McDONALD INSTITUTE MONOGRAPHS

Boeotia Project, Volume II: The city of Thespiai

Survey at a complex urban site

By John Bintliff, Emeri Farinetti, Božidar Slapšak and Anthony Snodgrass



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with contributions from
Philip Bes, Margherita Bonanno Aravantinos, Oliver Dickinson, Lorenzo Gentili, Catherine Grandjean, Machiel Kiel, Uroš Kirn, Chrystalla Loizou, Christel Müller, Robin Osborne, Jerome Poblome, Kalliope Sarri, Vladimir Stissi and Athanasios Vionis

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Contributors

John Bintliff was Professor of Classical and Mediterranean Archaeology at Universiteit Leiden NL, and is now Honorary Professor in the Department of Archaeology, at the University of Edinburgh (School of History, Classics and Archaeology, Old Medical Building, Teviot Place, Edinburgh EH8 9AG, UK; johnlbintliff@gmail.com).

Emeri Farinetti is a Faculty Member of the Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, Università di Studi Roma Tre (Via Ostiense, 234, 00146 Roma, IT; emerif@tin.it).

Božidar Slapšak is Professor in the Department of Archaeology, University of Ljubljana (Cankarjeva 9, 1000 Ljubljana, SI; bslapsak@yahoo.com).

Anthony Snodgrass is Laurence Professor Emeritus of Classical Archaeology of the University of Cambridge (Faculty of Classics, Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge, CB3 9DA, UK; ams1002@cam.ac.uk).

* * * * *

Philip Bes completed his Doctorate at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven BE, and has since held a research appointment at the Rijksuniversiteit, Leiden, NL (Mariastraat 69, 2595 GM Den Haag, NL; philipmbes@gmail.com).

Margherita Bonanno Aravantinos is Professor of Classical Archaeology at the Università Tor Vergata, Rome (Lettere e Filosofia a Tor Vergata, Via Columbia n. 1 – 00133 Roma, IT; margherita.bonanno@uniroma2.it).

Oliver Dickinson is Reader Emeritus in Greek Archaeology of the University of Durham, UK (12 The Village, Haxby, York YO32 3HT, UK; otpkdickinson@googlemail.com).

Lorenzo Gentili is Docente in the Facoltà di Lettere at the Università Tor Vergata, Rome (Lettere e Filosofia a Tor Vergata, Via Columbia n. 1 – 00133 Roma, IT; lorenzo.gentili@uniroma2.it).

Catherine Grandjean is Professeur d'histoire ancienne at the Université François-Rabelais, Tours (Responsable du CeTHiS EA 6298, Universiité François-Rabelais, 3 rue des Tanneurs, F 37000 Tours; catherine.grandjean@univ-tours.fr).

Machiel Kiel was Professor at Universiteit Utrecht, NL, then Director and now Senior Research Fellow of the Netherlands Institute in Turkey (Rhodosstr. 14, D-53177 Bonn; machiel.kiel@googlemail.com).

Uroš Kirn studied at the University of Ljubljana, SI and now runs a digitalisation company in Delft (Kirn Tech Support, Raamstraat 101, 2613RX Delft, NL; ukirn@kirntechsupport.nl).

Chrystalla Loizou is a PhD candidate at the Department of History and Archaeology in the University of Cyprus (Department of History and Archaeology, P.O. Box 20537, Nicosia 1678, CY; loizou.chrystalla@gmail.com).

Christel Müller is Professeure de l'Histoire grecque at the Université Paris Ouest Nanterre (UMR 7041-ArScAn, Maison de l'Archéologie et de l'Ethnologie, 21 allée de l'Université, F 92023 Nanterre Cedex; christel.muller@mae.u-paris10.fr).

Robin Osborne is Professor of Ancient History at the University of Cambridge (King's College, Cambridge, CB2 1ST, UK; ro225@cam.ac.uk).

Jeroen Poblome is a Professor in the Faculty of Arts, University of Leuven and directs the Sagalassos Archaeological Research Project (Blijde-Inkomststraat 21 – Box 3314, 3000 Leuven BE; jeroen.poblome@kuleuven.be).

Kalliope Sarri is Marie Sklodowska-Curie Fellow at the Saxo Institute, University of Copenhagen (Centre for Textile Research, Saxo Institute, University of Copenhagen, Karen Blixensvej 4, DK-2300 Copenhagen S; kalliope.sarri@gmail.com).

Vladimir Stissi is Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University of Amsterdam (Turfdraagsterpad 9, 1012 XT, Amsterdam, NL; V.V.Stissi@uva.nl).

Athanasios Vionis is Assistant Professor in Byzantine Archaeology and Art at the University of Cyprus (Department of History and Archaeology, P.O. Box 20537, Nicosia 1678, CY; vionis@ucy.ac.cy).

Chapter 2

The site of ancient Thespiai and the early travellers

The site of Thespiai, bereft of most of its monumental structures and lying a little way off the main routes of travel from Athens, both northwards to Thessaly and Macedonia and westwards to Delphi, was as slow to be firmly identified by the early visitors to Greece as it was to win the attention of their successors, the archaeologists and excavators. Of the well-known writers of the great age of rediscovery of ancient Greece some, like C.R. Cockerell, John Cam Hobhouse, F.A. Chateaubriand, F.C.H.L. Pouqueville or J.L.S. Bartholdy, were to pass it by completely: a common route, for the 'voyage pittoresque' as for the 'Grand Tour', was one that took in Attica and the Cyclades, often the Peloponnese, but nothing more of mainland Greece, before passing on to Asia Minor. Even those who did visit Boeotia often made the journey between its two principal towns, Thebes and Levadhia, in a single day, without making the short detour southwards to Thespiai.

By far the earliest witness whose account of the site survives is the Anglican clergyman George Wheler (1650–1724), though his narrative, like Homer's, bears internal traces of the fact that he had had forerunners in the same undertaking. He came to the site in March 1676 and we owe his visit, indirectly, to an unpremeditated departure from his planned itinerary. Together with his travelling companion for some months past, Dr. Jacob Spon of Lyon (1647–85), Wheler had left Athens (as they both thought, for the last time) on 29 February of that year, bent on a homeward journey overland, through central and northern Greece. So they retraced their earlier steps along the natural direct route, past Thebes, the southern shore of Lake Kopais and Levadhia. But they had set out too early in the year, before the winter snows had cleared, and at the *khan* of Tourkochori, near the border of Boeotia and Phokis, they received news that the passes further north along their route were still snowbound. Spon at once resolved to abandon the journey and make his way southwards, across the flanks of Parnassos, to take ship from the Gulf of Corinth: Wheler decided to tarry a while. Both their subsequent accounts (Spon [1678] 1724, ii 51; Wheler 1682, 330) mention a feature which had captured their interest earlier, on their outward journey: the fact that Lake Kopais, though fed by more than one major river, appeared to maintain its general level by being drained through underground passages at its far north-eastern extremity, of which they were told but which they had not had time to visit.

Left alone by his companion on 9 March, Wheler set out on a clockwise circle which took him, by way of Atalanti, round to these underground passages, the *katavothra*, which he thought (1682: 465) 'may well be reckoned among the greatest Wonders of the World'. He then continued southwards and, on coming again upon the main route which they had already twice traversed, decided to make a detour: instead of following the same road yet again, he crossed it, to explore the country immediately to the south. He was to write in the Preface of his account, published four years after Spon's, that 'I found I had many useful Observations omitted by him', and this final, solo foray gave an excellent opportunity to add to these. Crossing the range of low hills which lines the main road on its southern side, he made directly for the village of 'Rimokastro' (Erimokastro, modern Thespiés) which, from its hill-top vantage-point, looks down on what was then the much more evident site of some ancient city. Noting its mixture of Greek and Albanian inhabitants, Wheler went on to write (1682: 470) that

> 'about this place and just under the Mountain are so many and great Ruins that it hath made some to suppose this place to have been the ancient *Thespia*: But I am not of their opinion. I think rather it was the ancient *Thisba*, as I shall

> have occasion by and by to conclude, shewing by most probable testimony, where the old *Thespia* was'.

