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Summary
The civilisation of Byzantium is one of the world's most neglected cultures, most especially if we consider questions of everyday life from an archaeological viewpoint. And yet the Byzantines considered themselves as a surviving and indeed ultimately reinvigorated chunk of the Roman Empire.

In the context of this symposium it is a natural question to ask what exactly was going on in the Eastern Roman Empire, in town and country, during those centuries from around 200 AD to 1000 AD when immense transformations were occurring in the area of the Western Roman Empire.

The data-base taken as illustration of changes in the East will be that assembled between 1978 and 1985 in Central Greece by a joint expedition from Bradford and Cambridge Universities (cf. Bintliff and Snodgrass 1985). Reference will also be made to comparable evidence from other parts of the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Discussion of the Boeotia Project data-base for the period concerned will be prefaced by a short description of the field methodology utilised. Following a phase by phase analysis of the changing picture in the rural landscape and townscapes of Central Greece over the 1st millennium A.D, an attempt will be made to compare the archaeological evidence with historical sources for the same period, and to make cautious comparisons with contemporary developments in the West. Finally, a number of major theoretical issues that emerge naturally from the preceding analysis and comparisons will be broached.

Byzantium is a neglected civilisation (Fig. 14.1), partly because of the overconcern with literature, religious and secular architectural history, and a prolonged neglect of everyday archaeology; but also, as Timothy Gregory has shown (1984), because medieval history has almost exclusively treated Byzantium as a dead end, a fossil without relevance to the 'rise of the West' and of medieval and later civilisation in Europe. Scholars of Western European history generally ignore the belief of the Byzantines that they were merely the Roman Empire 'Part Two', a large chunk of that Empire that carried on Roman rule and tradition for a thousand years after the fall of Rome itself and the dissolution of the Western Empire. Instead of our term - Byzantines - this civilisation preferred the term 'Romaioi' or 'Romans' for themselves, and ironically today, the essence of being a modern Greek is summed up in the concept of 'Romaisine' or 'Roman-ness'. A central issue, therefore, which we would like to address in this paper, is the degree to which recent archaeological research is revealing the reality of the transition from ancient to medieval life in the Eastern Empire.

The data-base we will use will be essentially that collected since 1978 by the Boeotia Project, a 10-year field survey of a major region of Central Greece (Fig. 14.2 a,b) carried out jointly by the Universities of Bradford and Cambridge under the co-directorship of the authors. We will also refer briefly to archaeological data obtained elsewhere in the East Mediterranean region and attempt to draw cautious comparisons and contrasts with the situation in the West Mediterranean. Finally we shall even more cautiously indicate the intriguing theoretical issues raised by our analysis.
But first it is necessary to provide some background on the Boeotia project, and in particular about the methodology employed in obtaining the data about to be discussed (Bintliff and Snodgrass 1985; Bintliff 1985). It cannot be stressed enough that a clear statement of the methods used in obtaining site survey information is required, before its incorporation into summary form as distribution maps, which may then be used by other scholars for historical purposes (cf. Fig. 14.3).

The modern province of Boeotia is almost identical to the ancient tribal region, the latter having a surface area of some 3800 km$^2$. Since the first full field season we have fieldwalked 33 km$^2$ (1979-1984) of rural countryside in the South-Western sector of the region, finding on average 4 pre-modern sites per square kilometre. Field walkers are spaced at 15 metre intervals and 100% of the landscape is surveyed on foot. The districts so far covered were chosen to represent a cross-section of topography and geology typical for Boeotia as a whole, and to include land belonging to more than one ancient city-state (in this case the territories are those of Thespiae and Haliartos). Using an automatic counting device or 'clicker' each fieldwalker registers the visible density of pre-modern surface artefacts within each transect (which are usually 100-200 metre long). When recorded densities rise beyond a certain limit the fieldwalkers shift to a more intensive stage of surface recording, walking at 7½ metre spacing and proceeding in mini-transects of 10 metres length. For each mini-transect a total count of pottery density is made and a reasonable sample taken of 'feature' pottery for dating purposes; these data permit the mapping of both chronological and activity variations across each surface site. These sites can also be studied in relationship to the surrounding background scatter of pottery that carpets the countryside. The critical threshold in density that distinguishes concentrations of human activity or 'sites' appears to lie around 0.45 sherds per sq. metre with historical settlements in Boeotia.

From 1979-1984 fieldwalking took place in a large block of countryside surrounding the ancient cities of Thespiae and Haliartos. A remarkable density of rural settlements was identified, as well as a previously unknown town site that has to be the community of Askra, a satellite town of the city-state of Thespiae. In 1985 we turned our attention to these three urban centres, in expectation that a detailed survey of their surface pottery would provide an interesting comparison with the changing distribution of rural sites in their dependent territories.

