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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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Chapter 8

The history of Thespiai and Boeotia from Late Antiquity to the Frankish period

Athanasios K. Vionis and Chrystalla Loizou

Late Antiquity (fifth to mid-seventh centuries AD)

The period beginning around AD 400, whether referred to as 'Late Antiquity' or 'the Late Roman era', can be characterized as a turning point between the old Roman Empire and the emerging Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire. A sense of continuity with the Roman past can be noted, with elements of the ancient culture generally surviving into Late Antiquity. But this period can also be seen as one of gradual change and transformation, as attested in the material culture record. The founding of Constantinople by Constantine the Great in AD 330, as the new urban centre of the Empire in the East, and the emergence of the new (and later official) religion of Christianity mark the most significant of the breaks with the ancient past (Gregory 2005: 45–6).

The process of Christianization is of crucial importance when examining the history and archaeology of this period, relating as it does to political, economic and cultural aspects, as well as to the creation of an ideology centred on values that would unify a large number of diverse groups from different regions, with different languages and religions (Vionis forthcoming).

Epigraphic evidence and excavated ecclesiastical remains comprise almost the only sources of information about Christianization in Boeotia during the Imperial Roman era and Late Antiquity. The earliest reference for the existence of a Christian community in the region, however, comes from Paul's Epistle to the Romans, where the apostle gives greeting to a certain Rufus, *electum in Domino* (*Romans* 16: 13), who is also thought to have been the first bishop of Thebes (Le Quien (ed.) 1958: xxiv, 207; Trombley 1989: 221). Excavations outside the city at the beginning of the twentieth century revealed a number of rock-cut chambers, identified by the excavator as 'catacombs' or places of worship, used by a Christian community that survived the early persecutions (Keramopoullos 1917: 102–6, 111–22). The assumption (Keramopoullos 1917: 134; Trombley 1989: 221) is that, throughout the early centuries of Christianity and during the persecutions of Diocletian in AD 303–311 down to the age of Constantine, Christian Thebans were using rock-cut tombs of the Late Bronze Age as places of worship and burial. It is perfectly possible, however, that the use of such underground burial chambers was not in any way secret, and that they were never used as places of worship; rather, they should be seen as exemplifying a popular practice, spreading out from Rome, of using locations whose geology favoured the construction of underground cemeteries readily and cheaply (Vionis 2014a: 338).

While this process of Christianization ran its course in city and countryside, paganism seems to have survived in Boeotia, along with other areas of central and southern Greece – Attica, the Peloponnese – (Frantz 1965; Sanders 2005; Vionis 2014a), down to the fifth and sixth centuries AD. It is likely that, in Thebes, pagan cult activity persisted throughout the fourth century and that the temple of Ismenian Apollo was abandoned only after the edict of Theodosius I (AD 379–395). It was around this time that the temple area, on a hill outside the Kadmeian walls, started to function as a Christian cemetery filled with tile graves (Keramopoullos 1926: 127–9; Trombley 1989: 222). The practice of establishing a Christian necropolis in the precinct of a pagan temple was common in central and southern Greece during Late Antiquity, appearing around the late fifth and sixth centuries (as the Lerna court cemetery in Corinth: Vionis 2014a: 338–9). The last manifestation of pagan cult activity in Boeotia is a funerary inscription (*ἐπί Ἀθηνῶ ἥρωει*) dated to the third or fourth century AD (*SEG* 25 (1971): 175, no. 512; Trombley 1989: 221).

Thebes is listed as one of the ten cities of central Greece assigned a bishopric, possibly after the Council of Nicaea (Harnack 1908: 230–1, n. 4). It is likely that other Late Antique Boeotian cities, such as Thespiai, Koroneia, and Tanagra, already comprised separate bishoprics by the fourth century (*ibid*.). Moreover, the city of Koroneia appears in the participants' list at the Council of Ephesus in AD 431 (Koder and Hild 1976: 192–3). Thespiai too, by the first half of the fifth century, seems to have had a strong Christian profile, being mentioned in AD 446 by its ancient Greek name (*Thespiensibus*) in a text of Pope Leo I (AD 440–461) (Tautu (ed.) 1943: 185–6, no. 72; Schieffer (ed.) 1984: 771–2, no. 27; Koder and Hild 1976: 275). Two inscribed statue bases from Thespiai, one of them belonging to Constantine and the other to his sons Constantius II (AD 337–361) and Constans (AD 337–350) (Plassart 1926: 455 no. 99, 457 no. 101; Trombley 1989: 222–3; Vionis 2014a: 338) suggest that some of the Boeotian towns more than others showed an early inclination towards Christianity, or else a greater devotion to the Emperors.

The late fourth and fifth centuries must have been a period of relative stability and slight recovery for Thebes, after Alaric's attack of AD 396. According to the historian Zosimus (Paschoud (ed.) 1986: v. 175–6, § 5.7–8), Thebes had been the only Boeotian city to survive the assault (Koilakou 2006: 1105), suggesting that the walls of the Kadmeia were still strong enough to resist it. In the decree of AD 401/402 found at Megara (Cauer 1897: 663; *IG* vii, 21, no. 24), it is attested that Boeotia was able to provide a significant amount of agricultural surplus, as well as to participate in extended commercial activities in the Eastern Mediterranean (Trombley 1989: 216–18). Consequently, it is possible that the countryside had not suffered widespread destruction or large-scale depopulation. For the province of Achaea as a whole, a tax reduction occurred in AD 424 (Theodosius xvi, 11.1.33; Trombley 1989: 216–18).

The political boundaries of Boeotia in Late Antiquity remained the same as those of the second century AD, as described by Pausanias in the ninth book of his *Description of Greece*. According to the sixth-century *Synekdemos* of Hierocles, Boeotia was integrated in the Province of Hellas '*Ελλάδος, ήτοι Αχαΐας*' (which included Mainland Greece south of Thessaly and Epirus), with Corinth as its capital, under the administrative reforms of Diocletian (AD 284–305) and Constantine (AD 306–337). Hierocles, the author of the *Synekdemos*, provides a list of administrative divisions and their cities in different parts of the Empire. According to this, the geographical region of Boeotia contained five *poleis*, namely Anthedon (the ancient harbour of Thebes on the Euboean gulf), Thespiai, Thebes (the metropolis of the region), Tanagra and Plataiai; meanwhile, Livadeia, Koroneia and Thisbe are listed as 'cities' of the region of Phocis, while Chaironeia and Hyettos were 'cities' in Locris, in the *Synekdemos* of Hierokles (Honigmann (ed.) 1939: 17, 643.11, 644.5, 644.6, 645.2, 645.3a, 645.3b, 645.4, 645.5, 645.9; Trombley 1989: 215). Although the use and perception of the term 'city' in a Late Antique context is generally problematic, it has been suggested, on the basis of contemporary written sources of the period such as Procopius, that the status of a *polis* in the sixth century was defined by large-scale public amenities, such as aqueducts, cisterns, baths, public buildings, churches and fortification walls, as well as being large in extent and population and important in commercial activity (Bavant 1984: 246; Zanini 2003: 198–9).