Who were these 'some' who had made what in fact was the correct identification? We do not know; but there is a possible clue from another contemporary English traveller. Francis Vernon, together with his companions Sir Giles Eastcourt and Bernard Randolph, had apparently sailed together with Spon and Wheler on the outward journey from Venice as far as Zante (Zakynthos), where they split up. A much later publication of some of Vernon's note-books, with his copies of Greek inscriptions, adds the information that his now separate party had then landed on the coast of the Corinthian Gulf and travelled overland, via Thespiai and Thebes, to Athens: this was in late August 1675, little more than six months before Wheler's visit (Meritt 1949: 213). We do not know whether Vernon had found inscriptions at Thespiai and it was not until late January 1676 that Wheler and Spon finally reached Athens; but Wheler is likely to have heard there of the earlier itinerary of the other party, and perhaps of the village of Erimokastro as the accepted location for the site of Thespiai (hence his otherwise unexplained choice of it as a destination to make for). Among other possible authorities, Archbishop Meletios (1661–1714: see pp. 9, 10–11, 14) can hardly have visited Thespiai so early as this. The Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi had traversed Boeotia on a southward journey in 1668, but he was not one to make antiquarian detours: he covered the 30-mile journey by the direct road from Livadhia to 'Istifa' (Thebes) in five hours (see Cheiladakis 1991: 149).

In any case, next day Wheler did not directly address the question of identifying the ruins below, but instead rode a few miles westwards, passing on the way some lesser ruins at the localities which he names *Phria* (about a mile from Erimokastro) and *Spatharia* (a mile further), to reach the village which still retains the name of Neochori, just at the foot of the easternmost extremity of Mt. Helikon (1682: 471). Here he climbed to the ruined church above the village and found an inscription (later recorded as *IG* vii.1862) which begins with the words 'The sons of the Thespians..'. On this evidence, he identified the not very extensive traces of ancient and later settlement above Neochori (later to be registered in our survey as Sites 'NEO 1', '2' and '3') as the ancient Thespiai.

Later that day, he turned eastwards again and, this time, passed through the site in the plain below Erimokastro, 'which they now call only Castri': yet, strangely, he omits all mention of the feature from which this name must have come, the late antique wall-circuit, so prominent in the descriptions of later travellers. He does however tell us that 'Rimokastro is divided into three little knots of houses, two upon the hill and one below': in other words, that the ancient site on the plain was also that of a still inhabited village or hamlet. This can evidently be identified with the larger of the two concentrations of Ottoman-period pottery found by our urban survey, lying south of the river, due east of the *Kastro* and towards the eastern extremity of the Classical site. Here, he writes, 'there are many ruined Churches, with Fragments of Inscriptions about them. Amongst which, I found a Stone in the Wall...' (1682: 471). His description of this stone matches the one later recorded as *IG* vii.1831, bearing the (only partially visible) signature of the great fourth-century BC sculptor Praxiteles. Wheler was learned enough to know that Praxiteles had executed more than one famous statue at Thespiai; and the logical implications of this second find were enough to draw from him the concession that the place must have lain within the 'territories' of Thespiai, but not more. He still clung to the identification of the site with 'Thisba' (which for much of antiquity was in any case a city subordinated to Thespiai), and reinforced this by his journey the following day (1682: 472) to the shore of the Corinthian Gulf which, he persuaded himself, could be reconciled with the description by Pausanias (ix. 32. 2) of the situation of the coast, relative to Thisbe. He was never to visit the actual site of Thisbe further to the west: instead, he turned eastwards, to work his way back once more to Athens, and his travels were soon to end: less than a dozen further pages find him concluding his account, safely home in Canterbury.

Wheler's observations on this final foray, notwithstanding his errors in identification, retain much value for their authenticity and early date. His location of Thespiai at Neochori won some currency, being adopted (according to Kruse 1826: 33) by the noted German geographer Konrad Mannert (1756–1834). His work, both in the original and in a French translation, was used by Jean Baptiste Bourgignon d'Anville in compiling the sheets of his Atlas (d'Anville 1743–86) that were devoted to Greece, as d'Anville tells us in the separately published *Analyse de la Carte intitulée Côtes de la Grèce* (1757). But, interestingly, d'Anville does not appear to have followed Wheler in his placement of Thespiai and Thisbe: his most detailed map '*Graeciae Antiquae Specimen Geographicum*' (d'Anville 1762), despite its small scale, correctly locates Thespiai well to the east of Helicon and Ascra, and Thisbe similarly at or near its true site. This reinforces Wheler's own suggestion that his locations ran counter to the majority view.

Some 125 years elapse before we find another account to match or excel that of Wheler in reasoning and detail. This interval of course witnessed intellectual developments more important than the mere passage of time. The entire phenomenon of the Enlightenment, with its insistence on accurate, lucid, dispassionate description, and the artistic intervention of the Society of Dilettanti in Italy and Greece, with its equal concern for visual accuracy, had each run much of their course, transforming (among many other things) travel writing. In place of the omnivorous and sometimes uncritical curiosity that had motivated Spon and Wheler, with their frequent anecdotes of human encounters, a new and more scientific treatment of nature and the works of man had come to prevail.

The first name that can claim to exemplify these developments is that of Richard Chandler (1738–1810), Rector of Tilehurst near Reading, who was in fact a major figure in the activities of the Society of Dilettanti just mentioned. Rightly respected for his accounts of his more extensive journeys in Asia Minor, Chandler also spent 15 months, between August 1765 and November 1766, travelling in Greece (Chandler 1776).

Against such a background, his account of western Boeotia comes as a sad disappointment. It involves little actual autopsy: part of his Chapter 64 (1776: 256–9) reads as a mere paraphrase of Pausanias, while much of the rest depends on the reports of Wheler. He approached the region by sea, sailing eastwards along the coast of the Gulf of Corinth and so passing from the shore of Phokis to that of Boeotia, calling in at a series of harbours. It is doubtful how far, if at all, he personally ventured inland from this coast: his map (1776: Frontispiece) does little to dispel the impression of vague, second-hand information, supplemented by distant views of the unmistakable landmark of Mt. Helikon. Uncertainty as to the exact locations of Thisbe and Thespiai is reflected his identification of their ancient ports, which he knew must have been among those at which his ship called. He recognizes Creusa, the port of ancient Thespiai, in the little roadstead of 'St. Basilio' (*Agios Vasilios*), which lies in a lateral inlet on the east side of the Bay of Livadostro: the more important harbour of Livadostro itself, just to the west, is assigned to Thisbe. These determinations were bound to affect his location for Thespiai; and here, remarkably, he turns Wheler's evidence against Wheler himself. In the closing days of his lone journey through the region, Wheler (1682: 473) had spent a night at the 'cold harbour' of Agios Vasilios, proceeding inland next day in the direction of Plataia, that is roughly north-eastwards. After an hour or more on the way, he had passed the actual town of 'St. Basilio', where he noted the remains of an ancient site. This site Chandler, apparently without visiting it, now proceeds to identify as ancient Thespiai. This in turn necessitates a different identification for Wheler's own 'Thespia' at Neochori and, in a footnote (1776: 257, n.1), Chandler offers one: 'it seems to have been Coronea' – a geographical error much more substantial than Wheler's, since Coronea lay on the far, northern side of Helikon.

