



# Rural Settlements in Medieval Europe

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## The Archaeological Investigation of Deserted Medieval and Post-Medieval Villages in Greece

### Abstract

Since 1978 the Boeotia Archaeological Survey has discovered some 300 rural settlements and analysed three ancient city sites through surface study. The Medieval Village Project is a subproject which is focused on deserted Medieval and Postmedieval village sites, combining surface mapping and artefact collection with information from Byzantine, Frankish and Ottoman chronicles and tax-cadasters. This paper will present the various approaches that the Boeotia Project is currently taking to study rural communities in Medieval and Post-Medieval Boeotia. The accompanying ceramic analysis will be presented by Miss Joanita Vroom in her separate contribution to the Bruges Conference.

The traditional and primary source for studying the archaeology of Medieval and Post-Medieval Boeotia, a large agricultural province (Fig. 1) in Central Greece, has been the surviving monuments across the countryside, such as the Middle Byzantine church at Skripou (modern Orchomenos). A useful map and gazetteer of such monuments and of excavated medieval sites in the region has been published by Koder and Hild (1976) as Volume 1 *Hellas und Thessalia* of the Austrian Byzantine Atlas Project. In an early phase of our Medieval Boeotia Project our Frankish specialist Peter Lock published a study (1986) of the best-preserved Frankish towers of Boeotia; recently he has published the first modern textbook on Frankish Greece (1995). Figure 2 shows the location of the major pre-Ottoman medieval monuments in Boeotia together with medieval settlements (open circles) studied by the Boeotia Project or recorded in medieval archives.

Monuments that still lack both study and conservation include Post-Medieval water-mills, of which a group of three datable to the 16th century from documentary sources and surface finds has been recorded during our intensive field survey of the Valley of the Muses (Bintliff 1996b). Our project has also made a beginning with localised study of traditional domes-

tic housing, such as the ubiquitous early Modern ‘longhouse’ (*makrinari*) which our analysis of deserted villages at Rhadon (between Pyrgos and Pavlo, North Boeotia) and site VM4 (near Palaiopanagia, South-West Boeotia), together with oral history reports, suggests formed the typical rural dwelling from the 16th century at least in the region. Some of our earlier work (Fig. 3) on village houses has recently been published by Nancy Stedman in an edited volume on the archaeology of Medieval Greece (Lock & Sandars 1996), but Boeotia desperately needs a locally-organized project, perhaps through schools, to record traditional houses by photography, drawings and interviews before they are all demolished to make way for more spacious modern houses.

Secondly, we have a range of graphic sources, beginning with artistic representations such as an icon representing the townscape of Thebes (one of the two major towns of the region) at the turn of the 16th-17th centuries, and including photographs from the last century of local villages and their inhabitants – but also other regional personalities such as the notorious Dilessi bandits whose like made much of the rural areas of Boeotia insecure in the third quarter of the 19th century. Of especial importance for Boeotian village history are the numerous maps, often linked to the descriptions of both Western and Eastern Travellers, and commencing in the 17th century. One of the most helpful of these for tracing deserted villages is the *Atlas de la Grèce* of 1852, drawn up by the French Army, which marks both contemporary villages and the location of many abandoned villages.

A third source is that of official archives. Apart from state censuses of the Greek state from the late 19th century onwards, and the limited records of Byzantine and Frankish times for Boeotia, the most important archives are those of the Ottoman Empire. Our project Ottoman specialist Machiel Kiel (Kiel, in press) has provided us with the tax reports for some 200 villages in Boeotia, as well as for its towns of Thebes and Livadhia, from 1466-1687, together with fragments from the 18th century. I have been able to localize some 160 of these villages (Fig. 4), shown

