

The Eastern Korinthia Archaeological Survey: A Report to the Ministry of Culture, 1999

Citation: Gregory, Timothy E., and Frederick P. Hemans. "The Eastern Korinthia Archaeological Survey: A Report to the Ministry of Culture, 1999." *Ancient Corinth: The Eastern Korinthia Archaeological Survey*, October 18, 1999.

The Eastern Korinthia Archaeological Survey carried out its first field season between June 28 and August 8, 1999, under a permit granted to the American School of Classical Studies by the Ministry of Culture and the 4th Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities. The project wishes to thank Mrs. Elisavet Spathari, Mrs. Zoe Aslamatizidou, and Mrs. Panagiota Kasimi for their assistance and advice in all aspects of the project. The fieldwork was conducted under the direct supervision of Mrs. Kasimi, who was most helpful in every way.

Active archaeological fieldwork began on July 7 and ended on July 30 (a total of 18 working days) and it was restricted to selected areas of the Isthmia Basin (a total of 30.13 sq. km.). Intensive archaeological survey was carried out in a major transect running from the slopes of Mt. Oneion east of Xylokeriza to Rachi Boska and then to Perdikaria and the height of the Agios Demetrios Ridge. During this intensive survey archaeological objects, including pottery, were counted but not collected; rather, representative pieces were described, photographed and drawn *in situ*. In this manner a total detailed examination of 0.82km² was achieved in 281 individual Discovery Units. This represents a coverage of 2.7% of the total Isthmia Basin. In this intensive phase some 32,085 sherds, 11,765 tiles, 240 lithics and 86 miscellaneous archaeological objects were counted, and 3,295 of these were described, many of which were also drawn and photographed. Four individual objects of particular importance (3 coins and a Chalcedony arrowhead) were collected and turned over to Ms. Kasimi after their location had been carefully recorded. Within the area of intensive survey some five areas were identified as places of Localized Cultural Activity (LOCAs); these are what many surveys refer to as "sites," and they include an important prehistoric and classical complex at the top of Rachi Boska. Artifact density for all of the Discovery Units was recorded, along with information about the chronological periods that these represent. The survey was fully diachronic and special attention was taken to record the archaeological evidence from the most recent periods. An intensive program of experimentation was conducted to test various methods of survey technique and recording. This program helped us to define our fieldwork in 1999 and will assist in the planning and analysis in future seasons.

Overall artifact density was quite high, with as many as 2,726 objects counted in a single Discovery Unit. Mean density, for all the units surveyed, was 0.05 objects per sq. m. The large number of objects and their spread across the landscape confirm our expectation that we would encounter enormous quantities of archaeological material in the survey area: using standards applied by other, comparable, Mediterranean surveys, practically the whole of the survey area would be considered an archaeological site! Nonetheless, clear distinctions between areas of high density and those of low could be observed, and these will be subject to detailed examination in the GIS, taking into consideration such factors as recorded visibility and geomorphological characteristics of the various areas.

Generally speaking Late Roman material was predominant on the slopes of Mt. Oneion, although there were significant numbers of possibly prehistoric obsidian objects there. The relatively flat land to the north of Mt. Oneion revealed significant evidence of activity in the Classical and Hellenistic periods, although there was still some indication of Roman and Late Roman use. The plateau of Rachi Boska, one of the areas of highest density in the intensive survey, contained significant quantities of prehistoric pottery, from Middle Neolithic to Late Helladic, along with large quantities of Classical and lesser quantities of Late Roman pottery. The finds in the Perdikaria region were once again primarily Classical and Late Roman in date. Significantly, there were no concentrations of medieval or Ottoman period ceramics in the intensive survey area.

Extensive survey was carried out in several areas within the Isthmia Basin, most notably in the area of Kromna, located near the Hexamilia quarries, just south of the road between Hexamilia and Kyras Vrysi. In this area, previously explored by James Wiseman and partially published by him, were found the architectural fragments of several structures, including what are probably monumental tombs. Indeed, this whole area (around Kromna) seems in antiquity to have been an important cemetery. It would have been clearly visible from the ancient road, and probably served distinguished Corinthians who wished to be commemorated in such a public place--in a manner that reminds one of the distinguished cemetery of the Athenians at the Kerameikos. Large architectural features were also encountered and recorded elsewhere, including a substantial ashlar wall on the east side of Rachi Boska and a reasonably well preserved stretch of Cyclopean (presumably Mycenaean) wall along the north side of the same hill. The examination of aerial photographs revealed a large linear feature, running roughly northwest-southeast through the survey area. Ground-based examination of this feature confirmed its identification and suggested that it was an ancient road running, presumably, to the port at Kenchreai from the city of Corinth, and perhaps from the harbor of Lechaion to the west.

Important innovations of the project include a fully interdisciplinary approach, involving survey archaeology, an experimental approach, and involvement of the earth sciences from the very beginning of the undertaking. Especially significant to the project were: the complete geomorphological mapping of all areas prior to the archaeological survey, and the functioning of a GIS (geographic information system), based on digitized topographical maps (terrain models) and aerial photographs. All survey units were laid out so as not to cross over geomorphological boundaries, thus preserving the integrity of the archaeological data vis-à-vis their environmental setting, and geomorphologists accompanied the archaeological teams every day in the field. The survey units were clearly marked on printouts of the aerial photographs before the archaeological survey took place, allowing us to have full spatial control at all times, and all information from the survey is stored in digital and paper form in Greece and in the United States.

Most archaeological surveys in Greece have been carried out in "marginal" land, far from centers of population, both ancient and modern. The Eastern Corinthia Archaeological Survey, by contrast, focuses on the immediate hinterland of Corinth, and as such it is the first intensive survey to be carried out adjacent to one of the great cities of the ancient world. The territory of the Eastern Corinthia is also undergoing rapid development, and EKAS seeks to assist the Archaeological Service in its task of defining areas of archaeological importance before they are destroyed. The non-collection procedure of the survey is an effective and innovative low-impact prospecting technique that allows for excellent understanding of the archaeological remains with little damage

to the environment or the archaeological record. We expect to continue and refine these successful techniques in future seasons, as we expand the coverage to areas not yet studied.