

## 1.6 The Archaeologist and the Historian: *Methodological Problems Faced by Historians Participating in Archaeological Surveys*

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Many of the numerous surveys of the 1980s and 1990s, at least those with the most ambitious aims, show a new systemization of their research: the territory of the target field-work became clearly demarcated, labour-intensive pedestrian survey by teams, along with procedures for standardizing the collection and recording of data, and they became interested in recording the full range of archaeological phenomena together with studies of erosion, soil formation, vegetation history etc.<sup>1</sup> However, though they showed an interest in historical periods which had been previously neglected (e.g. the Byzantine, the Frankish, the Venetian or the Ottoman periods), few went as far as to involve trained historians of these periods to perform detailed historical research concerning the wider region of the survey, despite the fact that relevant historical data, published or unpublished, were available. In most cases, a general overview of these periods is presented, often without direct relevance to the area under study, and specifically aimed at helping archaeologists determine the nature of a 'habitation site' or single building.<sup>2</sup>

This approach clearly exemplifies the usual attitude surveys showed towards more recent history. Historians, when involved in one of the surveys or regional studies, tread more or less on new ground, which is quite foreign to what they are used to in their own discipline. For the historians, surface surveys present an uncommon encounter in their usually lonely research of written historical sources: they have to co-operate with scholars of other fields, whose methodology and work, as well as their viewpoints, knowledge and understanding of history, may be considerably different from their own. This is the first challenge they have to face. Their co-operation can usually be, of course, very instructive for everyone involved, and may also prove very helpful in their work, but often it presents additional problems, which beg for solutions.

The participation of a historian in a surface survey planned by archaeologists and geared to the demands of their own discipline and *desiderata* raises a crucial question: What exactly is the aim of the project as far as the historians are concerned, particularly for those studying the Medieval and Early Modern era? It is this aim that will determine the role, if any, of the historians in such a research project. In most archaeological or landscape surveys the main focus remains the settlements, their numbers and the fluctuation of their population, or the correlation between the numbers of settlements in any given period with the demographical

evidence. This is the historical evidence to be researched and evaluated. However, there are several surveys, which have, directly or indirectly, also aimed to secure a better and more general understanding, not only of the demarcated region of the survey, but also that of the settlements themselves. This more ambitious approach can hardly be reached without the use of documentary and other textual sources when we start looking for evidence particularly in the Medieval and Modern Periods. Obviously, if the planning of the project is interested in these perspectives, then the role of historians in the team acquires a different importance.

The presence and contribution of historians to such projects in Greece, either published in a preliminary report, or in their final version, is noticeably variable. Their methods and approaches towards the historical data also vary considerably. However, in all these cases, there remains as a common factor, as a key element, the development and history of the settlements, since this is the usual aim of the project.

Aside from this basic consideration, the role of historians in a surface survey is not at all well defined. Quite often there is no Medieval or Modern historian involved in the survey at all. Occasionally, a historian of ancient history might cover as best as he/she can these long, and, in every respect, so very different periods.<sup>3</sup> Historians with skills in linguistics, epigraphy or palaeography only rarely participate in archaeological teams.<sup>4</sup> It is also taken for granted that a historian can cover many different fields and be at the same time a historical demographer, historical geographer, and a historian of Medieval and/or Modern Greece, for both the periods of Venetian and Ottoman occupation, as well as for the Modern Greek state. In some other cases, the role of the historian is in fact non-existent and the archaeologists themselves deal with whatever aspects of regional history they consider appropriate, or relevant to their own research, even for much later periods, although in most cases they are little qualified for this task. The realization, however, that the role of the Medieval and Modern historian should be different is being gradually not only recognized, but also clearly stated, as well as being splendidly exemplified in more recent works.<sup>5</sup>

Surface surveys mostly study a small, demarcated area for an extended period of time. This, necessary as it might be for archaeological research, immediately presents practical and methodological problems for the historian who might be called to participate in such a

project. The first problem is obvious: the selection of any particular area of a survey was made with archaeological rather than historical criteria in mind. Very occasionally, this might not be a handicap. But in most cases it proves to be one, since the archaeologists do not take into consideration the availability or not of any kind of textual sources when selecting the region. The study of the history of a small area in which there are often few settlements, and only rarely any of considerable size and/or importance leaves a very limited scope for the historian. Taking this into account, it becomes evident that the historians have to incorporate into a historical context and interpret finds and conclusions of other disciplines, as, quite often, surface surveys are interdisciplinary studies. These find, however, are frequently imprecise, fragmented, certainly variable and hardly ever corroborated by documentary evidence. Under these circumstances, dealing with the history of a very small area included in a surface survey is very different to writing a regional history. This is, perhaps, the reason why the participation of qualified historians in the team of a survey does not seem absolutely necessary to many archaeologists as their absence in many cases indicates.<sup>6</sup>

