

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND NEW APPROACHES TO THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF MEDIEVAL GREECE

JOHN BINTLIFF

University of Leiden, Netherlands

INTRODUCTION

Medieval archaeology in Greece has till recently been dominated by the study of Byzantine churches, icons, and castles. A new wave of information, however, is coming out of two parallel developments. Firstly, a renewed interest in post-Roman excavated deposits can be observed, especially those encountered in major urban excavations (and most notably at the key Frankish centre of Corinth). Secondly –and much more widespread– there is the striking evidence for Medieval rural life that is coming from a series of regional surface surveys inaugurated over the last twenty years and now emerging in final publications.

The archaeology of town and country which is now maturing is not confined to the chronology and typology of Greek medieval culture, but includes innovative work in relating chronicles and tax cadasters to rural settlement systems discovered through intensive fieldwork, and the study of ethnicity and popular lifestyles from the material culture record.

This paper will review these developments and illustrate them by reference to a series of recent and ongoing archaeological projects in Greece, and in particular from my own project in Boeotia, Central Greece.

TRADITIONAL WORK ON MEDIEVAL GREEK ARCHAEOLOGY AND RECENT WORK ON THE MONUMENTS

Medieval Greece has been richly served by research and publications throughout the 20th century, focussing on the highpoints of Medieval art and architecture –the churches, monasteries and their icons (notably the work of Orlandos) and the major castles (especially the work of Bon), accompanied by a rich number of studies of the chronicles and archives (Miller, Setton). In the first half of this century an unavoidable side-result of largescale American excavations planned to uncover major Classical monuments in the ancient centre (agora) at Athens and in that of Corinth, was the revealing of significant Medieval levels.

Much to their credit, the excavation directors commissioned pioneering studies of the finds (e.g. Frantz [1942] for the Agora), the most substantial of which –Morgan (1942 for Corinth) remains a major sourcebook for the modern study of Byzantine and Frankish ceramics in the Aegean.

A recent project by the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the *Tabula Byzantina*, has been issuing regular volumes of an atlas of the Byzantine empire, province by province, under the general direction of Professor Johannes Koder (the first volume, *Hellas und Thessalia*, 1976, being especially useful for my own research in Central Greece). Alongside excellent maps showing the location of monuments, excavations and literary topographic references, the texts of these volumes offer historical resumes and discussions for each Byzantine province (or *theme*) under a number of headings, and in general this series provides an ideal and relatively up-to-date review of the published evidence for Medieval monuments and the localities mentioned in the sources.

An example of more recent work on the medieval monuments is the examination by Peter Lock of the freestanding towers of South-Central Greece (Lock, 1986, 1996), which are probably to be dated for the majority to the Frankish period (13th to 15th centuries a.D.). Lock combines careful modern architectural survey with pioneering discussion of the social, and especially feudal contexts in which these towers may have functioned. A much more recent monumental landscape is represented by similar pioneer work by Todd Whitelaw on the rural structures of the island of Kea (1991, in Davies et al.), interrelated complexes of terrace and other field walls, paths and isolated farmhouses of the 19th century a.D. Once again a painstaking survey of large areas of these features is accompanied by a highly insightful discussion of the socioeconomic circumstances within which this landscape was created. Equally fascinating is the careful documentation and mapping of Post-Medieval khans (wayside hostels) in the rugged uplands of Aetolia province in Central Greece as part of the long-running Dutch Aetolia Project (Bommeljé and Doorn, 1996) in relation to historical geographical analysis of communication systems in the long-term within that region.

This last example introduces the fruitful combination of oral, archival and standing building evidence to reconstruct a series of post-Classical structures. There are indeed examples where no physical trace remains of even outstanding medieval and post-medieval monuments. One such example came to my notice at an exhibition of photographs of ecclesiastical art and architecture in the Central Greek province of Boeotia by a friend –George Kopanyas, in the regional capital of Livadhia. In the background of a splendid icon of St. John the Baptist from Thebes I observed what appeared to be a detailed representation of that town at the height of the Ottoman era, including a mosque of remarkable proportions and complexity. Fortunately our Project Ottoman archivist, Professor Michael Kiel, was also a specialist in architecture, and has recently published this lost monument (Kiel, 1999), based entirely on this image, attributing to it a date in the early 17th century and classing it as a major provincial imitation of the great mosques of Istanbul.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SURVEY

