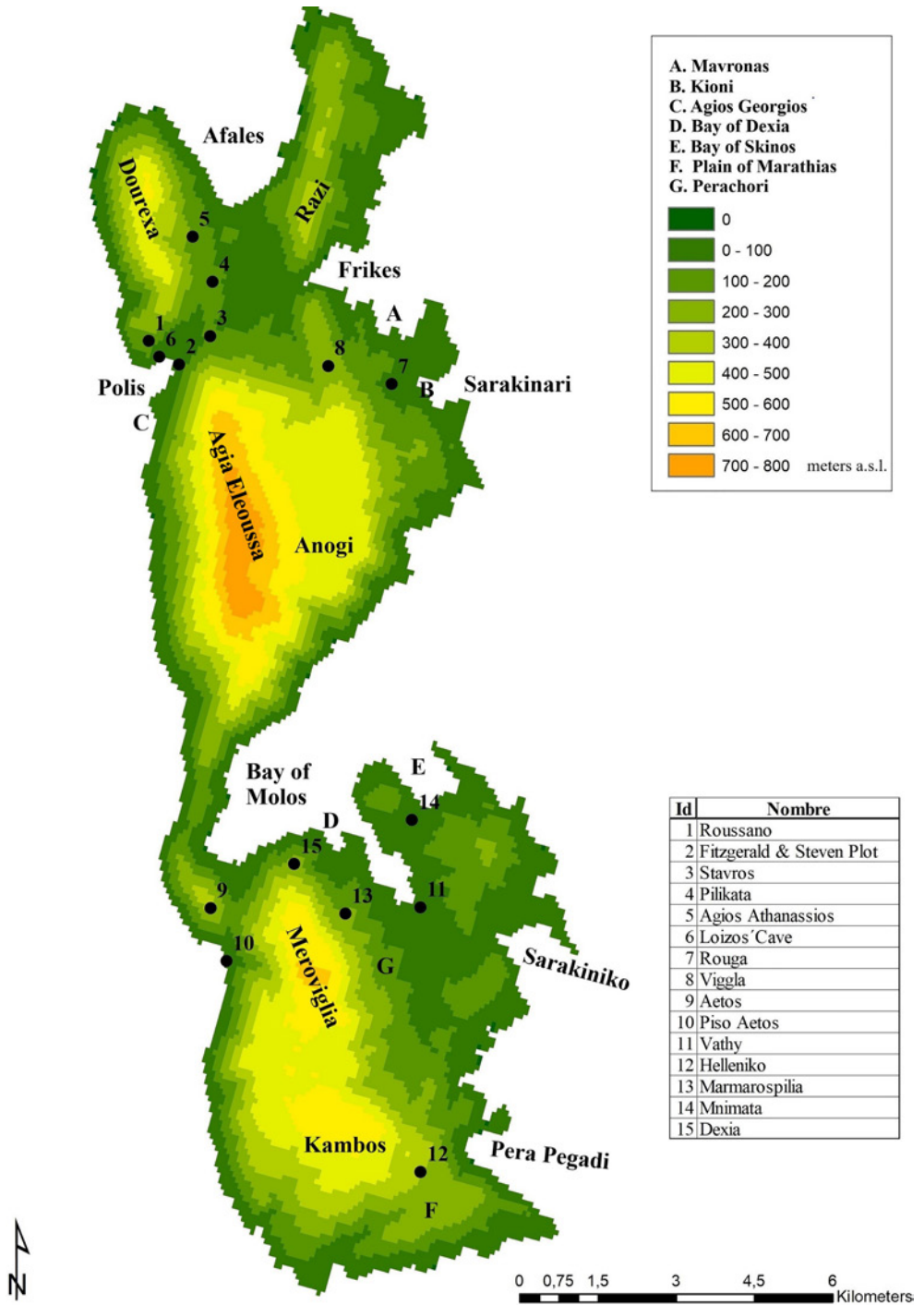


Figure 1. Ithaca (author's elaboration).

(6.5%), 3 km² between 600 and 700 m and 1.6 km² between 700 and 800 m. Little more than 50% of the island is below 200 m, which means we are dealing with an especially precipitous territory in relation to the island's long profile. As we shall see, this means that probably only between 10% and 20% of the overall surface area was exploitable from the point of view of agricultural cultivation. This led to a necessarily intensive exploitation of livestock and fishing resources on the island, not to mention the practice of hunting and food gathering. It is doubtful whether their territory encompassed other islands closer to Leucas or the Acarnanian Coast.¹⁴

Altitude (metres a.s.l)	Surface Area (km ²)	Percentage (%)
0-100	32.55	30.38
100-200	23.20	21.65
200-300	10.08	9.40
300-400	15.58	14.60
400-500	14.33	13.35
500-600	7.02	6.55
600-700	2.74	2.55
700-800	1.63	1.52
Total	107.14	100.00

Table 1. Ithaca. Altitude and Surface.

Another characteristic of the island is its steep slopes, as witnessed by the fact that the surface area between 200 and 300 m in altitude is less extensive than that situated between 300 and 400 m (60% more). Furthermore, a good part of the island, close to one third of the total surface area, is situated between 300 and 500 m in altitude. A typical example of this precipitous terrain is Aetos, located in the middle of the island, this being the site of the *ásty*, which presents a series of sheer and rugged slopes rising up some 378 m in altitude. Another of the characteristics of Ithaca is precisely the presence of high plateaus such as Anogi in the north or Kambos in the south. Another typical feature is the dearth of rivers on the island, which are not perennial or even seasonal. Except for a few streams in the north, as in Gephyri, water supply was one of the main problems on Ithaca, depending to a large extent on freshwater springs, which explains the long-running settlement of what is known as the "School of Homer" close to the Melanydros Spring or the presence of Classical and Hellenistic material at the Asprosykia Spring, some 450 m to the west of Stavros. In other cases, these torrents or springs were situated in such uneven terrain that any kind of settlement was quite impossible. This is especially true in the southernmost parts of Ithaca, the most unproductive section of the island. This scarcity of water, which made settlement and exploitation of the territory difficult, forced the inhabitants

¹⁴ Except perhaps Atokos, the neighbouring islands such as Meganisi or Arkoudi probably belonged to Leucas or to the Acarnanian *póleis*.

of the island to build cisterns, which are especially numerous, for example, at Aetos. In short, we are dealing with a mountainous and rocky island featuring a limited amount of arable land.¹⁵

Ithaca narrows in the middle to the extent in which the Isthmus of Molos, measuring some 600 m in width, divides and “breaks up” the island into two parts or peninsulas, rather than joining them: the Northern Peninsula and the Southern Peninsula (see **Fig. 1** and **Table 2**). Aetos, which stands in the middle of the island, connected and controlled the passage between the two peninsulas.¹⁶ This is undoubtedly the most characteristic feature of the island, namely the division of its territory into two peninsulas, with the *ásty* in the middle between the two regions.

The Northern Peninsula presents a surface area of approximately 58 km² and a perimeter measuring 58.5 km, whilst the Southern Peninsula occupies an area measuring 49 km² and has a perimeter of 56 km (**Table 2**).

Altitude (m a.s.l.)	NORTHERN PENINSULA		SOUTHERN PENINSULA	
	Surface Area (km ²)	Percentage (%)	Surface Area (km ²)	Percentage (%)
0-100	15.91	27.52	16.53	33.55
100-200	12.32	21.31	11.53	23.37
200-300	8.51	14.72	6.97	14.13
300-400	5.27	9.11	4.70	9.53
400-500	8.24	14.25	5.98	12.12
500-600	3.63	6.27	3.38	6.85
600-700	2.41	4.17	0.22	0.45
700-800	1.53	2.65	–	–
Total	57.82	100.00	49.32	100.00

Table 2. The Northern and Southern peninsulas.

On the Northern Peninsula, which is dominated by the Neriton mountain range,¹⁷ some 14 km² are situated between 0 and 100 m in altitude (approximately 28% of the total surface area of the peninsula), 12 km² are located between 100 and 200 m (21%), 8.5 km² between 200 and 300 m (15%), 5 km² between 300 and 400 m (9%), 8 km² between 400 and 500 m (14%), 3.6 km² between 500 and 600 m (6%), 2.5 km² between 600 and 700 m (4%) and 1.5 km² between 700 and 800 m (2.6%). As we can see, the surface area between 400 and 500 m is greater than between 300 and 400 m, which reflects the high plateaus that can be found above 400 m in altitude.

The most appropriate area for settlement on the Northern Peninsula runs NW between the Bays of Polis, in the south, and those of Frikes and Afales in the north

¹⁵ Leake 1835, 31; Morgan 2007, 74; Livitsanis 2014, 20.

¹⁶ Goodison 1822, 148; Leake 1835, 36; Partsch 1892, 5-6; Morgan 2007, 74.

¹⁷ Mt. Neriton includes the mountains ranges of Kleisma Paraskevis (806 m) and Agia Eleoussa (809 m).

(Fig. 4). Mounts Neriton (Agia Eleoussa, 809 m), Razi (351 m) and Viggla (289 m) face NE and Pernarakia (505 m) and Neion (Dourexa, 519 m) face NW. This hilly country was dominated by the Stavros-Pilikata line, which rose up to 150 m in altitude, running 1 km in length and 200 m in width. The area measured approximately 5 km² and, from a geomorphological point of view, included a series of alluvial deposits, Pleistocene consolidated conglomerate and fluvio-terrestrial deposits, not to mention Oligocene Miocene flysch and clay beds. Together with Vathy on the Southern Peninsula, this was the most fertile part of the entire island, one that was supplied by various springs and by the torrents that ran down from the nearby mountains.¹⁸ On the eastern coast of the Peninsula, between Cape Mavronas and the Bay of Sarakinari, at the site of the present-day town of Kioni, another area could be cultivated, measuring less than half a square kilometre in size. To the south of the Peninsula ran the high plateau of Anogi, at more than 400 m in altitude and covering an area of 1-2 km² in size, and the area of the present-day town of Lefki, located on the precipitous west coast, measuring 0.2 km² in size. Anogi appears to have been a settlement that originated in Medieval times, whilst the area of Lefki seems to have been occupied possibly since the Roman period, as the neighbouring site of Agios Georgios would appear to suggest.¹⁹ In this respect, in Classical and Hellenistic times the population would have been concentrated mainly around the Stavros-Pilikata area, and it is also possible that only the areas of Stavros-Pilikata and Kioni featured sites of grouped habitation. In the cases of Anogi and Lefki we could be dealing with a system of extensive exploitation, without any population centres and only dispersed or even non-existent settlers.