Noting in passing the partly fictional but enormously popular *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis* of the Abbé J.J. Barthélemy (1716–95), who himself never visited Greece but in his posthumously published work (Barthélemy 1822–24: iii, 242) had brought his hero briefly to Thespiai, we may turn to the opening years of the nineteenth century which, for Thespiai as for Greece as a whole, saw an exponential increase in the frequency and number of learned visitors. We begin with the Cambridge polymath Edward Daniel Clarke (1769–1822), whose *Travels in various countries of Europe, Asia and Africa*, published in 1818, had brought him to Thespiai in December, 1801, close to the dates of the first journeys of Dodwell and Leake (see below). On the 8th of that month, Clarke had ridden north-westwards from the village of Plataná, close to the site of ancient Plataia, all the way to Neochori, where Wheler had placed Thespiai (1818: vii, 102). The later part of this journey took him through the locality called Lefka, a place-name which we hear for the first time from him, but which his description clearly identifies with the true site of Thespiai (and so with Wheler's 'Thisba'). Noting that the area is 'covered with immense fragments of marble and stone', he realizes that he must be at the site of a major ancient settlement: but which? Here, unfortunately, Clarke is misled (1818: 112). He mentions an alternative spelling of Lefka as Leftra, which leads him easily to the conclusion that this is the site of ancient Leuktra. Lefka in fact meant simply 'poplar' in contemporary Greek and had no necessary bearing on the ancient name of the site; while the toponym of Leuktra, given to the site of a famous battle, may anyway have applied only to a locality in the rural territory of Thespiai, rather than to a settlement of any kind, let alone a major one. But Clarke, like Chandler before him, was now embarked on a collision course with those who identified this site as that of ancient Thespiai or, in Wheler's case, Thisbe: and the same consequences followed.

In Clarke's case, he had to travel only a little further before finding a conjectured location of his own for Thespiai: this was to be in the ruins at Phria, the locality which Wheler had reached about a mile westwards from Erimokastro (see p. 5), and for which he had declined to give an ancient identification. (Clarke

found this place to be *two* miles west of Lefka, which fits with the fact that the main focus of ruins at Lefka was towards the eastern end of the plain). But Clarke had taken care to proceed first to Wheler's favoured 'Thespia' at Neochori, where he spent the night. Finding it quite inadequate for identification with a major city, he writes, in a perceptive anticipation of the methods of modern survey archaeology (1818: 113), that 'there is not a trace even of the ancient pottery whch is always found upon the site of antient cities' and concludes (114) that 'not a vestige remains of the antient city'. Realizing that he can nevertheless not be far from the vicinity of Thespiai, he turns back to the journey of the previous day, and settles provisionally on Phria.

The traces of settlement here may have been much more extensive in the time of Wheler or Clarke than they were in 1984, when we recorded what must be the same location in our survey as 'Site PP 16'; but they can never have compared with those visible at Clarke's supposed satellite settlement of 'Leuctra', and Clarke was evidently not comfortable with his proposed identifications. He ends his account with the words: 'it must be evident that the situation of Thespia, although nearly that which Wheler has assigned for it, has not yet been satisfactorily ascertained' (1818: 116); and the truth is that his most valuable contribution, for our purposes, had been to show that the true location for ancient Thespiai, though evidently already mooted before the time of Wheler's visit in 1676 (see p. 5), was still open to fundamental challenge as late as the end of the year 1801.

But the matter was to be definitively settled by the next two visitors, Edward Dodwell (1767–1832), a gentleman of private means, and William Martin Leake (1777–1860), an officer and later Lieutenant-Colonel of Artillery. Their journeys run in a closely parallel rhythm: Dodwell had passed directly along the main road through Boeotia in 1801, without turning off to Thespiai, while Leake had paid a first brief visit to the site on his mapping expedition, apparently together with Colonel Squire and Mr. Hamilton, in 1802; Dodwell then made the detour to Thespiai in March 1805, Leake again following less than a year later with his more extended visit. The comparison of their accounts is enlivened by consulting Leake's own annotated copy (held in the library of the Faculty of Classics at Cambridge) of Dodwell's book, by some margin the earlier of their two accounts to be published (1819). Both had approached the site by the same route, which differed from those of Wheler or Clarke in coming neither over the hills from the north nor from the south-east, but up the valley of the Kanavari river from the east, the natural approach from Thebes.

Dodwell's account is the briefer of the two and suffers in other ways from a comparison between them, but the salient point is that both writers are of one mind in their conclusions, and reach these by broadly the same methods. Dodwell repeats Clarke's toponym for the location, but not his deduction from it (1819: i, 255):

> 'A small village called *Lefka* is seen in the vicinity, the inhabitants of which, in tilling the ground, find a great many small copper coins of Thespeia. I bought several of them...'

As for its identification, he had already concluded that it was 'probably Thespeia' (1819: i, 253, also giving the alternative ancient spellings). He comments that 'the walls, which are almost entirely ruined, enclose a small circular space, a little elevated above the plain, which probably comprehended the Acropolis.' This 'elevation above the plain', designed to reinforce the interpretation as an acropolis, applies only to the southern extremity, where the ground outside the circuit also rises: there is little difference in elevation between the interior and exterior of the circuit, here or elsewhere. Dodwell goes on to note a few of the same features that Leake was to describe more fully: 'There are the remains of some temples in the plain; their site is marked by some churches that are composed of ancient fragments' (in few cases, at Thespiai anyway, is it likely that the churches stood on the actual *site* of a temple). He continues: 'in one of them is an imperfect inscription mentioned by Wheler' (here he draws the stone naming Praxiteles, still only partly visible, which Wheler had earlier seen). With another stone, a 'badly executed' (Leake indicates his disagreement) relief with a horseman that is inscribed 'To Alexander the Hero' (later published as *IG* vii. 1823), he unwisely speculates that it may commemorate the restoration of Thespiai by Alexander the Great: here Leake writes dismissively in the margin of his copy, 'a common heroic monument'. He visits the Church of St. Charálambos, where he notes much the same monuments that Leake was later to describe. Dodwell's description ends with the sage observation that 'the soil is fertile and has risen considerably above its ancient level. Some valuable antiquities and inscriptions might no doubt be found here with little trouble and expense'.

Dodwell's account suffers from a fair number of other historical and geographical errors, such as placing the peak of Cithaeron to the north, rather than the south-east, when seen from Thespiai (duly underlined by Leake). This casts doubt on the strictures of his own which he offers on two of his predecessors