If the aim of the project is just a superficial examination of the development and history of the settlements in connection with their demographic trends over the centuries, then the role of the historian is restricted to assisting the archaeologist in mapping, in a more or less general way, settlement patterns in an area, in connection with the pottery finds of the survey; in such a case his/her participation is of limited importance. Moreover, in some cases, the presence of an historical geographer or historical demographer in the research team might prove a better option for the survey. But even then, such a historian's input will only prove truly constructive if he/she is an expert in the history of the region and well acquainted with the richness and the complexity of the documentary sources,<sup>7</sup> something to which we shall refer in detail below.

On the other hand, if the aim of the project is broader, i.e. an overall historical and interdisciplinary study of an area, in which historical data of every period are examined in order to form as clear a picture as possible, then historians should have a different scope in their research. However, this is not what we actually encounter in the final results of many surveys, despite the fact that sometimes such claims have been made, at least initially.

Therefore, the brief, general historical context often included in many surveys is inadequate, because it fails to offer any new perspective or understanding of the history of any given area. The historical perspective, if any, should not be restricted to the very specific issues as regards the settlements, their population and its fluctuation, or the correlation between the numbers of settlements in any given period with the demographic evidence. Several other important factors immediately connected with the above should also be taken into account, even if we wish to restrict our research only to

the settlements themselves. Documentary and other textual sources are absolutely essential requirements for the study of land ownership and land use patterns, agriculture, trade, local administrative and ecclesiastical history of a region. The consequences of historical events, either of local or more general importance, which might have affected the area, cannot be disregarded either. Otherwise, one can hardly reach any understanding at least of the expansion or desertion of settlements and the fluctuation of their population. Thus, more recently, 'Archaeologists have been compelled to place great emphasis on written texts in attempting to reconstruct settlements'.<sup>8</sup>

The historians, therefore, engaged in such a task will have to study written sources, completely independent of the surface survey finds. Once embarked on such a research, historians are often faced either with the scarcity of available documentary and textual sources, particularly for the Medieval and some times even for the Early Modern periods, or overwhelmingly extensive archival material published and unpublished. The demarcated small areas which are studied in the surveys, obviously accentuate the problems, although, occasionally, lack of textual sources is encountered not only for small areas, but sometimes for whole regions as well. This is also a common problem in most European countries, despite the fact that they have very extensive and much better preserved archival material than Greece. The case of Tuscany offers a good example of the gradual increase of the volume of documentary sources that help establishing the history of the settlements there.<sup>9</sup>

To an historian it is self-evident that it is impossible to restrict the historical research to within the boundaries of the particular region where the actual archaeological research is being carried out. Such an approach would make it all but impossible to achieve any in-depth understanding of the history of the demarcated area and to reach any serious historical appraisal, or, at least, to promote the historical knowledge and the understanding of more complex issues in a broader chronological perspective.

All the above considerations may, perhaps, explain why there are so relatively few contributions by historians in surface surveys, at least as far as Greece is concerned. Moreover, they offer us a clue as to the reasons behind the considerable variations in the historical approach and discussions to be found in these surveys. The most common approach, as suggested above, is to present a general historical background based on published sources, with minimal, if any, new historical research regarding either the territory of the survey, or its wider area. In some cases, whatever historical background is presented has not even been written by a historian, but it is the work of the participating archaeologists.

These problems of dealing with historical research in the context of a surface survey, we ourselves solved by expanding our research to cover a much wider area than the one in which the intense surface survey was

conducted. The surface survey covered a small part of the province of Pyrgiotissa in Southern Crete, but we extended our historical research to include the whole provinces of Pyrgiotissa and the neighbouring province of Kainourgio, which shared many common trends in their history, although they also present several differences,<sup>10</sup> a labour which took several years.

Since a historian's main tools are the written sources, it would be useful to select and examine some of these in relation to the specific methodological problems they present, when used for the goals of a surface survey, focussing on the Medieval and Modern Periods, since archaeologists are far more familiar with Antiquity and its historical sources, be they direct or indirect.

