Mediterranean Landscapes in Post Antiquity

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New frontiers and new perspectives

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Sauro Gelichi and Lauro Olmo-Enciso

The study of landscape has again in recent years been subject to considerable experimentation in archaeology. In particular, a series of new diagnostic instruments, often not invasive, has provided the opportunity to adopt a highly-innovative approach. Along with these new diagnostics (remote sensing, Lidar etc.), a series of approaches of geo-archaeological and paleo-environmental character have been strongly developed. This new situation has allowed also the rethinking of some theoretical orientations of approach; or, it can be said that these methods have been appropriately and profitably used in the service of a new theoretical and conceptual framework (giving them, at last, sense and a correct orientation). Of course this does not mean that the results deriving from them (the results of the researches which refer to those theoretical and methodological assumptions) are not exempt from old 'vices' (together with new 'virtues').

These new methods and these new theoretical approaches have allowed us to overcome the impasse following the great era of the 'surveys'; an era which, as is known, has characterized much of the best landscape archeology of the 70s, 80s and 90s of the last century. This was a period that represented, at best, the 'illusions' of processualism and which aspired to reconstruct the spatial arrangement of settlements in large areas and over a long period. The merits (and even more de-merits) of this way of studying the locality are known to everybody and there is no need to dwell on this point. However (and indisputably) one of the characteristics of this type of approach has been to focus on the recognition and the census of settlements. It is not surprising that one of the most problematic aspects of the discussion that has followed as a result of this type of archeology has been the need to qualify the concept of 'site' (and, conversely, that of 'off site').

These analytical trends have also featured in the Mediterranean area. Although the Mediterranean is the home of classicism (which also defines a particular archaeological methodology), it has seen the implementation of projects of this new kind, and in regions of Spain and Italy, after some delay, the proliferation of landscape archaeology studies. There are examples of more-or-less sophisticated post-colonial archaeological work, albeit conducted at the same time as examples of unreconstructed colonial archaeology. It is not easy to resolve a situation like this which requires the full integration of the different national archaeological cultures into a truly global forum. But some reflection on the cultural differences between the various landscape archaeologies, at least in the West is required. These considerations have given rise to the idea of this book which examines these themes in the framework of the Mediterranean area.

A second aspect of this volume aims to determine the chronological component. The past era of landscape archeology tended to move in the diachronic dimension of the 'longue durée'. It was the correct choice, which tended to break the traditional barriers that had characterized chronologically, and still characterize, our way of interpreting archeology. However, especially in recent times, a lot has been said about 'global archeology' or 'total archeology' in which the landscape becomes a sort of 'mega container'. It is a choice that made sense when it was intended to break down the hidden criteria of selective archaeology in the monumental or formal sense. But it is also a choice that shows its weakness when it ends up becoming, as often happens, an indistinct archeology, where everything has value (and thus, one might add, nothing has value); where everything is on the same level. The recovery of the concept of selection is therefore a salutary change; accordingly, we want to go back to retrieve a selection that is perhaps more congenial for us: a chronological selection. We believe that this recovery is entirely legitimate, but this will make sense if we know how to make sense of it, through the quality of the results that we can achieve.

When landscape or landscape archeology is discussed, we refer, of course, to a very complex concept (rather, one might say, a composite concept). Thus, in this book, we have proposed a variety of different landscapes for study (attributing to the word a very broad meaning in order to encompass the urban area). This seems to be a correct approach, an acceptable choice (and we gladly accept it). What is important, however, is the way in which some of these (old) problems are studied: not only through the application of new instruments but, above all, we would say, by the application of a new perspective by which the various aspects of the landscape are analyzed and connections established.

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The transformation of Medieval and Post-Medieval archaeology in Greece

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Abstract

This contribution summarizes the delayed development of Medieval and Post-Medieval Archaeology in Greece, overshadowed for long by an emphasis on Byzantine art and architecture, and highlights recent developments in this fast-growing field.

Keywords: Greece, Byzantine, Crusader, Ottoman, folkore, vernacular architecture, archives, surface survey, deserted villages

Introduction

In the early 1970s, when I began my doctoral research into the prehistoric settlement patterns of Greece, both prehistory and the Greco-Roman eras were already major research areas in both museum and excavation studies. Landscape Archaeology was primarily a matter for prehistorians concerned with major settlements and classicists interested in identifying localities mentioned in ancient texts. However, while undertaking background reading for the several regions I selected for landscape analysis, it became clear that there already existed a long tradition in German historical geography of studying the regions of Greece in the genuine Longue Durée, to take the concept of Braudelian Annaliste history (Bintliff 1991). The pioneer work by Herbert Lehmann on Crete and in the Argolid, for example, strove to make sense of the 'sequent occupance' by local societies (Whittlesey 1929) from prehistory through Classical to Medieval and Modern, in well-defined geographical units (Lehmann 1937; 1939). Subsequently, the massive 5-volume work by Philippson and Kirsten (1950-1959), *Die Griechischen Landschaften* offered a complete cover of Greece and likewise progressed from geology through geomorphology, climate and vegetation into the localised history of human settlement in every era up to the present, supported by personal inspection on the ground that went back to the end of the 19th century.