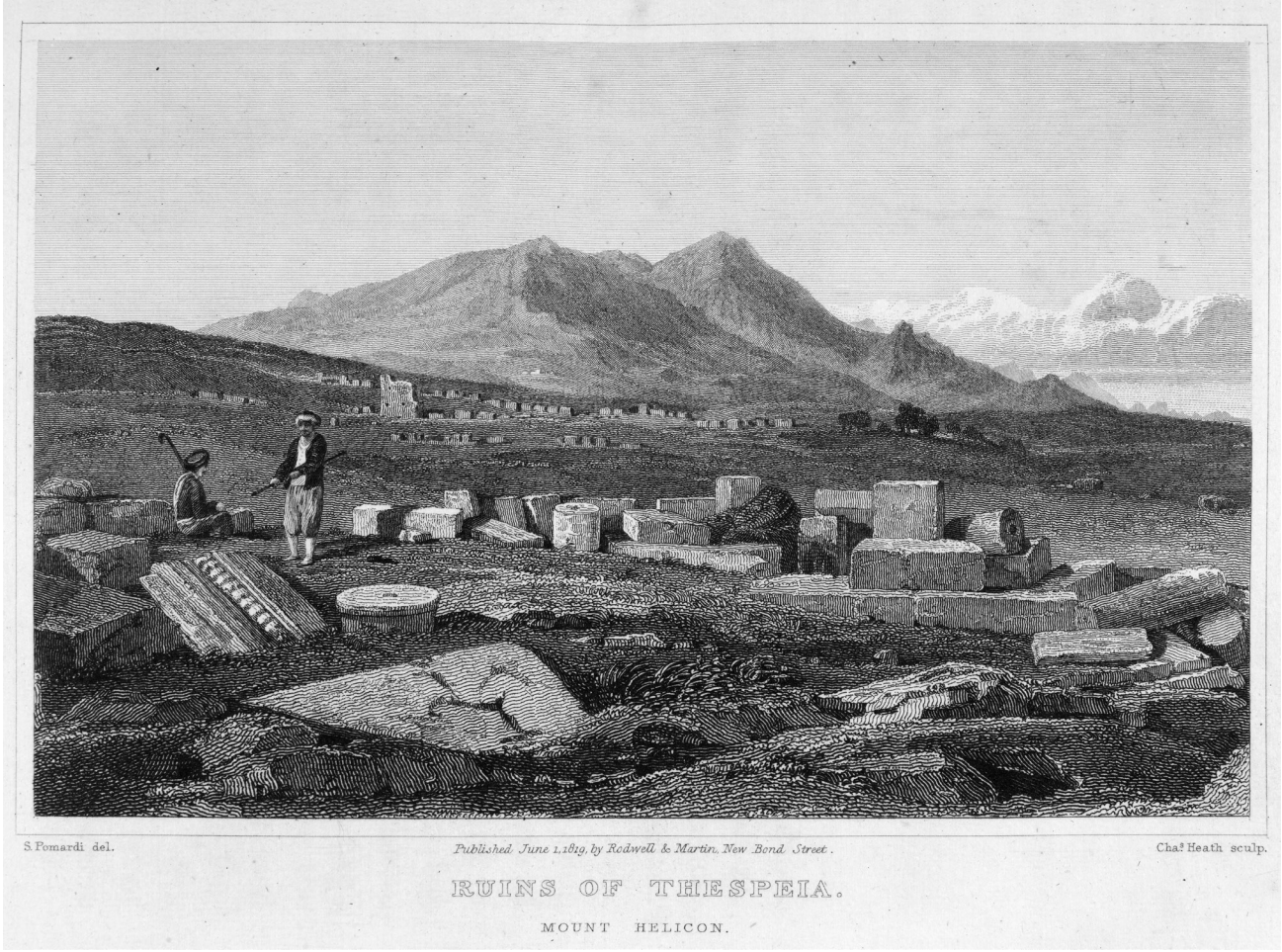


Figure 2.1. *Engraving entitled 'Ruins of Thespeia' (from Dodwell 1819, facing p. 256).*

(1819: i, 256, n.1): 'It is necessary to put future travellers upon their guard against the Geography of Meletius, which is a mass of errors.' He goes on: 'Meletius will have it that *Kakosi* is Thespiae and D'Anville is equally mistaken in supposing it to be *Neochorio*'. Dodwell had evidently not noticed, as Leake was to do, that Meletios (1661–1714) had been precisely the source for the earliest objective evidence for the *real* location for Thespiai, by citing inscriptions from Erimokastro which named the ancient city (Meletios 1807: ii, 341: see below, pp. 10–11). But it is true that Meletios has in effect a 'double entry' for Thespiai: after correctly situating '*Thesptis polis*' at 'what is commonly called *Erimokastro*' he proceeds, on the next page, to locate '*Thespeiai*' at Kakosi, the village which lay on the actual site of Thisbe, well to the west (he wrongly believed ancient Thisbe to be on the coast at Aliki), and to give a description of what is probably that site (Hobhouse, Byron's erstwhile travelling-companion, was another traveller who, in a long footnote, evinced difficulty in handling Meletios' text hereabouts: 1813: 277–83). As for d'Anville, whatever he may have written somewhere (Dodwell cites no reference), we have already seen (p. 6) that his actual map of ancient Greece reflects no such supposition as this about the location of Thespiai.

Yet Dodwell makes a unique contribution by giving us the earliest engraving of the actual site at Lefka (1819, facing p.256, usefully reproduced in Roesch 1965, pl. xx). Captioned 'Ruins of Thespeia', it is clear and detailed (Fig. 2.1): a view looking westwards from a point which can still be precisely located (the ruined foundation in the left foreground is marked to this day by a heap of ancient blocks, Site 34 in Chapter 4). It includes the upstanding remains of a Byzantine apsidal church, which partly survive today, in the middle distance to the left (Site 36 of Chapter 4); and, most valuably of all, the unmistakable line of the fortification wall of the *Kastro* behind this, running across the scene from right to left and then returning, on a

roughly parallel line behind, down the hill from the left. The eastern peaks of Helikon are portrayed, in the main accurately, in the far distance. This is a precious visual record, worth many words of description, of a monument whose days were numbered.

Dodwell seems to harbour no misgivings about the identification of the site, which again has implications when he moves on to Neochori. Perhaps in deference to Wheler, he feels it necessary to find an alternative name for Wheler's mistaken identification of a place 'where ancient traces may be seen' (here Leake pencils the word 'none' in the margin, echoing Clarke's negative findings). He concludes that it is 'probably Askra', an identification that was to fare no better than Wheler's.

Leake, although his account was not to be published until 1835, had as we have seen paid a first visit to the site in 1802; his second, extended one of 1806 is easily our most valuable account of the site. Two and a half hours' ride from Thebes found him in sight of 'a verdant plain containing the sources of the [Kanavari] river'; then he ascended 'the height which rises from its northern side', on which stood Rimokastro and its neighbour Katzikaveli (modern Leondari). He goes on:

> 'In the middle of the vale, immediately below Rimokastro, are extensive ruins of an ancient town, undoubtedly Thespiae, the founders of which seem to have chosen the site for the sake of the sources of the Kanavari. Such a low situation... must have been inconvenient in any kind of warfare...' (1835: ii, 478–9).

Leake turns first to the wall-circuit which Dodwell had drawn:

> 'The only remains of military architecture are the foundations of an oblong or oval inclosure, built of very solid masonry of a regular kind. It is scarcely half a mile in circumference; but all the adjacent ground to the south-east is covered, like the interior of the fortress, with ancient foundations, squared stones and other remains, proving that if the inclosure was the only fortified part of the city, many of the public and private edifices stood without the walls.' (479).

So far, this exemplary account has already given us a description of the natural setting of the site, a correct identification for it, a reasonable explanation for its location and a description of its most prominent feature which brings out, by a cautious and conditional deduction, the salient fact that the city extended far beyond the wall-circuit – specifically, in a south-easterly direction, where the main Roman and later nucleus, rather than that of Classical Greek times, lay. It was perhaps beyond the powers of an observer at the beginning of the nineteenth century, even Leake (who, as we shall see, was alert to chronological factors in interpreting the site), to make the further deduction that the date of the 'inclosure' had been of a later period than that of the greatest extent of the city.

Leake next tells us that

> 'The place is called *Lefka*, from a village of that name no longer in existence, but the ruined churches of which still remain to the number of five or six. When I visited these ruins in 1802, there were still three inhabited cottages at Lefka, but these are now' [that is, in February 1806] 'deserted and ruined. In the time of Wheler the village appears to have been nearly of the same size as Rimokastro or Kaskaveli' [compare p. 6 above]

The toponym Lefka, unrecorded by Wheler but now evidently in general use (Leake gave short shrift to the '*Leuka* = Leuktra' equation), is here applied specifically to the modern village on the ancient site. It was not a replacement for Wheler's name of '*Castri*', which was to survive (in the form *Kastro*) until long after Leake's time: rather, 'Castri' applied to the ancient wall-circuit, 'Lefka' to the contemporary village which lay at a short distance to the east. Leake, in combination with Dodwell who had (surprisingly) found Lefka inhabited less than a year before, provides a uniquely precise date for the abandonment of these last remains of settlement in the plain. The inhabitants were presumably absorbed into the (by now much larger) villages of Erimokastro and Katzikaveli on the hill-top above.

Observing that the Kanavari 'flows along the North side of the ruins' (480), Leake then turns, as Wheler had, to the ruined churches 'to the number of five or six'. They contained 'remains of cornices, ceilings, architraves, columns and plain quadrangular stones, all of white marble', proving that there had been a major Classical site, 'one of the most considerable in Boeotia', in their vicinity. Rather than simply taking on trust the identification of this site with Thespiai, which had long had currency (though not with Wheler, Chandler or Clarke), Leake advances proofs of his own, based primarily on epigraphy. First, although he himself could no longer find any inscriptions on the site which named Thespiai or the Thespians, he quotes in full two examples from Erimokastro, seen and transcribed much earlier by Meletios (1661–1714), the former Metropolitan Archbishop of Athens, which

had done so. These inscriptions, although now lost and evidently already missing in Leake's day, were later to enter the record as *IG* vii. 1841 and 1860, along with 2001, also copied by Meletios, which did not name Thespiai but which Leake *was* able to see and draw *in situ* (1835: ii 481, pl. xv, 75), thus vindicating the authenticity of Meletios' other sightings. (A later and fuller edition of his universal *Geography* had recently been published in Venice, and it is this version (Meletios 1807) which Leake is known to have possessed and used.)