Since the 1960s in Greece, regional field survey has been a major research tool for understanding the development of settlement, population and land-use in the long-term. However, even when methods moved from the more superficial, extensive survey to the slower, field-by-field, intensive approach, the recognition and study of post-classical sites has been limited. One difficulty has been the absence of detailed ceramic sequences for worn surface ceramics and the great shortage of specialists with knowledge of such material. Since the pioneer urban publications from Corinth and Athens only a few case-studies have provided textbook examples to compare surface ceramics with (the finest by far being John Hayes' modern classic –the Saraçhane Excavation report [Hayes, 1992]); one can also mention the growing series of studies by Guy Sanders on the older and recent medieval excavations at Corinth and for the Cyclades (Sanders, 1987, 1995, 1996), and the fine research of Papanikola-Bakirtzis into medieval glazed wares (eg 1999).

On the Boeotia Regional Survey Project, which I have jointly directed with Anthony Snodgrass of Cambridge University since 1978, we are strikingly fortunate in that the surface ceramics of post-classical date (almost entirely made within the region itself), are of excellent quality and rich variety. Primary work by John Hayes on the basic chronology is now being supplemented by Joanita Vroom (generously funded by the Leverhulme Foundation and currently by the Dutch Science Research Council), who is fine-tuning the sequence and investigating aspects such as changing dining habits through the period. The very numerous post-classical sites discovered by our field survey ensure that many are occupied in limited timespans, allowing the possibility of creating a floating chronology of ceramic types which can be given approximate chronological associations through the survey equivalent of "closed assemblages", with the help of occasional well-dated forms or imports (eg Vroom, 1997). Even from the preliminary stage, based on the basic chronology established by John Hayes, it has been possible to begin to map the evolution of rural settlement through contrasting phases of several hundred years' duration, such as Early, Middle or Late Byzantine / Early Frankish, Late Frankish to Early Turkish, and Late Turkish to Early Modern (cf. Bintliff, 1996b, Bintliff and Snodgrass, 1988).

Naturally the typical post-classical surface site is merely a concentration of potsherds in a ploughed field, occasionally with fragments of house walls, but one can occasionally come upon more substantial remains hitherto unrecorded scientifically. One such example came to light in Boeotia at the end of the 1980s, when unparalleled drought coupled with opportunistic expansion of irrigated land caused a dramatic lowering in the level of Lake Ilike. Nineteenth-century maps and reports evidenced the existence of a medieval tower of the kind published by Peter Lock, whose top emerged from the lake in very rare drought years. A visit to the location revealed not only the complete tower but a surrounding medieval estate centre, its walls washed clean by the lake and the similarly washed ceramics lying in each room and open space. We were able

to make a detailed plan of the site and collect the ceramics in each architectural context, but the final publication of the Klimmataria site will take some time as its complexity outstrips any other surface survey site outside our work on Greco-Roman cities. However it very quickly became apparent that a close parallel exists between the tower and those typical Frankish feudal monuments common elsewhere in Boeotia, and moreover equally good parallels can be found for the plan of the surrounding estate complex with those being published for Frankish rural estates in the contemporary Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem (Ellenblum et al., 1996, Ellenblum 1998).

In the remainder of this paper I shall turn to the contribution regional survey can make to fundamental historical issues for Medieval Greece, and to new approaches to the social and economic history of the period through the study of material culture. The examples given emanate from my own project in Boeotia, Central Greece.

MAJOR HISTORICAL QUESTIONS BEING ADDRESSED IN REGIONAL SURVEY

The Transition from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages

Firstly it is worth reminding researchers in the West of Europe that this transitional phase belongs to the period between the 7th and 9th centuries a.D., since at least till the later 6th century, the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire was highly flourishing. Now one of the clearest ways to try and focus in on the nature of the changes for typical communities at the village and smaller urban level in Greece, is to start with the mature settlement network of Greco-Roman times across a large province like Boeotia, and compare this level of larger, nucleated settlements with that of the High Middle Ages (Bintliff, 1995, 1997). Since intensive field survey can only cover small sectors of such a province, we have to use extensive and topographic survey for this level of generalisation –but fortunately it is in the classes of small villages-hamlets and isolated farms that intensive survey makes the most dramatic enrichment of our map of archaeological sites, whilst the larger settlements can be reasonably located from extensive and topographic survey. Thus, if we plot settlements mentioned in the historic sources, Frankish (Crusader) feudal towers, churches, and excavated sites with evidence for the High Middle Ages (ca. 1000-1400 a.D.), it becomes apparent that a high number of Greco-Roman villages and towns are still in occupation at this later time, a fact which is a first argument for continuity of occupation –and perhaps a significant element of population continuity, across the “Dark Ages” that intervened.