Late Antiquity appears to have been a period of increasing prosperity and economic vitality throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, especially during the fifth and sixth centuries, as has been reported by a number of other archaeological field projects in the Aegean (Alcock 1993; Jameson *et al.* 1994; Bintliff 2012: 353–60; Vionis 2014a: 331–2). In Thespiai, the fifth-century wall-circuit enclosed an area of only 12 ha, containing the old forum of the town, while an unfortified extramural settlement of almost 20 ha was also identified to the east through intensive survey (Bintliff 2013a: 191, 195). Both areas in Thespiai bear traces of intense human activity in Late Antiquity, and include the contemporary remains of Christian basilicas. Even more interestingly, the evidence for ceramic and metallurgical production from within the walled area of Thespiai, and presumably in amongst the built structures such as the basilicas, reinforce the argument for an immediate relationship between production and the Church, as similar evidence for industrial and artisanal production from elsewhere (e.g. the fortress of Hexamilion at Isthmia or the town of Messene) seems to confirm (Gregory 1993: 47; Tsivikis 2012: 62–9). By the sixth century, it becomes evident that churches in 'urban' contexts and in their surrounding territories had become the social/economic focal points of the civic community. A series of transformations took place, in the wake of the dominance of Christianity, changing the civic plan and the social structures – for example by the construction of large basilicas (Bintliff 2012: 360–3). Not only was the position of early Christian basilicas in the urban grid the most prominent reference point for an institution and its financial resources, but the aim of visibility was to prove crucial for the emergence of a monumental Christian architecture (Cantino Wataghin 2003: 230).

According to the sixth-century historian Procopius of Caesarea, the fortifications of cities in the southern Balkan peninsula had long since fallen into ruin; most of these defences, however, were rebuilt or renovated by Emperor Justinian (AD 527–565) in the framework of his large-scale building programme and defensive policy (Gregory 2000: 105; 2005: 135). Although Gregory has suggested (2005: 135) that, to further his eulogy of Justinian, Procopius credited him with the construction work of his predecessors, it is certain that Justinian did restore most of the enceintes of the *civitates* that lay inside the fortifications of Thermopylae (Procopius, *De Aedificiis* iv. 2, 23–4). Procopius mentions restored fortifications in Thessaly, namely those in Echinus, Thebes, Pharsalus, Demetrias, Metropolis, Gomphi and Trika (*De Aedificiis* iv. 3, 1–15, where it is more likely that Procopius refers to the *Thessalian* rather than the Boeotian Thebes). Corinth, Athens and Plataia are also listed by Procopius amongst the fortifications restored by Justinian, although it is almost impossible to determine with accuracy which other Boeotian *civitates* were fortified or re-fortified in the framework of the emperor's building programme (Gregory 2000: 105–7, 109–10). But there is interesting evidence for the refurbishment of certain ancient forts or *phrouria* at this period in Attica and Boeotia, namely Kynosoura, Phyle and Panakton (Ober 1985: 145–7; 1987: 205–7, 209–11, 226; Munn and Zimmerman-Munn 1989: 38–9, 110), which points towards the need for defence in those provincial areas that were located on strategic land and naval routes, and to a primarily military act of organization, in a process of 'militarization of central Greece that was modelled on that of the Balkans' (Dunn 2006: 49–50; Vionis 2017).

In the mid-sixth century, as noted in Procopius's *Secret History* (viii. 25, 16–18) and Evagrius Scholasticus (Whitby (ed.) 2000, iv. 221. §23), earthquakes in Boeotia (in AD 543 and 551/2) proved quite destructive for many towns, including Chaironeia and Koroneia. On the basis of archaeological evidence from Corinth, however, it has been suggested (Sanders 2004: 163–93) that the violent events recorded in textual sources, such as the sacks by Herulians, Visigoths and Slavs, as well as several major and minor earthquakes in mainland Greece, did not always result in complete catastrophe and collapse at this time (see also Vionis forthcoming).

Thus, a period of transformation started to take effect from the late fifth century onwards, when Christianity began to leave its imprint on urban topography and the material culture record; this was the time when a new urban pattern developed and a monumental identity emerged in much of southern mainland Greece. As has already been mentioned, archaeological evidence from Thespiai testifies to this new urban pattern. The dense concentration of Late Roman surface ceramics within the so-called *Kastro* (which lies behind the settlement's later name of Erimokastro) and beyond it towards the north-eastern and eastern sectors, with a spread of contemporary burials around this occupied part of the site, taken together with the industrial debris within the *Kastro* area and the evidence for an early Christian basilica church within the walled area, with three more in the eastern and north-eastern sectors, represent an interesting case of a Late Antique *civitas*. This evidence suggests that Thespiai offers all the basic elements of a contracted, yet still busy *civitas*, with defensive walls, industrial activity, religious monuments and extensive Christian cemeteries (Vionis 2017).

Most interestingly, the *poleis* of Thespiai, Koroneia, Plataiai and Tanagra in this region are all noted as Episcopal sees of the fifth century, while Thebes formed the ecclesiastical metropolis of Boeotia (Koder and Hild 1976: 192–3, 243–4, 267, 275). It should be mentioned that our information about bishoprics in Boeotia in the fifth century derives mainly from participants' lists in Synods, such as those of Ephesos in AD 449 and of Chalcedon in AD 451, in both of which Domninos appears as the bishop of Plataiai (Δομνῖνος Πλαταιῶν τῆς Ἑλλάδος and Δομνῖνος ἐπ. Πλαταιέων) (Honigmann (ed.) 1942–43: 36, 56). It is noteworthy that Thespiai is not included in the list of early Christian bishoprics of Boeotia in Koder and Hild 1976; we should nevertheless consider it as one of the fifth-century Episcopal sees of our region, since Rufinus is listed as bishop of Thespiai (*Rufinus Episcopus Thespiensis*) in AD 458. Meanwhile, the content of an epistle of Pope Leo I the Great (AD 440–461) to the Metropolitan of Achaia implies that a bishop had already been appointed to the Thespians by that time (Tautu (ed.) 1943: 185–6, no 72; Le Quien (ed.) 1958: xxv, 210–11; Vionis 2017).

When we consider the status of Thespiai and other Boeotian cities in the fifth century, as ecclesiastical centres from which the bishops supervised their districts or dioceses, taking into account also the fact that all five sites – Thespiai, Koroneia, Plataiai, Tanagra and Thebes – are included in Hierocles' list of *poleis* of the Province of Hellas by the sixth century (Honigmann (ed.) 1942–43: 17, 645.4; Le Quien (ed.) 1958: xxv, 210–11), it is not hard to imagine that these Christianized places had acquired an 'administrative' or central role, always at local level, similar to that of their Classical–Roman predecessors. The archaeological evidence from Thespiai supports the belief that all five city-bishoprics could have preserved, to a certain

degree, the physical appearance of cities: they were densely occupied, they housed an élite as well as artisans, land supervisors and workers, they comprised regional *civitates*, and they must have functioned, both economically and ecclesiastically, as necessary centres for the populations living and working in their immediate territories (Vionis 2017).

The Byzantine Early Middle Ages (mid-seventh to early ninth centuries)

War, earthquakes and plagues were usually listed amongst the most favoured phenomena to explain the 'shrinkage', 'decline', 'collapse', 'transition' or 'transformation' of urbanism in the Eastern Roman Empire, from the late sixth to the seventh and eighth centuries. The difficulty of recognizing the material culture of the period has also contributed to the general assumption, by both archaeologists and historians, that the beginning of the Middle Ages is marked by a transformation and ruralization of the Late Antique city, and by the impoverishment of the countryside in the Aegean and in the Eastern Mediterranean regions (Brubaker and Haldon 2011: 453–4; Vionis 2013a: 29). Several scholars have detected variations in the scale and effect of external threat and natural disasters. It is, however, the excessive trust in the historical validity of our textual sources that has, for too long, shaped our perception of this period in a negative light, perceiving Slav land invasions and Arab sea raids as the sole explanation for almost every misfortune in the Early Medieval Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean (Charanis 1950; Ostrogorsky 1963; Zakythinos 1966; Herrin 1973; Mango 1980; Foss 1997; Holum 2005).

