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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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7. Table of artefact density and visibility measurements for Thespiai City (Ch.3b)

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 1

Introduction: the survey of the city of Thespiai

The Boeotia project, initially a joint venture by the Universities of Bradford (John Bintliff) and Cambridge (Anthony Snodgrass), later Durham and Cambridge, and sponsored by the British Academy and these three Universities, carried out its first field season in 1979. The team was initially based in the village of Mavrommati, intermediate in location between the ancient cities of Haliartos to its north-west and Thespiai to its south, and probably close to the ancient border between their territories. It was natural to commence intensive field survey in the immediate environs of the village, then to proceed radially outwards, to include those two city sites. This rural prospection occupied us through to 1984, during which time the field teams had reached Haliartos and the environs of Thespiai in the northern and southern directions respectively. Eastwards we were limited by permit constraints to a small expansion, but during the same period a major extension westwards was achieved through the complete survey of the non-mountainous sector of the Valley of the Muses (preliminary summaries in Bintliff 1985; Bintliff and Snodgrass, 1985a–b).

It was the latter sector which first faced us with the complete survey of a major (11 ha) 'urban' site, the second-order settlement (*komê*) of Askra. In 1982 and then further in 1985, Askra was surveyed at two levels – first, field by field, then through placing a formal rectangle of 30 by 10 m within each field as a sub-sample. Learning from this first experiment helped us to design an improved scheme in the course of the 1985 season, when two separate teams tackled the much larger urban centres of Haliartos (*c.* 36 ha surveyed, almost the entire site), and Thespiai (179 ha, including extramural areas) (Bintliff and Snodgrass 1988; Snodgrass and Bintliff 1991). In subsequent years this core survey-zone in south-western Boeotia was to be expanded, notably to include a large area in the southern hinterland of Thespiai city, the subject of the first of our final monographs (Bintliff, Howard and Snodgrass 2007, henceforward *Testing the Hinterland*) (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2). But during the years 1989–1992, in order to check whether developments in other parts of Boeotia were comparable, we opened up a new survey window in the northern borders of Boeotia, carrying out rural survey around the ancient city of Hyettos and a complete survey of the town itself (around 30 ha) (Bintliff, 1997c) (Fig. 1.3).

Processing of the survey finds and revisits to most sites occupied us until 1997, when full-team fieldwork formally ceased. The rapid development in the methodology of survey interpretation and the sheer size and complexity of our database led to a lengthy delay of ten years before the first final publication; throughout this period, however, we were able to publish a continuous series of articles outlining our ongoing evaluations. From 2000, John Bintliff's appointment to Leiden University and the requirement to provide annual field-training in Classical Archaeology for his students led to a new programme in Boeotia, the Leiden Ancient Cities of Boeotia project (annual reports in *Pharos*, the journal of the Dutch Institute at Athens, vol. 8 (2001) to present; see also Bintliff *et al.* 2008). Božidar Slapšak joined this 'Boeotia 2' project with his staff and students from Ljubljana University, with particular expertise in geophysics, architectural survey and air photography. This second project carried out research in new areas of Boeotia, first conducting a total survey of the ancient city site of Tanagra (around 30 ha in its Late Roman enceinte, perhaps twice as large in its Classical Greek heyday) in the far east of the province, as well as large areas of its territory, then commencing a total urban survey at the city of Koroneia (*c.* 34 ha), in the centre of the region. This revival of fieldwork has been very informative for the writing-up of the original Boeotia project, as it has shed light, through fieldwork innovations, on our older data, and enabled us better to understand other Aegean survey results (see Fig. 1.3).