On the other hand, there is a tradition of historical geography, to which I subscribe, that of the *Siedlungskammer* of the German Landeskunde school (eg Lehmann, 1939; Bintliff, 1994) recently elaborated into the *Community Area* theory of the current Prague school of landscape archaeology (Kuna, 1991), and this reminds us that diversified landscapes tend to create definite “constraints

and possibilities" for settlement, often in or around certain recurrent places in the landscape (the product of physical topography, soil types, technological and land use regimes, natural paths of communication, etc.). It is therefore quite possible for apparent continuities in the placing of settlements over time to be the result of convergence of natural conditions, or ways of using the landscape, rather than due to genuine continuities of local peoples.

To help resolve the balance between these contrasted processes we need more precise information, and as noted above, this is an area where intensive survey of small districts at the *Siedlungskammer-Community Area* scale, combined with historical and archival evidence, can provide major insights. In the Valley of the Muses in Boeotia (Bintliff, 1996a), we have achieved this goal with a small, largely enclosed upland valley landscape, where in the long-term there has normally only been one nucleated settlement. Complete intensive survey of the Valley found some 50 archaeological sites of all periods from Neolithic to late Turkish times. In Greco-Roman antiquity the central nucleation was a large village or small town at Askra, which was particularly flourishing and extensive in Late Roman times (4th-6th centuries A.D.). Securely-dated Byzantine ceramics from Askra are of types current from the 9th-11th centuries A.D., but suggest a much smaller village in spatial terms, and are associated with a very large church in the centre of the site (Bintliff and Snodgrass, 1988). Our Project Byzantine historian—Archie Dunn, has argued that this community and its church can be identified with a settlement which gained an Orthodox bishop in the 12th century, who was then replaced after the early 13th century Frankish conquest of Greece with a Latin bishop. Direct archaeological evidence for continuity of use of the site between the 7th and 10th centuries is problematic, since characteristic medieval glazed and painted wares seem to be a novelty in the Greek provinces belonging to the 9th-11th centuries and not earlier. Our current thinking echoes that amongst many researchers working on the Mediterranean Late Antique to Medieval transition in both Byzantine and Islamic regions, that the transitional period may be characterised by considerable continuity of preceding material culture (notably ceramics). Our Byzantine ceramic specialist in Boeotia, Joanita Vroom, has thus modified her phase distributions of sites so that we now have a single 'Late Roman-Early Byzantine' era into which sites suggested to be either or both are classified, so as to introduce the strong possibility that 'Late Roman' ceramic styles were the main forms in use in the period after the 7th century A.D., and possibly up till the introduction of the distinctive novelties of the 9th-11th century ceramic repertoire (Early Byzantine is here dated between the mid-7th and mid-9th centuries A.D.).

Although this argument can offer a reason to postulate that the small Middle Byzantine (mid-9th to early 13th century) village of Askra—which significantly overlies the core of the Late Roman large community—may well have been its direct descendant, the archival sources both offer deeper confirmation but also a potential disconfirmation at one and the same time. The creation of a Suffragan bishop in the 12th century is at a place now called Zaratoba rather than Askra, and this has to indicate a dominant linguistic presence of Slav-speakers