The Byzantine Empire went through a series of administrative reforms during the course of the seventh century, when the so-called 'themes' or *themata*, a series of larger administrative units or districts, in effect replaced the many small provinces which had characterized the period since the time of Diocletian (Haldon 1997: 132–6; 2005: 68; Gregory 2005: 178). The themes were essentially military zones, across which separate armies were governed by a *strategos* or *archon*, with military and civilian power and which. by the first half of the eighth century, became distinct geographical entities with defined boundaries. This new system of administration has generally been regarded as the result of Heraclius' policy (AD 610–641), but it gradually developed further within the Empire's defensive strategy to face the Arab advance in the Eastern Mediterranean (Haldon 2005: 68–70; Gregory 2005: 180).

The *Theme of Hellas*, which comprised the eastern portion of central and southern Greece, including Boeotia (with its northern extension into Thessaly), Attica and part of the Peloponnese, was formed some time after AD 687 but not later than AD 695 (Charanis 1955: 173–5). This dating rests on the fact that the *Theme* does not appear in the list of commands (*c*. AD 687) addressed by Justinian II to Pope Conon (Mansi (ed.) 1960–61: xi, 737); while Leontius, a former general of the *Theme of Anatolikon*, had already been appointed *strategos* of Hellas by *c*. AD 695 (in Theophanes: De Boor (ed.) 1980: i, 368, 18–21; Charanis 1955: 173; Ragia 2011: 97).

The Danube was generally considered the effective political frontier between the civilized Roman Empire and the barbarian world. In the mid-sixth century, a number of northern 'barbarian' groups, such as the Huns and various Germanic and Slavic tribes (e.g. the Veneti, the Antae and the Sclaveni), moved closer to the *limes*: these were occasionally invited by Byzantine emperors as *foederati* and frequently settled within the empire of their own will, seeking suitable unoccupied land (Barford 2001: 23–4; Gregory 2005: 157; Haldon 2005: 18, 28). As attested in Procopius's *Secret History* (viii. 18, 20), the Huns, the Sclaveni and the Antae had raided Byzantium almost every year since the reign of Justinian. The Slav raids were intensified in frequency and scale by AD 530, while Justinian was launching extensive military expeditions to restore the frontiers of the former Western Roman Empire (Barford 2001: 50–1). According to Procopius (vii. 29, 1–3; 38, 1–38), Slav expansion continued into the second half of the sixth century beyond Illyricum and Thrace, in a period when Byzantium neglected the Balkans through focusing on the eastern frontiers instead, in order to confront Persian aggression (Barford 2001: 56–8; Gregory 2005: 150).

The situation for the Empire became yet more challenging during the reign of Emperor Maurice (AD 582–602) with the arrival of the Avars, nomads of Turkic origin, who became a serious threat in the Balkans at that time. This was the beginning of a series of Avar attacks in the Adriatic, Aegean and Black Sea areas throughout the later sixth and early seventh centuries, effectively causing the penetration of Slavs and others into the Greek peninsula (Barford 2001: 56–8; Gregory 2005: 153; Haldon 2005: 18). According to the history of Menander Protector (AD 560–580), the Sclaveni 'devastated Thrace and many areas', arriving in *Hellas* towards the end of the year AD 578 (Blockley (ed.) 1985: fr. 20–1; Metcalf 1962: 134–5; Curta 2004: 515). Similarly, another contemporary account by John of Ephesus (Payne Smith (ed.) 1860: vi, 6, §25), recording events in AD 581–584 (in the reign of Maurice), narrates that 'an accursed people, called Slavonians' invaded the whole of Greece, pillaging and capturing towns and forts (Barford 2001: 61; Curta 2001: 92;

2004: 515–16). It is worth pointing out that, between AD 579 and 587, the Avars led several barbarian tribes, mostly Slavs (Charanis 1959: 36–7), in attacking the city of Thessaloniki on several occasions (in AD 586, 615 and 618), as is attested in the *Miracula of St. Demetrius* by Archbishop John of Thessaloniki (Lemerle (ed.) 1979–81: ii, 46–73, (1.13–15); Vryonis 1981; Curta 2001: 92–4).

Accounts of the expansion of Slav penetration into Greece have been largely based on the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*. According to the Chronicle, the Avaro-Slavs penetrated and conquered the Peloponnese (except for its eastern part), Thessaly, Epirus, Attica and Euboea, causing part of the Byzantine population to flee to Sicily and to small islands off the coasts of central and southern Greece (Charanis 1950; Barford 2001: 61; Curta 2001: 66–9). After the peace with Persia in AD 591, Emperor Maurice started to transfer large portions of the Byzantine army back to the Balkans. John of Ephesus (Payne Smith (ed.) 1860: vi. 6, 25) notes that in 584 the Sclaveni were still encamped and living peacefully in the rural hinterland of Thessaloniki. The intensity and extent of Slav settlement in Greece, however, remains a matter of historical and archaeological debate. A number of recent studies, based on a re-examination of the material culture record, have challenged the validity of sources such as the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, putting forward the argument that a supposed Slavic invasion or migration in the southern Balkans in the early 600s does not fit the archaeological record; it seems that no material evidence comparable to that found north of the Danube can be dated earlier than AD 700 (Charanis 1959: 37; Curta 2001: 307–10; Vionis 2013b: 110–11).

But an acceptance of Slavic settlement in Greece, with a subsequent significant population movement thereafter, cannot be reconciled with the supposed emptiness of the Early Medieval landscape, since such settlers will undoubtedly have revived land use. The picture emerging from the limited material traces recovered or dated by archaeologists, it is suggested, points to a declining urban and rural life, with the acropolises of shrinking ancient cities serving as refuge spots for Byzantine Greek populations that seem to have remained in or near the former *foci* of settlement, during the late seventh and eighth centuries. This seems to have been the general pattern both for urban centres such as Athens, Corinth and Ephesus, and for the countryside (Bintliff 2001: 38; 2012: 384–8). Although it remains credible that the cities of the Late Antique era had ceased to be the dominant units of social and commercial organization and that villages and fortresses became the main settlement cells of the Early Medieval world (Mitchell 2000: 145), it should not be assumed that at this time the countryside was necessarily overrun by barbarian tribes, whose only contribution was the disruption of urban life, technology and trade (Vionis 2008: 34; 2013a: 29–30).

Regardless of the effects of potential incomers, settled communities in Boeotia seem to have remained on or near former settlement *foci*, presumably reduced in size and in the volume of material remains. As mentioned above (p. 244), this material 'absence' is probably related to our inability to recognize the material culture of the period, a gap which is now being filled by recent and ongoing archaeological investigations (Bintliff 2012: 384–8; Vionis *et al.* 2009: 149–50; Vionis 2013a: 29–31). The number of Slav toponyms that survive in Boeotia is not necessarily a confirmation of violent intrusion in the region by incoming Slavs between the later sixth and late seventh century; it could, alternatively, hint at continuity of settlement, with the likely replacement of Greco-Roman with Slav ethnic place-names (Bintliff 2000: 42; Vionis 2013a: 30; 2013b: 112). The numbers of the local population living in the countryside must have declined, possibly without recovering, throughout the seventh and eighth centuries. Yet, even assuming that we accept the historical narrative about the effects of the well-documented Justinianic sixth-century plague, continuing into the eighth century, and the gradual settlement of incoming Slavs in the southern Balkans, one would have expected some reasonable surviving population numbers, at least in rural areas. Trombley (2000: 1005) argues that the Slav population of Boeotia would have never been large because Slavic tribal-names do not appear in the toponymy of central Greece to the same extent as in the Peloponnese and Thessaly. However, as successful mixed farmers in their lands of origin in Northern Europe (Malingoudis 1991; 1992), integration with local Byzantine farming communities would have been relatively easy for the Slavs, as we can see from the better-documented interactions between Byzantine Greek and Albanian populations in the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries AD in the same landscape.