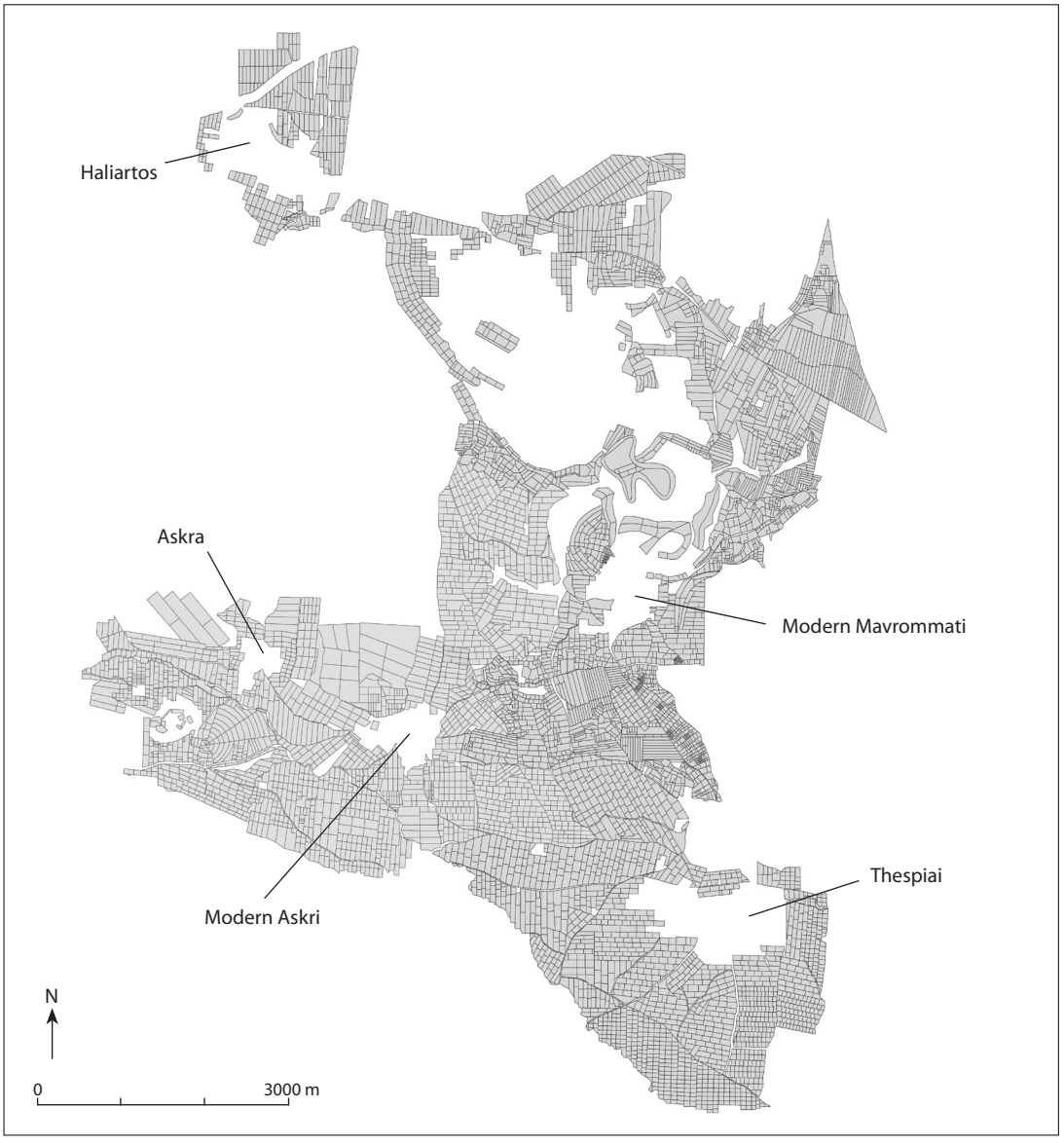


Figure 1.1. *The off-site, rural transects covered by the end of fieldwork in south-western Boeotia. The ancient cities of Haliartos, Thespiai and the village-town of Askra, together with their modern settlement replacements, form several of the blank 'holes' in this cover. The first two ancient city-sites were surveyed by an urban gridding procedure, Askra through a combination of field-by-field study and dispersed rectangular units (compiled by Dr. Mark Gillings).*

A more direct benefit for the older project has been the invaluable assistance that the Ljubljana team has given with the revisiting and writing-up of the original Boeotia project. Božidar Slapšak (Fig. 1.4) has been particularly active in adding to the evidence from the rural and urban survey at Thespiai: his geophysical results from the city of Thespiai (see Chapter 4, pp. 192–6), though fruitful, did not match the truly remarkable town-plan that his team revealed at Tanagra. But an intensive re-mapping of architectural surface finds by the Ljubljana team, following earlier recording by the 1985–1986 city survey team leaders and by Bintliff and Snodgrass on several occasions up to 2001, has revolutionized our knowledge of the development of the town (see Chapter 3 below, Parts (ii) and (iii)). In addition, a small team from the University of Rome, Tor Vergata, directed by Professor Margherita Bonanno Aravantinos, with assistance from Dr. Lorenzo Gentili, has in collaboration with us produced a commentary on the surface architectural finds at Thespiai, as well as discovering new fragments (see Chapter 4, Part (i)).