In the case of the Southern Peninsula, some 17 km² are located between 0 and 100 m in altitude (approximately 33% of the entire surface area), 12 km² between 100 and 200 m (23%), 7 km² between 200 and 300 m (14%), 5 km² between 300 and 400 m (9.5%), 6 km² between 400 and 500 m (12%), 3.4 km² between 500 and 600 m (7%), 0.2 km² between 600 and 700 m (0.44%) and 1.5 km² between 700 and 800 m (2.6%). In the same manner as on the northern part of the island, the high plateaus, such as Mega Kambos, make up an area located at around 400 m in altitude. The most fertile and extensive region undoubtedly stretched from the bay and present-day town of Vathy (**Fig. 2**)²⁰ towards the town of Perachori in the south, between Mounts Meroviglia (570 m) and Nerovouno (669 m) in the west and Mounts Karnavas (186 m) and Paliomylos (192 m) in the east. The area measured some 2-3 km² in size and was made up of alluvial deposits, scree and talus cone. To the west extended a small cultivable area between the Bay of Molos (Bros Aetos) in the north and the Bay of Piso Aetos in the south. This was a very small area measuring just 0.5 km², featuring alluvial deposits and Pleistocene consolidated conglomerate and fluvio-terrestrial deposits, crammed between Mounts Meroviglia and Paliokastro (378 m), alongside the *ásty* of the polis of Ithaca itself. At the south-eastern end of the peninsula there was an especially remote area, beyond Mount Meroviglia (570 m) made up of the plateau of Marathias, between 270 and 290 m in altitude²¹ and measuring 0.5 km² in size. Nevertheless, this small area may have been cultivable in

¹⁸ Livitsanis 2014, 20.

¹⁹ Pentedeka *et alii* 2014, 777-778.

²⁰ Leake 1835, 33.

²¹ Partsch 1892, 6.

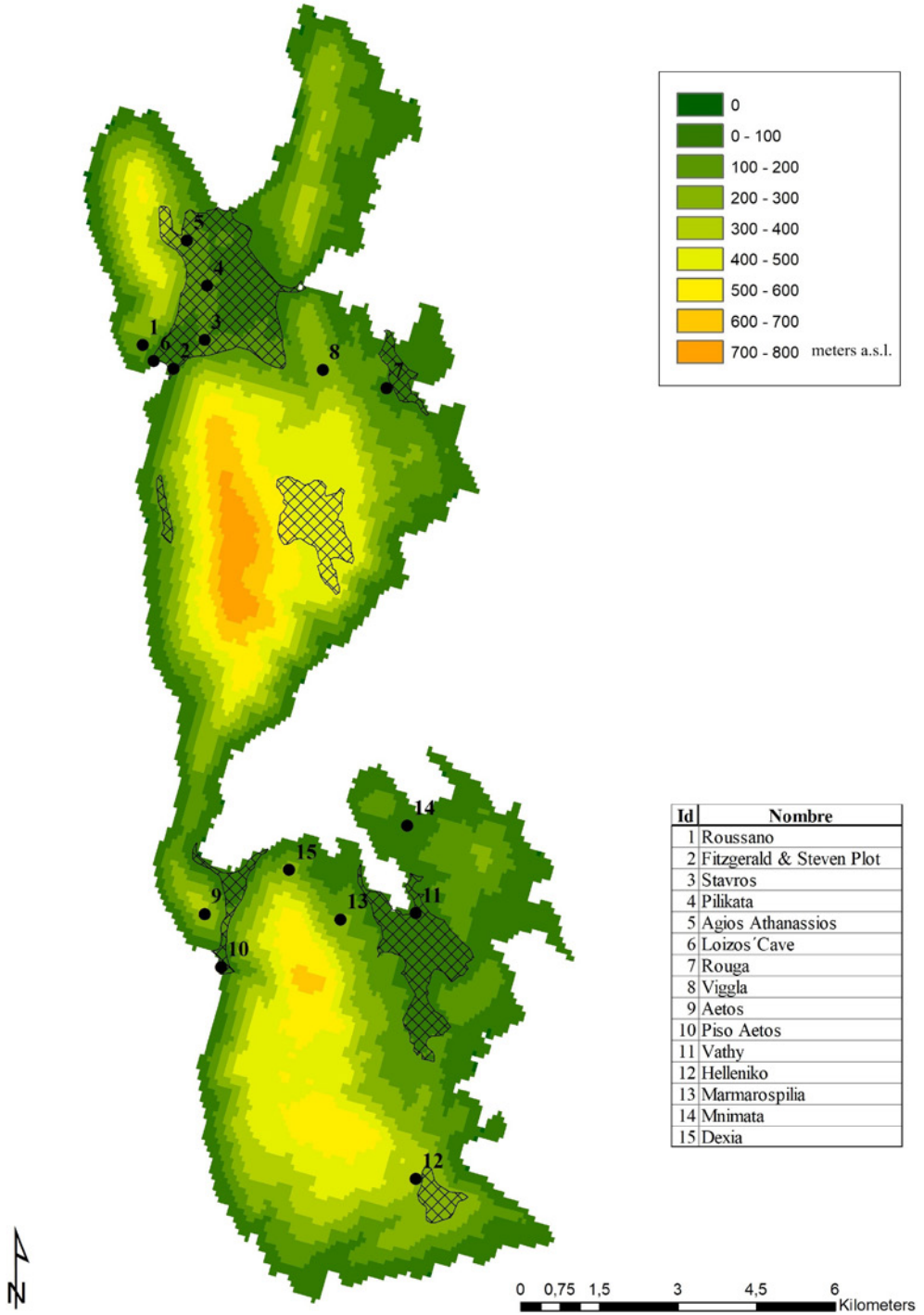


Figure 2. Ithaca. Agricultural resources (author's elaboration).

ancient times.²² Finally, to the south-west of Perachori lay the plateau of Mega Kambos. Over and above its altitude, which rises higher than 400 m, the arid nature of this terrain would not appear to have favoured any kind of settlement here.

In short, we have two very similar parts of the island in terms of their size.²³ Most of the island, probably more than 80%, consisted of Ionian zone carbonate series type soil of the Jurassic Cretaceous age, which was practically non-cultivable. There were very few areas where multi-family population centres could be established, being restricted to two areas in the north and three in the south. Actually, both peninsulas featured a cultivable area concentrated in one specific region, Stavros-Pilikata in the north and Vathy in the south. The northern part of the island featured some small sections of cultivable land between the Bay of Polis and Agios Athanassios, whilst in the southern part of the island the cultivated fields were concentrated around Vathy.²⁴

Various harbours granted access to the island. Starting in the north and the eastern side of Ithaca, we find Frikes, Mavronas-Limeni and Kioni-Filiatro. In the centre of the island opens out the extensive Bay of Molos (Bros Aetos), which is followed by three other bays, Skinós, Dexia and Vathy, with their respective harbours. To the south lies Sarakiniko. These harbours on the east coast present a number of difficulties. First of all, a good number of them were very small and could barely provide shelter for three or four boats. This was the case with Frikes, a tolerable harbour, Dexia, a harbour where boats could anchor without difficulty, in a similar manner to Skinós, although the latter was somewhat wider.²⁵ Second, various harbours along the east coast presented difficult communication links with the interior, as was the case with Frikes, which only had a narrow gorge leading inland.²⁶ However, the main problem with the eastern harbours on the island was the fact that they were exposed to the wind. Thus, Gell encountered difficulties entering the harbour of Molos due to the wind and was forced to anchor at Skinós and reach Vathy from there overland.²⁷ Mavronas was not a safe harbour either because of winds from the south-east.²⁸ In the case of the winds directly from the east, Leake noted that boats preferred to anchor at Mavronas or Limeni rather than at Frikes.²⁹ Finally, and no less importantly, and precisely because of the winds on the east coast, the main maritime traffic in ancient times ran along the west coast rather than the east, along the Strait of Cephallenia.

On the west coast of the island, the only two usable harbours were Piso Aetos and the Bay of Polis. Nevertheless, these were only small harbours and could not compete with Same in Cephallenia in terms of capacity, which was undoubtedly the most important harbour along the Strait of Cephallenia. Even so, the two Ithacan harbours, in addition to serving as a supply line for the island, played their role in maritime traffic, although this role was probably quite modest.

²² In modern times, Perachori was the only village, apart from Vathy, in the south of the island, and it is located in a mountainous setting at 330-350 m in altitude (Parsch 1892, 6).

²³ Livitsanis 2014, 20.

²⁴ Morgan 2007, 74: "There is also a contrast in topography, with smaller but visually connected pockets of cultivable land in the north (north of, and around Mt. Neriton), whereas the south has a larger but more confined plain".

²⁵ Gell 1807, 65, 155-159; Leake 1835, 25.

²⁶ Leake 1835, 53.

²⁷ Gell 1807, 156-159.

²⁸ Gell 1807, 155-156.

²⁹ Leake 1835, 33.