As noted in Chapter 3, at the ancient city site and Late Antique bishopric of Thespiai, re-study of the systematically collected surface pottery from within the urban area has revealed low-density human activity in different parts of the site, not only in the core zones of late antique settlement and burial, but also in spots which will later form the centre of the later and clearer Middle Byzantine settlements that developed within the city's ancient boundaries. Although only 14 fragments of Early Medieval pottery have been recognized at the site, this material must be taken to indicate some settlement activity continuing in

the Late Antique town. Meanwhile, a carved piece of church architecture from the Late Antique *Kastro* of Thespiai, dated from the eighth to the early ninth centuries, provides further evidence for the continuation of domestic life within (as well as outside) the enclosure walls (Chapter 4, p. 149, 'Site 8'; Vionis 2013a: 30; 2017).

In the Tanagrike, the small fortified hilltop site of Kastri has been identified as a 'refuge' or successor settlement of the period (after the abandonment of the ancient city of Tanagra, 2 km to the north-east): the finds include a crudely built surrounding defensive wall and fragments of the so-called 'Slav' hand-made pottery. A different phenomenon has been observed at the ancient city-site of Hyettos, where surface ceramic evidence (both 'Slav' hand-made pottery and wheel-made vessels) points to a village community of the Byzantine Early Middle Ages, scattered between a cluster of small sites in the open country and close to the ancient town. In addition, the site of Askra in the Valley of the Muses, which flourished particularly between the fourth and seventh centuries, survived into the Middle Byzantine period as a small village-site. This community can be identified, through textual sources, with the settlement later called Zaratova, which gained an Orthodox bishop in the twelfth century, the name possibly indicating a presence of Slav-speakers there (Bintliff 2000: 41–4; 2012: 387–8; 2013b: 131; Vionis 2008: 33–4; 2013a: 30; 2013b: 111–13). Meanwhile, the fact that hand-made vessels of the 'Slav' tradition, with a flat base and flaring rim in coarse fabric, have been found in association with wheel-thrown vessels (such as amphorae and imported wares) at a number of sites, mainly in the Peloponnese but now in Boeotia too, could indicate the peaceful merging of local populations with incoming Slavs, creating Slavo-Hellenic communities through intermarriage (Avraméa 1997: 86; Bintliff 2001: 37–8; 2012: 385; Gregory 1993: 155; Vionis *et al.* 2009: 152–3; Vionis 2013a: 30).

In relation to evidence for Slav presence in central Greece, intensive field survey on the islets of Kouveli and Makronisos in the bay of Domvraina in the gulf of Corinth by Timothy Gregory (as well as elsewhere, in the Saronic gulf and close to the coasts of Boeotia, Attica and the Peloponnese) has revealed concentrations of surface pottery and extensive architectural remains recognisable as small late antique settlements: houses, a church, dock facilities and industrial/storage areas (Gregory 1980: 31–41; 1986: 16–21). Sinclair Hood's long-established view (1966: 165–71; 1970: 37–45), that such off-shore islets were used as refuge places by Greek populations in the course of the successive Slav invasions from the late sixth century on, has been challenged by firm evidence from these sites for the existence of flourishing *emporia* or 'ports of trade', as places where goods were collected, loaded and shipped in various destinations by 'open' communities of traders, rather than by small 'closed' groups of refugees between the sixth and late seventh centuries (Gregory 1984: 287–304; Kardulias *et al.* 1995: 3–21; Vionis 2013b: 113; 2017). However, normal open-air domestic activity at such sites is not clearly evidenced after the late seventh century, when they were usually replaced by less accessible often fortified coastal and inland establishments.

Considering that the 3rd *Notitia* for the Province of Hellas lists a total of 39 bishoprics, of which as many as seven sites in the province of Boeotia – namely Thebes, Hyettos, Chaironeia, Koroneia, Levadeia, Plataiai, and Thespiai – are attested as suffragan bishoprics of Athens in the eighth century (Darrouzés (ed.) 1981: 3, 43, 687–726), it is worth asking whether noticeable growth or decline of the number of bishoprics may be an indication for the growing or declining importance of local or regional settlements. Although references in the sources to bishoprics do not necessarily imply the survival and presence of a city or a site of urban character during the Byzantine Early Middle Ages and later, their appearance or reappearance in the eighth century can attest not only to a general political and military reorganization, with the foundation of fortresses by Constantine V (AD 741–775), but also the thrust to impose Imperial control along important routes and crossroads, in a period of administrative reorganization (Hendy 1985: 80–2; Kountoura 1997: 279–80, 285–6).

It is noteworthy that, while the admittedly limited archaeological record points to contraction in the nucleated and dispersed settlements in the provinces, focused on agrarian and other production, written sources such as the *Farmers' Law* provide important glimpses into a highly stratified society, with a growing class of free peasantry building up an agricultural and pastoral economy; and that the state and the Church were eager to re-impose their authority in a period of administrative reforms, through the so-called *themata* and the continuous assessment of existing and new bishoprics (Haldon 1997: 132–6; Wickham 2005: 633; Koder 2006: 163–5; Vionis 2017). Defensive measures, the continuous sight of the ruins of the Roman past and memory of the former status of those places, the presence of a bishop (even if resident in another centre), the evidence for elaborate churches, as well as industrial installations and evidence for commercial activity through regional trade networks: this is as far as we can get with the textual and material records available for Boeotia at this time.

The Middle Byzantine period (mid-ninth to early thirteenth centuries)

As the archaeology and the limited textual evidence confirm, the succeeding Middle Byzantine period saw significant growth and stability in Boeotia and other regions, with a further slow and steady demographic rise in urban centres and the countryside to come, mainly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Thebes played a central role in the economy of Boeotia, growing into a major regional capital with an industry of international importance and an agriculturally rich and well-populated agrarian territory in its lower and upper plains (Herrin 1975: 256; Dagron 2002: 401–4; Louvi-Kizi 2002: 631; Bintliff 2012: 394–5). As capital of the *Theme of Hellas*, probably from the mid-ninth century, Thebes was also a military and administrative centre. The evidence from the surviving ecclesiastical monuments (both monastic and parish churches) testifies to economic and cultural fluorescence, to imperial interest and the establishment of firm imperial control in central Greece. New churches were founded by local patrons, who seem to have been prominent officials of the Byzantine court, as attested by dedicatory inscriptions in the church of Saint Gregory the Theologian in Thebes, the monastery of Hosios Loukas or the church of the Dormition of Theotokos (Skripou) in Orchomenos (Oikonomides 1992: 245–55; Papalexandrou 1998: 18–24, 149).

The church of Saint Gregory in Thebes was built by *basilikos kandidatos* Basil in AD 872/73 during the reign of Basil I (AD 867–886), while a year later, in AD 873/74, Leo, *basilikos protospatharios* and *strategos* of the *Theme of Hellas*, erected the monastery of Theotokos Skripou in Orchomenos (Soteriou 1924; Pietro-Dominguez 2013: 174). Leo was obviously a wealthy landowner of the region, a member of the new elite of big landowners who decided to invest part of their income in the construction of churches, such as the church of Theotokos Skripou, as a symbolic expression of status or as a form of piety and desire for protection and prosperity (Soteriou 1931; Papalexandrou 1998; Pietro-Dominguez 2013; Vionis 2017). Close by, the remarkable classicizing church of Aghios Nikolaos sta Kampia, an outstation or *metochi* of the Hosios Loukas monastery, also marks the expansion of the local economy by wealthy lay and ecclestiastical founders (Bouras 2006: 132).