The satellite town of Askra was analysed as follows (Fig. 14.4): the individual fields that contain this site were used as macrosample units, for each of which quantitative surface pottery densities were recorded and representative collections recovered. A second series of samples, much smaller than the previous 'town samples' was set up in a network across the whole town area; these were standard 10 by 30 metre sample units as we employ them in all rural sites, but their role in the towns was to act as a control on the sampling error that might occur in the 100% cover of macro-samples. The city state centre of Haliartos was analysed with a more regular system of contiguous 'town samples' at the macro-level, blocks of 50 by 60 metre size; the network of mini-samples was spaced evenly across the site and was again in units of 10 by 30 metre (Fig. 14.5). Whereas Askra and Haliartos are medium-sized Greek cities, approximately 20 and 25 hectares, the city state centre of Thespiae was known to be much larger, around 100 hectares or more. Moreover the exact location of the city boundaries was unknown. Travellers' accounts did however allow us to reconstruct the probable line of a late antique town wall, which in the early 19th century appeared to enclose only the westernmost third of the ruins. On the basis of this information we set up a very large grid of 'town samples', normally 50 by 60 metres, designed to cover the whole town and define its edges into the
non built-up countryside; at the micro-level these c. 260 sample units were complemented by a very numerous series of mini samples of 10 by 30 metres (Fig. 14.6). During the 1985 season all the pottery collected at Askra and Haliartos was dated, but at Thespiae we still have to process the material from the western end of the site for dating purposes.

However, the general character of this sector is known, and it is not expected that the analysis of its pottery in 1986 will significantly affect our provisional interpretation of the occupational history of the overall site based on the material analysed from the central and eastern sectors. In the following section we shall briefly present the picture we now have available for the changing nature of town and country during the consecutive historic epochs in South-West Boeotia. It will be appreciated that the interpretations offered are provisional, and may be modified as a result of future seasons, work in Boeotia.

**Geometric to Archaic period c. 900 to 600 BC**

We shall not illustrate the distribution of rural sites for this period, as only a handful of sites are known from the area of over 30 sq kms. hitherto surveyed. This suggestion of extremely low population density is confirmed from the three urban sites. At Haliartos (Fig. 14.7) the plot of individual dated sherds of this period from the sample collections shows a small beginning of the settlement on the upper acropolis sector, in late Geometric times, followed by a more extensive occupation in transitional Geometric/Archaic and full Archaic times. At Askra (Fig. 14.8) we illustrate occupational intensity by degrees of shading. Only in the far north is any significant settlement attested, with sporadic low-level activity in a limited number of town samples elsewhere on the site (the zero symbol denotes no finds of this period recovered in a particular sample area). At Thespiae (Fig. 14.9) individual dated sherds are plotted. Here we may be seeing a slightly different pattern of early occupation with several arguably discrete but small foci of settlement. Whether this corresponds to the model of hamlet-clusters for the Proto-Polis (Greek city), set out by Snodgrass (1980) should become clearer when we have the additional results from the mini-samples at Thespiae (the plots used in this paper rely entirely on the 'town' samples). Once more, the later pottery of Archaic date shows a more extensive community developing.

In summary, the region seems to have been thinly-populated until mature Archaic times. Rural settlements datable before c.600 BC are extremely rare, and at the later town foci small hamlets can be identified. Since the subsequent, rapid expansion of population is synchronous for both rural and urban settlements, these particular Boeotian towns would seem to have grown as much by internal demographic take off as by the influx of rural population. In other parts of Mainland Greece such as Attica and the Argolid this period of low population is well-attested till middle Geometric times, but already from late Geometric times (the 8th century BC) population begins to rise dramatically, in both town and country (cf. Snodgrass 1980, Figs. 3 and 4). It is tempting to link the retarded development in Boeotia with the late climax of Boeotian power compared to its neighbour states, and perhaps to its failure to merge its constituent city-states into a unified territorial state.

**Archaic Classical and Early Hellenistic period c 600 BC to 200 BC**

The distribution of rural sites for this era (Fig. 14.10) shows a formidable density of settlement entirely consonant with the highly flourishing picture of classical Greek civilisation available from the historical sources. Almost all these rural sites are small farms, the remainder being rural hamlets together with some potential sanctuary sites. The town sites offer the same picture of cultural climax. At Haliartos (Fig. 14.11) the plot of individual sherds is a dense one
throughout the city area. At Askra (Fig. 14.12) there is dense occupation in the north and central sectors of the site, and very few fields without activity during this period. Finally at Thespiae (Fig. 14.13) in the samples so far dated, we see a very extensive community covering almost every town sample for which information is available, with only a handful of cells lacking definite finds of this era.

The historical picture of this era as the climax of Greek city-state life, and especially for the 4th century BC as being a time of very high population density in Boeotia, is fully borne out by rural and urban archaeology. Indeed we have suggested elsewhere (Bintliff and Snodgrass 1985; Bintliff 1985) that this demographic climax was seriously beyond the landscape's capacity to support it in the long-term.