3. Settlement during the Classical and Hellenistic periods

As a whole, we know of approximately fifteen sites dating from the Classical and Hellenistic Periods of varying characteristics (settlements, fortifications, necropoleis, sanctuaries and harbour facilities), although some, such as Helleniko, located on the plain of Marathias, have generated significant doubts regarding their settlement during these periods (**Table 3**):

	Settlement	Fortification	Necropolis	Sanctuary
Aetos	x	x	x	x
Piso Aetos	x			
Vathy	x			¿?
Helleniko	¿?	¿?	¿?	
Mnimata		x		
Dexia		x		
Roussano	¿?	x		
Cave of Polis				x
Stavros	¿?		x	
Agios Athanassios	x	x	x	¿?
Pilikata	¿?	¿?	x	
Rouga	¿?	x		
Cave of Marmarospilia				x
Fitzgerald & Stevens Plot			x	
Viggla		¿?		

Table 3. Sites from Classical to Hellenistic Periods.

In the Bay of Polis, as he was entering the harbour, Gell saw the ruins of a tower on the left; here Leake indicated a small acropolis and he noted that various tombs had been discovered towards the south, towards the beach and on the sides of Mount Neriton beyond Stavros.³⁰ In 1814, Haller sketched the polygonal walls on the western side of the Harbour of Polis, which he called the Castle of Polis.³¹ Schliemann indicated that, some 100 m from the Cave of Polis, could be found the ruins of an ancient acropolis with walls of between 1 and 2 m in length and 1.30 m in width; Salvator also mentioned the existence of an ancient wall at a site known as Paleokastra, on Mount Roussano, which closed off the Bay of Polis to the north-west.³² Finally, Dörpfeld excavated what he called the small Castle of Malos, which

³⁰ Gell 1807, 138; Leake 1835, 45.

³¹ Steinhart – Wirbelauer 2002, 114-115, 170, 187-188, figs. 42, 43, 75.

³² Schliemann 1869, 47; Salvator 1905, 168-173; Steinhart – Wirbelauer 2002, 188-189, fig. 75.

possessed polygonal walls and featured Classical, Greek (Hellenistic?) and Roman ceramics (see **Table 4** for a summary distinguishing for each site the periods of occupation).³³

Mount Roussano makes up the southern part of the mountain range consisting of Pernarakia (509 m) and Dourexa (or Neion, 519 m). Right at the end of this mount, below 200 m in altitude (between 180 and 200 m precisely), exists a small flat area that features an ancient fortification made of polygonal dressed stones, which could date from the Hellenistic Period, and is known as Paleokastro of Roussano, Kastro Malou or Malos (1). The area measures approximately 0.16 hectares and has a perimeter measuring 180 m. Whatever the case may be, it is larger than a mere tower.³⁴ Although it has been thought that this site would not have been systematically occupied,³⁵ it is possible that a small, fortified settlement may have existed here in Hellenistic times.

On the road that runs down from Stavros towards the Bay of Polis, on the eastern side of the valley and at a place known as the “Fitzgerald & Steven Plot” (2), just in front of Roussano, Livitsanis excavated part of a necropolis featuring a series of pyres attached. The burial sites dated from the end of the Archaic Period to the beginning of the third century.³⁶ The problem resides in the fact that we do not have any evidence of a nearby settlement to which these tombs might correspond³⁷ and there are various alternatives. We might, perhaps, think of Paleokastro of Roussano or Pilikata, which would seem to be somewhat too far away, or of a settlement located in Stavros. It is possible to think that a harbour existed in the Bay of Polis that may have served the Northern Peninsula and provided a communicating link inland.³⁸ Through the Bay of Polis ran the important naval route of the Strait of Cephallenia,³⁹ and it seems unquestionable that links between the Bay of Polis and Aetos habitually took place by sea. From the Harbour of Polis we have an inscription on a black-figure vase dating from the fifth century,⁴⁰ which would support the hypothesis of the existence of a harbour in the bay.

In Stavros (3) a number of routes join together that run from the Bay of Polis to the Bay of Frikes and towards Pilikata, Agios Athanassios and the fertile Valley of Kalamos.⁴¹ It was here that Gell observed a series of walls that Vollgraff failed to find a century later.⁴² Waterhouse, for his part, highlighted “the existence of large, dressed blocks lower down the slope at the head of the valley, and of other blocks and rock-cuttings farther westwards, towards Polis Bay”,⁴³ which would suggest, according to this author, a considerable settlement in Classical times. Morgan believed that,

³³ Dörpfeld 1927, 146-148.

³⁴ Pentedeka *et alii* 2014, 778, but we do not necessarily have to think of a Hellenistic tower that was subsequently expanded in Roman times.

³⁵ Livitsanis 2014, 22.

³⁶ On the east side of the valley, there were some ancient remains: Leake 1835, 45; Livitsanis 2013, 115; 2014, 61-66, 81.

³⁷ Livitsanis 2014, 22.

³⁸ Morgan 2007, 79.

³⁹ Waterhouse 1996, 309-315; D’Agostino 2012; Livitsanis 2014, 26.

⁴⁰ *JG IX* 1², 4, 1610.

⁴¹ Waterhouse 1952, 227.

⁴² Gell 1807, 107-108; Vollgraff 1905, 152.

⁴³ Waterhouse 1952, 227.

following its abandonment at the end of the Bronze Age, the site was resettled at the end of the seventh century, expanded rapidly during the Classical Period and was then surrounded with a wall in around the year 400.⁴⁴ The site's demise during the Hellenistic Period could be due to the expansion of other nearby settlements in the north, Pilikata and Agios Athanassios. The Asprosykia Spring, which has produced Classical and Hellenistic material, is located 450 m to the west of Stavros, and from Stavros we have various funerary inscriptions that date from the fourth century to at least the second/first centuries.⁴⁵

Pilikata (4) is located at the northern end of the Stavros-Pilikata line, on the Hill of Pilikata itself. It occupies an approximately triangular area measuring 300 x 150 m at 148 m of altitude, an area that can be defended easily and is well supplied with water. At Pilikata the routes that come from the Bays of Afales, Frikes and Polis also converge,⁴⁶ which it visually surveys. Here there was a significant settlement during the Bronze Age, largely dating from the Early Helladic Period (II-III),⁴⁷ although there are also vestiges from the Mycenaean Period.⁴⁸ The wall that surrounds the settlement, measuring 200-250 x 100 m, has been called Cyclopean, although it is more rough polygonal. It has been dated from the EH Period, in which respect Pilikata has been considered a fortified settlement from this period, with its respective EH necropolis.⁴⁹ However, Heurtley, who excavated the site, indicated that "only in pits outside the apparent line of the wall were later sherds found, and the Hellenic or Hellenistic burials all lay outside it".⁵⁰ These "Hellenic or Hellenistic" sherds were similar to those of Asprosykia and Agios Athanassios. In a later publication, Heurtley also mentioned the existence of Classical material and the presence of later burial sites "all outside the circuit-wall" and considered that Pilikata was used as a necropolis and not as a place of habitation.⁵¹ Possibly the desire to distinguish an EH site led him to disassociate the latest wall findings, to omit them and to place both the burial sites and the ceramics from the subsequent settlement outside the wall. The burial site findings outside the walls are evidently coherent with regard to the existence of a settlement inside the walls. The walls themselves may date from the Mycenaean Period, the Archaic Period or even from a later period.⁵² In photographs of the excavation,⁵³ one section could be polygonal and other parts could possibly date from later periods. Subsequent analysis of the site⁵⁴ indicates the existence of a significant settlement here during the Hellenistic Period, which could be linked with the wall, which dates from up to the end of the Roman Period. From Pilikata we also

⁴⁴ Morgan 2007, 59, 80; 2014, 24.

⁴⁵ *IG IX 1*², 4, 1588 and *IG IX 1*², 4, 1600, respectively. Vollgraff 1905, 150-151, 160; Livitsanis 2013, 115-119; 2014, 20-25. From the third century: *IG IX 1*², 4, 1591-1592; possibly from the third century: *IG IX 1*², 4, 1590; from the second century: *IG IX 1*², 4, 1593; from the Hellenistic Period: *IG IX 1*², 4, 1607. A total of at least 15 tombs from between the fifth and the third centuries (Waterhouse 1952).

⁴⁶ Dörpfeld 1927, 146.

⁴⁷ Souyouzoglou-Haywood 1999, 92: a small amount of MH and LH ceramics was also discovered.

⁴⁸ Heurtley 1939-1940, 9.

⁴⁹ Heurtley 1934-1935; 1939-1940, 2-3.

⁵⁰ Heurtley 1934-1935, 14-15.

⁵¹ Heurtley 1939-1940, 2, n. 1, 10.

⁵² Souyouzoglou-Haywood 1999, 96.

⁵³ Heurtley 1939-1940, plate 3.

⁵⁴ Morgan 2014, 23-24.

have a funerary inscription, probably from the Hellenistic Period, and an urn dating from the Imperial Period, which would seem to suggest the same conclusion.⁵⁵

A short distance to the south-east of the present-day village of Exogi and one kilometre north-west of Pilikata lies Agios Athanassios (5), also known as the “School of Homer”. The first thing that stands out at this site is a tower that measures 9.8 x 8.6 m and features two chambers (**Fig. 3**). The tower is reached by a stairwell sculpted into the rock on the north side. It also feasibly includes a drainage channel. The original sections of the tower were built with Randsborg type 25 dressed stone which this author dates back to around the year 400 or later,⁵⁶ replete with trapezoidal outer walls that tend to be based on horizontal rows and feature peritaeneia at the corners. To the south and at a distance of 5.4 m from the southern face of the tower rises up another wall that is 1.8 m wide and was built with Randsborg type 11 polygonal dressed stone, dating from early third century BC⁵⁷ which encloses an area right next to the tower in order to create a fort.⁵⁸ On the plateau that stretches out just below the tower (running west to north) we can find ample remains of ancient structures and houses, some of them excavated into the rock.⁵⁹ Finally, some 200 m to the south of the settlement lies the spring known as Melanydros, which would have supplied the settlement.⁶⁰



Figure 3. Agios Athanassios. Tower (author’s photo).

