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Introduction

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Introduction

Deborah E. Brown Stewart and Rebecca M. Seifried

The deserted rural village has often been presented as a foil to the grand narratives of modernity. Indeed, early modernity is usually defined by the sweeping political, technological, economic, and cultural changes that disrupted the agrarian societies of the European Middle Ages. Over the last few decades, the rapid climate change, globalism, and consumerism of so-called supermodernity have threatened what remains of the rural countryside and the lifeways of agropastoralism, in part because it privileges urban and suburban modes of living. In 2007, the relocation of human populations reached a pivotal point, when the inhabitants of the world's cities finally outnumbered rural populations. As people have sought the opportunities and amenities of modern urban life, the depopulated village and the aging shepherd/farmer have become tropes for an allegedly simpler past and—in some places—for cultural identity itself (Gerstel 2020:viii). In short, the abandonment of the countryside has become a powerful motif that influences both popular culture and academic scholarship alike (Kourelis 2010:209).

By elucidating what is missing or misrepresented in these narratives, archaeologists are uniquely equipped to trace the continuities, discontinuities, and transformations that are an integral part of the abandonment process. The papers in this volume are a collection of archaeological case studies that explore this theme in different ways. The collection stems from a two-part colloquium on “Deserted Villages” held at the 117th Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) on January 8, 2016, in San Francisco, California, and organized by Deborah Brown Stewart and Kostis Kourelis. The colloquium is one of several sponsored by the Medieval and Post-Medieval Archaeology interest group that have resulted in publications. The first was a volume on *The Archaeology of Xenitia: Greek Immigration and Material Culture* edited by Kostis Kourelis (2008). The next was a special issue of *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* on the topic of “The Abandoned Countryside: (Re)Settlement in the Archaeological Narrative of Post-Classical Greece,” edited by Kostis Kourelis and William R. Caraher (Kourelis 2010). The most recent, a section in *Journal of Greek Archaeology* on “The Medieval Countryside in the Aegean and Anatolia: An Archaeological Perspective,”

edited by Effie Athanassopoulos (2020). While all of the collections invariably deal with abandonment, this volume makes the focus explicit, challenging the authors to elucidate how archaeologists of the medieval and post-medieval eras (broadly understood to mean the sixth century AD and later) understand the process of abandonment as it plays out in the eastern Mediterranean.

The authors who first presented their work in the 2016 colloquium have revised their content to incorporate new insights from fieldwork and expanded research, and additional contributions are included here from colleagues who were unable to participate in the colloquium but offered papers or their services for peer review. The dialogue that was launched by both the colloquium and the creation of this volume has succeeded in connecting researchers who share methodological and theoretical approaches to studying an endangered category of material culture, regardless of the place or primary time period of their research. The variety of ways in which deserted villages can be studied is, indeed, the overarching theme that connects the papers, which otherwise deal with case studies that are separated not only temporally—with regional chronologies often reflecting the unique historical trajectories of each area—but also geographically. For example, while most of the contributions focus on medieval and post-medieval villages in the eastern Mediterranean, one team applies the insights they gained from conducting intensive survey in the Mediterranean to their own backyard: the oil fields of North Dakota.

Research on Deserted Villages in Historical and Geographical Perspective

Research on the medieval and post-medieval villages in the eastern Mediterranean has emerged from the timely convergence of several important trends. Archaeology in the region has a fairly well-deserved reputation for privileging the monumental and spectacular over the mundane, as well as for being preoccupied with large tells and famous ancient sites where archaeologists hope to uncover monumental architecture, valuable artifacts, and even traces of major historical events and historical figures. Until recently, medieval and post-medieval archaeology struggled to advance beyond cultural-historical approaches that gave primacy to cultural descriptions and historical events recorded in textual evidence. Because of the subdiscipline's alignment with history, geography, art history, and folklore, the value of material culture to research—as well as to cultural heritage—was tied closely to its perception as a record of history or a direct link to a valued ancestral past. Therefore, monuments of art historical

or historical value, such as churches or fortifications, have dominated the literature. Furthermore, to many minds, archaeological research on the more recent past seemed entirely unnecessary. Fortunately, the archaeology of quotidian pasts has always had its advocates, who argue that too many perspectives are omitted from texts and documentary records, and who have sought to advance research through the best technologies, methods, and theoretical approaches.