Next, Leake reports (as Dodwell had) that he was able to purchase 'several coins of Thespiae… not very common in other parts of Boeotia', in the two villages on the hill above. Then he confirms (481–2) that the figure given by Pausanias (ix. 26.2–4), 50 stades or about 9 km, for the distance from the mountain of the Sphinx (the modern Fagá, a definite identification) to Thespiai, works out correctly for this site – here Leake makes an uncharacteristic slip, because that is actually the distance that Pausanias gives from the Sanctuary of the Kabeiroi to Thespiai; but the correspondence is nevertheless tolerably close from either starting point.

Leake is able to make a rough correlation between the description of Thespiai by Strabo (ix. 2.5 and .25) as one of the two Boeotian cities still flourishing in his day – that is, just before the beginning of the Christian era – with the date of some of the inscriptions that he himself had seen, belonging to Roman Imperial times. He too locates and draws the stone naming Praxiteles which Wheler had earlier seen (Leake's pl. xvii, 77: later fully published as *IG* vii.1831), correctly noting that this is 'more ancient than the others'. He finally (483) visits the church of Agios Charálambos, which stands outside Erimokastro on the west (Leake mistakenly writes 'east') and the fame of whose cult, he suggests, may explain the increasing local primacy of that village: here there are frescoes and, again, ancient stones within the church or built into its walls and he transcribes the inscriptions of three of them (Leake's pl. xvi, 73 and xvii, 78–9: they were the future *IG* vii. 1866, 1916 and 2130). Leake ends as he had begun, with a brief view of the contemporary scenery: apart from some vineyards on the plateau to the north, there is 'scarcely a tree or shrub to enliven the view' (484), a description in great contrast to the landscape both of today and evidently (as Leake notes) of antiquity also.

If some of the liveliness of the earlier writers is missing from Leake's narrative, the compensating gains are enormous. In the space of seven pages of text, he gives us an account which his successors would find it hard to improve upon, combining precise description of the present with reasoned and well-informed deduction about the distant past. Leake relates his account to that of Wheler at several points, drily pointing out his false identification of 'Thisba' (1835: 479, n.1) and later alluding to Wheler's inland journey from 'St. Basilio' (504, n.1), but not to the false edifice built on it by Chandler (see p. 7): indeed, there is no reference to Chandler, Clarke or Dodwell in his account of the site. Leake also differs from Wheler when he tackles the ancillary problem of the site of Keressos, the separate acropolis or refuge of Thespiai, which makes two conspicuous appearances in ancient history, but without any clear indication of its relation to the city itself. Where Wheler had chosen the hill-top behind Palaiopanagia in the lower part of the Valley of the Muses, for Keressos, Leake (490, 500) eventually concludes that 'it is by no means improbable' that Keressos was the true identification for Wheler's mistaken 'Thespia', at Neochori. Neither supposition has since been proved right or wrong.

During the decades that elapsed between Leake's first visit in 1802 and the long-delayed publication of his *Travels in Northern Greece* in 1835, a series of other more or less learned visitors, many of them his fellow-countrymen, followed in his steps and in some cases anticipated him in print. Dr. Henry Holland, who had meanwhile published (Holland 1815) his own much more cursory *Travels*, was one of these. He states in his Preface (iii), with anxious deference, that 'Had I previously been aware that Major Leake had intended to publish his 'Researches in Greece', I should scarcely have had courage to commence my own work'; and, in return, several of Holland's observations were to be cited in Leake's later publication. Holland paid a brief visit to Thespiai during the winter of 1812–13, approaching by Dodwell and Leake's route along the Kanavari valley (1815: 402). He found only two of the ruined churches, producing his own sketch of Wheler's Praxiteles inscription (neither Dodwell nor Leake being yet in print), and otherwise 'no individual remains of any importance'; the main interest of his account is to show that by this date, less than a decade after Dodwell and Leake's time, there was evidently no longer the slightest question about the ancient identity of the site.

A more significant figure of this time was Sir William Gell (1777–1836), artist and former travelling-companion of Dodwell, who copied inscriptions at Thespiai; he also published what was effectively the first modern guide-book for travellers in Greece (Gell 1819). It consists of terse itineraries, measured by travel times of Leake-like precision, with brief descriptions of the more interesting stopping points. One of these journeys (1819: 118–20) brings the reader from *Kakosi* (Thisbe) to *Erimokastro* in just 3 hours, 21 minutes, pausing at the latter village to examine the ruins

of Thespiai. On the wall-circuit, whose shape Dodwell had described as 'circular', Leake as 'oblong or oval', Gell prefers to say that 'it seems a regular hexagon, and the mound occasioned by the fall of the wall is perfect' (119). These obscure words perhaps add a little to our picture of the appearance of the wall in the early nineteenth century; the description would fit an enceinte composed of straight stretches with towers or buttresses at the angles, and such a plan may yet prove to be hidden under the tumbled rubble of today. Gell could only explain the small area that it contained by appealing to the parallel of Mantineia, where a much larger but similarly shaped *enceinte* survived. He goes on to say:

> 'Its defence seems to have been the marsh in which it was situated. The fountain is to the north and the stream runs [ultimately] into the plain of Thebes'.

Gell is the first writer, but by no means the last, to describe the immediate environs of the wall-circuit as a 'marsh': compare Phillipson 1950: 507, relating to the years 1928–1934. Some of Gell's visits may have been in winter, but it is worth mentioning that our own informants in modern Thespies still record the tradition that the motive for the final abandonment of the ancient site had been the then waterlogged state of the ground and its unhealthy consequences for the inhabitants. Gell's *Itinerary* was much read and his observations influential, surfacing again in later writers. Pending the publication of Leake's works, other visitors to Thespiai at this time tended to fall back on Dodwell, usually citing him with approval, as did F.C.H. Kruse (a historian and geographer rather than a traveller: 1826: ii, 602–4).

But the truth was that, short of scientific excavation of the site, Leake and his predecessors had left little positive that the visitors in the remainder of the nineteenth century could contribute. The heyday of the 'picturesque' travel account, as of its earlier counterpart the 'voyage littéraire', with their preference for a letter or diary form and their poetic adornments, was now over – public appetite for them had been exhausted by repetition – and it found perhaps its last major exemplification in the two huge volumes of the Comte de Choiseul-Gouffier (1782, 1809). Leake had started a trend for sterner and more focused descriptions. At Thespiai, the main changes to come from now on were to be negative ones, in the progressive spoliation of the remains that is reported in the later accounts. The plain around Castri and Lefka might now be empty of human habitation, but it was the scene of intensive cultivation by the inhabitants of the two modern villages on the hilltops above, whose numbers were not dwindling (Erimokastro in the 1830's boasted 70 houses, Kaskaveli (as it was now spelled) was somewhat smaller).

The deliverance of Greece from Ottoman rule, to which Leake and others had looked forward with more hope than expectation, the establishment of an independent Greek state and the installation of a Bavarian prince as King Otto I in 1832, had a profound effect on the careers of the next two significant visitors to Thespiai, Ludwig Ross (1806–59) and Heinrich Ulrichs (1807–43). Ross acted from 1834 to 1836 as head of the newly founded Archaeological Service of Greece, then from 1837 to 1843 as the first Professor of Archaeology at the University of Athens until his perceived arrogance towards his Greek colleagues brought his enforced withdrawal from the scene, to a Chair at Halle. Ulrichs, primarily a philologist, also taught at the University of Athens until his early death. Both represented the new German learning and an important result is that we have, for the first time, writings that reflect an intellectual standing at least on a level with that of Leake.