**Late Hellenistic and Early Roman period, c.200 BC to 300 AD.**

The rural settlement of this era (Fig. 14.14) (note that this particular map only shows areas surveyed by 1983) exhibits a severe contraction of population, not only in terms of a greatly reduced number of occupation sites, but at numerous of these sites activity for this period is only slight. The decline is most notable in the northern zone, that belonging to the city of Haliartos.

At first sight, the drop in surface finds at Haliartos seems unbelievably severe (Fig. 14.15) but in fact the city was destroyed by the Romans in 171 BC and our sherd finds attest to the absence of any significant reoccupation of the site for the rest of the period. There is some slight historical evidence suggesting a relocation of the survivors, which we have suggested may refer to a large site a couple of kilometres to the east. The reduction in rural settlement is especially drastic in the putative hinterland of Haliartos, understandably, although it is pronounced throughout the territory of Thespiae as well. At Askra (Fig. 14.16) we see a very much reduced area of intensive occupation in the centre of the site, and most of the town samples show no activity datable to this era. Thespiae (Fig. 14.17) likewise demonstrates a clear urban contraction, with occupation concentrating on the sector enclosed by a late antique wall and that part of the site immediately to the east of the wall.

**Late Roman period, c.300 to 650 AD.**

The rural settlement distribution (Fig. 14.18) shows a dramatic recovery of population, particularly in the 'chora' or lands of Thespiae. The pottery from rural sites is dominated by late forms which point to the 5th to 7th centuries as the climax within this phase. On the other hand, until survey was extended to the urban sites, some doubt existed that diagnostic pottery forms for the earlier half of the period were not being distributed to inland Central Greece. The 1985 urban surveys, especially at Thespiae, demonstrated on the contrary, that the period c.300 to 500 AD was indeed probably a continuation of the Early Roman slump, with recovery beginning in the 5th and continuing through the 6th centuries, possibly even into the first half of the seventh century AD.

Haliartos (Fig. 14.19) obviously has not recovered its urban status, indeed the thin scatter of sherds indicated, concentrated in the south-east sector, need represent little more than a small farming site. The probable replacement community is however extensive and flourishing at this time. Askra (Fig. 14.20) has become once again a large urban focus, with intensive occupation concentrated in the central and south-central sectors of the site. Very few town samples lack activity for this period. At Thespiae the much larger proportions of the town in all periods enable a localisation of pottery exclusively datable to the early half of this phase (c.300 to 500 AD) (Fig. 14.21) which we shall term 'Mid Roman'. The areas indicated are exactly those to which the town
was confined during the preceding period. Significantly there is an inscription referring to a major rewalling of Thespiae in the 4th century, and the numerous inscriptions that were built into the wall circuit, still visible in the early 19th century, include many early Imperial pieces (indeed the wall was almost completely demolished by French 'archaeologists' at the end of that century for the sake of its content of inscriptions!). The comparatively limited defensive enclosure would certainly be appropriate for the shelter of a town population confined to the walled sector and an adjacent eastern suburb, together with a rural population still perhaps at the same reduced level as in Early Roman times. If we turn, in contrast, to the picture for the Late Roman era as a whole (Fig. 14.22) bearing in mind that the ceramics are typified by 5th to 7th century AD forms, we see a much more extensive community, with the same core zones in the enceinte and to its immediate east, but accompanied now by significant reoccupation in a wider swathe to the site limits.

We can relate this Late Roman revival, especially for the phase following the sack of Rome, to a general flourishing of settlement in the Eastern Mediterranean lands. Well-published examples include the cities of Asia Minor and the expansion of village life in Syria and Israel (including the latter's southern deserts) (cf. Foss and Magdalino 1977). Some North African evidence tends towards the same view, Graeme Barker's (1982) model for rural Cyrenaica for example, and the cumulative historical sources for Carthage (Clover 1978, 1982). On the other hand, contrasting with a supposed rise of population and expansion of the rural economy in Cyrenaica is the excavated evidence for very impoverished town life at former centres such as Sidi Kebish, and for all the liveliness of Carthage in our sources, recent excavations again reveal a very decrepit urban fabric (Hurst 1985). It is therefore of interest that scholars are increasingly suggesting that the towns of the Eastern Empire had already begun to transform themselves into the supposedly 'Islamic' pattern of decentralised residential and commercial quarters with tortuous paths of communication (cf. Kennedy 1985). In this respect it is noteworthy that the flourishing rural landscape of Thespiae is focussed upon an obviously large and thriving town, yet at the beginning of this period the 4th century defence wall is built by dismantling a considerable quantity of the monumental accoutrements of preceding centuries. Just how 'classical' the revived Late Roman town remained is therefore an open question.

Medieval to Modern period, c.650 AD to present.