One area where archaeological research on deserted villages has benefited from this kind of advocacy is the United Kingdom. Medieval archaeology in this region owes a great debt to the multidisciplinary and multiscalar research agendas of the Deserted Medieval Villages Research Group, which was founded in 1952 and later renamed the Medieval Settlements Research Group (MSRG; for history, see [Bentz 2008](#); [Dyer 2017](#)). As described by a founding member, the participants sought to bring different disciplinary expertise to myriad research questions, including the materials and methods of construction of individual buildings, the physical and social structures of villages, diverse strategies for land utilization and communications, and “the growth and decay of the village, and the possible connections of this with broad climatic changes” and other crises ([Hurst 1956:267](#)). For decades, the MSRG focused on two projects: the large-scale excavation at Wharram Percy, which continued until 1990, and the sampling and documentation of sites across the landscape. The results of these projects appear in *Wharram Percy: Deserted Medieval Village* ([Beresford and Hurst 1990](#)) and *Deserted Medieval Villages: Studies* ([Beresford and Hurst 1971](#)). Although the excavations at Wharram Percy have ended, similar questions about the origins, development, and abandonment of medieval villages and their hinterlands continue to drive other excavation projects in the U.K., which benefit from new technologies, scientific analyses, improved archaeological methods, and, in many cases, financial support from the MSRG. Since the advent of processualism and ongoing debates influencing landscape studies, archaeology in the U.K. remains in close conversation with prehistoric and historical archaeology in the Americas ([Egan and Michael 1999](#); [Gerrard 2003](#)), as well as with developments in landscape archaeology in Italy and the eastern Mediterranean ([Harkel and Bewley 2018](#); [Smith 2018](#)).

The scale, resources, output, and coordinated agenda of the British research group are admittedly unmatched in the rest of Europe, where “preventive archaeology,” also known as salvage or rescue archaeology, is responsible for most of the excavation, survey, and documentation of abandoned or at-risk medieval and post-medieval villages. In recent

decades, anxieties about heritage at risk from conflict or development, increasing interest in the archaeology of households, and ongoing questions about the origins, expansion, contraction, and abandonment of villages has prompted academics and professional archaeologists in several European countries to re-engage with the archaeology of villages (Carré et al. 2009; Dyer and Jones 2010; Fernández Fernández and Fernández Mier 2019).

Research on medieval and post-medieval villages has progressed along a somewhat different trajectory in the eastern Mediterranean. For most of the twentieth century, occupied and deserted villages in the region were the purview of anthropologists, folklorists, and architectural historians who documented either current/disappearing rural lifeways or vernacular architecture (see discussion in Brenningmayer et al., *this volume*). However, beginning about 50 years ago, and under the influence of Anglo-American archaeological discourse, archaeological landscape surveys began documenting detailed settlement histories, rural landscapes, and the material signatures of peoples' everyday activities, including evidence from the medieval and early modern eras (Athanasopoulos 2010:256; Diacopoulos 2004:185). As John Cherry (2003:141) explains, what made these projects "so distinctively new and different was their intensity, diachronic focus, interdisciplinarity, and use of the region as the conceptual basis for addressing historical or anthropological questions." Ethnographers and ethnoarchaeologists also joined the archaeologists in the form of interdisciplinary survey teams—both to help with the investigation of the modern communities and to seek analogies for premodern behaviors related to pastoralism, agriculture, craftsmanship, and village social dynamics. Ultimately, these teams produced research findings that challenged "long-standing assumptions of stability, longevity, and essential uniformity among Greek villages" (Sutton 1994:314), revealing instead the "fluidity and flexibility of the nature of settlement over time" (Jameson 2000:xi) and "an understanding of the material condition of rural Greek life as mutable and negotiated" (Sutton 2000:2). In addition to the stimulus that landscape survey provided to the field of medieval and post-medieval archaeology in the eastern Mediterranean, several excavation directors have dedicated time and resources to studying medieval and post-medieval levels at complex, multiperiod sites where earlier levels traditionally had been the priority. The increasing amount of finds and data recovered from excavations and surveys in the last few decades have galvanized efforts to develop typologies and chronologies for common archaeological artifacts such as ceramics and glass.

In tandem with these new research avenues, archaeologists began partnering with historians to explore archival lines of evidence—especially Venetian and Ottoman administrative records—and gain additional insights into the villages they were documenting materially (e.g. [Bennet 2007](#); [Davies 2004](#); [Doorn 2009](#); [Given 2007](#); [Kiel 1999](#); [Price et al. 2008](#); [Zarinebaf et al. 2005](#)). On this point, it is worth highlighting that the field of history is currently undergoing a parallel shift toward centering the material cultural heritage and people who live within the rural landscapes they study (e.g. [Kolovos 2015](#)). However, as Thomas Gallant (2018:178) points out, archaeologists and modern Greek historians would benefit from working more closely together (and citing one another) in order to fruitfully combine two different avenues for exploring abandoned rural villages.