Ross had the privilege, but also the burden, of accompanying the young King Otto and Queen Amalia on several of their journeys through their new kingdom. The very energy of the pair – they climbed several of the highest mountain summits of Greece – meant days of hard riding and hurried visits, interspersed with impromptu public appearances. Their most extended visit to the ruins of Thespiai took place on 14 September 1834, a day when the royal party rode from Kokla (Plataia), by way of Leuktra, where they encountered heavy rain, on to Erimokastro where they temporarily sheltered. When the rain stopped, they visited the ancient site. Ross comments on the 'circular form described by the ruins of the fallen wall' and speculates that 'Thespiae probably incorporated, at the time of its last flourishing under the Romans, a substantial further extension eastwards from the wall-circuit' – yet another unsuccessful attempt to reconcile the wide extent of the ruins with the small capacity of the fortification (Ross 1848: 20–1). The party proceeded that night to Thebes, but 11 years later another royal progress brought them back to Erimokastro by a journey of some interest, along the 'high level route' over Mt. Helikon (Burn 1949), starting from the monastery of Hósios Loukás to the west (Ross 1848: 197–8). On the way, Ross noticed the site above Palaiopanagia which Wheler had identified as Keressos and approved his choice. It is worth noting that on the very next day the party first rode, and finally drove by carriage, the entire distance from Erimokastro to Athens – almost 100 km.

The more painstaking travels of Ulrichs were published in two volumes (1840, 1863): the first volume reports briefly on a journey through Boeotia in 1837, while the second, posthumous one contains a long section devoted to Boeotia (pp. 1–113, with pp. 82–101 focused specifically on the territory of Thespiai), being a digest of a series of journeys between 1838 and his death five years later. Ulrichs gives an especially valuable account of the wall-circuit of the *Kastro*. He followed Gell in describing it (1863: ii, 84) as a 'regular hexagon', and closely examined its structure. The lower courses were 'well-preserved, built of large squared blocks', but on this footing, he inferred, there had been a superstructure of mud-brick, whose collapse had given the whole monument the misleading appearance of an earth rampart (compare p. 12 above). Like the more observant of his predecessors, he noted that the evident traces of the city spread far to the east, outside the circuit: Ulrichs estimated their extent at three times the diameter of the *Kastro*. But he did not come any nearer to explaining this disparity: instead, in an eccentric reading of the passage in Thucydides which refers to the Theban destruction of the wall of Thespiai in 423 BC (iv.133.1), he inferred, from the absence of a definite article before the word 'wall', that the destroyed fortification had been, not a wall running round the city but the wall of this same *Kastro* (1863: ii, 84, n.7; though he went on to admit, from the evidence of Xenophon (*Hellenica* v. 4. 41), that at times there had really been a fortification round the whole city). The explanation, obvious enough to later generations, that the *Kastro* was a later construction and that its 'squared blocks' had been re-used, was not yet apparent.

Where Leake had put the number of the ruined churches of Lefka at 'five or six', Ulrichs went on to enumerate the six that he could see, together with three major springs, the *Megáli Vrísis* ('great spring') under the Church of St.John; the *Vrísis tîs Itiâs* ('spring of the willow'), which he locates only by its two willow-trees (1863, 85); and the *Varváka*, further east, opposite the village of Kaskaveli. Recognition of these landmarks today is hampered by the despoliation of the churches and the fact that the springs (like the river Kanavari itself) no longer run perennially as they did two centuries ago; but aided by the local survival of toponyms.

The Church of St. John, the only one of the six whose dedication was remembered in Ulrichs' day, has now vanished but its position, in agreement with Ulrichs' location of it 'a little to the east' of the wall-circuit, must be marked by a small, almost square foundation (*c.* 3.00 by 2.50 m) of ancient blocks and by the small pillar (itself composed of ancient blocks) with an icon of St. John the Baptist (Site 32 of Chapter 4). This must take with it the 'great spring': although no spring is visible in this immediate vicinity today, a tributary ravine does enter the Kanavari, only 150 m away to the north, from this direction. In his second church ('nearby') Ulrichs recorded two inscriptions (the future *IG* vii. 1839 and 1849): but the latter is stated in *IG* to have come from 'the fountain *Dendra*' ('trees'). This can be confidently identified with Ulrichs' 'Spring of the Willows' and may have been seen as the main source for the Kanavari: a later visitor, Vischer (below, p. 14), was told by one of a group of women he met washing their clothes in the river that *Dendra* was her name for the Kanavari itself. Fortunately the name *Dendra* is remembered to this day and applied to the spring, with a rebuilt wall dated by an inscription to 1897, which lies roughly mid-way between the Church of St. John and the third spring, *Varvaká*, whose name and location also survive.

Ulrichs' 'brick building, further uphill' [from the 'Spring of the Willows'] must be the structure, still visible today but evidently not recognized by him as a church, which had featured in Dodwell's engraving (above, p. 9). Ulrichs' third church seems to be the larger 'Makri Ekklesia', further eastwards, which still shows the most extensive visible walls: not far east of it again is the *Varvaká* spring, now dry, again with a still surviving fountain-wall, bigger and older than that at *Dendra*. It does indeed lie precisely opposite Kaskaveli as Ulrichs says. Of his fourth church, we know only that it lay close by; his fifth and sixth, even supposing that their foundations were still visible today, are too vaguely located in his account to be placed on the map.

The location of a very important further spring, yet one apparently nonetheless unmentioned by Ulrichs, is detectable in the built cistern in the middle of the north side of the wall-circuit of the *Kastro* itself: see Chapter 4, pp. 154, 188–90. Here again, a fairly deep channel runs northwards across the fields in the direction of the Kanavari. This too was evidently once a major source of running water, and we recall Gell's aside (1819: 119; see above, p. 12) that the 'fountain' for the wall-circuit was to its north.

Another intermittent member of the (mainly German) royal entourage, C.A. Brandis, visited Thespiai in these same years, apparently on his own. He came by a new route, south-eastwards across the hills from Mazi above Haliartos; but his cursory passage through the site, by the light of the setting sun, offers no other interest, apart from his strange impression that the ruins of Thespiai had survived 'unscathed' (1842: 238) – not a view that some of his predecessors, let alone his successors, could share.

His contemporary Ludolf Stephani came in 1842 as near as the village of Vayia, a few kilometres to the north-east, where he saw the Thespian inscription, later *IG* vii.1830, and inferred (probably rightly) that it had been relatively recently carried there from ancient Thespiai, but did not proceed to its source (Stephani 1843: 74).

In May of the same year, 1842, Thespiai was visited by yet another noted German scholar who was an older contemporary and friend of Ross and Ulrichs, F.G. Welcker. Welcker (1784–1868), a figure of high repute in the Classical field, held a Chair at Halle where Ross later came: he was already in his 58th year at the time of his journey and, by the time that he had seen his account through to publication, he was in his eighties (Welcker 1865). There is much to be said for the view (Roller 1988: 149) that Welcker represents a throw-back to an earlier phase of travel (he had even once been a protégé of Goethe himself at Weimar): his use of the diary form is one sign of this. His approach was by the now common route from the battlefield of Leuktra, a site made more famous by his younger friend Ulrichs' recent discovery (1839) of the Theban victory monument of 371 BC, across the last low hills, to descend to the plain of Thespiai at its eastern end. Welcker is merely following his predecessors with his opening observation that, coming from this side, 'one would believe oneself to be already within the city, but for the fact that only after a long distance does one come to the wall, which can be surveyed in its entire extent' (1865: 33). But his is the first account to take as its theme the ongoing despoliation of the site: only a couple of days previously, he was told, three statues had been found and destroyed, and he could see around the wall-circuit 'holes which I at first ascribed to art-loving Englishmen', but which proved to be the work of villagers, merely seeking building-blocks for their houses. Here, if we needed it, is an explicit contradiction of the judgment of Brandis, only three or four years earlier.

The Swiss traveller Wilhelm Vischer (cited above, p. 13) came in May 1853 and echoed the puzzlement of his predecessors over the disparity between the wide extent of the city and the small compass of the wall-circuit. He found the walls 'stand[ing] out little above the fertile soil', reflecting a rather different picture from Gell's evaluation of a generation earlier (Vischer 1875: 553).