Textual sources vary considerably in kind and extent or volume, depending on the period and the region under study. Archival material usually presents us with the most important documentary sources: land, fiscal, judicial or other registers, censuses, notarial protocols, official or private correspondence, etc. However, such documents are sometimes either completely lacking for certain periods and regions, or they are only partially preserved. In other instances their sheer unpublished bulk is overwhelming. In all three cases, however, just a single historian, amongst a team of archaeologists, trying to master the problems that arise is inevitably faced with serious difficulties.

For the Byzantine period, documentary sources are scarce, not to say non-existent, with the exception of a few monastic archives like the ones in Mt Athos and in the island of Patmos, which provide rich evidence for the Late Byzantine and Post Byzantine periods of these areas and the areas where their possessions lay. But this kind of documentation for the better part of Greece, in the First and Middle Byzantine Periods, is almost entirely lacking. Furthermore, other types of indirect sources, such as historiography and chronography, usually offer little information of the kind we are interested in for the lands in present-day Greece. Unfortunately, the few surviving fragments of Byzantine land registers concern only some well-defined small areas, for which of course, they are invaluable. Historians, therefore, are forced to study a huge bibliography in order to extract limited information; they also have to take into account whatever other evidence is provided by other disciplines, namely of linguistics, literature, history of art, or by certain sciences, such as archaeometry, geology, and botany. Despite the long and labourious research, the final result may be poor, when dealing with a very small area. Then, it should be incorporated in a plausible manner into the history of the wider region, along with an interpretation of the archaeological evidence, whether it be monuments, coins, seals, or pottery.

The expansion of Western trade and influence, and, finally, the Latin conquests in the Greek East resulted in the gradual increase of valuable documentary sources for the present Greek lands and the wider area of the South-Eastern Mediterranean, in the archives of Western

Europe, which became much more abundant after the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The rich archives of Venice and other Italian cities provide material mainly, but not exclusively, for the regions that were under their rule. Moreover, local archives were gradually created in the conquered areas, with still more documents often with great local importance. Archival sources become more numerous as we progressively reach the Early Modern Period.

After the Ottoman conquest, starting with the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Ottoman archives become available, the wealth of which is invaluable. However, only a very small amount of the published material so far concerns the Greek lands. During the same period we also have a remarkable increase of ecclesiastical and monastic archives in Greece.

The continuous expansion of international trade in the Mediterranean, particularly from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the capitulations of the Ottoman Empire and the increasing economic infiltration of the Western European countries (France, England, Holland), as well as other countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Austria and Russia), not to mention the frequent wars, created an extensive network of political, diplomatic, economic, cultural and other relations. These were recorded in innumerable documents deposited in the archives of all these and several other countries, the Republic of Venice included, the presence of which was still considerable, if steadily declining in the region. Amongst this vast wealth of documentary sources many relate to the local history of various regions directly or indirectly. Unfortunately, once again, the relevant sources still remain mostly unpublished.

Finally, there has been a remarkable increase of documents in the Greek Archives since the War of Greek Independence and the foundation of the Modern Greek State in 1830. The subsequent gradual process of incorporating the formerly occupied lands into it, a process which lasted well into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, further contributed to the expansion of public and private archives, which, besides modern documents, often contain much older ones. It must also be noted, however, that for the older periods it is only in a few cases that we have continuous series of data, such as population numbers, tax revenues, production, exports etc., which would permit their quantitative processing over a longer period of time. Often we do not have reliable quantitative data at all. It is also not uncommon for historians to have difficulty in gaining access to monastic or ecclesiastical documents of local interest. Thus, valuable information concerning their possessions, especially their lands, becomes nearly impossible to obtain, even if this is simply to verify older published data.

As a result, for the Modern Period, i.e. the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, we have vast and diverse archival material at our disposal. If we consider the fact that only a tiny part is published, while often the documents themselves are not even catalogued in detail, or indexed in a systematic way, it is evident that historians are presented with

further difficulties, since it is practically impossible to sift through immense numbers of documents of long historical periods in order to gather information about the small area of the surface survey.