there. This should not surprise, since the majority of the Greek landscape was conquered by migrating Slav tribes in the late 6th and 7th centuries, leaving only major towns and fortresses in the hands of the Byzantine Empire (Malinogoudis, 1991). Boeotia was recovered by the Byzantine army during the 8th-9th centuries. The toponym therefore ought to belong to the settlement of Slavs exactly at the period where our ceramic evidence is still ambiguous for continuity of site use at Askra. At the same time as giving us further cause for arguing for the site being continuously occupied, the replacement of a Greco-Roman with a Slav ethnic toponym might mean rather abandonment and a refoundation by new settlers on precisely the same spot within a reasonably short time. It is however far more likely that the Greco-Roman rural population of the Balkans was neither exterminated nor fled to the shrinking major cities and forts which escaped Slav control, but merged –perhaps peacefully– with the invaders, creating Slavo-Hellenic countrysides. Askra should in any case have shrunk with the warfare and plagues of the 6th-7th centuries but subsequently have received additional population from the Slav settlement. It recovered sufficiently to be awarded its own bishop in the 12th century. Growth continued into the 12th and 13th centuries, or High Middle Ages, as can be seen in the quantities of both ceramic discard at sites such as this with earlier beginnings and also through the foundation of increasing numbers of sites with this date throughout those parts of Boeotia where we have carried out intensive survey (Bintliff, 1996).

The High Middle Ages and the Impact of the Frankish Conquest

As was noted earlier, the regional monuments in Boeotia suggest considerable continuity of the Greco-Roman settlement network into the High Middle Ages. Ancient towns and villages often seem to survive as hamlets or villages, whether or not their inhabitants remained in place, or were replaced, or supplemented, by Slav incomers. Thus when the Fourth Crusade conquers the Byzantine Imperial capital of Constantinople, and Mainland Greece is carved into a nested series of feudal fiefs under a Frankish elite, we are not now surprised to find that the dominant castles and the subfief markers of rural towers typically lie on or near ancient population centres (Bintliff, 1995, 1997). The regional castles at Thebes and Livadhia were ancient cities, the former probably remaining in Byzantine hands through the Dark Ages. The feudal towers seem to have been placed as defended points of surplus extraction from nearby indigenous villages, and show little attempt to occupy remote defensive positions or those with good intervisibility between each other.

A good example can be given through continuing the historical story for the Valley of the Muses (Bintliff, 1996a). Probably early in the 13th century, a feudal tower is erected about 500 m distant from the Byzantine village of Askra, and at this time the majority of the villagers seem to have been moved to a hillside immediately below that tower. Arguably the Latin bishop remained at Askra, and may have been the object of regular predation by the minor feudal occupier of the tower, to judge by correspondence which our Project Frankish historian

Peter Lock believes is associated with these localities (Lock, 1995). The new village site (site VM4 in our survey numbering) shows a more extensive area than Byzantine Askra, reflecting that longer-term growth of population in the countryside we saw commencing in the 10th-11th centuries a.D. (Bintliff, 1997).

Catastrophe and Recovery-The Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries

The central village in the Valley of the Muses, formerly at Askra-Zaratoba at the ancient and Byzantine location, now at the new location of VM4 –of uncertain naming in the Frankish era, gives from archaeological intensive survey a clear picture of dramatically-enhanced population growth from the 14th-16th centuries (the Late Frankish and Early Ottoman era). At the end of that period this village –which by now is certainly called Panagia– is greater in extent than ancient Askra at its maximum (12 compared to 10.5 ha) and is known to house over 1000 people. The ceramic evidence from VM4 (Bintliff, 1997; Vroom, 1999), is in the form of a maximum extent of wares of Late Frankish-Early Turkish styles, dated to these three centuries. Moreover the prosperity of Panagia can be further evidenced not only by its foreign import wares (from Italy and Anatolia), but also from the Ottoman tax archive records (defters), translated by our Project Ottomanist Prof. Machiel Kiel (Bintliff, 1995; Kiel, 1997), where alongside those population figures we see that the village was wealthy enough to fund two new monasteries and some half-dozen water-mills in its territory.

The potential of the Ottoman archives is extraordinary for rural history and archaeology in all of its former provinces. Professor Kiel and I have been able to locate some 75% of the archive villages for Boeotia, and this does offer a very rich means of comparing surface material traces with highly-detailed inventories for each community at a number of time-intervals from 1466 to 1687. It is clear that the early Ottoman era of the late 15th and 16th centuries was a time of stability and rapid growth of population and economic production in our region –due in large part to the benefits of the Pax Ottomanica.