From this point on, there were evidently diminishing returns for learned visitors to the site, and the frequency of published accounts diminishes accordingly. The German visitors of the late 1830s and early 1840s – Ross on his second journey, Ulrichs, Brandis, Stephani and Welcker – could have used Leake's works, but show scant signs of having done so (though Ross sent copies of his publications to Leake). In contrast, Christopher Wordsworth, nephew of the poet and Bishop of Lincoln, felt that even in listing his bibliography 'the writer cannot mention these works of Colonel Leake without expressing his obligation to them' (Wordsworth 1839: xii). But Sir Thomas Wyse (1791–1862), English Minister in Athens, who stayed at Erimokastro in the October of – probably – 1858 (see Roller 1988: 169–70 for the date of his Boeotian journey) is the first visitor to arrive, explicitly, 'Leake in hand' (Wyse 1871: 66, 69). He seems not to have troubled to visit the main site, commenting only on the changes to be seen, since Leake's time, at the Church of St. Charálambos outside the village (68). In Wyse's day, a prominent concern here and elsewhere in Greece was now the danger of brigandage, which features frequently in his account: the notorious Dilessi murders (Jenkins 1961) had occurred by the time that his niece saw his papers into posthumous publication. Charles Lenormant left his only visit to Thespiai until the closing weeks of his life – a lunch break on an excursion of 22 October 1859, when he encountered villagers offering to sell him 'for almost nothing… vases, terracottas and charming antiquities', a further sign of the local exploitation of the site and, it would now seem, of its accompanying cemeteries too (Lenormant 1861: ii, 385). R.R. Farrer's *A Tour of Greece: 1880*, finally, is notable for containing only our second engraving of the neighbourhood, showing the church of Agios Charálambos (Farrer says that it has 'two or three good bas-reliefs built into its walls') on a hillock outside Erimokastro with Helikon behind; but for nothing else: he remarks that 'the village is graceful but contains no ruins' and seems unaware of the site nearby, invisible in his engraving (Farrer 1882: 102–3).

The age of the travellers was over. Before we turn to its sequel, a melancholy one in the case of Thespiai, we may review the attainments of the previous two centuries. First, the correct identification of the ancient Thespiai, although evidently suspected in the years before Wheler's visit of 1676 and reinforced soon after by the unnoticed evidence of a little-regarded authority, Archbishop Meletios, remained contested until, in the opening years of the nineteenth century, it was put beyond further argument by the authority of Dodwell and Leake, and by the clinching evidence which the latter had unearthed in the confused pages of Meletios. The more intelligent observers all noted the small compass of the still surviving wall-circuit by comparison with the visible traces of the city, and offered a succession of different explanations for it: all were in different degrees mistaken but the notion,

originating once again with Dodwell and Leake, that the fortification served as some kind of internal acropolis was a step in the right direction, lacking only the dimension of chronology (cf. pp. 16–17 below). Some 30 years after Leake, Ulrichs offers us the only account which stands beside his in careful description, and indeed marks an advance on it in the enumeration of visible remains. The gradual destruction and dispersal of these remains, noticed from the time of Welcker's visit of 1842 onwards, has left us today with only a shadow of what the early travellers saw. It is striking and regrettable that not one of these visitors found it worth their while to print even a sketch-map of the visible remains of Thespiai. But they had done much to serve what has been an abiding aim of Classical Archaeology, the reconciliation of material remains with documentary history.

Such a background was to have a discouraging effect on the excavators, Greek or foreign, who in the course of their almost ubiquitous discoveries in Greece, over the next century and more, might otherwise have been expected to extend these to ancient Thespiai. It was by chance that, in 1882, P. Stamatakis came to make the most important single discovery at or near the site: the monument and collective burial (*polyandrion*), soon shown by A. Kirchhoff (1887: 141) to have been set up for the Thespian soldiers killed in the victory of the Boeotians over the Athenians at Delion in 424 BC. The commemorative statue of a lion had come to light, 'some 1100 metres to the east of the ruins of the city' (by which Stamatakis evidently meant the then still-standing walls of the *Kastro*). This is a substantial distance, perhaps somewhat understated in Fossey's reference to a location 'a little to the East of the settlement' (1988: 137), echoed in the more recent description by Low, 'close to the eastern gate' (2003: 104). The partial exploration of this locality by Stamatakis was continued, a generation later, by perhaps the most noted of Boeotian excavators, A.D. Keramopoullos, who had seen the potential value of Kirchhoff's identification of the *polyandrion* for the dating of its associated pottery (Stamatakis 1883; Keramopoullos 1912, 1920; see also Schilardi 1979). A by-product of this find was the location nearby of a pre-existing city cemetery of Archaic and later date, and of a probably ancient road running through it. Sir James Frazer, in the fifth volume of his monumental commentary on Pausanias, gave a full account of the site, which he visited in 1890 and 1895. He was able to include Stamatakis' find but, in the aftermath of of P. Jamot's activities (see below), could record little else that was new and much that was now lost (Frazer 1898, v, 141–2). He comments tartly that 'archaeologists have made short work of most or all of these churches', but goes on to indicate other possible culprits by recording 'a good many traces of recent excavations', most of which were assuredly not archaeological ones.

No comparable discovery has been made at the site since 1882: the few excavations of small plots, in or around the city, have followed the precedent of Stamatakis in being occasioned by chance finds made in the course of cultivation (Gallet de Santerre 1953: 219; Andreiomenou 1988; with many other brief reports of chance finds handed in by conscientious local farmers, most recently in *ADelt* 49 (1994) [1999], B1, 290–1; 51 (1996) [2001], B1, 286; 52 (1997) [2002], B1, 393; 54 (1999) [2005], B1, 329–30; 55 (2000) [2009], B, 406–7; 56–9 (2001–2004 [2011], 205). The great contribution of the site of Thespiai has been not to archaeology, but to epigraphy and, through it, to Greek and Roman history. Karl Keil had long since produced his first collection of Boeotian inscriptions (Keil 1847). The entries for the territory of Thespiai in *IG* vii already, by 1892, ran to over 500, many of them collected and copied, after exhaustive searches, by H.G. Lolling in the years 1885 and following (Dittenberger 1892: Preface, v: the removal of these inscriptions to Thebes is recorded under no. 1887). Numerous further inscriptions were to be published over the next century, amply confirming the identification of the site; some years ago, the yield of inscriptions from the city site and its neighbourhood alone had grown to about 1400 (Fossey 1988: 138), and new ones continue to come to light (see e.g. Piteros 1989). The only monograph devoted to the city (Roesch 1965) is essentially an epigraphic study; the late Paul Roesch had also worked for many years on the preparation of a corpus of Thespian Inscriptions which has now seen the light of day posthumously, in an electronic edition (Roesch 2007/2009).

This epigraphic richness was to prove fatal to the most substantial of Thespiai's standing remains, the wall-circuit or *Kastro*. In the years 1888–1890 inclusive, the French epigraphist Paul Jamot, who had worked elsewhere in central Greece, excavated at several locations within the ancient city, as well as elsewhere in its territory. He published the briefest of reports on this activity (Jamot 1891; Homolle 1891 b; [Jamot in] Homolle 1891 c), devoting his main attention thereafter to a few choice inscriptions and sculptures. But during his third year of work he conceived the idea, based on his observation of the visible stones in its make-up, that the destruction of the *Kastro* would yield the richest harvest of all (as indeed it did). He began this work already in the 1890 season and was able to add 132 new inscriptions to his tally (1891b: 449); for his final season of 1891, having enlisted the

help of the archaeologist A. de Ridder, he was emboldened to declare that

> 'This year, the aim is to demolish completely the fortifications at Erimokastro, composed in large part of ancient materials' (Homolle 1891b: 449).