⁵⁵ *IG IX 1*², 4, 1604 and *IG IX 1*², 4, 1612, respectively.

⁵⁶ Randsborg 2002, 1.109-110, 2.246.

⁵⁷ Randsborg 2002, 1.109-110, 2.222-227: between c. 350 and 275 or even 200 BC.

⁵⁸ Vollgraff 1904, 437; 1905, 155.

⁵⁹ Vollgraff (1095, 157) mentions the discovery of seven silver coins and thirty bronze coins dating from the third century BC to the third century AD. For the material dating from the Bronze Age: Souyouzoglou-Haywood 1999, 95.

⁶⁰ Leake 1835, 43; Vollgraff 1904; Dörpfeld 1927, 147; Heurtley – Lorimer 1932-1933.

Most of the findings, especially those around the tower, date from the Late Classical and Hellenistic Periods, probably mainly the latter, in which respect we are essentially dealing with a Hellenistic settlement that may have reached its point of greatest development in the second century.⁶¹ An inscription devoted to Hermes from the Hellenistic Period also comes from Agios Athanassios,⁶² which means a cult devoted to this deity may have been located here. Agios Athanassios also featured a sizeable necropolis, which means we are dealing with a settlement and not a fort belonging to the *chóra*. At least two inscriptions originate from this site, one probably dating from the Hellenistic Period and the other from the second century AD,⁶³ but it is possible that the funerary inscriptions from Exogi, which date from the Hellenistic Period in the third century up to the second and third centuries AD, could have also come from Agios Athanassios.⁶⁴ Its necropolis may have been located to the south of the settlement, in the direction of Pilikata. A funerary inscription at the Church of Agioi Saranta, to the north-west, could also have come from the necropolis of Agios Athanassios.⁶⁵

In short, we are dealing with a settlement that was reoccupied or occupied in the fourth century, where we can define at least two construction stages: a tower dating from the Late Classical Period and a Hellenistic polygonal wall from the third century,⁶⁶ of the type found at the fortified settlements replete with tower on Leucas.⁶⁷ This settlement may have been the most important on the Northern Peninsula at the end of the Classical Period and throughout the Hellenistic Period.

The existence of a cave sanctuary, The Cave of Polis, Loizos' Cave, The Cave of the Nymphs or The Cave of the Tripods (6) in the Bay of Polis, was known as of the nineteenth century,⁶⁸ and this sanctuary was excavated by Benton. This sanctuary was used as of the Bronze Age, in the LH, up until the Roman Augustan Age.⁶⁹ From here originate at least thirteen massive Protogeometric and Geometric cast bronze tripod-cauldrons.⁷⁰ The sanctuary was devoted to the Nymphs; it may have been connected with Athena Polias and Hera Teleia, at least in the sixth century,⁷¹ and at least in the second century BC it was also linked to Odysseus, as suggested by an inscription, dating from this period.⁷² Benton excavated a curved rubble wall located close to the entrance of the cave, dating it after the year 300, and behind this wall, she only found offerings from the Hellenistic and Roman Periods. We can assume that the sanctuary may have been at least partially redesigned during the Hellenistic Period.⁷³

⁶¹ Morgan, 2014; Souyoudzoglou-Haywood 2018, 147.

⁶² *JG IX* 1², 4, 1622.

⁶³ *JG IX* 1², 4, 1628 and *JG IX* 1², 4, 1627, respectively.

⁶⁴ *JG IX* 1², 4, 1589, 1594-1598, 1601-1603, 1605, 1606, 1608, 1609.

⁶⁵ *JG IX* 1², 4, 1599.

⁶⁶ There are marks on tiles and also on lead dating from the third century up until the Imperial Period (*JG IX* 1², 4, 1629-1635).

⁶⁷ Morris 2001.

⁶⁸ Schliemann 1869, 45-46.

⁶⁹ The vast majority of the inscriptions in the Cave are dedicated to the Nymphs, at least as of the third and second centuries (*JG IX* 1², 4, 1611-1619).

⁷⁰ Benton 1934-1935; Morgan 2007, 77, 85; Deoudi 2008.

⁷¹ *JG IX* 1², 4, 1614.

⁷² *JG IX* 1², 4, 1615: εὐχὴν Ὀδυσσεῖ. Morgan 2018, 241-243. Cf. Vollgraaf 1905; Souyoudzoglou-Haywood 1999, 94-95.

⁷³ Benton 1934-1935, 48-50, fig. 4, 54; Livitsanis 2014, 20; Morgan – Hayward 2020, 80-81, fig. 4.6, 86.

The eastern part of the Northern Peninsula, in the region around the present-day village of Kioni, is one of the least-known and most elusive areas of the island from the point of view of ancient settlements.⁷⁴ Practically the only evidence we have consists of a wall made of polygonal dressed stone, apparently type 8,⁷⁵ in Rouga (7) towards the south-east of the present-day village of Kioni. In principle, this wall can be dated back to the Hellenistic Period, due to its similitude with regard to other fortifications on the island, although we have no confirmation of this fact. Apparently, the wall is wider than a mere tower and may have formed part of a fort or constituted the defences of a small settlement. We have reports of fragments of undated ceramics from the area and some kind of construction, such as a well.⁷⁶ Whatever the case may be, we cannot rule out the possibility that a small settlement existed here, as it does today, dating from at least the Hellenistic Period, with a view to exploiting this small cultivable area, supported by the Harbours of Mavronas and Kioni. Finally, Leake, without further information,⁷⁷ found two inscriptions at the Church of Panagia in Frikes, one in Greek and the other in Latin, which could perhaps correspond to a small harbour settlement here.

In 1938, Oikonomou published a photograph furnished to him by P.A. Nerantzouli⁷⁸ of a polygonal wall, apparently a tower, and he indicated that it was located at a site known as Viggla (8), situated above the Gulf of Frikes. In effect, to the south-east of the Harbour of Frikes lies Mount Viggla (289 m), which blocks any view of Kioni from the Valley of Agios Athanassios, Pilikata and Stavros. Kioni is only overlooked by the western side of this mountain. It would have been necessary to construct an observation point on Viggla in order to establish visual communication between the area of Stavros and Kioni and monitor the island's west coast, in which respect it is certainly possible that a tower existed on Viggla in Hellenistic times, especially bearing in mind the polygonal style of the wall.

On the small tongue of land that separates the two peninsulas is located Palaikastro Aetos or Aetos (9), the most important settlement on the island during the Classical and Hellenistic Periods (**Fig. 4**). This settlement was situated on Mount Aetos, which is separated to the south from Mount Merovigli or Petaleiko by a valley that was cultivated with vines in Leake's day and age. This valley links up with the Gulfs of Molos (Bros Aetos) and Piso Aetos (or Exos Aetos) and was irrigated by two rivers, one that flowed towards the Gulf of Molos, and the other that flowed down from Piso Aetos.⁷⁹

The settlement dates back to at least the LHIIB, persisting during the LHIIC and the Protogeometric Period and surviving up until at least the first century AD,⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Morgan 2007, 25: "enigmatic".

⁷⁵ Dendrinios – Kallinikos 1991, 102 (see figure there), and 103; Randsborg 2002, 1.110; 2.216-221: around 300 BC; Morgan 2014, 27 and fig. 11.

⁷⁶ Dendrinios – Kallinikos 1991, 102-103.

⁷⁷ Leake (1835: 52): "In proceeding to the port of Frikes I observe, near a ruined church of the Panaghia, several ancient blocks of stone carved in furrows, as if for a rustic basement. Here are also two inscriptions, one of which is in Latin. Like all those found in the district of Oxoi, they are sepulchral, and of the time of the Roman empire". Apparently not in *IG*.

⁷⁸ Oikonomou 1938, 67, fig. 11.

⁷⁹ Dodwell 1819, 65; Leake 1835, 34-35.

⁸⁰ Vollgraff 1904, 438; Anderson – Benton 1953, 257-256; Symeonoglou 1985; 1986, 235-236; 1989, 292-294; 1990, 271; 1992, 202; Souyoudzoglou-Haywood 1999, 95, 103; Morgan 2007, 79; Livitsanis 2014, 25; Vikela 2010, 115.



Figure 4. Aetos (author's photo).

featuring possible habitation at the beginning of the Byzantine Period.⁸¹ Aetos occupies an area of approximately 12 hectares and was divided into two parts, the acropolis on the summit of Mount Aetos (378 m), which is 300 m long, and the city, located under the south-eastern slope, which stretched up to the intermediate valley alongside the route that linked the Gulf of Molos and the Bay of Piso Aetos.

Both the acropolis and the slope were fortified.⁸² The acropolis is enclosed by a wall and featured at least two towers, at least one of which was free-standing. Inside there were also at least three cisterns. Two walls, which enclosed the settlement, ran down the side of the mountain from the acropolis, with a tower half-way along the southern wall. Between both walls an intermediate wall was built and this may have connected with other perpendicular terracing walls.

Two types of wall are visible: first we find pseudoisodomic masonry consisting of trapezoidal dressed stone, similar to that of the so-called Hellenic Tower (**Fig. 5**, Randsborg type 21), which has subsequently been interpreted as being the foundations of a temple, maybe dedicated to Apollo; and the rest of the walls, which were built with a highly uniform polygonal dressed stone (**Fig. 6**, Randsborg type 8).⁸³ The latter enclosure was perhaps left uncompleted on the valley side or perhaps we have lost the easternmost section.⁸⁴ Consequently, we would have at least two construction phases. The first phase would be represented by the free-standing towers and temple,

⁸¹ Symeonoglou 1990, 272; *Ergon* 1990, 123-127. Paleochristian tombs and Byzantine cist graves: Heurtley – Lorimer 1932-1933, 22.