However, it is exactly these records but on the level of the entire province, which give us a more subtly-complex story to that detectable from VM4-Panagia for the transition from Frankish to Ottoman times. The 1466 Ottoman tax register is the first so far available, and it provides clear evidence for the aftermath of a catastrophic depopulation. If we begin with villages classed as equivalent to Byzantine Orthodox Greek, only a small number are present, mostly clustered in the fringes of the central mountains of the province (one being Panagia-VM4). These are large. Elsewhere there is a wide dispersal of small recent settlements described as Arnavaudan –or Albanian, and furthermore termed “katuns” which signifies semi-mobile communities. Textual sources inform us (Jochalas, 1971), that in the final Frankish period and the Early Ottoman era a major wave of Albanian colonists was invited to settle in South-Central Greece to repopulate the land. The reasons for such largescale loss of villages must include the known impact of the mid-14th century Black Death, constant warfare in this region, and raids by Ottoman pirates from the coastlands. If we take away these new colonists we see that over two-thirds of the Byzantine-Frankish

settlements must have been abandoned, probably largely in the 14th century. The large size of the few survivor indigenous villages, such as Panagia, must reflect their status as refuge communities for wider areas.

The subsequent tax records show that the Albanian hamlets multiplied and grew larger, and the Greek villages also grew even further. The *katuns* became permanent villages with tree crops and other products comparable to the Greek settlements. Given the disturbed conditions of the final Frankish centuries, this picture of growth and prosperity is attributable to the improved conditions consequent upon the imposition of the "Pax Ottomanica" (Kiel, 1997).

The Decline of the Ottoman Empire and the Origins of the Traditional Villages of Today, Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries

The tax records agree very well with the field survey evidence in evidencing a dramatic decline of the region during the 17th century A.D. (Bintliff, 1995; Kiel, 1997). Villages are abandoned or contract considerably in size, and most are converted from semi-autonomous communities paying taxes to support the Ottoman military elite, into serf-estates or *ciftliks*. The village of Panagia-VM4 for example (Bintliff, 1996a, 1997; Vroom, 1999) has very little surface ceramic evidence for the later Turkish era (17th century and later), but we know from the tax records that it shrank dramatically in size (to some one third of its 16th century population) and was broken up into twelve small serf-estates. In fact other sources tell us that the main village location was abandoned for a new one some 2 km distant, where the modern village still lies.

These troubles were in fact general throughout the Ottoman Empire (Inalcik, 1972), and were the complex result of a number of historical factors –the decline of imperial administration, radical transformations to the army and hence the peasant tax system in response to the challenge of Western military technology, the progressive undermining of the Ottoman economy by Western capitalism, the effects of a series of crippling wars, and climatic deterioration.

A fortunate discovery promises to shed light on the new situation in the countryside from an archaeological viewpoint. For many years our Project team in Boeotia resided in the village of Mavrommati. Part of that village's population was traditionally believed to have migrated there from a now deserted village called Harmena. We were shown the spot and it also subsequently appeared in the Ottoman village tax records. Most remarkable was the chance discovery by Machiel Kiel of a rare late tax record for this community –an 18th century assessment (Kiel, 1997). Here it is described as a great *ciftlik*, and indeed its population is considerable for its era –some 200-300 inhabitants. We are interested to see exactly what material conditions were like in such a serf-estate, a form of tied cultivation which at least by the early 19th century was giving rise to very negative comments by Western travellers within the Ottoman Empire. The ceramic finds from the surface of Harmena are surprisingly rich and varied, rather than cheap homemade coarseware which one might have expected from such a community. However, the standing buildings at the village (abandonment

must have occurred before the 19th century) do match early modern descriptions and drawings for ciftliks (eg Cvijic, 1918): we have made architectural plans of a large number of rather primitive rubble foundation longhouses and one much more pretentious, multiple-storey house, which must represent peasant families and the estate owner or supervisor respectively. On the positive side though, is the mention in the 18th tax record of a group of people living in the ciftlik who were there voluntarily as additional workers.