We shall confine discussion to the more important sites of this long period, for reasons of space and clarity. Figure 14.23 summarizes the key points of settlement development. Provisionally we would distinguish two settlement types for the post-Roman era. One is a hilltop or hillslope community with defensive advantages, typical for recent traditional village locations in Boeotia; the other is a low lying habitat, much more accessible to agricultural land and comparable to or indeed overlying ancient settlement foci of the Greco-Roman eras. An overall tendency however, unifying both settlement modes, is towards nucleation of settlement in post-Roman times, with the emphasis being on hamlet/village sites spaced regularly across the landscape, anticipating and probably forming the origins of the modern village network. Smaller, dispersed farm sites, as would appear to be the characteristic feature of the Greek and Roman countryside, are not common, indeed there is no everyday word in Modern Greek for a 'farm' in this sense, so natural has nucleated community life become.

The early to high medieval phases in Greece are divisible as follows: EARLY BYZANTINE runs from the mid 7th to mid 9th centuries AD, and is generally termed a 'Dark Age' because of the breakdown of Imperial authority outside of the main cities of the Byzantine Empire and the incursions into and conquests of
Imperial lands by Arabs and Slavs. The MIDDLE BYZANTINE phase is one of recovery of the Empire under the vigorous Macedonian dynasty, dated from mid 9th to the end of the 12th century. The LATE BYZANTINE or FRANKISH era commences in 1204 AD with the conquest of Constantinople by the Latin Fourth Crusade, after which Greece is carved up into feudal domains by a motley collection of nobles from France, Italy and Iberia. The period is brought to an end by the inexorable advance of the Ottoman Turks, who are already the dominant force in Central Greece by the end of the 14th century but whose total conquest of Byzantine Greece is signalled by the fall of the Imperial capital in 1453. It is important to note that although later Middle and Late Byzantine pottery should be recognisable in provincial Greece, the nature of provincial pottery in the Early Byzantine era is almost unknown, and we have only the most tentative suggestions for occupation sites in this period in our survey area.

Referring once more to Figure 14.23, an obvious example of our first model of post-Roman settlement is the community of the Expedition base village, Mavrommati. Our field survey tends to confirm the folk-memory of the villagers, that the original settlement lay a couple of kilometres to the north-west (medieval 'Palaeomavrommati'). Surface pottery confirms the existence of the settlement in late Middle and Late Byzantine times, whilst a few sherds might conceivably belong to Early/early Middle Byzantine times. In the Early Turkish period archaeology and folk-memory point to the transference of this community to the modern village site. Both locations are in hidden, defensive locations, peripheral to their farming land. The predecessor of modern Neochori village lies uphill of the modern site. Both are hill locations, the earlier being well hidden in comparison to the modern site. Medieval Neochori is in existence at least by later Middle Byzantine times, and possibly earlier. In addition to these modern villages, our field survey has come across two previously unknown medieval sites, probably small hamlets, indicated as 'D.M.V.' (deserted medieval village) in the south-centre and south-west of Figure 14.23. The western example lies on the fringes of the ancient Sanctuary of the Muses, and is a Byzantine and Early Turkish community in a very secluded and defensive location on the periphery of its putative farming land. The other DMV lies in a low-lying, exposed plain-edge location but has a very short occupation in the late Middle and early Late Byzantine era; at least at this time it would seem that security was not the vital factor for rural populations, although the community is certainly larger than a farm. This latter hamlet represents our first example of a Model Two location.

Turning to the fate of our three urban sites in the post-Roman era, we can begin with Haliartos (fig. 14.24). The ancient town lies on a low hill in a narrow plain bordering Lake Copais (drained in the late 19th and early 20th centuries). The modern town of Haliartos is a large 'street town' straddling the old main road through Central Greece, and its western suburbs extends onto the eastern slopes of the ancient town. However modern Haliartos is a very recent settlement postdating the Copais drainage, and the immediate predecessor is a typical hill-village on steep mountain slopes a kilometre south of the ancient and modern towns (Mazi). Surface survey shows that the ancient town saw only slight activity during the post-Roman era, with at the most a limited settlement of the upper acropolis sector in Late Byzantine/Frankish times. Whether this was a small military post utilising the ancient fortifications, or an agricultural hamlet is beyond the limits of our data. However our research in the final days of the 1985 field season suggest a more intriguing story, which seems to indicate that Haliartos conforms not to Model 1 but Model 2 for post-Roman settlement. About a kilometre east of modern Haliartos is a large and imposing Frankish tower, which with numerous other examples in Boeotia has been assigned to a network of route defences. Our ongoing research on these towers inclines rather
to the interpretation of them as feudal keeps associated with dependent villages and a mosaic of land fiefs (cf. also the forthcoming architectural analysis by P. Locke in *Annual of the British School at Athens*). Local confirmation is hinted at in the description of this locality by Colonel Leake in 1835: although the contemporary village lay at Mazi, Leake records a ruined medieval and early Turkish village in the area of the modern town of Haliartos. A brief reconnaissance following Leake's directions relocated one of his ruined churches together with surface pottery of late Middle and Late Byzantine age. It would seem probable therefore, that the main post-Roman settlement focus in the Haliartos locality remained in the exposed lowland near the ancient city until a relocation occurred in late Ottoman times to a hill-village with peripheral access to the best land.