The slow emergence of post-Roman archaeology in Greek lands

There had also been a precocious interest by archaeologists, especially British researchers, in the early years of the 20th century, in monuments, artefacts and sites of the Post-Roman periods, combined with folklore studies (Bintliff 2012: Introduction, pp.2-3; e.g. Traquair 1923), but as that century progressed Greek archaeology may have expanded in its practitioners yet at the same time as its focus grew ever-more specialized by period. During this process, the Bronze Age and the Classical Greek eras dominated, with rapidly-declining interest as one moved from later Hellenistic times onwards in time. Post-Roman archaeology came into neglect and was widely characterized as narrowly-focussed on Byzantine churches and icons (Rautman 1990).

In reality, steady progress was occurring, out of sight of academic researchers (and the vast majority of Greek tourists). Pioneer efforts had been made on major, long-running excavation projects such as the Athenian Agora, or the city of Corinth, to collect and publish Medieval and later ceramics and building-plans (e.g. Morgan 1942; Waagé 1933), and later, outstanding Greek scholars chose to specialize in Byzantine ceramics, not just decorated fine wares, but also domestic wares (Bakirtzis 1989; Papanikola-Bakirtzi, Mavrikiou and Bakirtzis 1999). Still considered apart, folkloric studies moved from displaying 'traditional' ceramics with little attention to their changing social and economic context, to detailed monographs on the history of Post-Medieval production centres and their distribution and use, linked to tracing the spread of exotic imports from both East and West (e.g. Korre-Zographou 1995).

Nonetheless, as I wandered around one Greek landscape after another on foot or bicycle (Bintliff 1977) the regular appearance of Post-Roman monuments neglected by signposts, let alone explanatory boards, produced mystification for me. In fact the nascent Greek state of the 19th century had purposefully set itself to bypass the millennia of foreign domination since the Hellenistic monarchs in favour of revealing the preceding eras of independent Greek communities and polities (Hamilakis 2007).

What was needed was a powerful stimulus to revitalize interest in the Post-Roman periods, and it came in the 1970s with the rise of extensive – and especially intensive – survey. Taking its cue from its parent in

the United States, regional survey was to use primarily surface ceramics, secondarily standing buildings, to recover every phase of landscape occupance, from the sporadic traces of Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers up to the contemporary villages. However, when we began our regional survey project in the province of Boeotia, Central Greece, in 1978, Anthony Snodgrass and I were expecting to mostly document prehistoric and Greco-Roman settlement patterns, and did not imagine that the later periods could be reconstructed with any useful precision. This, despite our rapid recognition that our landscape was studded with 'medieval' or possibly Ottoman (Early Post-Medieval) towers, while Boeotia possessed two outstanding rural monastic churches of Middle Byzantine date in Orchomenos and nearby (Skripou and Aghios Nikolaos sta Kampia, cf. Bouras 2006). A vital opportunity opened up when we persuaded John Hayes, the doyen of Late Roman ceramics in the Mediterranean (Hayes 1972; 1997) to study our survey pottery. Not only was he able to pronounce on the entire Greek and Roman material, but to our astonishment he had been developing an intimate knowledge of Post-Roman wares, Byzantine, Ottoman and later, not least through preparing the finds from the Saraçane excavation in Istanbul (Hayes 1992). To be told that a survey site produced 6th century BC or 5th century AD ceramics was one thing, but the revelation that it also produced 12th century or 17th century AD finds was for us quite astonishing. Quite suddenly we were able to produce settlement maps across the 1500 years or so beyond the chronological borders generally recognized previously, where texts and churches had had to serve to replace sites and ceramics as the primary evidence for Greek landscape history. Other survey projects were moving in the same direction, often building on Hayes' work and even using his skills at first hand (e.g. the South-West Argolid, Kea, Methana and Laconia Projects).

Another innovative step was taken by Charles Williams and Guy Sanders, who were using their roles as excavator and ceramic specialist respectively, at Corinth, to reconsider its Post-Roman town plans and ceramic sequence (Sanders 2000; Williams and Bookidis 2003). Sander's doctoral research investigated the medieval era on the Cyclades, where he combined survey finds with a study of medieval town plans, which still form a clear imprint in contemporary settlements (cf. Sanders 1996). As for the study of domestic buildings, rather in parallel with what we have seen with Post-Medieval ceramic studies, there already existed a strong publication history by Greek and foreign scholars in the disciplines of Folklore and Historical Geography, drawing, photographing and making formal descriptions of vernacular housing and village and town plans. One should highlight the most impressive of these products, the great series covering traditional private housing for all of Modern Greece in regional studies by the Athenian Melissa Press, much of which was available in several languages (Philippides 1983-1990). Nonetheless these were still to be connected to archaeological contexts and studied in a long-term developmental series.

