Dumbarton Oaks Spring Colloquium 2013

Byzantine Survey Archaeology: Reflections and Approaches

Surface Survey: a Comparative Study of Methodologies and Results

Pamela Armstrong, Oxford

In the second half of the twentieth century surface survey became one of the principal systems of archaeological investigation in the Mediterranean. This paper considers the effectiveness of a range of types of surface survey from intensive to extensive as a means to garner previously unknown historical data. It demonstrates how an exercise in comparative methodologies helps not just to evaluate the results of individual surveys but how to measure different regions of the Byzantine world against each other.

The kind of history derived from the new information provided by surveys differs from the event- and personality-driven themes of written histories. By dealing primarily with the countryside, surveys can help us see how it functioned and was organized. The different types of data sets collected in the course of a survey can identify what people were doing where, point to trade and contacts within a region and further afield, as well indicate the character of daily life, thereby suggesting otherwise undetectable constructions of rural society. One of the issues addressed in this paper is how historians can properly access and fully use this information.

Of particular interest to this audience is the presentation of Byzantine results when they are part only of wider strategies in landscape archaeology, compared with surveys which address questions to specific aspects of Byzantine history. A number of surveys are used to illustrate the seeming variability of outcomes with suggestions of how they can be reconciled and their results taken into secondary interpretation.

Evidence for the arguments presented is drawn from the large numbers of surveys conducted in Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus. The paper ends with a comparative view of the development of Byzantine archaeology in regions where surface survey is not a major tool of investigation.

Archaeological Surveys as Social History: Case Studies from Medieval Southern Greece

Effie F. Athanassopoulos, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Archaeological surveys have produced a rich surface record of many regions of rural Greece. They have provided data on rural settlement and land use, subjects that the available written sources do not cover or cover poorly. Interest in the archaeology of the medieval and post-medieval past was slow to develop but in the last two decades the study of the medieval material remains has grown substantially. Currently, the majority of survey projects in the eastern Mediterranean incorporate the medieval, the post-medieval and the early modern pasts in their research design and publications. This new direction offers opportunities but

also presents challenges. Earlier surveys treated the historical and archaeological records as two separate entities. More recent studies have been moving towards an integration of the two. As medieval regional archaeological research expands, there is a growing need to develop context-specific narratives informed by historical approaches.

Here, a number of questions will be addressed which underline the potential as well as the limitations of our data sources: what do medieval ceramic scatters recorded by regional surveys represent? What do they reveal about farming practices and habitation? What have we learnt about consumption patterns, local production and trade networks? How do survey data inform us about social and economic conditions that prevailed in the medieval countryside? How can we encourage a meaningful dialogue between the textual and the archaeological records at the regional level? The Nemea Valley Archaeological Project will serve as a case study but other intensive regional survey projects, primarily from southern Greece, will be brought into the discussion.

The Contribution of Regional Survey to the History of Byzantium in Town and Country

John Bintliff, Leiden University, Netherlands

This paper will review a series of regional surface survey projects from the different provinces of the Byzantine world (ca. 400-1400 AD), to consider how this approach provides complementary and even sometimes challenging information for the understanding of how urban and rural life was transformed over the 1000-year timespan of Byzantine civilisation.

Looking Across Chronological Barriers

Bill Caraher, Univeristy of North Dakota

In some circles, it remains common to group Byzantine archaeology in Greece in the broad category of post-antique archaeology or to place it in synthetic works alongside discussions of medieval and post-medieval material culture. This periodization scheme reflects not only the long-standing privileging of the Classical and Ancient (and the grouping of other periods as either pre- or post this central age), but also coincides with the interpretative tendencies of fieldwork and scholarly practice. For example, Byzantine architecture, ceramics, social institutions, and even literary forms extend well beyond chronological periods defined by the political entity known as the Byzantine Empire. This has largely coincided with the tendency of diachronic survey to avoid rigid boundaries that locate artifact, architecture, and landscapes within a single post-ancient period. As result, scholars drawn to research questions more narrowly defined by the fields of Byzantine archaeology or Byzantine Studies have consistently found themselves pushed into dialogue with landscapes that conform to different economic, political, and, perhaps, settlement frameworks. While the implications of this interpretative practice make difficulties for an autonomous and distinct archaeology of the Byzantine period, the tensions between different chronological and periodization regimes provide an opportunity to problematize Byzantine archaeology in ways that shed light on formation processes, narrative strategies embedded within the landscape, and practical issues

of continuity and discontinuity in place and space. By adopting perspectives and practices that push us to look across chronological barriers, Byzantine archaeology moves to a future endowed with significant methodological and interpretative sophistication.