At Askra (Fig. 14.25) we find ourselves again in a typical lowlying topography, central to the extraordinary arable richness of the Valley of the Muses. The plot of post-Roman pottery is suggestive of continuity, as the earliest clearly-datable finds come from the south-centre and south 'town' samples of the site, where we have seen the main occupational emphasis shifting to during the Greco-Roman eras. This collection of pottery of Middle and/or Middle-Late Byzantine date rarely rises above a thin scatter except around the ruined religious building marked on the plan, an Ayiasma or sacred spring complex. This locality has a modern toponym 'Episkopi'. Pottery of Late Byzantine date shows a more extensive use of the site, although most significant activity continues to be focussed in the south and south-central sectors. The pottery of the next phase, with transitional Late Byzantine/Early Turkish styles, has a very similar distribution. Later Turkish finds point to the likely abandonment of the site except for sporadic activity, probably of a non-occupational character. There are a few pieces of pottery from this medieval settlement area that could conceivably bridge the apparent gap in occupation for Early to middle Middle Byzantine times, and the toponym Episkopi might even suggest that the Roman city survived into medieval times with a special attachment to a Bishop. Did the Dark Ages witness continuity of occupation at Askra linked to ecclesiastical continuity of authority in this region, and was the medieval village a dependency of a bishop now residing elsewhere? These are mere speculations at this stage of our enquiries, but it may help to explain the significant overlap of occupation between Askra and its eventual successor, a large medieval village founded in late Middle Byzantine times about a kilometre to the east and in a much more defensive and arable-peripheral topography. In Late Byzantine times an impressive Frankish tower is erected on a high crag above this new village. Was this a secular counterpart to a putative ecclesiastical estate village on the ancient town site? In any case by Early Turkish times Askra is abandoned and all the local population is concentrated into the hill village. In Late Turkish times once again the village is relocated, this time about a kilometre and a half further to the east, where it exists today as the large village of *Palaeopanagia*. This final location is a rocky ridge projecting into fertile land from impoverished limestone hills, and combines a defensive stance with excellent access to its fields.

The available surface data from Thespiae is shown in Figure 14.26. Early to Middle Byzantine sherds from town samples are indicated individually by symbols, those of the Late Byzantine/Frankish era by a filled circle or numbers. In the north-east sector of the site a few pieces may attest continuity on a very small scale through the Dark Age of Early Byzantine times. During the Middle Byzantine revival we have evidence of an extensive village stretching across the whole of the east side of the site (the area between stream and road with no data shown is known to be rich in medieval pottery). This village clearly continues through the Frankish era, and as may be seen from Figure 14.27, pottery
The Byzantine Empire (after Browning 1980, Map 2)

The Byzantine Empire

- Frontier of Empire in 867
- Frontier of Empire in 1025
- Frontier of Empire in 1081
- Coincidence of frontiers in 1025 and 1081
Fig. 14.2b: Boeotia
Fig. 14.3: Density of total sites per sq.km in surveys
Fig. 14.4: Askra
Fig. 14.5: Haliartos
Fig. 14.6 Thespiae
Fig. 14.8: Askra
Fig. 14.10: Boeotia: rural sites of Archaic/Classical periods
Fig. 14.12: Askra
LATE HELLENISTIC / EARLY ROMAN

Definite site ●
Possible site ○
Uncertain ?

Fig. 14.14: Boeotia: rural sites of Late Hellenistic and early Roman periods.
LATE HELLENISTIC / EARLY ROMAN

Fig. 14.16: Askra
Fig. 14.18: Boeotia: rural sites of Late Roman period.
Fig. 14.20: Askra
Fig. 14.25: Askra
spanning Frankish to Early Turkish times has an identical distribution. Fortunately in 1204 we have a record of the handing over of this village to the Latin order of the Premonstratensians, where it is called Erimokastro. This name, which means 'deserted castle' aptly describes our village lying distinctly outside and to the east of the Late Roman defended enceinte. The village was clearly large and important, and there are still visible the foundations of several large churches across the eastern sector of the site. By Late Turkish times however, as Figure 14.28 demonstrates, the village is all but deserted. This harmonizes excellently with the reports of English travellers. In 1682 Wheler records two villages on the high ridge overlooking the ancient and medieval site, and one on the plain below. Colonel Leake is even more helpful, informing us that in 1802 he saw only 3 inhabited cottages at the plain site, then none in 1835. The two hilltop villages were known to the travellers as Erimokastro and Kaskaveli, (today renamed Thespiae and Leondari), and are typical examples of Model I defensive locations, even though they have the advantage of excellent access to the fertile plateau lands to counteract the steep journey down to their plain fields. There is minimal surface pottery at these hill villages for a pre-Modern occupation (although Classical remains may hint at an 'acropolis' role to the main city down in the plain).