In Boeotia, now that we had reliable ceramic series to place survey settlements into periods of a couple of centuries, it became obvious that Post-Roman sites were remarkably plentiful and indeed very recognizable in the landscape. Connecting their rise and fall with historical sources was not difficult to accomplish, especially with the Middle to Late Byzantine eras of the 9th-14th centuries AD, where abundant texts matched the dense spreads of contemporary ceramics lying above abandoned villages. The growth of population and rural colonisation over these 500 years were similar to the wider European and Near Eastern archaeological record. The transition from Late Antiquity however, long remained a problematic 'Dark Age', the 7th-9th century, Early Byzantine period. The decline of population, the almost total lack of clearly Medieval glazed wares, and the likely movement of people from Roman settlement foci to more secure refuge sites, meant that the nature of the ceramic assemblage to be sought for was totally unclear. The situation was further confused by the textual sources, which indicated that the Greek mainland was widely taken out of the Eastern Roman Empire's (Byzantine) control through the aggressive invasion of Slav tribes in the 7th-8th centuries; frustratingly, very little trace of 'Slav Wares' could be identified even at settlements known to have continued through the Early Byzantine era. A genuine 'Slav' cemetery at Ancient Olympia till recently remained an isolated example of this seemingly major human migration (Vida and Völling 2000) (just in the last few years, other examples have been uncovered from the Peloponnese). In fact research was to show that handmade wares often ascribed to Slavs were more likely to reflect the decline of industrial production in the Post-Roman period for domestic wares, and their replacement by locally-made, technologically-less complex products (cf. Rautman 1998). It also recently became clear, that just as in Italy, Spain and the Near East, Post-Imperial Roman ceramics for some centuries included sub-Roman versions of well-known Roman wares such as red-slipped tableware and characteristic transport and storage amphorae, confusable with their earlier prototypes (Armstrong 2009). Only in the last few years furthermore, has it also become possible to populate the Early Byzantine assemblage with distinctive ceramic types; this was achieved through careful attention to novel fabrics and decorative types in plainwares on excavation, and in survey site collections where the rise of the fabric-series has greatly improved the recognition of new pottery groups (Vionis, Poblome and Waelkens 2009). In some cases now we can suggest at least for Boeotia, that individual Late Roman urban

and rural sites, especially with defensive potential, became refuge foci in the troubled 7th-9th centuries, to be replaced by new open-landscape villages around 1000 AD following the reconquest of the Mainland by a resurgent Byzantine Empire (Bintliff 2012 Chs. 16-17, pp.351-401; Vionis 2008).

With the almost complete conquest of Greece by Frankish armies within the so-called Fourth Crusade in the early 13th century, the introduction of a distinctively feudal regime brought with it what has been called a 'transported landscape'. The few major aristocrats built castles to dominate their greater fiefs, although very few have been subjected to modern architectural or ceramic study (Chlemoutsi is a shining albeit recent exception, Skartsis 2012). Far commoner were the feudal towers constructed by the more numerous minor-fiefholders, maybe only controlling one or two Greek villages. Despite being noted by early West European travellers and the first topographers, their age and significance remained unclear. It was the achievement of a British medieval historian and architectural specialist, Peter Lock, to carry out the first in-depth study of a series of such towers within our Boeotia Project in the 1980s (Lock 1986). This firsthand experience with Frankish Greece encouraged him to follow this up with the first modern textbook history of the era (Lock 1995). We were able to confirm Lock's conclusions that the Central Greek towers were a fairly homogenous group, probably always close to and physically dominating a pre-existing Greek village and lacking a regional military watchtower role. Subsequently Sharon Gerstel and Mark Munn conducted a pioneer excavation of such a tower, also in Central Greece, together with its associated settlement (Gerstel *et al.* 1983). One important insight from survey archaeology was the discovery that, despite the imposition of a more demanding tax regime on Greek villages with the arrival of the Franks, indigenous settlements generally grew in size in Central Greece during the 13th-14th centuries under this alien regime.