Ceramics and Interpreting the Late Roman Transition in Sinop

Owen Doonan, California State University Northridge and Krzysztof Domzalski, Institute of Archaeology, Polish Academy of Sciences

This paper looks at the distribution of 4th-6th c. imported Pontic Red Slip (PRS) wares documented by the Sinop Regional Archaeological Project. These wares are examined in relation to site topography, scale and the site assemblages including locally produced wares. To date these PRS wares have been recorded at more than 20 sites. A discussion will follow on the patterns of presence and absence of these wares at late Roman/ early Byzantine sites in Sinop and what these might suggest about the engagement of the Sinop hinterland with the broader Black Sea area, and the transition to the early Byzantine economy.

Considering the "Late Periods": Newer Approaches to Older Methodologies in Northern Syria

Asa Eger, University of North Carolina, Greensboro

An unfortunate characteristic of many older surveys in the Near East was that interest in the post-Iron Age settlement appeared sporadically and was often misinterpreted. Attention to these "Late Periods" deteriorated exponentially, with Early and Middle Byzantine and Islamic periods at times completely ignored or conflated in large swathes of time. How can we reconcile this research today? Knowledge of the rural landscape of the Late Antique and Medieval periods is only now being considered and much still remains to be learned about settlement patterns, demography, economy, and land use. The original surveyors' efforts should not be totally discounted; they recorded many settlements and built a framework to study a specific regional landscape. At the same time, many of these surveys, particularly those in politically unstable or war zones such as Syria or environmentally altered landscapes such as the Euphrates, represent the only evidence we have. For some of these surveys, their collections are still sitting in museum storehouses or universities and may be re-examined. As such, it is necessary when possible to revisit these surveys, apply newer approaches, and realign and integrate the data with our growing knowledge of ceramics and remote sensing. This paper will introduce as a case study the Tell Rifa'at survey of the Nahr Quwayq region north of Aleppo as both an older survey and one currently in a war-zone. Even preliminary results will show that through a combination of older and newer methodologies, these older surveys can be 'reclaimed' and reveal much about Late Antique and Medieval landscapes. When connected with available historical evidence and laid side by side with other survey results, significant conclusions emerge about settlement and land use patterns in a landscape that is still constantly shifting and ephemeral.

Staring Down and Seeing Up: The Role of Surface Survey in Building a Unified Historical Archaeology

P. Nick Kardulias, College of Wooster

This paper presents an overview of the role of surface survey in Byzantine archaeology, both in terms of current practices/uses and possible future trends. Traditionally there has been a divide between Byzantine archaeology and other aspects of classical archaeology (including the study of prehistoric periods). What has been happening over the past several decades is an effort to break down these artificial barriers and move to a unified archaeology. Comparison with American archaeology is instructive in this respect. Major practitioners of historical archaeology in the US, such as Stanley South, made the argument in the 1970s for a comprehensive archaeology. According to South, all archaeology is the search for patterns. I make the same basic assertion for archaeology in the Aegean. Just as South did so eloquently, I suggest that Aegean archaeology is at its best when undertaken through application of rigorous scientific methodology, because it generates results that are comparable across broad areas and allows us to address big questions, such as how and why political systems arise and collapse. Survey work has been central in pulling together the various threads of Aegean archaeology through the use of common field methods, new technologies (e.g., GIS, satellite imagery), and interpretative models. Byzantine archaeology has played an increasingly important role in this development with its abundant material culture and array of written sources. I will examine some of these trends and discuss ways in which Byzantine specialists might develop them further in the future.