The overall development of post-Roman settlement in South-West Boeotia matches the highpoints of the best-known monuments in this province of Greece. The Middle Byzantine revival is borne witness to locally by the construction of the splendid churches at Skripou (ancient Orchomenus) and at the Holy Luke monastery, whilst the continued flourishing of village life into the time of the Frankish occupation is reflected in the numerous Frankish keeps that probably once formed a dense and continuous network across the more fertile zones of Central Greece.

For the Ottoman centuries we have no visible trace of a mosque or Moslem graveyard, but there are extensive remains of elaborate irrigation works and mills that should belong to this era; though mostly ruined, parts are still in use. The Boeotia Project is currently investigating the Turkish period in the following ways:

1) recording surface sites as part of the continuing field survey programme
2) visiting deserted villages recorded in historic sources
3) studying the physical evolution of the modern villages with the aid of vernacular architecture, village plans and local tradition
4) collaborating with Ottoman archive specialists who have valuable imperial tax returns for Boeotia in the Early Turkish period
5) working systematically through the travel books of Western European authors who frequently visit Central Greece from the 17th century onwards.

Preliminary results from other field surveys in Greece provide a similar picture of recurrent fluctuations in population density, generally contemporaneous with those described above for Boeotia. For the Argolid Survey for example, an overall summary view has recently been published by Pope and Van Andel (1984).

Discussion
(John Bintliff)
It seems a worthwhile exercise at this point to suggest apparent contrasts and parallels to conditions in the Western Roman Empire, having followed one region of the East across the troubled divide of Ancient to Medieval. It is widely accepted that the Late Republican and Early Imperial centuries, up to the crises of the 3rd century AD, saw the climax of the Western Empire, especially in Italy itself. From then on there are widespread signs of decay, both in many areas of
the countryside, and in the size and visible wealth of towns. I am aware that
this state of affairs is localised and not necessarily the case for all regions of the
West, but the useful summary for North and Central Italy given by Tim Potter
(1979) sums up a widespread trend of decline. One possible exception to the
trend is Roman North Africa, to judge by recent fieldwork on rural settlement in
the Libyan Valleys and in Cyrenaica.

For Early Imperial times, in Greece at least, the climax of the West is a time of
a virtually empty countryside and shrunken towns, (though in the latter relevant
imports still accumulate and limited prosperity can be found archaeologically
and in the sources). From c.300 AD onwards, and especially for the 5th-6th
centuries AD, there are plentiful signs throughout the East Mediterranean of a
flourishing urban and rural life, even of expansion and/or recolonisation of land
under cultivation.

For the post-Roman era I shall confine my Eastern data base to the Byzantine
heartland of Greece (and let us recall that post-Roman begins in mid-7th
century!). Here, whilst in much of Western Europe between 700 and 900 AD
there are plentiful signs of revival and repopulation, culminating in the
Carolingian Renaissance, we have in Greece the opposite, the most severe phase,
genuine Dark Age (Early Byzantine) in which traces of human activity are
minimal in countryside and rural towns alike (and matched by the cultural
negativism of Iconoclasm). Only with the latter part of the Middle Byzantine
era, the 11th-12th centuries AD, do our proto-villages and hamlets grow to any
size and number, before being taken over as expanding concerns by the Frankish
feudal gentry. That Frankish conquest, after 1204 AD, is indeed symptomatic of
the more developed economy and surplus population produced by the earlier
recovery of Western Europe from the traumas of the collapse of Roman rule.

Theoretical Issues
In the final section of this paper I shall raise two important theoretical issues
that emerge from the previous data and discussion.

(i) The disappearance of the complementary town and rural farm settlement
pattern, and the rise of the nucleated hamlet/village pattern is characteristic for
post-Roman Greece as it is for large areas of the Western Empire. Certainly in
Greece until this century there has never been a significant revival of dispersed
settlement for most of the country, the early medieval hamlets merely growing
into villages and thence more recently into mega-villages often numbering
several thousand inhabitants.

In trying to understand the reasons behind this fundamental break with the Greco-
Roman rural landscape one must consider the catastrophic drop in population
seemingly evidenced by site survey archaeology: we have to envisage a formerly
populous landscape now inhabited by tiny hamlets generally kilometres apart.
Such small settlements would have subsisted adequately on the immediately
surrounding fields, leaving the vast bulk of a previously highly-cultivated
countryside reverting to wasteland and scrub. For such small communities, with
the known breakdown of central Imperial administration and in particular of
local security arrangements, in the Dark Age, safety should have ranked
foremost, and the need to concentrate into multi-household units in defensible
and hidden locations on the margins of cultivable land a natural behavioural
response.