Thus, there are two options available concerning the use of the archival sources, options which, however, are not mutually exclusive. The first option is the one usually preferred in the surveys and regional studies. This consists of studying only the published sources. This has been done with various degrees of diligence and final success, because these sources often provide limited and patchy information for the area. It is also evident that quite often secondary rather than primary bibliography is used. Therefore, even well-researched studies of this category seldom include primary published Greek or other sources, which even when available to the authors require quite a different in-depth understanding and processing in order to be profitably exploited. A case in point would be the well researched, as regards published bibliography, contribution to the history of Medieval and Modern Southern Argolid. In this book, it proved difficult to master and include the abundant historical material for Modern times. Even an exhaustive use of the copy of the Venetian *Catastico Particolare* of the Argos area, which was made available for study by Peter Topping, produced preliminary remarks.<sup>11</sup>

The other option is to make, at least partial or selective, use of some of the most promising unpublished sources, with all the advantages but also dangers involved in reaching any conclusions of a more general nature. The combined evidence of published and unpublished sources is obviously a much safer approach to the problem, but it requires time and a more extensive team of specialist historians in various fields, than those usually participating in surveys. Such efforts often have as a result important changes in previously existing views or, occasionally, preconceived ideas, which might have been widespread.<sup>12</sup>

Each one of the various types of textual sources presents different problems that normally would require a particular expertise. The interpretation of diverse data ideally would require such a wide knowledge and training that they cannot be easily found in just one person. For example, even distinguished historians feel obliged to point out that, since they are not trained in historical demography or historical geography, their interpretation 'might be opened to discussion'.<sup>13</sup>

An even more tentative approach is absolutely necessary when the absence of official documentary evidence necessarily leads historians to the use of indirect evidence, such as, e.g. the travellers' accounts, when used for information on population numbers. The value and reliability of travel texts varies considerably depending on the bias, preconceived ideas, personality, ability, interests, and the aim of each traveller in writing their texts, not to mention the reliability, or not, of their own sources of information. Thus, travel literature can be useful but must be treated with great caution and needs to

be corroborated by other contemporary sources.<sup>14</sup> In cases where, for whatever reason, our only source for the population of a region are the travellers' accounts, their numerical data must be treated with even greater caution and should be considered to be only indicative, because the reliability of the travellers' sources or the personal estimates of the authors can seldom be verified.<sup>15</sup> Generally, however, texts written by persons who were on a specific mission, military, political or commercial, present special interest and are often more reliable, since their authors had taken care to include concrete and verified data as best as they could.

The terms used to define settlements and sites in the sources, since they vary considerably, not only over the centuries but also locally and linguistically, pose further questions. Thus, linguistic and toponymic research becomes quite often necessary because of the very requirements of a surface survey. The identification of the present day toponyms with those under which many settlements appear in various periods, frequently languages other than Greek and usually greatly distorted, is also one of the common difficult tasks historians encounter, along with the need to identify uncertain archaeological finds with those settlements of which nothing but their names have survived, with hardly a clue as to their location.

The difficulties become even greater when the data of the archaeological research do not agree with the information provided by the written sources. The 'dramatic mismatch between archaeological and archival information, even in periods for which documentary evidence is plentiful'<sup>16</sup> requires further research, but also a profound knowledge of the history of the region for the period under examination, if the historian is to offer any serious explanation of the phenomenon. An instructive example here is provided by the *Sydney Cyprus Survey Project*: the survey area produced almost no Byzantine pottery at all between the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, a gap of no less than 600 years, while the historical sources, on the contrary, provide ample information about the fortunes of Cyprus during this period.<sup>17</sup>

Other types of sources useful for a historian taking part in a surface survey are geographical works, *isolaria*, maps and *portolans*; legal texts, military reports and publications of army headquarters, not to mention philological, ethnological and linguistic sources, memoirs etc. Finally, particularly useful may prove surviving inscriptions and graffiti on the monuments of the area under study.

To sum up, for the Early Byzantine period documentary sources are practically non-existent, and the historian more often than not has to rely on other types of sources. For the Middle and Late Byzantine periods these are still scarce and concern specific areas, so they can be used profitably only if the study concerns these particular regions. Finally, for the Modern era, the wealth and diversity of the unpublished material mean that the historians will conduct their research with difficulty and

quite possibly selectively. It is very promising that the Modern period, for which there is so much and so rich and diverse historical information, has become the object of separate studies, as we have seen in the case of Southern Argolid and Southwestern Morea as a result of the surveys conducted there. Thus the remark: 'Neglect of critical archival sources for the study of Post-Byzantine Greece reflects in part a general apathy among the archaeologists concerning research and instruction in the recent history of Greece, a tendency particularly acute outside Greece itself',<sup>18</sup> is hopefully an indication that this tendency is in the process of changing.