The early 19th century saw massive disruption to rural life with the War of Independence, but even after the foundation of the modern Greek state at the end of the 1820s a further half-century of economic depression ensued –with severe problems over land distribution and endemic banditry in Boeotia (Slaughter and Kasimis, 1986). During this time it seems that many villages which had survived into the 17th-18th centuries, or were founded as part of the transformation into ciftliks, were abandoned and their inhabitants moved into a smaller number of villages. We are currently studying the surface finds from several such recent deserted villages (Bintliff, 1995, 1997; Vroom, 1996, 1997, 1998). Finally the last quarter of the 19th century witnessed a phenomenal population boom focussed on these larger villages, one paralleled in almost all the rural zones of the Mediterranean lands. More secure conditions and the impact of commercial agriculture, a rise in rural industrial production (Proto-Industrialisation), and the improvements in maritime and overland communications, are amongst the critical factors. One material symptom is the arrival in quantity during this period either side of 1900 of relatively inexpensive factory-produced ceramics into rural villages, including foreign imports from Western Europe (Vroom, 1998).

BEYOND CHRONOLOGY AND HISTOIRE ÉVÉNEMENTIELLE

Although as has been seen, there remain problems of ceramic chronology and ethnic history for future research, the evidence of surface survey, combined with the rich archive materials, does allow us to address other historical issues beyond the essential reconstruction of the historical geography of the region. These deal with the additional information we can hope to extract from material culture of the medieval and postmedieval eras.

First.-housing. We have observed that the basic peasant house at 18th century Harmena was a single-storey longhouse. Current work at the Frankish-Early Ottoman deserted village of Panagia-VM4, where there are fragments of house outlines, may show whether this standard house type for Boeotian villages in the Early Modern era already existed by the 16th century. It is specific to a form of open plan settlement with stock in part sharing the longhouse with the family, whilst both traces of this plan and of the house type survive in most older villages of South-Central Greece (but sadly will not for long) (Dimitsantou-Kremezi, 1996). Descriptions and occasional depictions of house interiors of this kind of dwelling in normal use during the 19th century show it to be relatively unfurnished and lacking in signs of wealth both in construction and house contents. Apart from documenting the houses visible at deserted villages, we have also

studied standing examples in traditional villages (eg. Stedman, 1996), as well as carrying out a programme of recording pre-modern vernacular constructions in the provincial capital of Livadhia (where the longhouse was also surprisingly common alongside the multistorey larger dwellings of the middle and upper classes) (Aalen et al., 1999). Apart from the ubiquitous traces of watermills and irrigation conduits of the Ottoman era, and the churches, castles and towers discussed earlier, other Medieval-Postmedieval architectural remains are rare in Mainland Greece. The example of a small mosque in the former main street of Livadhia, its shell occupied by a flower-shop, is typical of the arbitrary nature of survival of once major monuments.

Next—*the ceramic assemblage as social history*. We are currently, particularly through the researches of our Project post-Classical pottery specialist Joanita Vroom (*op. cit.*), investigating the potential of the rich and well-preserved ceramic collections from the survey's surface sites, to shed light on changing wealth, trade and lifestyles amongst the rural communities of Central Greece. A particular inspiration was a pioneering paper on Italian medieval survey ceramics by Hugo Blake (1980), which dealt with the evidence they offered for the relative wealth of different settlements. An additional aspect of social history relates to the story of dining habits in Europe. Our medieval assemblages are comparable to those of other South European countries such as Italy and Spain, where older traditions of communal eating from wide open shared serving dishes were being supplemented from the late 15th century by individual bowls and plates for each diner. Whilst however this tendency in Western Europe was to develop further in association with the rise of Capitalism and Individualism, resulting in a full suite of personal ceramics, glasses and table cutlery (cf. Gaimster, 1994), Greece shifted during Ottoman times into Oriental eating (both in culinary terms and in table manners): once again large open shapes in the centre of tables served a group of diners, who had limited personal tableware and cutlery. Careful analysis of our large ceramic assemblages is currently being carried out to trace the timing and extent of these changes in eating habits, with the aid of contemporary scenes in art (notably church icons, which frequently modify biblical depictions to suit changing table customs!).

By the time that Western factory-produced tableware began to pour into the Greek countryside, in the final decades of the 19th century, the orientation of rural life was once again facing westwards—so that rapidly we see the adoption of modern styles of individual eating as required by the ceramic sets being supplied. A parallel process was taking place at the Sultan's table in Istanbul from the 19th century, with vast dinner services being made to order from the West.

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