As a consequence of these comparatively late developments to the archaeology of the medieval and post-medieval Mediterranean, reflective and reflexive practitioners, such as our authors, have engaged with critical discourses and methods developed within the approaches of processualism, social archaeology, environmental humanities, and historiography. As surveys continue in the eastern Mediterranean, albeit with modified research agendas and new technologies, they continue to evaluate changes to rural settlement patterns and land use through time, comparing their findings to what was known about the dramatic historical events and socioeconomic changes that impacted important centers, and identifying rural sites for further inquiry. It is no coincidence that many of the contributors to this volume have returned to medieval and post-medieval villages they first encountered while participating in large-scale surveys, now equipped with a variety of new archaeological methods, technologies, and research questions. Thus, this volume not only records medieval and post-medieval villages for the sake of expanding the corpora of known sites of archaeological and cultural interest, but also demonstrates the ways in which critical and multidisciplinary approaches have been internalized and emerge as research questions for this generation of medieval and post-medieval archaeologists.

Archaeology and Abandonment

The overarching theme of this collection is the exploration of the complex processes that are at work during the abandonment of rural settlements and the formation of archaeological sites, with conscious attention to their medieval, early modern, and modern contexts. Rather than supply a

narrative that end with a site's abrupt and final abandonment (as viewed from a much later point in time), each paper thoughtfully considers histories of occupation, abandonment, and postabandonment that can be traced through documentation, oral histories, and the investigation of abandoned or partially abandoned material culture. Abandonment is considered both as a site-formation process and as a human phenomenon that intertwines the seemingly conflicting threads of memory and amnesia, opportunity and loss. This approach offers a more nuanced understanding of the reasons why people abandon rural homes and villages, the behaviors associated with abandonment of these places, and the significance of deserted villages in cultural landscapes. Most importantly, the case studies presented here reframe abandonment and postabandonment as dynamic, sometimes cyclical, and sometimes protracted processes, and they explore a vast range of environmental, political, social, and economic factors that are believed to contribute to abandonment and formative processes. Through all these papers weaves a challenge to archaeologists to reconsider how they interpret abandoned landscapes and the cultural assemblages that are deposited both upon and within them.

Abandonment—as both a sociocultural process and a process through which material culture enters the purview of archaeologists—is of fundamental concern to the discipline. Following Robert Ascher's (1961) pioneering work on formation processes, archaeologists utilized experimentation, observation, and ethnoarchaeological studies, primarily in the Americas, to investigate the ways in which artifacts, structures, and sites are transformed into archaeological record both during and after abandonment. For processual archaeologists such as Michael Schiffer (1972, 1983, 1985) and Lewis Binford (1981), a better understanding of the creation of artifact assemblages and stratigraphy was essential to establishing scientific methodologies and improving archaeological fieldwork and analysis. In particular, they sought to dispel what they termed the "Pompeii Premise," which suggested that what is uncovered in excavation necessarily correlates with the mundane activities before abandonment. Of enduring value to the discipline is the understanding that "whether one sees abandonment processes as transforming the material record ... or as integral components of site formation ... all archaeologically recovered remains have been conditioned by abandonment processes" (Tomka and Stevenson 1993:191). More recently, archaeological studies of abandonment have expanded beyond a focus on site formation processes to

include strategies involved in abandonment, mobility, and place-making (e.g. [Beaudry and Parno 2013](#); [Lamoureux-St-Hilaire and Macrae 2020](#); [Preucel and Meskell 2004](#)).

A critical engagement with abandonment is central to the fervent discourse surrounding the archaeology of the contemporary era or recent past, which is rapidly being established as a specialization within the broader discipline. After all, as Alfredo González-Ruibal (2019:18) argues, “[c]ontemporary archaeology also deals with what is in the process of being dematerialised and disassembled—things that in some cases become rematerialised and reincorporated into extant assemblages through recycling, lateral cycling, curation, collection and so forth.” In part, this echoes a point that Ascher (1961:324) raised decades earlier in an article that greatly influenced the development of ethnoarchaeology and abandonment studies: “In a certain sense a part of every community is becoming, but is not yet, archaeological data ... The observational fields of ethnology and archaeology overlap on that proportion of a living community which is in the process of transformation.”