## CONCLUSION

Archaeological surveys which aim at a 'total' investigation of an area extending into the Medieval, Early Modern and Modern periods, should include historical research of equally detailed and exhaustive proportions to that undertaken for archaeological finds. Published and unpublished documentary sources should be taken into account and researched by trained historians of those periods. If historical documents and archival material are available, it is inconceivable that they should be disregarded and that attempts would be made to draw historical conclusions with the help of mainly pottery finds and some general, background historical information. Also, existing unpublished historical documents should be researched, at least partially. This is not to discount the great usefulness of input of other sciences, such as geology, ethnoarchaeology, geography, botany etc, but for the more recent historical periods the results of the survey projects will inevitably be incomplete without the information provided by detailed historical research. Finally, it seems self-evident that the participation of more historians, of different skills and fields, would greatly help towards a more accomplished 'total' regional survey.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Alcock and Cherry 2004, 3.

<sup>2</sup> See Cavanagh, Mee and James 2005, 10-14.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Lucia Nixon and Jennifer Moody, *The Sphakia Survey: Internet Edition* [<http://sphakia.classics.ox.ac.uk>]. The survey has made limited use of historical material and almost no use of archival sources for the Early Modern/Modern periods. Among the 'principal investigators' was one ancient historian, who was involved, in the 'analysis of ancient and modern historical sources', alongside his other duties. The Documentary Research Methods include 'Byzantine MSS, Venetian reports (*relazioni*), drawings, and maps, Turkish tax records, 18<sup>th</sup> century land sale documents, ecclesiastical records'. Also it is stated that 'we are combining archaeological and environmental data with the historical sources, which results in a more balanced general picture'. However, it is not clear from the reports whether more than one single unpublished document has been used.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Bennet, Davis and Zarinebaf-Shahr 2000, 345.

<sup>5</sup> Bennet, Davis and Zarinebaf-Shahr 2000, 343, 345-346.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. a) Cherry, J.F., Davis, J.L. and Mantzourani, E., *The Nemea Valley Archaeological Project. Archaeological Survey. Internet Edition* [<http://river.blg.uc.edu/nvap/>]. This is a mainly archaeological survey with no obvious historical research. No historian seems to participate.

b) Davis, J.L., Alcock, S.E. and Bennet, J. *et al.*, *The Pylos Regional Archaeological Project. Internet Edition* [<http://river.blg.uc.edu/prap/>]. The co-director for Historical Studies here is a classicist/archaeologist. Although the aim of the project is stated as being 'to investigate the history of prehistoric and historic settlement and land use', the project

'has employed the techniques of archaeological surface survey, along with natural environment investigations' with no apparent historical research as such.

c) Davis, J.L. and Korkuti, M.M., *The Mallakstra Regional Archaeological Project Internet Edition*:

[[http://river.blg.uc.edu/mrap/MRAP\\_en.html](http://river.blg.uc.edu/mrap/MRAP_en.html)]. This is an 'archaeological expedition formally organized in 1996 to investigate the history of Prehistoric and Historic settlement and land use in central Albania' but as far as one can see there are no plans for any systematic historical research.

<sup>7</sup> Renfrew and Wagstaff 1982; Bennet, Davis and Zarinebaf-Shahr 2000, 343-380; see also Zarinebaf, Bennet and Davis 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Bennet, Davis and Zarinebaf-Shahr 2000, 343; see also Davis and Davis 2007, 6ff, for a discussion on the necessary co-operation between archaeologists and historians, which is still lacking.

<sup>9</sup> Ginatempo and Giorgi 1999, 173-193.

<sup>10</sup> Tsougarakis and Angelomatis-Tsougarakis 2004, 359-439, 551-593.

<sup>11</sup> Jameson, Runnels and Van Andel, 1994, 112-139. 'The society and the economy of the Southern Argolid of today and of the recent past are only briefly sketched' in the book, as they were studied in a separate volume; see Buck Sutton 2000.

<sup>12</sup> See for example Kiel 1999, 196.

<sup>13</sup> Kiel 1999, 197; Bennet, Davis and Zarinebaf-Shahr 2000, 343-380.

<sup>14</sup> Angelomatis-Tsougarakis 1990, 13-24, 210-211; Renfrew and Wagstaff 1982, 146-149; for an excellent treatment of the problems presented even by a traveller who is considered as reliable as far as geographical and topographical evidence are concerned, see Bennet, Davis and Sarinebaf-Shahr 2000, 343-380.

<sup>15</sup> See Cherry, Davis, and Mantzourani 1991, 365-385; see chapter 19: 'A Synopsis and Analysis of Travelers' Accounts of Keos (to 1821)'.

<sup>16</sup> Bennet, Davis and Zarinebaf-Shahr 2000, 345-346.

<sup>17</sup> Gregory 2003, 283-284.

<sup>18</sup> Bennet, Davis, and Zarinebaf-Shahr 2000, 345.

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