The church of the Theotokos in the Monastery of Hosios Loukas, in upland far west Boeotia, was constructed in the second half of the tenth century thanks to imperial and local patronage, and was to play a significant social and religious role for the Christian community of central Greece. This religious foundation was located on an important trade and pilgrimage route, within reach of the harbours on the Corinthian gulf and the major towns of Boeotia, becoming renowned for the healing miracles of the saint's relics (Connor 1992: 297). According to the *Vita* of Hosios Loukas (written by an anonymous monk in the third quarter of the tenth century), the Saint maintained close relations with high military officers, administrative officials and wealthy landowners of the *Theme of Hellas*; the *Vita* also informs us that Krinites, *strategos* of the *Theme of Hellas*, funded the construction of the church of the Theotokos already during the Saint's lifetime (Connor 1991: 108). Later, the construction and decoration of the monastery's *Catholicon* (erected in the early eleventh century) was funded by Theodore Leobachus, an imperial administrator and member of the Theban élite (Connor 1991: 51, 107, 120; 1992: 294). The architectural sophistication of this monastic complex and the lavishness of its mosaic decorative programme have been linked to a prophecy made by the Saint, relating to the re-capture of Crete from the Arabs under the Byzantine emperor. It is of great importance that the monastery of Hosios Loukas was associated not only with a renowned Saint, locally esteemed and with healing qualities, but also with the imperial victory on Crete, so crucial for the Empire in an era of political, military, naval and economic resurgence after a long period of insecurity and loss (McCormick 1986: 167; Connor 1992: 296).

Another important piece of prosopographical information about the lay population of Boeotia derives from the *typikon* of a Byzantine lay confraternity, a devotional and burial society founded in central Greece in the year AD 1048. Ioannes (monk and priest of Hagia Photeini), Soterichos (priest in the district of Copais), Gregorios Kalandos, and Georgios of Sagmata are names listed in the *typikon*, comprising prominent people who lived in the region surrounding Lake Copais. Gregorios Kalandos was a member of a land-owning Theban family, Ioannes was monk and priest of Hagia Photeini, a tenth-century church near to Thebes, Georgios of Sagmata must have been an inhabitant of the substantial settlement at the foot of the Sagmata mountain, close to the famous monastery of the same name (Nesbitt and Wiita 1975: 373–8). Meanwhile, the names of certain other prominent families possibly indicate their profession, such as Blatas (perhaps deriving from βλαττία, 'purple cloth of silk'), Chalkeus (smith), Sapoleros (soap maker), and Maloseiros (probably derived from the Slavic, meaning 'small cheese'). Evidence of this kind for settlement, landed property, and professions imply a mixed economy for Boeotia, based on agriculture and large estates, pastoralism, and industry (Vionis 2017).

The gradual revival of this period could potentially be traced through the conciliar lists of *Notitiae Episcopatuum*, which document the presence of metropolitan and suffragan sees in the region. Thebes seems to have emerged as an independent archbishopric after the Second Council of Nicaea in AD 787, like other ecclesiastically important regions in Greece, such as Thrace, Macedonia and the Peloponnese, even though it had no suffragan sees of its own (Darrouzés (ed.) 1981: *Notitia* 2, 79; Darrouzés 1975; Dunn 1995: 757). Thebes maintained its autocephalous status in the ninth century (Darrouzés (ed.) 1981: *Notitia* 7, 86), while reference to it as a *Metropolitan* in the late tenth century has been argued to suggest its promotion, by having gained its own suffragan sees (Darrouzés (ed.) 1981: *Notitia* 8, 63; Dunn 1995: 757–8).

Thebes apart, the 13th *Notitia* lists five suffragan bishoprics by the mid-twelfth century, namely Kastorion (ancient Thisbe), Zaratova (archaeologically recognized as the successor settlement to the town of Askra, also known locally today as 'Episkopi'), Kanala, Trichia and Platana (none of the last three being archaeologically associable with any known settlements in the region); while Diavleia and Koroneia are listed as suffragans of Athens (Darrouzés (ed.) 1981: *Notitia* 13, 449–50; 752–6; Vionis 2017). Archibald Dunn (1995: 759–60) provides a useful overview and analysis of the rise and fall of bishoprics in Middle Byzantine Boeotia, arguing that of these five listed suffragans of Thebes, Zaratova and Kastorion may precede the twelfth century. It is noteworthy that Tanagra disappears as a bishopric, possibly in the seventh or eighth century, and it is never listed as such again.

Assuming that the wealthiest and most populous bishopric, Thebes, never lost its dominance in Boeotia and functioned as the provincial capital and central market town of this region in Middle and Late Byzantine times, one might infer that lesser bishoprics should be rated as large and prosperous settlements, certainly not mere villages. But apparently not all of them were (Dunn 1995: 762). Intensive survey by the 'Ancient Cities of Boeotia Project' in and around the ancient city of Koroneia has identified the site of Middle Byzantine Koroneia, but its size would only rate it as a village. Similarly, earlier work by the Boeotia Project in the Valley of the Muses has identified Middle Byzantine Zaratova, the successor settlement of Late Antique Askra, but its size was certainly no larger than a village (Bintliff 2012: 387; Vionis 2017). It is highly likely that Zaratova had ecclesiastical control over most of the territory of ancient Thespiai, while the site of the ancient city of Thespiai itself survived as a village in Middle Byzantine times, inhabited by two communities clustered around two churches (Aghios Athanasios and the *Makri Ekklesia*), functioning as the parish churches of the settlements (see Chapter 3, p. 124, where it is estimated that some 300 people might have occupied these adjacent settlements). To conclude, 'we cannot regard the existence or foundation of new bishoprics as a straightforward sign of successful urbanization' (Dunn 1995: 764–5).

The *Cadaster* (or Land Register) *of Thebes*, dated shortly after the mid-eleventh century, demonstrates that agriculture was intensified during this period in Boeotia, while the number of land-owners was also rising (Svoronos 1959: 1–145; Avraméa 2005: 220). The Cadaster, however, simply lists the names of land-owners, without giving the size of peasant holdings (Harvey 1989: 59–76). Some 24 settlements, located between the town of Thebes and the eastern coast of Boeotia, are characterized as 'villages' in the Cadaster, while some of the land-owners mentioned are residents of Thebes or nearby Chalkis in Euboea, and their commercial enterprises were destined for those local markets (Harvey 1989: 228; Avraméa 2005: 220). This historical source gives clear signs of agricultural expansion, resulting in major population growth, re-settlement and rising productivity in the Boeotian countryside (Bintliff 2012: 388–95). The fertile lands had begun to act as a sought-after resource by the rising population, while production, mainly of wheat, was destined to meet the growing demand of major urban centres such as Constantinople (Dunn 1995: 770–1; Vionis 2008: 35; 2012: 35).

Despite the significant number of invasions in the region recorded by Byzantine authors, economic recovery seems to have developed steadily throughout the Middle Byzantine period. Symeon I of Bulgaria invaded Boeotia and Phocis with heavy forces in AD 918, devastating the land and claiming the payment of taxes (Oikonomides 1992: 252–3). Symeon's expansionist activities are narrated in the *Vita* of Hosios Loukas (Sofianos 1989: 182), which also records that the rural population abandoned its settlements and moved to fortified urban centres or other safer regions. Arethas of Caesarea (Bees 1928: 337; Bazaiou-Barabas 1989: 384) and the Chronicle of Galaxidi (Sathas 1865: 200–2) state that the city of Thebes was equally threatened by the Bulgars. The last significant invasion of Boeotia, recorded by Ioannes Skylitzes (Thurn (ed.) 1973: 330, 341–2; Wortley 2010: 313, 323–4), occurred in AD 996/97, when the Bulgarian Tsar Samuel swept from Thrace down to the Peloponnese through central mainland Greece, devastating Thessaly, Boeotia and Attica.