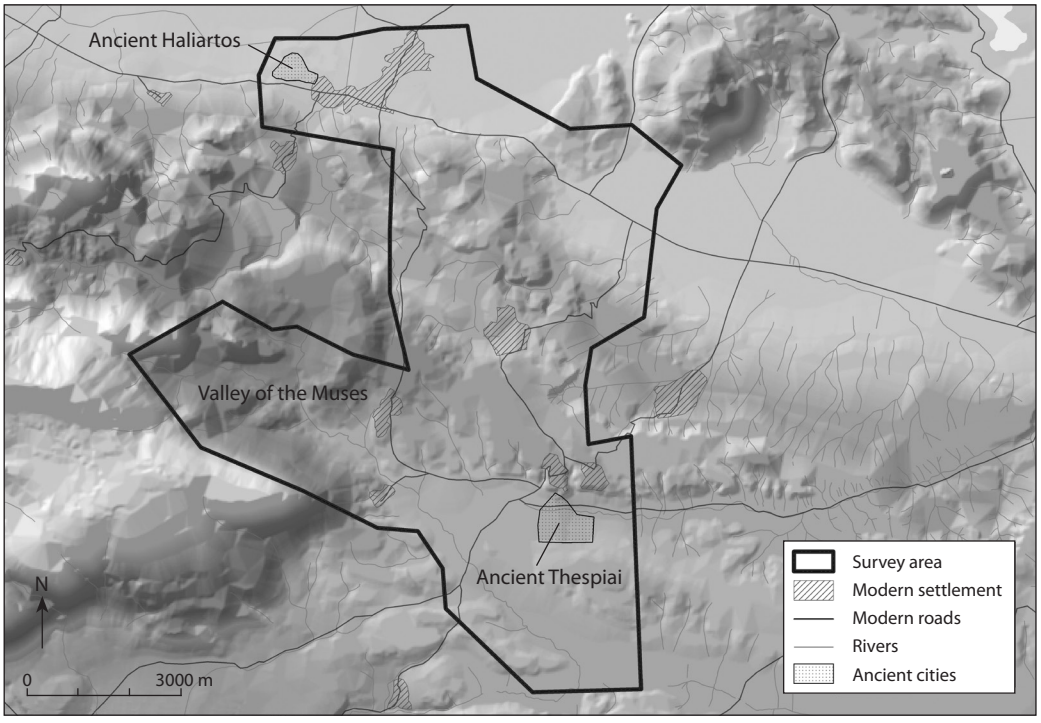


Figure 1.2. *The overall location of the surveyed area in south-western Boeotia, with ancient Haliartos and Thespiai marked (compiled by Emeri Farinetti).*