However, as we have seen, at least in Boeotia this Mode One seems to be only a
gradual development in settlement history, often only completed in Late Turkish
times, rather than an immediately post-Roman creation. The decline of the
Ottoman Empire, from at least the 17th century, was accompanied by rural insecurity and abuse of power on a massive scale, coupled with endemic malaria and a possible climatic deterioration (the Little Ice Age of Europe; the present day inhabitants of Thespiae village explain their move from the plain below as due to swamp diseases). A more dominant mode of post-Roman settlement shows the same preference for multi-family nucleations but remains in the ancient lowlying locations on or beside the ancient cities, or in similar topography; in the former case continuity of settlement may be postulated but not yet proven (Mode Two). If anything ties together these two modes of post-Roman settlement, apart from the long drawn-out trend from type 2 to type 1 settlements, it is the apparent emphasis upon the supra-familial local community in the face of external pressures.

It is appropriate at this point to refer to a general model described elsewhere (Bintliff 1982; 1984, chapter 5) where I have suggested that cyclical patterns in the intake and abandonment of the agricultural landscape in pre-Industrial Europe have been intimately related to the elaboration of social elites and to variability in the economic dependency of the rural peasantry. Let us apply this model to an historic context not dealt with in the above-cited applications: the post-Roman Dark Age of the Eastern Empire. We might suggest that the loss of authority over the Greek countryside by Byzantine generals and bureaucrats went hand in hand with the collapse of rural security and of markets for non-subistence products and services. By a combination of these elements, plus the thoroughly obscure incursion into Greece of Slav peoples, a catastrophic population decline occurred from the 7th through to the 9th century AD. The tiny remnant populations necessarily cultivated but a fragment of the available land, and local elites would have become ineffective or even non-existent. Only with the revival of Imperial control and of the general economy in Greece, from the late 9th century through to the 12th century AD, would the expanding village populations and growing potential for surplus product have encouraged the rise of a new regional elite structure, based in part on local social differentiation and in part on the import of elites back into areas of countryside as these were effectively reabsorbed into the Imperial administration.

Remarkably, this generalising predictive model matches very well with a model put forward by Byzantine historians entirely from written sources for the same period of the latter 1st millennium AD. These scholars (cf. Antoniadis-Bibicou 1977, Patlagean 1975, Browning 1980), argue that the post Roman era witnessed the emergence of a class of free peasant cultivators out of the tied populations or coloni of antiquity. This class became concentrated into distinct local communities with a strong sense of solidarity. By the end of the millennium however, this class is under general attack by an expansive, aggressive seigneurial elite - the conflict of the 'powerful and the weak'. Despite attempts by the central government to protect the peasant communities, a systematic swallowing-up of the semi-autonomous villages into seigneurial domains is a characteristic phenomenon of the 10th to 13th century Byzantine economy and political development. From this situation which some compare to Marx's concept of the 'Asiatic Mode of Production', a smooth transition occurs to the imposed feudal system of the Franks and then to the management strategy of the Ottoman Empire with its policy of treating the rural commune as a semi-autonomous unit to be milked for taxes and manpower.

2. More complex is the apparent out-of-phase relationship between the rise and fall of the Western provinces and those of the Eastern Empire and possibly parts of North Africa. One could be tempted by a bipolar model, where the rise of the Roman Empire based in Italy had fed upon the newly-conquered Eastern and African provinces, sucking them dry of their resources in food, minerals and
manpower (a parasitic 'core-periphery' model), just as the core region around Rome had done to the rest of Italy in an earlier period. In the Late Empire a more independent East and South entered into pronounced recovery and growth, precisely matched by the opposite symptoms of demographic and economic contraction in the European West. The temporarily successful attempt by the Byzantine Empire under Justinian, in the 6th century, to expand into Italy and North Africa, merely replayed the empire-building game, but from the opposite end of the pitch. Long before, when Rome was but a sleepy little hill-town in the 8th century BC, but then on till at least the 4th century BC, political initiative and colonial expansion had also come from a flourishing Eastern Mediterranean, with the massive spread of city colonies of Greeks and Phoenicians through the Western Mediterranean.

But in considering this ebb and flow of power and economic prosperity over the centuries, the 'core-periphery' model makes, I believe, a false assumption that a uniform political system implies a totally integrated economy and population balance. In a recent paper (1984) Fergus Millar discusses the late Roman Republican era, when the Mediterranean lands are criss-crossed by the armies of the Civil War, whilst exorbitant demands are being made on the local populations by the rival powers. Millar asks: how far did these events affect the continuity of regional life? He concludes, surprisingly, that very broadly, not much long-term disruption occurred in provincial life. How can this be? Surely the giant Roman state must have irreversibly transformed provincial towns and villages into harmony with the ups and downs of political and military events at the centre of power? Let me take a bolder paradox. Richard Hodges in 1984, in a single page, packaged the Decline and Fall of Rome. But what is intriguing is how erroneous it would be to use his model for Late Roman Italy, in other provinces of the Empire. When the Barbarian tribes swept through almost every province in the 4th-5th centuries AD, local conditions were very far from uniform. Within the Early and then Late Roman Empire the apparent 'health' of individual provinces varied markedly across the Empire and locally from century to century.