Kekaumenos' *Strategikon*, of the eleventh century, emphasizes the importance of landed property,

because 'one's own land is the most important source of income', while *Nomos Georgikos* informs us that the 'normal' population of the tenth century consists of farmers living in a village, not owners of large landed property who, in the case of Boeotia, are residents of Thebes and Chalkis (Koder 2006: 163). It has been argued that traditional agriculture and pastoralism in Boeotia were more important than the silk business, at least in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and that central Greece was supplying Constantinople with significant quantities of wheat down to the early fourteenth century, after the Bulgars had interrupted the flow of Thracian wheat to Constantinople (Dunn 1995: 770).

A parallel growth is also attested in regional towns, with Thebes occupying the most prominent position in the economy of central Greece. The city functioned as a large regional market, being located in the midst of a fertile area and on the land-route that linked Corinth with Thessaloniki (Gerolymatou 1997: 101–2; Jacoby 1991–92: 471). The dominance of Thebes can be seen in a series of treaties signed between Venetian merchants and the Byzantine Court in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In May 1072 two Venetian merchants appear to have agreed to confront the dangers and expenses of a commercial trip from Venice to Thebes; in August 1073 a similar agreement between Venetian merchants was reached for the same purpose (Gerolymatou 1997: 97–8). A treaty in the form of an imperial chrysobull was issued by Alexios I Komnenos in AD 1082, offering major trade privileges to Venice in exchange for military support against the Normans, who were invading Byzantine territory at the time. According to the treaty, Venetians were allowed to trade without customs duties in specific cities throughout the Empire, Thebes being listed amongst them (Gerolymatou 1997: 98–9; Jacoby 1991–92: 495). These privileges were renewed in AD 1126, 1147 and 1198, increasing Venetian involvement in Byzantine internal trade and leading gradually to Venetian acquisition of landed property and permanent settlement in centres like Thebes (Gerolymatou 1997: 99).

Silk industries had already developed at Constantinople and in the Byzantine provinces before the arrival of the Fourth Crusade in AD 1204. Important silk-producing centres were located in Thebes, Corinth, Patras, Euboea, and the island of Andros, all of which produced samite, a strong and glossy silk cloth in twill weave composed of six threads (Jacoby 2000: 22). Thebes was considered the main producer in twelfth-century western Byzantium of high quality silk textiles, dyed with murex purple from marine molluscs (Jacoby 1991–92; 2000). The large number of molluscs needed for the production of a small amount of dye (the purple colorant), the highly sophisticated procedure for preparing the colorant, and the actual dyeing process in Thebes rendered silk cloth a product of high cost, the production of which was subsidized by the emperor (Jacoby 1991–92: 455–8; 2000: 23; 2009a: 378–80; Muthesius 1995: 327–8).

The expansion of the silk industry in Thebes was supported by the abundance of water containing certain minerals (calcium and magnesium), important for the washing and dyeing process. Mulberry trees seem to have grown in the plains near the city, an area known locally as 'Morokampos' (Jacoby 1991–92; Koilakou 2004: 221–2). Evidence for the existence of the so-called rural 'longhouse' type in Boeotia, by the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries or even earlier at Harmena and Panakton (Gerstel *et al.* 2003: 154–5), may also imply its use for the household production of silk fibre (making use of the longer half of the house, sizable enough for silkworm farming). The sea around the port of Negroponte (Chalkis) functioned as a fishing area for the marine molluscs used for the well-known *porphyra*, the purple dye of the Theban silk industry (Koder and Hild 1976: 102–4; Koilakou 2004: 221–2; Dunn 2006: 53–4). The fact that purple fishers were operating also off the Aegean island of Gyaros, between Andros and Kea, some time after AD 1208, as suggested by the contemporary Michael Choniates, may indicate that silk thread was still being dyed with murex purple in Thebes, even after AD 1204 (Jacoby 2004: 210).

Byzantine textual sources, such as the poet John Tzetzes (AD 1110–1180) or Michael Choniates, writing as Metropolitan of Athens in AD 1183–85, refer to the skilful female weavers of low as well as high social rank of the Theban silk industry (Leone (ed.) 1972: 101–3, no 71; Lambrou (ed.) 1879–80: *Ep*. no. 50, lines 63–5; Setton 1944: 195–6; Jacoby 1991–92: 466–8). The appreciation of Theban silk fabrics beyond the Empire is revealed by Niketas Choniates, who documents the request for an annual grant of 40 pieces of Theban silk cloth, by Muhyi al-Din the Seljuk emir of Ikonion, from Emperor Alexius III Angelus in AD 1195 (Jacoby 1991–92: 467). It is noteworthy that after the Norman king Roger II of Sicily raided Thebes in AD 1147, he deported to Palermo a number of the most skilful silk workers, amongst them many Jews (Pertz (ed.) 1994: 83, lines 53–5; Pertz (ed.) 1989: 370, lines 29–32; Niketas: Van Dieten (ed.) 1975: 74, lines 45–9; Setton 1944: 195–6; Koder and Hild 1976: 270; Magdalino 1993: 51; Angold 1997: 200–1; Gerolymatou 1997: 105; Louvi-Kizi 2002: 631). According to the account of the Iberian Jewish traveller Benjamin of Tudela, who visited Thebes around 1160, the Theban silk industry quickly recovered after this event and flourished even

more (Adler (ed.) 1907: 16–17; Jacoby 1991–92: 473; 2004: 225; Angold 1997: 281–2; Louvi-Kizi 2002: 632).

Until the late twelfth century, Thebes remained the capital of the *Theme of Hellas*, as is attested in a letter of Michael Choniates to the Emperor Alexius III Angelos (Lambrou (ed.) 1879–80: 308 §3). Boeotia, however, began to suffer from the arbitrariness of local power and excessive taxation. A requirement of additional tax payments was not uncommon: Leo Sgouros, an independent *archon* of the north-eastern Peloponnese in the early thirteenth century, forced the population of central Greece to pay the so-called 'naval tax' in return for protection from pirate raids (Setton 1944: 192–3; Angold 1997: 310). Sgouros took advantage of the chaos caused by the Fourth Crusade to extend his authority into central Greece by capturing Thebes and devastating the Boeotian countryside (Setton 1944: 204–5; 1976: 22).

According to the schematic map drawn by the historian Alain Ducellier of the pattern of settlement and cultivation within a Middle Byzantine village-territory, based on documentary sources, a number of farms and hamlets were dependent on the main village of the region, while areas under crop cultivation, vineyards, and fruit and vegetable gardens surrounded each settlement (Ducellier 1986: 187–8; Lefort 2002: 236–7; Bintliff *et al.* 2007: 23–4; Vionis 2013a: 31–2). Village, hamlets and farms, close to water sources and interconnected though a network of roads and paths, formed an economically successful and distinctive autonomous entity, even though their inhabitants comprised almost exclusively tenants. The infield intensive cultivation also is very well reflected at the two Thespiai villages, where a wide spread of manuring finds litter their fields to the west (see Chapter 3, p. 128).

Despite the at times discouraging picture drawn by the historical narrative above, ceramic sherds recovered during the course of archaeological intensive survey in several parts of Greece have shown widespread signs of recovery in the Byzantine countryside between the eleventh and the early thirteenth centuries. Middle Byzantine settlements are well-attested in several regions of Boeotia with diagnostic surface pottery reaching its peak between the mid-twelfth and mid-thirteenth centuries. These new settlements, of various sizes, established across the countryside are interpreted as small nucleated hamlets and villages, located at regular intervals in a way reminiscent of the modern nucleated village pattern. The locations of these settlements, both lowland (non-defensive) and hill-top (defensive), usually concentrated around churches, which probably functioned as parish churches for each settlement (Vionis 2008: 35; 2013a: 31–2).