Proponents of an archaeology of the contemporary era maintain that archaeology should resist the artificial temporal boundaries that prevent an archaeological study of material culture in the present and recent past ([Buchli and Lucas 2001](#); [Gould and Schiffer 1981](#); [Harrison 2011:150](#); [Harrison and Schofield 2010](#); [Lucas 2005:118](#); [Olsen and Pétursdóttir 2014:21](#); [Rathje 1979](#); [Thomas 2004](#)). By challenging the discipline’s identity as the study of abandoned things *only* from the remote past, they argue that archaeology will confront its complicit role in the political and cultural production of “heritage.” Such reflexivity does not aim to abdicate responsibility, but rather to embrace activism and develop its potential to include subaltern voices that are often omitted from the documentary record ([González-Ruibal 2019:20–21](#); [Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009:66](#); [Harrison and Schofield 2010:9–15](#); [Witmore 2013:138](#)).

Without question, the rapid pace of environmental, technological, and cultural change over the last century is unprecedented, and researchers in many disciplines are documenting the abandonment of houses, settlements, and the broader countryside, as well as the disappearance of rural lifeways. Current archaeological thinking about the collapse of earlier complex societies favors a “cyclical model in which societies oscillate from periods of urbanism and sociopolitical centralization to intervals of ruralism and local autonomy” ([Schwartz 2006:4](#) citing [Yoffee 1979](#)) and posits that rural resilience after collapse at urban centers has been fundamental for the regeneration of new entities following collapse ([Schwartz](#)

2006:9 citing Adams 1978, Graffam 1992, and Van Buren 2000). Therefore, it is not surprising that recent abandonment of rural communities produces anxieties not only for at-risk archaeological sites, but also for the fate of humanity.

Yet, archaeology moves between illuminating grand narratives and producing “highly specific, localized narratives” (González-Ruibal 2019:17). Depending on the focus and research methods, it operates between Braudelian short-, medium-, and long-term timescales (Braudel 1972). In order for archaeologists to evaluate what is being perceived as rural collapse in our contemporary modernity, there still remains considerable work to be done recording, analyzing, and interpreting what has happened both at individual rural sites and within regions through time. Twenty years ago, archaeologist Oliver Creighton and ethnographer Joan Seguí warned that “cultural processes underlying abandonment and structuring the material remains of [agropastoral] sites as they enter the archaeological record await controlled academic scrutiny in the Mediterranean context” (Creighton and Seguí 1998:31). This volume adds to a small but growing body of archaeological work on the abandonment of rural settlements during the last millennium and a half.

Each of the papers in this volume presents a somewhat different—and, as we see it, complementary—approach to its particular case study, but they all cohere in representing abandoned rural settlements as highly contingent. On the one hand, prior to abandonment, villages and other rural sites are dynamic spaces that are configured by (and, in turn, configure) social experiences that still need to be explored archaeologically. As ethnographers and ethnoarchaeologists have documented over the last few decades, modern agriculturalists, pastoralists, and tradespeople in rural Mediterranean landscapes adapt their behaviors to local, regional, and global market forces, as well as to social and political changes. Furthermore, abandonment and reuse can be deliberate strategies for facilitating these adaptations (Costello and Svensson 2018; Creighton and Seguí 1998; Forbes 2007; Gould and Schiffer 1981; Harrison 2011; Lucas 2001; Mientjes 2004, 2010; Sutton 2000). Although anthropology as a whole engages with issues of urbanization, mobility, migration, and displacement (Herzfeld 2015), there has been a renewal of interest in contemporary, not-yet-deserted villages as dynamic sites that are “never inert but always becoming,” “localized sites for the negotiation of meanings” (Sorge and Padwe 2015:241), “continuously contested” (Schut and Mulder 2019:10), “translocally connected spaces” (Stasch 2017:441), and important “zones of entanglement” especially within globalization (Cochrane 2019:88). Even

in what appear to be postabandonment phases, deserted villages continue to undergo transformations from natural and human causes. Yet, they also bear meaning to individuals and communities as places significant to a family or community's history; as ruins with the potential to either add to or detract from the tourism of aesthetic or cultural experiences; as structures and materials that have the potential for reuse; and, indeed, as objects of study for archaeologists, historic preservationists, and other researchers.