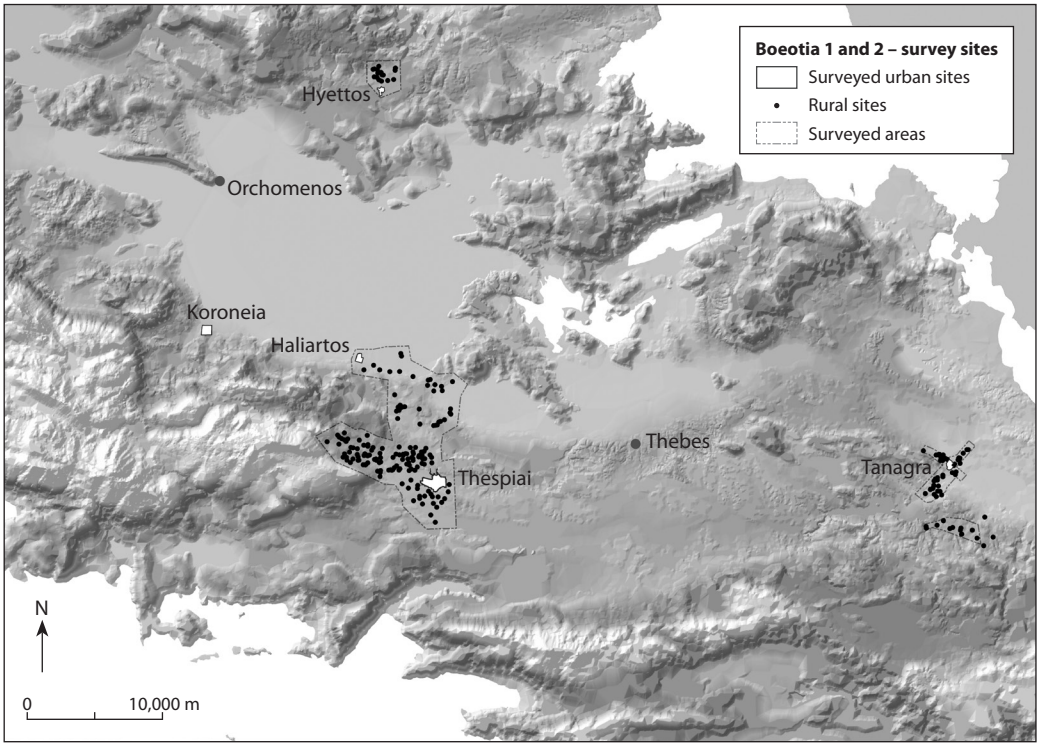


Figure 1.3. *The rural and urban areas surveyed by the original and the more recent Boeotia Projects (GIS by Emeri Farinetti).*

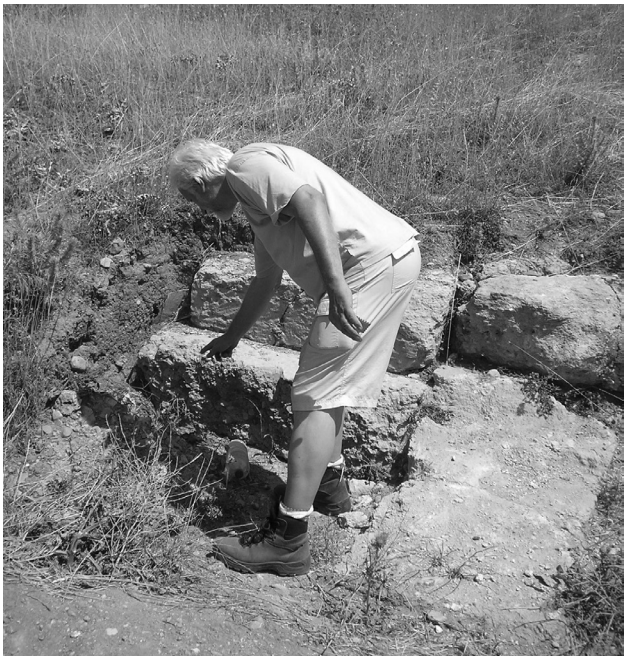


Figure 1.4. *Božidar Slapšak inspecting a section of the probably Hellenistic extension wall of Thespiai, exposed in a sand quarry north of the Kanavaris stream.*

Even more recently, a project of 2013 to widen the east–west (Thebes) road that runs north of the river Kanavaris, and hence divides what we take to be the original city and the projected ancient extension, has opened up a narrow but very long swathe of land some 10 m wide and half a kilometre long. Here the Ephorate has been busy monitoring and then excavating a series of exposures and monuments (Fig. 1.5). This last-minute intervention, during the final stages of preparation of this volume, has provided exciting new evidence from excavation, and we are privileged to be able to include (Addendum to Chapter 4 below, pp. 196–8) a short account of these finds from our colleagues at the Thebes Museum.

The present volume, our second monograph to arise from the original Boeotia Project, contains the data and analysis from the 1985–1986 surface survey of the city site of Thespiai, together with a catalogue and interpretation of the architectural pieces scattered across its surface, recorded and studied between 1985 and 2009. Besides the narratives of the development of the city found in Chapters 3 and 4, there are contributions on the documentary sources and the later history of the site, as well as individual chapters by period specialists in ceramics and numismatics.



Figure 1.5. *Part of the rescue excavation of the Thebes Ephorate of August 2013, showing what appears to be a sector of the Classical or early Hellenistic wall, connecting the city extension north of the river Kanavaris with the older city and enceinte south of the river. Modern Thespies village is just visible behind.*



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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