The Late Byzantine/Frankish era (early thirteenth to mid-fifteenth centuries)

The capture of Constantinople by the Latins of the Fourth Crusade and the subsequent distribution of Byzantine territory amongst those who had contributed to the Latin conquest, led to the incorporation of Boeotia into the Duchy of Athens. The *Partitio terrarium imperii Romaniae* between Venice and the Crusading knights was agreed in October 1204, according to which a quarter of the Empire was assigned to the Latin Emperor of Constantinople (Gregory 2005: 282). The Duchy of Athens and Thebes, along with the Kingdom of Thessalonica, the Principality of Achaea and the Duchy of the Archipelago, was one of the conquered territories divided by the Latin Emperor into larger or smaller vassal fiefs (Longnon 1969: 235–6; Tricht 2011: 160–1, 234–5). Boniface of Montferrat established himself as king of Thessaloniki, having seized Macedonia, Thessaly, Boeotia and Attica, while declaring himself lord of Athens and granting the administration of Boeotia and Attica to the Burgundian noble Otto de la Roche (Setton 1944: 204–5; Longnon 1969: 238; Lock 1995: 70–2).

Otto de la Roche shared the administration of Thebes, '*Domini Thebarum*', with his son Guy de la Roche from 1211 on. Guy's sister, Bonne, received the other half of Thebes as part of her dowry upon her marriage with the Flemish knight Bela of Saint Omer. It is worth noting that Bela's father, Nicholas I of Saint Omer, had been granted lands in Boeotia as one of the participants in the Fourth Crusade (Setton 1966: 388–9, 408; Jacoby 1999: 525–8). Bela's son, Nicholas II of Saint Omer, completed in 1287 the construction of the castle and palace of Thebes which, according to the Chronicle of the Morea, was decorated with frescoes depicting the conquest of the Holy Land during the First Crusade (Lurier 1964: 298; Kalopissi-Verti 2007: 3–5).

The social and cultural background which the Latins brought with them from their countries of origin is not to be ignored (Ellenblum 1998: 13). Thus, the rulers and the imported Frankish élite of the Duchy of Athens imposed the Western feudal system on to the territory they ruled, organizing in this manner the exploitation of an extensive rural landscape, establishing themselves in castles and towers in or near the long-established towns and villages of the Middle Byzantine period (Bintliff 2000: 44; Vionis 2008: 35–6). They divided the Boeotian countryside into a number of fiefs, given out to Latin nobles and minor lords for agricultural exploitation, as agriculture continued to constitute the economic base of the region during the Frankish period; meanwhile the remaining Greek

Archons gradually penetrated into the Latin feudal network (Bintliff 1996: 5–6; Jacoby 2001: 199; 2009b: 524; 2010: 187). Archaeological evidence from Boeotia suggests that the general prosperity noted during the Middle Byzantine era continued through the Frankish period, until the outbreak of the bubonic plague in the second half of the fourteenth century and the Ottoman conquest in the second half of the fifteenth (Bintliff 1996; 2000).

Western immigration into the Aegean increased, gradually but substantially, after 1204 (Jacoby 1999: 534, 537). Western knights in Thebes formed a well-defined social class, who established themselves in urban castles and towers in the countryside. These feudal towers in the Boeotian countryside, rather than forming parts of an organized defence network, functioned as control- and tax-collection points for dependent villages in their vicinity, or served as a fortified residence for the landlord himself (or his bailiff) and as an administrative and storage centre of the fief (Lock 1986; 1989; Bintliff 2000; Vionis 2008). The social structure of the period consisted of free Franks and a largely unfree peasant population, the *villani*, strictly dependent on their lords and tied to the land (Jacoby 1973: 889–90; 2009b: 524–5).

Despite Latin immigration and shifts in the administrative system, agricultural and industrial productivity continued to grow in the second half of the thirteenth and the first quarter of the fourteenth century. Thebes remained a major trading and silk-producing centre, with a strong element of Latin merchants and bankers. The presence of the Genoese in Thebes is attested only after the Latin conquest, when they were acting as entrepreneurs in the city, financing the activity of the silk workshops (Jacoby 2004: 223). The treaty signed between the Genoese consul Riccio di S. Donato and the lord of Athens Guy I de La Roche in 1240, for the free export of Theban silk textiles, reveals that Genoese merchants financed a number of local silk workshops producing cloth for them, and probably also ordered silk fabrics from other manufacturers (Jacoby 2000: 24). One can also detect an internal movement of population from the countryside into the city of Thebes, taking advantage of new opportunities provided by the industry and trade in silk (Setton 1976: 420; Jacoby 1999: 540; 2010: 188, 190).

Catholicism had never been consolidated in the Aegean, except in some of the Cycladic islands, despite the efforts of the Pope and the Frankish lords. It should be noted that the majority of Greek bishops deserted their sees, refusing to submit to papal authority, and were replaced by Latin bishops. In a letter addressed to Otto de la Roche by Pope Innocent III and dating to AD 1210, it is stated that a Latin priest should be appointed in any community which numbered more than 12 Latin residents. It seems, however, that the Franks did not require the local population to renounce the Orthodox faith, and this led to a commitment of the Orthodox clerics to the rural churches and the monasteries (Migne (ed.) 1851: XIII, Ep. xvi; Wolff 1948: 41; Jacoby 1999: 542). In the Duchy of Athens, Athens and Thebes were preserved as two ecclesiastical provinces, while the autocephalous archbishopric of Thebes lost three of its five sees, retaining only the bishops of Zaratova and Kastorion (Wolf 1948: 55–7; Setton 1966: 409; Lock 1995: 208). The bishops of Diavleia and Koroneia remained under the authority of the Archbishop of Athens.

Archaeological investigations in Thespiai confirm that the two Middle Byzantine communities identified in the eastern sector of the ancient city, known together as Erimokastro, continued to exist and indeed to grow into the Frankish period (Bintliff 2012: 388; in Chapter 3 (p. 127) it is estimated that the Middle Byzantine population may have doubled to some 600 inhabitants, matched with more intensive manuring in the two villages' inner landscape). The Middle Byzantine church, built on the foundations of an Early Christian basilica and marking one of the two Middle Byzantine settlements, was later accompanied by a large estate tower of the French monastic order of the Premonstratensians who acquired this settlement, according to a letter of Pope Innocent III and dated to 1212 (Bintliff *et al.* 2007: 181; Bintliff 2012: 431). The letter confirmed the donation of the village *Hermocastrum* on behalf of Nicholas I Saint Omer to the Premonstratensians and to the brothers of Saint Mary of Ponte Parvo in Brindisi. It seems that Premonstratensians founded a community in the village, which was abandoned shortly after its building (Migne (ed.) 1851: 591, XV, Ep. lxviii; Tsougarakis 2012: 268–70; Coureas 2015: 166). Similarly, in the micro-landscape of the Valley of the Muses, the Middle Byzantine settlement of Zaratova (one of the new eleventh- to twelfth-century bishoprics of Boeotia), was transferred some 500 m to the east in the early thirteenth century; a Frankish tower was built on a high crag and the settlement itself, larger than its Middle Byzantine predecessor, was established on the hillside below the tower (Vionis 2008: 35–6; Bintliff 2012: 421).

But a turning point for Latin Boeotia was to come in the battle between the allied forces of the Duchy of Athens and the Catalan Grand Company on 11 March 1311. The *Magna Societas Catalanorum*, a band of mercenaries from Spain, was founded by Roger de Flor in the early fourteenth century (Gregory 2005: 304). In AD 1303 Roger de Flor, married to the

Byzantine Emperor's niece Maria Asenina, had offered the Company's services to the Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos, in support of the Byzantine Empire against the Turkic threat in Asia Minor (Miller 1908: 214–15; Setton 1948: 2–5; 1966: 411; 1975: 167–9; Lock 1995: 104–6).