Part I: Abandonment in the Archaeological Record

The papers in Part I deal with case studies of long-abandoned sites that are being investigated via excavations, archaeological survey, and/or historical and archival research. While these methodological approaches are not new to the broader field of historical archaeology, their application to medieval and post-medieval domestic cultural heritage in the eastern Mediterranean is a recent—and growing—trend (e.g. [Diacopoulos 2004](#); [Gallant 2018](#); [Murray and Kardulias 1986](#)). Through their own fieldwork and analyses, the authors illustrate what the surviving evidence can reveal and what remains obscured about the sites' abandonment as they evaluate long-term change, rural resilience, adaptation, and memory based on fragmentary archaeological and documentary evidence.

Focusing on an excavated farmstead at the site of Çadır Höyük, Turkey, [Marica Cassis and Anthony Lauricella](#) employ resilience theory to explore episodes of change that are documented through the seventh to twelfth centuries. They find evidence for both slow and sudden abandonments, as well as reorganization among the site's identifiable phases. They argue that changes to structures and activities reflect adaptive behaviors to a variety of internal and external stimuli that occurred at varying magnitudes, but also often concurrently. Through this thoughtful study of adaptive cycles, they identify the impact of large historical events, such as the nearby Battle of Manzikert in 1071, but also argue for cycles of growth and release that reflect upon locally specific conditions and the capabilities of residents to adapt.

At Anavatos on Chios, the Greek Ministry of Culture has made considerable effort to excavate, restore, and commemorate a village lost to war and natural disaster. In this volume, [Olga Vassi](#) provides the first English description of the site, its surviving structures, and its portable finds. Based on her team's findings, she argues that the village was founded in the fifteenth century, when defense against piracy was foremost among the concerns of the residents. During the eighteenth century, the settlement

expanded beyond the fortification walls, but a massacre in 1822 desolated the population. Anavatos continued to be occupied until a violent earthquake wreaked destruction in 1881. Thereafter, the village was abandoned, yet never forgotten, its ruins standing as a monument even before the 1998–2001 archaeological project.

In their contribution to the volume, [Lita Tzortzopoulou–Gregory and Timothy Gregory](#) explore collective memory and long-term processes associated with the abandoned villages of Ayios Dimitrios (Palaiochora) and Georgadika on the island of Kythera, Greece. In addition to their ongoing field survey and historical research, the team has traced stories of population displacement, resettlement, and revival through interesting toponyms, local legends, cults of saints, and archival records related to once-distinguished families. They frame the abandonment experienced on this island as part of an ongoing process of change—whether intentional or unintentional—rather than as the result of sudden and catastrophic events.

[Rebecca Seifried](#) makes a case for future excavations at the household level in the rural settlements known as the *palaioaniatika* in the Mani, Greece. Her chapter offers a thorough review of the published art historical and architectural studies of the villages and summarizes the limited evidence about the settlements' chronology, which spans the eighth through late seventeenth centuries. Through field survey and in-depth archival research, with the village of Koulouvades as a case study, she demonstrates how archaeological sampling can provide deeper insight into the abandonment of the villages at the generational scale. Ultimately, she argues that survey is limited in the ways it can elucidate the lived experiences in the *palaioaniatika* and assist in interpreting settlement strategies in remote and rural landscapes.

Part II: Abandonment in the Recent Past

Part II focuses on houses and villages that have been abandoned within living memory, contributing to a small but important set of case studies from elsewhere in the region that harness scientific methods and ethnoarchaeological approaches to understand the process of abandonment in real time (e.g. [Andreasen et al. 2017](#); [Chang 1994](#); [Erny and Caraher 2020](#); [Murray and Chang 1981](#); [Papadopoulos 2013](#)). As the authors observe, former residents, their descendants, and other unidentified individuals return occasionally to the villages, standing structures, discarded artifacts, and open spaces. As a result, many of the villages are still undergoing what archaeologists recognize as the abandonment process. Documenting the

transformative stages of abandonment provides important lessons about archaeological interpretations of patterns in material culture. These papers shed light on the kinds of intermediary events that can take place between the initial transition from domestic space to its final abandonment and, furthermore, offer insights into the complex social dimensions of abandonment and reuse.

Integrating knowledge and methods from archaeology and ecology, [Isabel Sanders](#), [Miyon Yoo](#), and [Guy Sanders](#) demonstrate the value of interdisciplinary research to understanding the life cycle of the mostly abandoned village of Penteskouphi, which lies only a short distance from the American School of Classical Studies at Athens' excavations at Ancient Corinth, Greece. They combine years of observation, local knowledge, and their disciplinary expertise to elucidate stages in the abandonment of structures and fields in the village. In addition, their study of the area's flora and geomorphology provides clues to the village's subsistence base that would have been missed by most archaeologists. They demonstrate that aspiring archaeologists and public audiences can learn a great deal about site formation processes and interdisciplinary fieldwork by studying the availability and exploitation of natural resources at a given site.