⁸² *Ergon* 1985, 38-40, with a postern gate measuring 120 cm in width and 3.5 m in height.

⁸³ Gell 1807, 60-76; Dodwell 1819, 63-68; Leake 1835, 35; Schliemann 1869, 22-24; Vollgraff 1904, 438; 1905, 147: the tower ran roughly 8 m on one side (see Symeonoglou 1985, 237-239; 1989, 295; 1990, 272-277; 1992, 206, and *Ergon* 1987: as a sanctuary); Dörpfeld 1927, 146; Heurtley – Lorimer 1932-1933, pl. 1; Heurtley 1939-1940; Symeonoglou 1985, 210-213; Randsborg 2002, 1.109, 2.239-240, 282-283; Vikela 2010, 115. With regard to the inscription dedicated to Apollo: *Ergon* 1987; Souyoudzoglou-Haywood 1999, 95.

⁸⁴ Randsborg 2.282-283.



Figure 5. Aetos: The so-called Hellenic Tower (author's photo).



Figure 6. Aetos: The Polygonal Wall (author's photo).

possibly dating from the fourth century (circa 400), and a subsequent phase in which both the acropolis and the lower city were surrounded by a polygonal wall, also including the intermediate wall, which Randsborg dated from second half of fourth century BC and around 300 BC.⁸⁵ We might highlight its similitude with regard to the polygonal walls at Crane or Phase II at Poros in Cephallenia.⁸⁶ However, it is also possible that they could belong to the third century.

Although Mycenaean fragments have been discovered, together with Protogeometric ceramics, Geometric ceramics and considerable amounts of Corinthian ceramics and local imitations of the same, not to mention houses and structures dating from these periods,⁸⁷ the most abundant remains, both in terms of ceramics and constructions, can be dated from the Classical and Hellenistic periods. In these periods, the settlement was quite dense and extended over the entire side of the hill, in spite of the limited habitable space, replete with streets, many houses and terracing walls.⁸⁸ The centre of Classical-Hellenistic city was located towards the west of the present-day Church of Agios Georgios.⁸⁹ A large building dating from the Classical Period, which has been considered public, has also been documented.⁹⁰ A kotyle, dating from the first quarter of the sixth century, was dedicated to the Muses and to Apollo, whilst another two vase inscriptions, one dating from the sixth/fifth centuries and another from the Hellenistic period,⁹¹ are dedicated to Zeus, in which respect a cult devoted to all of these deities could have existed at Aetos.

The necropoleis were located at the northern and southern ends of the valley, with the main cemetery possibly extending north-east of the city at an altitude of 20 m. Guitera excavated two hundred tombs between the years 1811 and 1814 and uncovered a number of exceptionally rich Hellenistic graves. From the necropolis at Aetos also originate a good number of funerary inscriptions that encompass a period stretching from at least the fourth century to the second/third centuries AD.⁹²

It is possible that the place itself was known as Alalcomenae, at least during the Roman Period, and it could be the same site that both Strabo and Plutarch refer to by that name.⁹³ Whatever the case may be, due to its fortifications, the size of the settlement and its buildings, everything would seem to indicate that we are dealing here with the *ásty* of the polis of the Ithacans.

The excavations at Piso Aetos (10) carried out by the British School of Athens partially revealed what the excavators called “a fine piece of Hellenic wall”, which they interpreted as being part of the facilities of an ancient harbour.⁹⁴ Furthermore,

⁸⁵ Randsborg 1.109; 2.237-240.

⁸⁶ Randsborg 2.256, 275-276 and 2.263-264, respectively.

⁸⁷ *Ergon* 1985, 35-41, 1986, 79-81; Souyouzoglou-Haywood 1999, 95. Morgan 2007, 76: discoveries of Ithacan ceramics have been numerous around the Bay of Naples and extend up to Satricum at the very least.

⁸⁸ Vollgraff 1904, 438; 1905, 148-149; Heurtley – Robertson 1948, 113-114; Symeonoglou 1984, 109-121; 1985, 204; 1986, 236; 1990, 277; 1992, 206; *Ergon* 1984 42; 1985 35-38; Souyouzoglou-Haywood 1999, 95; Steinhart – Wirbelauer 2002, 331; Morgan 2007, 82. For a destruction layer, which Symeonoglou associated with the earthquake of 374/3: Symeonoglou 1992, 202-205; *Ergon* 1986, 79; 1987; 1990, 123-127.

⁸⁹ *Ergon* 1985, 41.

⁹⁰ *Ergon* 1990, 123-127.

⁹¹ *IG IX* 1², 4, 1681; *IG IX* 1², 4, 1687 and *IG IX* 1², 4, 1686, respectively.

⁹² *IG IX* 1², 4, 1636 and *IG IX* 1², 4, 1676, respectively; see also *IG IX* 1², 4, 1636-1678; Leake 1835, 35; Schliemann 1869, 22-24; Morgan 2007, 79.

⁹³ Str. 10.2.16; Plu. *Mor.* 301d. Souyouzoglou-Haywood 1999, 95; Vikela 2010, 114.

⁹⁴ Heurtley 1939-1940, p. 3, pl. 5, I.

the work of Symeonoglou also revealed a series of harbour facilities,⁹⁵ and it is possible that the harbour also featured a sizeable settlement, at least between the Classical and the Roman periods. This harbour, possibly the main one on the island, served as a base for navigation to Cephallenia and for the provisioning of the *ásty*, whilst also catering for Ithaca's participation in the trade that flowed along the Strait of Cephallenia. It is possible that Piso Aetos was the harbour in Ithaca mentioned by Pseudo-Scylax in an account dating from the early fourth century.⁹⁶ Another harbour may well have existed at Bros Aetos. It was here that the leg of a terracotta statue was found, which has been dated back to the Classical or Hellenistic Periods, together with roof terracottas.⁹⁷ And so Strabo writes that the small polis of Alalcomenae (which we have associated with Aetos) was located on the isthmus of the two harbours.⁹⁸

On the Southern Peninsula, in contemporary times, Vathy (11) constitutes the best and most beautiful harbour on the island,⁹⁹ open to the significant agricultural resources of the valley that extends to the south. Vathy has been the subject of urgent excavations by the 34th Ephorate since 2007 and remains have been documented that date from the end of the Geometric Period to the Imperial Period. Although there are barely any vestiges of the Classical and Hellenistic Periods, consisting of just a few black-varnished fragments,¹⁰⁰ we can assume that Vathy was occupied during these periods. From Vathy also come two funerary inscriptions that date from the second century and second/first centuries, and we do not necessarily have to assume that they originally came from Aetos, but possibly from the necropolis of a settlement at Vathy.¹⁰¹ An inscription dedicated to Artemis, discovered in Vathy, could have come from Aetos, from the Cave of Marmarospilia or from Vathy itself.¹⁰²

To the south of Vathy lies the most remote part of the island, consisting of the region of Helleniko (12) and the Plain of Marathias. Gell¹⁰³ mentioned the existence of a necropolis on the plateau of Marathias, in an area known as Mnimata, which is difficult to locate precisely today. Dodwell¹⁰⁴ stated that, between Vathy and the Spring of Arethousa, an hour away from Vathy, there was another city and, upon returning to the Spring, located just a mile away, on the high part of the island alongside what he called Mount Neriton (possibly the present-day Nerovouno, 669 m), he found tombs and vestiges of a settlement. From here you could see Vathy and the descent down to it.¹⁰⁵ Salvator wrote that, to the right from the road of Apanu Marathia, he could see ancient houses apparently excavated out of the rocks and some remains of walls against the sides of the Mountains of Petsulles at the foot of

⁹⁵ *Ergon* 1985, 39-40.

⁹⁶ Ps. Scylax *Per.* 34

⁹⁷ Morgan 2014, 26-27.

⁹⁸ Str. 10.2.16.

⁹⁹ Gell 1807, 36; Parstch 1890, 6; Dörpfeld 1927, 148.

¹⁰⁰ Morgan 2007, 85; Livitsanis 2013, 102-103, 106.

¹⁰¹ *IG IX* 1², 4, 1706 and *IG IX* 1², 4, 1707, respectively.

¹⁰² *IG IX* 1², 4, 1700.

¹⁰³ Gell 1807, 25-26: "Arriving at the summit, we were agreeably surprised by the sight of a Little enclosure free from bushes, and containing the remains of antique tombs, or sarcophagi, such as are usually found in the vicinity of ancient cities in other parts of Greece".

¹⁰⁴ Dodwell 1819, 69.

¹⁰⁵ Dodwell 1819, 70; Schliemann 1869, 50.

Skinia.¹⁰⁶ This author sketched a fortification wall here that he called “sto Elliniko”, a wall that was apparently trapezoidal and pseudoisodomitic. Oikonomou also researched the areas of Kambos and Helleniko and found remains dating from the Hellenistic and Roman Periods,¹⁰⁷ and published a photograph of a wall in Helleniko in 1938. The travelers provide no indication of dating the tombs and structures that they observed, and the vegetation is today particularly dense in the Helleniko area, but it is likely that it was the same area that Oikonomou explored. However, Steinhart and Wirbelauer doubted whether Helleniko was an ancient settlement, since they did not discover any ancient remains during their visit.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, the possibility remains that a settlement and a fortified enclosure, tower or fort did exist here during the Classical and/or Hellenistic Periods.