This only seems strange to us if we are thinking in terms of a modern national economy, where market forces and a constant flow of money to the centres of power have the effect of involving all the constituent regions of a political unit in the grosser swings and dives of economic productivity. Some people do try and portray pre-capitalist empires as if they were multi-national corporations or unified, centrally-directed economic blocs. A great deal of evidence seems to run counter to such a view, suggesting that ancient empires were in many respects a good deal less complex than we often imagine from their imposing ruins. Rather than seeing an ancient empire as an organic whole, with Rome for example acting as a typical 'brain organ' and each limb dependent on all the others for the flow of vital nourishment and preservation from disease, we should instead perhaps consider such empires as mechanical agglomerations of discrete regions, welded together by political forces but in important respects forming a series of semi-autonomous economies. Of course there are flows of tax to the centre, flows of exchange between provinces, but it can be argued that these are of less importance than the state of health of the regional, internal economy. Immanuel Wallerstein, in his influential study (1974) of pre- and proto-capitalist Europe has drawn a distinction between 'world empires' and 'world economies'. Ancient empires expand into multi-regional form as politically centralised units, but fail to integrate component regional economies on a scale to create total interdependence as in a 'market system'. World economies on the other hand, are exactly the latter kind of sphere of economic interdependence, and over time Wallerstein has argued that they replace the more primitive 'empires'. In Europe the demise of world 'empires' occurs with the growing penetration of an
international monetary economy and a linked international commercial/industrial sector throughout the Western European nation states from the later Middle Ages.

I would like to clarify the situation exposed by Millar for the Late Republic and that just outlined for the breakdown of the Roman Empire, through the following model (Figure 14.29). For the ancient Mediterranean we can isolate three major elements at work moulding regional community life: FIRSTLY local trends in population density, tied to the expansion or contraction of local food-producing activity - these indicate the ecological health of the human communities in their environment, and to a significant extent can form part of long-term semi-autonomous agricultural and demographic cycles. SECONDLY the locally-based 'modes of production' i.e. the ways in which local productive forces - land, labour and surplus products are controlled and manipulated by different social groups within provincial society. Chris Wickham in a major paper (1984) has highlighted the usefulness of keeping this factor separate from our element number THREE: the state's 'mode of production' i.e. the way in which the central authority draws on the resources of its provinces or hinterland to support its apparatus of officials, bureaucrats and permanent armed forces.

Fig. 14.29 Region → Macroregion Model

(1) Local Agricultural - Demographic Cycles; Local Human Ecology or 'Health'

(2) Mode(s) of Production Operated at Local Level

(3) Mode(s) of Production Operated at Macroregion Level e.g. by the State

Such a model, with scope for semi-autonomous developments within the various provinces of the Roman Empire, may help to make sense of divergent developments over time, but does undermine our earlier suggestion that the swing of prosperity from East to West then East again is due to alternate parasitical exploitation. A more satisfactory solution might run as follows:

It can be argued for Classical Greece, for example, that it underwent a dramatic phase of demographic and economic growth (Element I) between the 8th and 3rd centuries BC, that overshot available resources; the low population levels and political weakness of its city-states in the subsequent Late Hellenistic and Early Roman eras were an inevitable result. External political control (Element III) acted as a secondary force inhibiting local recovery. For the Early Roman era Millar argues that within the Roman state there existed a whole series of regional economies, fundamentally focussed on the older form of the polis or city state unit; the state was burdening these cities with heavy demands from its inner and outer conflicts. This is Wickham's Ancient Mode of Production at the state level (Element III). At the local level (Element II) he refers to the Feudal Mode of Production, stressing the dominant role of local land magnates in controlling surpluses and power. But whereas the ecological and demographic health at the regional level (Element I) was good or at least safely above the level of collapse in the Western Provinces, in Greece at least local conditions were poor to catastrophic. In the late Roman era, we also find contrasted evidence; now in the West, according to Wickham, we find a disastrous local agro-demographic picture (Element I), unbearable state demands on the regions (Element III) to support its hopeless wars against the barbarians and rival emperors, and a great strengthening of the local Feudal mode of production.
(Element II) as local elites withdraw their involvement in the state mode, converting the free peasantry to serfs. Wickham sees this as the birth of the medieval economy at both local and state level. But in the E. Mediterranean provinces (and possibly in North Africa) a different story must be written. By the Late Empire indigenous growth (Element I) has resumed and will be sustained well beyond the collapse of Roman Italy; we see the same state pressure (III) but a much healthier local human ecology (I) and a greater commitment of the local landowners (II) to the city state unit - hence the survival of the Greco-Roman way of life and landscape some two centuries after its collapse in Italy. Indeed when disaster does strike the Eastern Empire, obviously from the Persian and then Arab attacks and less clearly from Slav infiltration into the countrysides during the so-called Dark Ages from the mid 7th to 9th centuries AD, Western Europe is emerging from the worst of its post-Roman Dark Age into a new and different civilisation highlighted by the Carolingian Renaissance.

Bibliography