The long better-known Early Medieval wares on these numerous villages bear witness to a second caesura, an almost complete abandonment in the 14th century. The effects of the Black Death and perpetual warfare between Byzantines, Serbs, Franks and Turks clearly took a massive toll of the Greek countryside, even if fortified towns survived in use. Investigating the subsequent 500 years of Ottoman control on the mainland, and the shorter episodes of Venetian rule on Crete and many Greek islands, suffered more from a lack of research than material, but the pioneering work of Hayes was followed by younger scholars such as Athanasios Vionis (e.g. Vionis 2008; 2012) and Pamela Armstrong (e.g. Armstrong 2002), mostly based on survey collections. Here moreover a new treasury of information would be unlocked: whilst Byzantine and Frankish sources were extremely restricted in spatial and chronological cover, hardly ever at the site-level, surviving Ottoman and Venetian Post-Medieval archives operated over entire provinces at the village, and for the latter even field, level. In our case in Central Greece, the study of 19th century maps and travelogues allowed us to identify some 75% of rural communities in Boeotia featuring in the tax-records of the Ottoman Empire. To be able to collect abundant sherds from a deserted Ottoman-era village, and map its extent and trade links, then compare the results with the changing population and land-use registered in the 'defters' proved fascinating in two directions: for archaeologists one could match our estimates of population size and ceramic wealth to the tax records, whilst for Ottoman archival specialists, fieldwork offered a chance to test how well those records followed reality on the ground (Bintliff 1995; Kiel 1997). In the Venetian and Ottoman Peloponnese similar links could be made between text and survey archaeology (Davies and Davis 2007; Zarinebaf-Shahr, Bennet and Davis 2005).

The study of deserted Post-Medieval rural sites led to the possibility of mapping rural society and economy at a community-by-community level; the example from Italy set by Mannoni and Blake, of registering relative prosperity through the penetration of more expensive ceramics to villages was in our minds (cf. Blake 1980). A highly innovative paper by Vionis (2016) explores the divergent economies and trade links of two of our rural villages in this fashion. But on many such 'DMV's' (deserted medieval villages) it was soon clear that there survived house outlines, churches (often still maintained by the villages moved to after abandonment), and even in the formerly exploited-landscape major water-installations which were datable from their listing in tax-archives. An exciting and undreamt-of possibility now arose of connecting the archaeological record to the rich publications of vernacular architecture readily available in the context of folklore publications. The particular rural house-form dominant in much of lowland Mainland Greece was a single-storey longhouse, in which some domestic animals shared space, and we could show that this type had already appeared by the final century of Latin rule, in the 14th century. The relatively slow rate of change in peasant domestic architecture meant that numerous examples could still be mapped in modern villages (Stedman 1996) and provincial towns (Bintliff *et al.* 1999), although over the last generation almost all have been demolished in favour of international-style concrete, multi-storey dwellings (Verweij 2009). Parallel recording was being carried out in the Peloponnese by an American project (Cooper 2002). Our own experience in Central Greece encouraged the initiative to map traditional houses across all of Greece and attempt a developmental sequence. Aalen (1984) had already given an excellent example from the Ionian

Islands of what could be accomplished in this fashion. A young Greek researcher undertook this mammoth but very rewarding exercise for his doctoral thesis and would publish it in an accessible monograph series (Sigalos 2004).

The decline of the Ottoman Empire, which included Venetian territories largely lost to Venice in the 17th to 18th centuries, was well-known from historical sources, but it had been little appreciated that the early Ottoman centuries, the 14th-16th, had seen a vigorous demographic and economic growth in most of its provinces. The evidence from tax records could now be confirmed by matching increasing village size from survey to the official registers, but likewise the fate of villages in that subsequent era was dramatically observed in field survey through the abandonment and shrinkage of rural settlements (Bintliff 1995; 2000; 2007a-b; 2012 Chs. 19-22, pp. 416-497). Nonetheless a new field of study has recently opened up for the later Ottoman and Early Independent Kingdom of Greece for the 17th-18th and 19th centuries respectively, using the entirety of preserved material culture alongside the accounts of Western Travellers and living memory to document the changing lifestyles of the rural peasantry and emergent professional and commercial middle classes (Forbes 2007; 2009a-b). The use of distinctive community formal dress, and widely-traded Greek and foreign ceramics, to represent local identities for diverse regional communities within Greece, allows us to signal various ways that rural societies sought to accommodate themselves to major political, social and economic transformations (Bintliff 2013).

Since the first stirrings of an independent sub-discipline of Greek Medieval and Post-Medieval Archaeology in the 1980s-1990s, we can observe a rapid evolution in terms of projects and publications, whose results can already be brought into comparison with the much-longer established traditions for these eras in adjacent South European countries like Italy and Spain (Francovich and Hodges 2003; Valor and Gutiérrez 2014). This has emboldened me to create a first synthesis of Greek Archaeology to go beyond Prehistory and the Classical-Roman periods right up to the 20th century (Bintliff 2012), followed up with an edited volume on a similar timescale (Bintliff 2015).

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