Gautier V de Brienne, the heir of the last Burgundian Duke of Athens, had hired the Catalan Grand Company to protect his interests against Anna of Epirus, the Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos and the Lord of Vlachia John II Doukas, and managed to annex the Duchy of Neopatras and parts of Thessaly in AD 1310. Gautier then attempted to expel the Catalan Company with a reward for their services; but the Company refused to give up the lands and strongholds which they had occupied, claiming the right to hold them as fiefs. In March 1311, Catalan and Aragonese troops joined battle against Gautier's strong force of French Knights in a battle known as 'battle of Halmyros' or 'the battle of Kephissos' (Goodenough (ed.) 1920–21: 577, II, no. ccxl; Miller 1908: 224–9; Lock 1995: 106–7; DeVries 1996: 58–65; Dourou-Eliopoulou 1999–2000: 87–8). This is more likely to have occurred at the first location, in Thessaly, than by the Boeotian Kephissos river, according to most specialists. The Catalans defeated the Frankish forces, seized the Duchy of Athens and Neopatras, and established a new Catalan state in the region. The cities of Attica and Boeotia suffered heavy damage, and it seems that many of the Latin inhabitants sought refuge in neighbouring Euboea (Setton 1966: 411; 1975: 171).

In order to secure protection for their domain, politically and diplomatically, the Catalans turned to the House of Aragon and King Frederick II of Sicily. Henceforward, the Catalan Grand Company was renamed *Felix Francorum exercitus in Romanie* (Fortunate Army of the Franks in Romania) with Thebes as the capital of the Duchy. Five municipalities, namely Athens, Thebes, Livadia, Siderokastron, and Neopatra were incorporated under the suzerainty of the Catalans. The Assizes and the Customs of Romania were replaced by the *Constitutions of Catalonia* and the *Customs of Barcelona*, while the Frankish baronage was replaced by the court of the Vicar General in Thebes (Setton 1948: 15–20).

The Catalans preserved the social structure inherited from the Franks. The local population was divided into free Greeks (with the *Archontes* amongst them) and the *villani* or unfree peasants. Some Greeks, however, who had been incorporated in the Frankish class of feudal lords, lost their social and economic benefits with the disappearance of the Frankish feudal hierarchy (Jacoby 2003: 95–8).

The rebellion of the marshal Roger de Lluria against the vicar general Pedro de Pou in 1362, the coalition between Roger de Lluria and the Anatolian Turks, and the war of the Catalans against Venice, all caused damage and resulted in further relocation of peasants to Negroponte (Euboea). It seems that Pietro Gradenigo, the Venetian *bailo* of Negroponte from 1362 to 1364, encouraged this re-settlement of Boeotian *villani* in Euboea. After the end of warfare in 1365, the Catalans demanded from the Venetian Senate the return of peasants (Lluch (ed.) 2001: 341–2, no. cclviii; Setton 1966: 417–18; Lock 1995: 125; Jacoby 2009b: 533).

But, some time around the middle of the fourteenth century, most of the Boeotian countryside became depopulated and deserted. The devastating effects of the Black Death, the continuous warfare between Byzantines, Franks and Ottomans, and successive raids by pirates on coastal Boeotia during the second half of this century were particularly felt by the Frankish Dukes of Thebes and Athens, who invited in Albanian semi-nomadic clans to resettle the deserted lands. The use of Albanian colonization, over much of central and southern Greece, was to be a practice repeated by the Ottomans after their conquest of Boeotia in 1460 (Lock 1995; Bintliff 1996; Kiel 1997).

The Catalans, however, survived in the Duchy of Athens until the attack of the Navarrese Company. The Navarrese (or 'White Company'), mercenaries from Navarre and Gascony, crossed the Morea, passed through Corinth and entered the Athenian Duchy. Nerio Acciajuoli, the Florentine lord of Corinth and conqueror of Megara in 1374, then enlisted the Navarrese Company, whom he permitted to pass through Corinth and Megara, encouraging them to attack Thebes (Setton 1960: 105, 111–12; 1975: 218).

In May or June of 1379, the Navarrese Company seized Thebes, forcing a massive exodus from Boeotia of the Frankish and Greek inhabitants of city and countryside, to seek refuge once again in Venetian Negroponte. In a letter to the doge of Venice, King Pedro IV expressed his gratitude to the Venetians of Euboea for the reception of his subjects, expressing his wish to have them repatriated as soon as Thebes would be once more under Catalan rule (Lluch (ed.) 2001: 486–7, no. cccxcvi; Lock 1995: 131).

On 7 July 1385, Nerio received the title of the 'Lord of Corinth and the Duchy of Athens and Neopatras' (Setton 1966: 419–23). Nerio annexed the lower city of Athens in 1386 and occupied the Acropolis on 2 May 1388. Meanwhile, the domination of the Navarrese Company was to last until the Ottoman conquest of central Greece, when Mehmed the Conqueror captured Thebes in 1456 and Athens in 1458

(Setton 1960: 112–13; 1966: 419–23; 1975: 218–19, 222; Jacoby 2009b: 533).

Despite the misfortunes, narrated by the textual sources, of the peasant populations throughout Frankish, Catalan, Navarrese and Florentine rule in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, settlement activity in Boeotia survived and reached its zenith in the thirteenth and first half of the fourteenth centuries, until its devastation by the bubonic plague. Under new political regimes and the supervision of minor feudal lords, peasants still continued to till the same land. The settlement system continued to revolve mainly around the villages and hamlets established already in the Middle Byzantine period, now marked by the construction of feudal towers, symbols of a new regime and status. As has been noted above, the Latins opened up new export avenues and maritime contacts, while the new regimes in most cases continued to favour agricultural intensification, industry and trade. Survey archaeology since the early 1990s has revealed a dense network of rural sites, fortifications and fortified structures, to be associated with increased population (Vionis 2014b: 318).

This pattern of settlement in the areas where Frankish control had been imposed, as revealed by excavation and survey archaeology, has an interesting story to tell, featuring, first, the formation of new settlements; secondly, the relocation and thirdly, the continued existence, of old ones. The first category is well represented by the fourteenth- to fifteenth-century village-site of Panakton, on the borders of Boeotia and Attica, where excavation revealed a short-lived settlement dependent on agricultural production, with the humble housing of the inhabitants spread below a hilltop crowned by a feudal tower, in the possession of a foreign landlord (Gerstel *et al.* 2003: 149; Vionis 2014b: 321–2). The second case can be exemplified by the site of 'VM4', or Palaiopanagia, the eventual successor settlement to Askra/Zaratova/Episkopi, on the upper slopes of a rocky hill in the Valley of the Muses, where the feudal nobility established itself in a tower not far from Middle Byzantine Zaratova (Lock 1986; 1996; 1997; Bintliff 2000; Vionis 2014b). The third case is illustrated by the results of the 'Ancient Cities of Boeotia Project' in the region of Tanagra, where an existing Middle Byzantine settlement, around the church of Agios Thomas of the same date, was taken over by an incoming feudal lord at the beginning of the thirteenth century: the church was transformed into a square feudal tower with chapel and the village community continued to till the surrounding land until the outbreak of the bubonic plague (Vionis 2008: 30; 2014b: 322). The site of Erimokastro/Thespiai also belongs to this third category of continuing Middle Byzantine settlements, much enlarged over its Middle Byzantine predecessor but with the later addition of a large estate tower, belonging to the French monastic order of the Premonstratensians who had acquired this settlement.



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.

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