In Marmarospilia (13), on the way from Aetos to Vathy, alongside the Churches of Agios Nikolaos and Agios Andreas, stood a cave sanctuary that served as a place of worship dedicated to the Nymphs.¹⁰⁹ Here Vollgraff indicated the existence of a stone altar with a marble base measuring 60 cm in height, together with offerings of small vases and terracottas.¹¹⁰ The site was excavated by Symeonoglou, who defined two areas, a first chamber measuring 17 m in diameter, and a lower level that was reached by means of a stairwell. The bones of animals sacrificed during worship were also unearthed. The cave may have suffered damage from the earthquake of 374/3,¹¹¹ but the inscriptions dedicated to the Nymphs, which possibly begin in the fourth century and persist at least up to the second/first centuries, indicate the existence of a cult at least during this period.¹¹² This sanctuary would seem to be a replica on the Southern Peninsula of the Cave of the Nymphs at the Bay of Polis, and this would help to explain the relative decline that this sanctuary witnessed as of the third century.¹¹³

Between the Bays of Vathy and Skinos, located to the north-east of Vathy, lies the Bay of Mnimata (14). Here a landscape stretches out made up of the Hills of Poros (171 m), Mavro Megali and Vigla (244 m). On the slopes between these hills and an area situated above 80 m in altitude, a tower rose up that measured approximately 10 m in length on each side, made of polygonal dressed stone.¹¹⁴ Between Vathy and Aetos stands the bulk of Mount Merovigli, which rises up to 570 m in altitude and means that you cannot see Vathy from Aetos. In this area, and to the south-west of the Bay of Dexia and to the north-west of Marmarospilia and the Cave of the Nymphs, a series of stone blocks of polygonal appearance, in the area of Sotera-Pagano (15) and at 250 m in altitude, have been interpreted as the remains of a possible tower.¹¹⁵ Aetos is visible from the two towers we have mentioned, and although they may

¹⁰⁶ Salvator 1905, 228.

¹⁰⁷ Dendrinós – Kallinikos 1991, 95, 98.

¹⁰⁸ Steinhart – Wirbelauer 2002, 180, 299-300, n. 437.

¹⁰⁹ *JG IX* 1², 4, 1708-1719.

¹¹⁰ Vollgraff 1905, 146.

¹¹¹ Brown 2020, 197-205. The island is highly prone to earthquakes: Soudyouzoglou-Haywood 1999, 4; Pentedeka *et alii* 2022, 80.

¹¹² Morgan – Hayward 2020, 71. In addition to a cult dedicated to the Nymphs, there may have been a cult to Artemis, as testified by a terracotta votive offering dedicated to this goddess holding a quiver.

¹¹³ Morgan – Hayward 2020, 76.

¹¹⁴ A photograph was published in Oikonomou 1938, 68, fig. 10; Livitsanis 2013, 106.

¹¹⁵ Livitsanis 2013, 104-105, fig. 12.

have also provided safe refuge in times of danger,¹¹⁶ it is possible that their main purpose was to provide visual surveillance from Aetos of the eastern part of the Southern Peninsula.

All these sites studied were included in a single polis. In fact, a significant number of accounts indicate that Ithaca was made up of a single polis. Thus, in the *Periplus* of Pseudo-Scylax, dating back to the third quarter of the fourth century BC,¹¹⁷ it states that: νῆσός ἐστιν Ἰθάκη, καὶ πόλις καὶ λιμὴν μετὰ ταῦτα νῆσος Κεφαλληνία, which is to say, “Ithaca is a polis with a harbour beyond the Island of Cephallenia”.¹¹⁸ The name of the territory appears to be identical to that of the polis,¹¹⁹ and the polis itself, known by the city sub-ethnic of the Ithacans, is attested to as of fifth century.¹²⁰ Only the polis of the Ithacans issued coinage, from the late fourth/early third centuries up until the second century, alternating on one side and the other the head of Athena wearing the Corinthian or Attic helmet, and a bearded Odysseus wearing a *pileus*.¹²¹ All coins bear the legend ΙΘΑ, ΙΘΑΚΩΝ, which shows us the official name of the polis. Aristotle mentions the *politeia* of the Ithacans (Ἰθακήσιων πολιτεία) and Plutarch names two *géné*, the Coliadae and the Boucolidae, both of which possessed Odyssean ancestry.¹²² So the *génos* of Coliadae is descended from Eumaeus, the swineherd of Odysseus that of the Bucolidae from Philoetius, the cowherd.¹²³ Halliday suspected, as a mere probable guess, that the Coliadae and Boucolidae performed hereditary religious duties in connection with the cult of Telemachus.¹²⁴ We know nothing of their geographical distribution, but it is probable that, together with the influence of Corinth and its nearby colonies to Ithaca, these two aristocratic families were able to collaborate in order to create the polis which had precisely Telemachus as one of its main cults.¹²⁵ Given the importance of the archaeological remains of the Geometric and Archaic periods in Aetos, the creation of the polis could be quite early, perhaps around the beginning of the permanent Corinthian presence in the area.¹²⁶ There is little doubt that the *ásty* of the polis was located in Aetos.¹²⁷ Its location between the two peninsulas also supports the idea that there was just one polis for the whole island. In the Roman Period, at least, it may have been called Alalcomenae.¹²⁸ Finally, an inscription dating from the year 207/6, reveals, as we shall see, a well organised and structured polis.¹²⁹

¹¹⁶ Livitsanis 2013, 106, n. 30.

¹¹⁷ Shipley 2012.

¹¹⁸ Ps. Scylax *Per.* 34.

¹¹⁹ Hom. *Il.* 2.632; Od. 1.18; Ps. Scylax *Per.* 34; Plu. *Mor.* 301d; Steph. Byz. 75.14.

¹²⁰ B. fr. 29; E. *Cyc.* 276-277.

¹²¹ Postolakas 1868, 891, 892, 894; Head 1911, 428; Grose 1926, 6697-6699; *SNG Cop. Acarnania* 478. On occasion, the reverse side features a thunderbolt, a cock, an olive branch or the prow of a ship.

¹²² Arist. fr. 509-514 (n° 68, Gigon); Plu. *Mor.* 294c-d.

¹²³ See also Hansen 2004, 71-73; Gehrke – Wirbelauer 2004, 360.

¹²⁴ Halliday 1928; Plu. *Mor.* 294c-d.

¹²⁵ For the role played by the cults and the performance of the elite reconverted into the ruling class in the creation of a polis see: Valdés Guía, 2012.

¹²⁶ On the contrary, the growth of the *póleis* in Epirus could be a phenomenon of the first half of the fourth century B.C. (cf. Pascual 2018).

¹²⁷ Gehrke – Wirbelauer 2004, 360-361.

¹²⁸ Str. 8.2.2, 10.2.11-12; Partsch 1892, 57-58; Strauch 1996.

¹²⁹ *IG IX* 1³, 4, 1729.

Compared to this thesis, very few elements might lead us to conclude that a separate polis existed in the north of the island, which would mean that two *póleis* would have shared the island.¹³⁰ The term “polis”,¹³¹ which is also the name of a bay in the north of the island, does not only have one meaning, since it can also refer to a fortified site, such as Paleokastro of Roussano (which has also possibly contributed Archaic material), so this name does not necessarily make reference to a political centre. An inscription dating back to the second half of the sixth century,¹³² mentions worship at the Polis Cave of Athena Polias, but this description does not have to refer to a nearby polis in the north of the island, and the reference to the *peripóloi* (“people moving around”) simply indicates that we are dealing possibly with a body devoted to the patrol of the *chóra*¹³³ and this mention cannot be used as a strong argument for the existence of a separate polis in the north. The only ancient names we are aware of relating to settlements in Ithaca, Alalcomenae and Demus, were described as belonging to the Ithacan polis.¹³⁴

We can discover how the polis of the Ithacans was organised precisely through the aforementioned inscription,¹³⁵ which reflects the response that was given to the Magnesian ambassadors in c. 207/6. Ithaca is the official name of the polis of the Ithacans, ἡ πόλις τῶν Ἰθακῶν (4, 27), which refers at the same time to the *politeía* and the *politeúma*. Three *damiourgoí* are the eponymous magistrates (2) and one *epidamiourgós* is entrusted with setting the decree in stone and exhibiting it publicly (30). An assembly or *ekkleσία* (2-3, 13) exists, which votes on decrees (*psaphísmata*, 29), appoints *theorodókoí* (23) and grants *proxeniai* (25-28). The assembly meets at the Odysseion, where decrees are exhibited on stelae, and the polis has a public home (*pátrion hestían*, 21), possibly the residence of the magistrates, where public sacrifices take place and the Magnesian messengers are invited to dine, perhaps on the meat originating from the sacrifices (20-21). There is also a temple devoted to Athena (30, plausibly Athena Polias), whilst certain Games exist, the *Odysseia*, which are celebrated in honour of Odysseus, in which respect we can also deduce the existence of a *stádion* (16). The Odysseion could be a distinct sanctuary with regard to the temple dedicated to Athena, being declared a *heróon*, but we do not know whether this *heróon* was associated with the sanctuary of the Cave of Polis.¹³⁶

The polis had its own mythical tradition, in which respect Ithacus,¹³⁷ the hero who gave his name to the city-state, was the brother of Neritus, who gave his name to the most important mountain on the island, and the son of Pterelaus.¹³⁸ This tradition did not exclude the cult to the hero who held the city-state’s community together, Odysseus and his lineage. The assembly of the Ithacans met at the sanctuary, most probably at Aetos, and the Games or *Odysseia* were dedicated to the hero, at least during the Hellenistic Period. Plutarch refers to the annual offerings made by the

¹³⁰ Cole 1995; Morgan 2007, 78; D’Agostino 2012, 286.

¹³¹ Hansen 1996.

¹³² *JG* IX 1², 4, 1614; Jeffery 1961, 231.

¹³³ For the *peripóloi* see: Forbes 1930; Ober 1985, 91-94; Cabanes 1991.

¹³⁴ Plut. *Mor.* 301d: [Alalcomenae] τὴν ἐν Ἰθάκῃ πόλιν; Str. 7.3.6: Δήμου ἐν Ἰθάκῃ.