Survey Locally, Think Globally: Socio-Economic Strategies and Spatial Organization in the Late Byzantine Rural Landscape

Fotini Kondyli, Brown University

Archaeological field survey on the islands of Lemnos and Thasos focused on the identification of settlement and places of human activity in order to understand the nature of spatial organization and economic strategies in the rural landscape of the Late Byzantine period (13th -15th c.). Traditional views have long held that the political turmoil, the economic decline, and the arrival of the Black Death in the 14th c. led to the depopulation and abandonment of the rural landscape. However, fieldwork on Lemnos and Thasos provide a more complex picture whereby the inhabitants of each island developed distinct settlement, social, and economic strategies in response to the demographic and economic crisis of the final centuries of Byzantium. In that light, generic, simplified explanations of abandonment and decline of the Late Byzantine rural landscape are insufficient. Rather, our study of Byzantine communities must be comparative and regional in scope to allow room for local variability and complexity. At the same time it must be situated within the broader political and socio-economic phenomena of the Late Byzantine world.

The implications of this study are not limited to the Late Byzantine Northern Aegean. Rather, the results of this archaeological survey of Lemnos and Thasos invite a closer examination of

the response of local communities to the social, political, and economic changes experienced in Byzantium and beyond in the Late Medieval world, such as in England, Italy and Frankish Greece. Overall, this work can be seen as part of a growing body of scholarship that emphasizes local response and agency in the face of global change.

Survey Technologies: Possibilities and Limitations

James Newhard, College of Charleston, South Carolina

With the increased availability of satellite imagery and computing capacity, the improved accessibility of GIS, and the advent of mobile technology, the practice of archaeological fieldwork has undergone dramatic shifts in terms of tools and methodology. Like previous technological advances in the past, the increases in computational and geospatial capacity have given hopes to higher reliability in data capture, increased analytical capability, and the resolution of long-standing problems involving inter-regional comparisons and methodological disparities.

Using the Avkat Archaeological Project as an example, this paper discusses the changes in survey methodology brought on by these technological improvements. Although we have increased capabilities in data processing, visualization, and interpretative modeling, the effects of these innovations are limited by factors found inherently within the archaeological record – especially in negotiating the cultural palimpsest inherent in survey data. An objective view towards these advances is in order – one that appreciates the increased capacity for recording, analysis, and communication while at the same time being mindful that new approaches to the discipline should never be seen as a panacea for all problems.

The Reconstruction of Byzantine Lived Spaces: A Challenge for Survey Archaeology

Myrto Veikou, University of Crete

This paper will consider the issue of new approaches to medieval and Byzantine settlement patterns based on archaeological research in Greece and on a discussion of survey archaeology within the framework of the recent theoretical aspects engaging humanities and social studies. It will argue that Byzantine survey archaeology can adopt and elaborate theoretical concepts already offered by research in geography and especially social anthropology of space in order to: (i) elaborate its analysis and interpretations of different aspects of settlement and (ii) contribute innovative and inventive solutions to relevant problems therefore establishing an interactive interdisciplinary discourse.

In other words, I firstly hope to show that different settlement patterns and land uses in Byzantium are linked to cultural aspects – such as spatial functions and qualities – springing from the diverse spatial experiences of its people. Building on H. Lefebvre's concepts of

“perceived, conceived and lived social space”, I shall, secondly, discuss how survey archaeology can help reconstruct such cultural aspects and human practices as reflect upon land use and settlement in varying conditions and occasions.

Thirdly, I shall discuss that what has been considered as a principal weakness of survey archaeology (i.e. specializing in extensive yet surface investigation, as opposed to excavation, the in-depth investigation of a unique site) can in fact turn to an advantage. I intend to show how the practices of survey archaeology are fundamentally based on factual experiences of contemporary lived spaces. These experiences may generate appropriate tools for understanding the historical interaction between space and human agency.

Last but not least, I intend to build on postmodern geographers’ concepts of space as simultaneously a product (or outcome) and a shaping force (or medium) in social life. My purpose is to demonstrate ways in which space stands out as a social – thus historical – value in the Byzantine culture. In that respect, historical spaces should be reconstructed by archaeological / historical research as much as historical / cultural environments and landscapes. I therefore suggest that alongside environmental and landscape archaeology, a new field of *archaeology of space* seems not only highly relevant but also quite promising within research into Byzantine settlement.