This unabashed avowal of destruction, as the culminating goal for an established project on the part of an academic institution, seems to have generated none of the shudders then that it does today. In a separate communication of May 1891, the then Director of the French School at Athens had relayed much the same information, but with a vital epithet added, announcing it as the demolition of a *Byzantine* fortification (Homolle 1891a: 280). This new designation for the wall, closer to the truth than those of his predecessors, along with the 250 further inscriptions that were to be added by that year's operations ([Jamot in] Homolle 1891c: 659), would have been enough to reconcile the listeners to its fate. Indeed, the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres was soon to show its gratification: a brief notice of the following year announces the award of a medal to Jamot (*Comptes-Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions* 20 (1892), 152–3). Had Jamot published plans of the fortifications and of his activities in general, had he related more of his inscriptions to their contexts, had he even promptly published the inscriptions themselves (many of which were left to absorb the energies of generations of successors, notably of André Plassart who was still working on them more than 65 years later), then a more lenient judgment might be possible for us today. To do justice to Jamot, he had also made important finds outside the city, notably in the Valley of the Muses, and he had identified, inside the *Kastro*, the site and foundations of one sanctuary, which he believed was the small city Temple of the Muses mentioned by Pausanias (ix. 27, 4: [Jamot in] Homolle 1891c: 659; Müller 1996: 179–82); but this was to be his only lasting contribution to the topography of the urban centre itself.

But Jamot could have provided a more precise answer to a question which had long detained the earlier travellers: what had been the date of the wall-circuit? (Writing as late as 1935, K. Fiehn could still surmise that it was 'probably built by Agesilaos' – that is, during the wars of the 370s BC: Fiehn, 1935, 40). The laborious cataloguing of Jamot's inscriptions by his heirs, in many cases with their approximate find-spots and -dates, makes possible some conclusions here. On the face of it, the building of the *Kastro* should post-date the latest of the inscribed stones used for its construction. A search through the list for those recorded as having been detached from the walls in 1890 or 1891 throws some light: from a vital footnote in one of several later publications by A. Plassart (Plassart 1926: 390, n.1), we learn that all the inscriptions which he records there with the provenance '*Kastro*, 1890' and '*Kastro* 1891' were in fact recovered from the fortification itself. It is immediately clear that some of these inscriptions are of Roman Imperial date; among the latest of these is a statue-base with an inscription eulogizing a figure whom Plassart could identify as Vettius Florius Praetextatus, a Roman notable who was appointed *Proconsul* of the province of Achaia by Julian the Apostate and who is commemorated in near-identical terms all over Greece. Plassart duly notes its provenance as '*Kastro*, 1891' (Plassart 1926: 448–9, no. 85). Vettius served in Greece in the 360's of the Christian era: he rose to even higher things at Rome before his death in the 380's, but the absence here of any mention of his later titles indicated to Plassart that the inscription is of earlier date than that: between the years AD 361 and 369 is perhaps the safest guess. At all events, the walls should belong after that date; and this is confirmed by the evidence from our survey of the city site, showing a unique density of occupation in the area that they enclosed during the lifetime of the 'Late Roman' pottery phase, extending to the sixth century AD. Two other inscriptions perhaps tell us a little more: also found built into the wall ('*Kastro,* 1890') were an inscribed statue-base for Constantine the Great (Plassart 1926: 455, no. 99) and part of another ('*Kastro*, 1891') honouring his sons Constans and Constantius II (455–7, no. 101, inv. 502 only). Constantine had died in 337, and his sons' joint rule ended in 350: a considerable lapse of time would seem likely, before the destruction of statues of such prominent figures became acceptable – even under the duress of military threat – at the hands of a presumed Christian community.

Fossey (1988: 136–7) warns of the possibility that the *Kastro* could have embodied a late re-building of earlier walls: the line of argument that we have been following cannot be brought to bear on this hypothesis. But we can state that our own efforts to trace the only historically attested earlier walls, those of Classical Thespiai, have achieved some results: they show every sign of having enclosed a very much larger area, just as could have been predicted from the extent of the Classical finds; and they follow an entirely external line, which at no point can be seen to come into direct contact with the smaller circuit of the *Kastro*. A slim possibility remains that the Classical Thespians might have had a fortified internal acropolis as well as a city-wall; but their recourse to the 'external acropolis' of Keressos (see p. 11) tells against this.

The weight of evidence overwhelmingly suggests that it was the population of the Late Roman city,

living in what was no longer a fortified settlement, threatened by repeated insecurity and much reduced in numbers (though not so reduced that they could all live permanently within the 12 ha of the *Kastro*) who chose to construct this walled refuge some time between the late fourth and the late sixth centuries AD, taking as materials not only the carved and inscribed monuments of their forerunners, but also squared blocks which may well have been originally used for the Classical city wall. There is much attraction in the suggestion made recently by A.W. Dunn (2006: 48–9), that this and other constructions might be connected with the activity in the field of fortification, undertaken in Greece by Justinian and documented, with explicit mention of Boeotia, by Procopius (*de Aedificiis* iv. 2. 23–4; see also below, p. 188). In this particular passage, Procopius says that Justinian 'renewed' fortifications which had become derelict through age, though elsewhere he credits him with having also 'built many forts'. That the Thespiai fortification had already fallen into disrepair by the 530s AD is not impossible: if so, its first construction would be best dated to the late fourth century. But the passage should perhaps not be pressed as far as this and, for the closely parallel structure at Plataia, Aravantinos *et al*. (2003: 301, n.63) reject this conclusion.

The site of Thespiai had one surprise to spring, from a much earlier period of the past. The prehistorian Carl W. Blegen was among the first to detect, in 1920, the presence of prolific Neolithic sherds and even some figurines, with a thinner scatter of Bronze Age pottery, in one particular location of the ancient site, the low hillock or *magoula* lying some way to the north-east from the *Kastro*. Blegen later introduced his younger colleague John L. Caskey to the site, and Caskey and others later led excursions there with students from the American School of Classical Studies in Athens (Caskey 1951: Bass 1959). Fig. 2.2 is a photograph of 1924, taken by Dorothy Burr Thompson and showing women from the hill-top villages laundering clothes at the Ottoman-period fountain (Site 49 in Chapter 4 below). Whether by chance or not, accidental finds of Neolithic axes and other tools in 1951 apparently led to the mounting of a brief excavation there in 1952 by Chr. Christou (Cook 1953: 119–20; Gallet de Santerre 1953: 219): the location is then named as *Strongylion*.

This striking extension of Thespiai's record back into earlier prehistory makes some amends for the



Figure 2.2. *Photograph taken at the Varvaka fountain by Dorothy Burr Thompson in January 1924 (American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Dorothy Burr Thompson Photographic Collection).*

progressive destruction of so much of its Late Antique and later history. In the twentieth century, as part of the official government policy of giving villages new but historic names, Erimokastro was in 1934 renamed as Thespies and its main thoroughfare commemorates the heroism of the ancient city's soldiers at Thermopylai ('Street of the 700 Thespians'); while Kaskaveli was given the name of Leondari, apparently in honour of the discovery of the lion monument at the *Polyandrion*. In 1970, a new building in the village of Thespies, where already some of the inscriptions from the ancient site were stored, was opened as a Museum to house the continuing chance finds handed in (Ioannidou 1974).

Circumstances have made of the site of ancient Thespiai, which Dodwell had considered so promising, a deeply disappointing location from the traditional viewpoint of Classical Archaeology: compare the verdict of Fossey (1988: 136) 'There can be no site in Boeotia more depressing than Thespiai'. It is difficult to think of a parallel in Greece where a city, which at least in Hellenistic times was 'of the first rank' (Roesch 1965: 138–9) and which was to enhance its standing yet further under Roman rule, has met with such a fate. It was clear to us that, while the site was clearly going to be less than hospitable to any kind of archaeology, only by using new methods altogether could a possible way of improving this situation be found.



Boeotia Project, Volume II: The city of Thespiai

Few major Classical cities have disappeared so completely from view, over the centuries, as Thespiai in Central Greece. Only the technique of intensive field survey, carefully adapted to a large urban site and reinforced by historical investigation, has made it possible to recover from oblivion much of its life of seven millennia.

Authors:

John Bintliff was Professor of Classical and Mediterranean Archaeology at Universiteit Leiden NL, and is now Honorary Professor in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh.

Emeri Farinetti is a Faculty Member of the Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, Università di Studi Roma Tre.

Božidar Slapšak is Professor in the Department of Archaeology, University of Ljubljana.

Anthony Snodgrass is Laurence Professor Emeritus of Classical Archaeology of the University of Cambridge.

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