¹³⁵ *JG* IX 1², 4, 1729.

¹³⁶ Regarding the existence of public roads: 1684 with the inscription ΟΔ(ΟΣ).

¹³⁷ Hom. *Od.* 17.207.

¹³⁸ Acusilaus *FGrHist* 2 F43; Wirbelauer 1998, 280-283.

Ithacans to Telemachus,¹³⁹ in which respect we can assume that a cult also existed that was dedicated to Odysseus' son, in his capacity as a hero and a member of Odysseus' lineage.

The city-state also venerated the deities linked to the hero, as was the case with Athena, the main divinity of the polis, worshipped under the advocacy of Athena Polias,¹⁴⁰ linked perhaps to Hera Teleia. The veneration of Athena and Odysseus can also be seen on the city-state's coins, which alternate the two figures on the two sides. A cult existed dedicated to the Nymphs, who were closely associated with the hero at the cave sanctuary at the Bay of Polis. Another sanctuary dedicated to the Nymphs, and possibly also to Artemis, was located at the Cave of Marmarospilia at Dexia. Artemis images make up the great majority of Hellenistic figurines discovered at Polis, and they are also found at Aetos. The presence of these terracotta items has been associated with a *lex sacra* found in Vathy,¹⁴¹ which is thought to have originated in Aetos, like other construction materials used in Vathy, but which may have also come from Dexia or Vathy. This inscription refers to a precinct devoted to Artemis, who is granted a tenth part of the crops. A sanctuary and a temple dedicated to Apollo has been located on the eastern side of Aetos.¹⁴² Finally, an inscription dedicated to Hermes comes from Agios Athanassios and this may indicate the presence of a cult devoted to this divinity at this site.¹⁴³

4. Exploitation and visual surveillance of the territory

As we can see, the information at our disposal presents many difficulties as old excavations, except for those carried out by the 34th Ephorate and the University of Ioannina, of little extension and focused on the Homeric fascination, the lack of prospecting except in Stavros and the Bay of Polis, the use of surface ceramics in several cases and the existence of unexplored areas. However, in spite of these difficulties, one of the main characteristics of the Classical and Hellenistic Periods was the expansion of the settlements. In this respect, if in the Archaic Period we have three settlements, Aetos, Stavros and Vathy, and plausibly also Paleokastro of Roussano,¹⁴⁴ which may have been a fort or a small settlement, for the period we are considering here we find at least two additional sites, Agios Athanassios and Pilikata, whilst Rouga and Helleniko were also possibly populated at this time, at the same time as the settlement of the sites mentioned for the Archaic Period also continued (**Table 4**). This expansion of populated areas appears to have begun at the end of the fourth century, continued throughout the third and seems to have culminated in the second century or the first half of the first, as witnessed by the information we have gathered regarding Agios Athanassios. Once the settlement process was completed in the Hellenistic Period, all of the cultivable land on the island was brought into play.

¹³⁹ Plu. *Mor.* 294c-d

¹⁴⁰ *JG IX* 1², 4, 1614; *SEG* 27 180; Jeffery 1961, 231 n° 3.

¹⁴¹ *JG IX* 1², 4, 1700.

¹⁴² Symeonoglou 1986, 236-237, pl. 104a; see *SEG* 38 432 and *JG IX* 1², 4, 1685.

¹⁴³ *JG IX* 1², 4, 1626.

¹⁴⁴ Pentedeka *et alii* 2014, 784, fig. 5.

	Archaic	Classical	Hellenistic
Aetos	x	x	x
Piso Aetos	?	x	x
Vathy	x	x	x
Helleniko		?	?
Mnimata			x
Dexia			x
Roussano	?	x	x
Stavros	x	x	x
Agios Athanassios		x	x
Pilikata			x
Rouga Kioni			x
Viggla			?

Table 4. Ithaca. Sites by periods.

Another of the most prominent features of this period was the considerable amount of building activity, as witnessed, for example, at the cave sanctuary of the Bay of Polis, but, above all, by the construction of numerous fortifications, especially in the population centres, including at the very least Aetos, Stavros, Agios Athanassios, Paleokastro of Roussano, Pilikata and plausibly Vathy, Rouga and Helleniko. The two different kinds of dressed stone that have been observed, pseudoisodomic and polygonal, lead us to consider two distinct periods and fortification strategies. Thus, during the first period, beginning perhaps at the end of the fourth century, a series of defensive towers were built at the settlements, including various walled enclosures. This first phase was followed, most probably during the third century, by a spectacular programme, featuring the complete fortification of the settlements in polygonal dressed stone. Perhaps in some cases settlement began and then, only 50-100 years later, the settlements began to be fortified. At the end of these construction periods, the characteristic model of the settlements on Ithaca was essentially defined: of lesser or greater size, we are dealing with fortified grouped settlements.

These population centres were linked to one another by means of a series of towers and observation points throughout the territory, this possibly being a specific feature of the Hellenistic Period (**Fig. 7**). Thus, in addition to the fortifications that surrounded the population centres, towers were built at Sotera-Pagano, Dexia and perhaps Viggla, and also at Paleokastro of Roussano, Rouga and Helleniko, if the remains are towers or forts and not settlements. In addition to serving as observation and surveillance points, all of the fortified sites would have provided sites of refuge all over the island. In short, once this process had concluded, all of the population centres would have been interconnected and visual surveillance would have existed throughout all parts of the island liable to be exploited and, in particular, the sea routes towards Ithaca (**Fig. 8**).

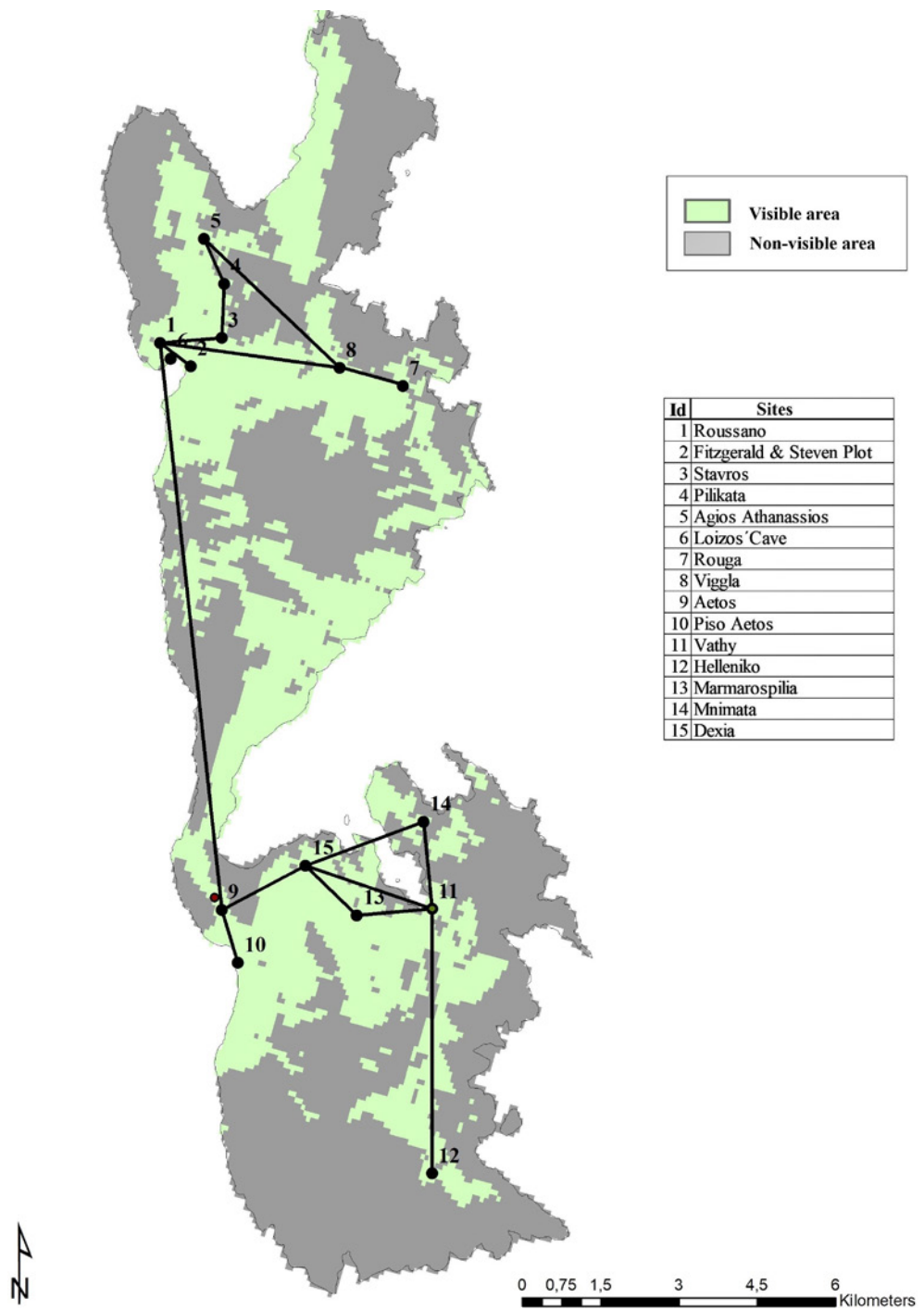


Figure 7. Visible and non-visible areas in the island (author's elaboration).



Figure 8. Visible and non-visible areas from Ithaca (author's elaboration).