The contribution by [David Pettegrew](#) and [William Caraher](#) is the culmination of 17 years of close observation and documentation of site formation processes at Lakka Skoutara in the Corinthia, Greece. Although no longer home to year-round residents, the village continues to undergo changes, interventions, and short-term habitation, in large part because of its proximity to a modern road. The work of the team (part of the Eastern Corinthia Archaeological Survey) was informed by observing the maintenance, repurposing, and deterioration of abandoned structures and the curation or discard of artifacts in what remains of the modern village. Using interviews with local informants and the results of the intensive pedestrian survey, together with the lessons learned at Lakka Skoutara, the authors extrapolate complex material signatures and historical contingencies that shape the rural landscape.

The paper by [William Caraher](#), [Dimitri Nakassis](#), and [Ioanna Antoniadou](#) further advances the argument that landscapes are dynamic and contingent spaces. Seeking to understand movement, connectivity, and agropastoralist strategies in marginally productive "intermediate zones" during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Western Argolid Regional Project in Greece studied the two seasonal settlements of Chelmis and Koutsopoulou, the hilltop fortification known as Daouli, now-abandoned routes, and local memories. In addition to shifting subsistence

strategies, they argue that state investment in paved roads elsewhere and the absence of strong social and economic ties between intermediate-zone settlements contributed to the abandonment of these sites.

Todd Brenningmeyer, Kostis Kourelis, and Miltiades Katsaros examine the impact of more extreme historical and economic changes on the village as a social unit, using Aigition in the region of Lidoriki, Greece, as their case study. Founded by the middle of the nineteenth century, the village endured a number of economic, ecological, and humanitarian crises during the twentieth century and was abandoned fully by 2001, except for occasional short-term use by pastoralists. Their research at Aigition not only documents what remains of the village's infrastructure, but also analyzes the mechanisms of resilience in a village that coped with emigration, war, internal displacement, episodic resettlement, modernization, abandonment, and postabandonment attempts at preservation.

At first glance, a paper on Wheelock, North Dakota, might seem somewhat out of place in a volume dominated by Byzantine, Ottoman, and early modern Greek villages whose existence relied primarily on agropastoralist activities. Yet the authors Richard Rothaus, William Caraher, Bret Weber, and Kostis Kourelis apply their combined experiences on archaeological field surveys in the eastern Mediterranean to the University of North Dakota Man Camp Project, identifying critical parallels that inform a broader archaeological interpretation of abandonment. As a settlement more ephemeral than others within the scope of their project, Wheelock became a case study for how humans behave and adapt in circumstances marked by scarcity of resources and instability without deep historical or social ties to a particular place. Situating this paper at the end of the volume invites readers to consider how the process of abandonment is experienced in different geographical, temporal, and economic contexts. Furthermore, it leaves us with a prophetic glimpse into what the archaeological assemblages of abandonment will look like in the future, particularly as more and more of the materials we leave behind are the products of modern manufacturing.

Conclusion

As so many of the papers within this volume illustrate, the study of deserted villages does not belong to the field of archaeology alone. Villages are inherently social spaces that are built up over generations through new construction, renovations, demolitions, repeated behaviors, and innovative reuses, and naturally they invite approaches from anthropology,

architecture, ecology, and political science. One of the main takeaways from this collection is the need for further cross-pollination between these fields as we strive to understand more about how these places come to exist, how they are affected by processes of abandonment and postabandonment, and how they are transformed eventually into archaeological assemblages. A second takeaway is the poignant reminder that rural depopulation is not a phenomenon of the past, but rather a very modern and ever-present problem. The reasons why people ultimately choose to leave their homes are as numerous as the people themselves, ranging from the allure of economic opportunity in urban centers to the horror of violence and warfare and the fallout from environmental disaster. It remains to be seen whether recent economic crises, higher costs of living in urban areas, and the pandemic of 2020 will reverse these trends, and, if so, what strategies will emerge for such essentials as subsistence and employment. This volume emphasizes that studying abandonment in the past is deeply relevant to the abandonment that is taking place today. Through it all, we remember that the deserted village is not only a painful or romantic icon of the past, but also a product of economic, political, and social forces at differing scales that alter rural communities and their connections to the landscape. It is our hope that the lessons offered here will be carried forward to inform a critical examination of the modern forces that are at work in the abandonment and postabandonment of rural landscapes all across the globe.

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