In this respect, with regard to the altitude at which the settlements were situated, the highest was Paleokastro Aetos, located at 378 m of altitude at its highest point, which clearly speaks of its dual purpose, namely that of serving as a central surveillance point and visual observation post for the entire island and for the sea route along the Strait of Cephallenia, as well as that of serving as a refuge for all of its inhabitants. Helleniko in the south, located on the Plain of Marathias, is the second highest site on the island, and one of its roles would have been to visually survey the Plain of Marathias itself and the rugged and sparsely populated south of the island, with the other being that of providing visual communication with the Harbour of Vathy and the entire fertile valley located between the two. The surveillance possibilities offered by Helleniko would favour the existence of a fortified site in this area.

If Helleniko served as a means of monitoring the south of the island, certain points located above 180 m in altitude were used to survey the Northern Peninsula. Thus, we might mention Agios Athanassios, which offers views of the eastern side of Mount Dourexa (Neion), with Exogi up to Agios Elias and the western side of Marmaka to the east. Paleokastro of Roussano, located at the same altitude, would have fulfilled the purpose of offering visual surveillance of the Strait of Cephallenia in its approach from the north, whilst also overlooking the Bay of Polis, the south of the Valley of Stavros and the entire south-west of the Northern Peninsula, stretching east as far as the Hills of Razi (289 m) and Viggla (289 m). In addition to providing refuge for the inhabitants of the bay, one of the main functions of Paleokastro Roussano was to provide communication with Aetos, in which respect it is the only point visible from Aetos to the north.

Other fortifications located closer to the sea were situated at a lower height, at around 80 m in altitude. This was the case with Rouga at Kioni, whose purpose was to provide visual surveillance and exploitation of the north-east of the Northern Peninsula, including the Bays of Sarakinari and Mavronas, up to the foothills of the plateau of Anogi. In this respect, we might mention the fact that, without an observation point on Mount Viggla, communication between Rouga and the Valley of Stavros-Pilikata would have been impossible. On the Southern Peninsula, the tower at Sotero-Pagano, which rises up to 220 m in altitude, served the purpose of providing visual communication between Aetos and Vathy. Mnimata to the north-east was fundamental in order to monitor the route towards Leucas, whilst providing visual surveillance of the south-east coast of the Northern Peninsula, not to mention communication with Sotero-Pagano and Helleniko as well.

Except for the case of Helleniko, the boundaries of the cultivated land areas would have been between 150 and 180 m in altitude, situated below the settlements. Outside this altitude band, an extensive exploitation of the territory would have begun, especially the raising of livestock and the use of other resources such as wood, honey, salt, fishing and food gathering, which would have complemented a diet based on barley, olive oil and wine. In this respect, in the yearly offerings that the Ithacans made to Telemachus included barley, rather than wheat, together with wine, honeycombs, olive oil, salt and adult animals,¹⁴⁵ not to mention a sheep that was also sacrificed in honour of the ambassadors of Magnesia ad Maeandrum

¹⁴⁵ Plu. *Mor.* 294d.

in 207/6.¹⁴⁶ This account gives us an idea of the main products of Ithaca's agricultural output.

In addition to its defensive purposes, which also included the prevention of piracy, the fortification of the territory also attests to the intensive exploitation of all of the island's resources. Thus, in order to establish the possible areas of influence between the settlements, the distance between Vathy and Helleniko on the Southern Peninsula is 5 km, whilst Rouga on the Northern Peninsula is some 5-6 km away from Stavros. Both are situated at more distant locations than the average, which would suggest a degree of isolation and would entail a greater expanse of exploitation territory with smaller settlements. With regard to the Southern Peninsula, the distance between Roussano and Stavros is 2 km, whilst the distance between Stavros and Pilikata is 1 km, the same distance as that between Pilikata and Agios Athanassios. This proximity and the existence of multiple settlements provides sufficient proof of the fertile nature of the Valley of Stavros. The distance in a straight line from Aetos to Vathy is 4 km, which would indicate more extensive and distant exploitation areas, which would appear to have been a characteristic of the Southern Peninsula.¹⁴⁷

Ithaca was situated in the middle of a series of key routes that linked the Peloponnese, Central Greece and the North-West of Greece with the South of Italy and the Adriatic.¹⁴⁸ One important route linked Cephallenia, Leucas and Corcyra and the Corinthian colonies of the Acarnanian Coast and the Gulf of Ambracia. In this respect, over and above its exploitation of its own territory, a key issue would consist of discovering Ithaca's degree of involvement in the trade traffic that passed along its coasts.¹⁴⁹ It is evident that one of the island's main roles was passive, in the sense that its location sheltered the Strait of Cephallenia from the winds of the east, this Strait being, as we have said, one of the main naval routes in ancient times. Another no less important factor has to do with the island's orography and the problematic nature of its harbours. As we have seen, many of them were located on the west coast and they presented numerous difficulties. Frikes was very narrow and was poorly connected to the inland areas. Kioni was difficult to protect and was exposed to the winds and to bad weather. Vathy could shelter deep-draught ships, but had a marshy and deeply sedimented coast, one in which the winds also made any approach difficult. Polis and Aetos were the main harbours on the island, given that they were located on the main route that ran along the west coast, but they were too small to be able to accommodate significant trade traffic. None of these harbours could compete with the main harbour along the Strait, which was Same in Cephallenia. Furthermore, we would need to take into account the surplus, probably quite a modest surplus, that the island would have been able to contribute to the trade flow, not to mention Ithaca's relative wealth compared to the *póleis* of Cephallenia and Leucas. As a result of the limited role that Ithaca played within the context of Greece as a whole and the Ionian Region in

¹⁴⁶ IG IX 1², 4, 1729, 20-21.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Leake's account (1835, 27-28, 31, 38) regarding the fertile nature of Vathy and the Valley of Oxi, the most productive on the island, which makes up an undulating valley with cultivated sides, forming a triangular area between the three harbours of Polis, Frikes and Afales. Aeto and Anoi had little cultivable land (Leake 1835, 33). In Lefka, he observed terraces planted with grain crops (Leake 1835, 37).

¹⁴⁸ Morgan 2007, 71; Livitsanis 2014, 20, 30.

¹⁴⁹ Livitsanis 2014, 31: "The crucial question is whether Ithacans were indeed passive receivers of all the developments happening around them, or whether they were active members".

particular, we have few accounts relating to the island and only sparse references to it in sources.

All in all, the island took part in the sea trade that circulated around its coasts in accordance with its possibilities. The sanctuary of the Bay of Polis was well-known and visited by those who sailed along the Strait, even those who came from the Italic Peninsula.¹⁵⁰ One of Ithaca's coinages featuring the head of Athena wearing the Corinthian helmet, has the prow of a ship on its other side, which speaks of the city's seafaring vocation.¹⁵¹ Such coinage finds reflect Ithaca's integration within the Corinthian trade and that of the Corinthian colonies throughout the region. Thus, in one of the treasure hoards discovered in a fourth century house in Aetos, eighteen coins were Corinthian, seven from Leucas and three from Anactorium.¹⁵² Furthermore, imports of Corinthian ceramics persisted over time throughout the fifth and fourth centuries, a truly exceptional case in the Classical Period, until a thriving local imitation pottery largely replaced it.¹⁵³ Links with the Peloponnese were also significant, in which respect Ithaca adopted an alphabet similar to the Achaean rather than the Corinthian alphabet¹⁵⁴ and, together with Attic imports, we also come across Laconian ceramics in the fifth century and pottery originating from Elis, Achaea and Epirus in the fourth.¹⁵⁵ This would lead us to assume that one of the most important aspects of the Classical Period, especially in the fourth century, consisted of a strong degree of western regional development, which ended up surpassing the Corinthian and colonial trade in terms of importance. It is not surprising, therefore, that on the lists of *theorodókoι* of Delphi from the first quarter of the second century,¹⁵⁶ Ithaca is included on the route consisting of Corcyra, Leucas and Acarnania and is not associated with the *tetrapolis* of Cephallenia. Livitsanis¹⁵⁷ has highlighted the typological similarities observed in the Ithacan pottery (about all the Ithacan reddish and pale fabrics) with Elis, Achaea, and Epirus. Finally, in relation to the Late Archaic and Classical Periods, by analysing the ceramics that has been found, Morgan¹⁵⁸ has been able to discern a difference between the two parts of the island. The Northern Peninsula appears to have been more strongly linked to North-West Greece, Corinth and the Corinthian colonies, whilst Attic ceramics and Peloponnesian influences appear to have predominated on the Southern Peninsula. Thus northern Ithaca drew closer to Leucas and local ceramic styles are particularly of Corinthian derivation, retained well down into the Hellenistic period, and Acarnanian, Aetolian and local red-figure and black glaze were more popular in the north. However, as the fifth century progressed, Attic and Peloponnesian imports came to be more concentrated in the south.

In short and in conclusion, Ithaca was integrated within the non-colonial context characteristic of the Southern Ionian Region, in which this island, together with Cephallenia and Zacynthus, were separate *póleis* with regard to Corinthian colonies

¹⁵⁰ See *IG IX* 1², 4, 1620; Benton 1934-1935, 55-56.

¹⁵¹ Postolakas 1868, n° 891.

¹⁵² Symeonoglou 1985, 204-206.

¹⁵³ Livitsanis 2018, 91-92, 792.

¹⁵⁴ Robertson in Heurtley – Robertson 1948, 81-82; Jeffery 1961, 230, 409.

¹⁵⁵ Livitsanis 2014, 91-93.

¹⁵⁶ Plassart 1921, 64.

¹⁵⁷ Livitsanis 2018.

¹⁵⁸ Morgan 2007, 79-80.

such as Leucas and Coreyra and the Corinthian colonies that controlled most of the Acarnanian Coast. However, it was located on the boundaries of the colonial world and, therefore, maintained close links with it. During the fourth and third centuries it made up an independent city-state community that was flourishing and expanding, one that was fully structured from a political, religious and economic point of view. Over and above Homer, as a Classical and Hellenistic polis, Ithaca found its identity in Odysseus, in which respect neither they nor we can ultimately escape from the predominant fascination with Homer and his work.

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