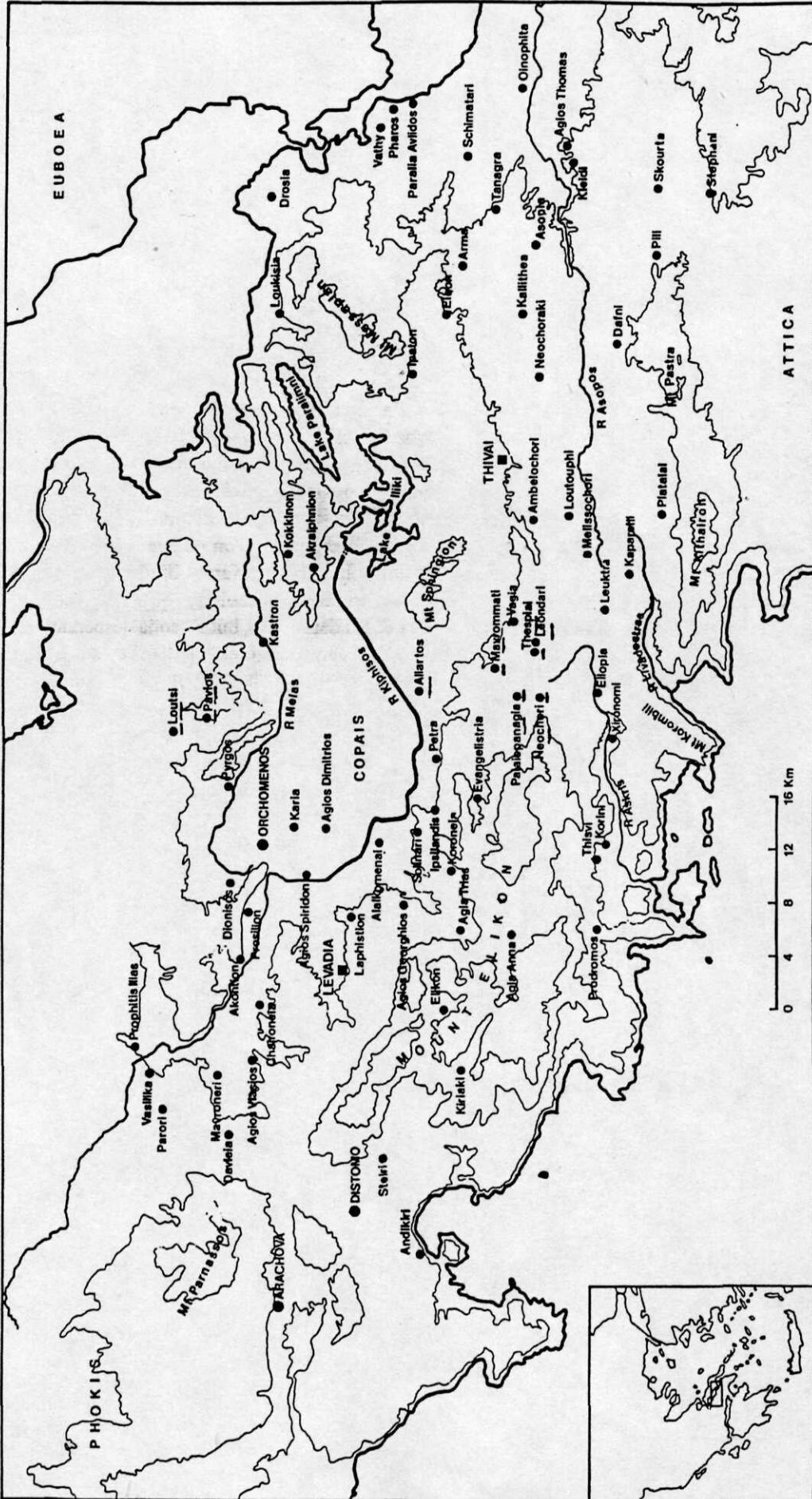


Fig. 1. - Location map of the modern province of Boeotia, Central Greece, with temporary towns and villages. Modern villages in South-West and North-West Boeotia mentioned in the text are underlined.

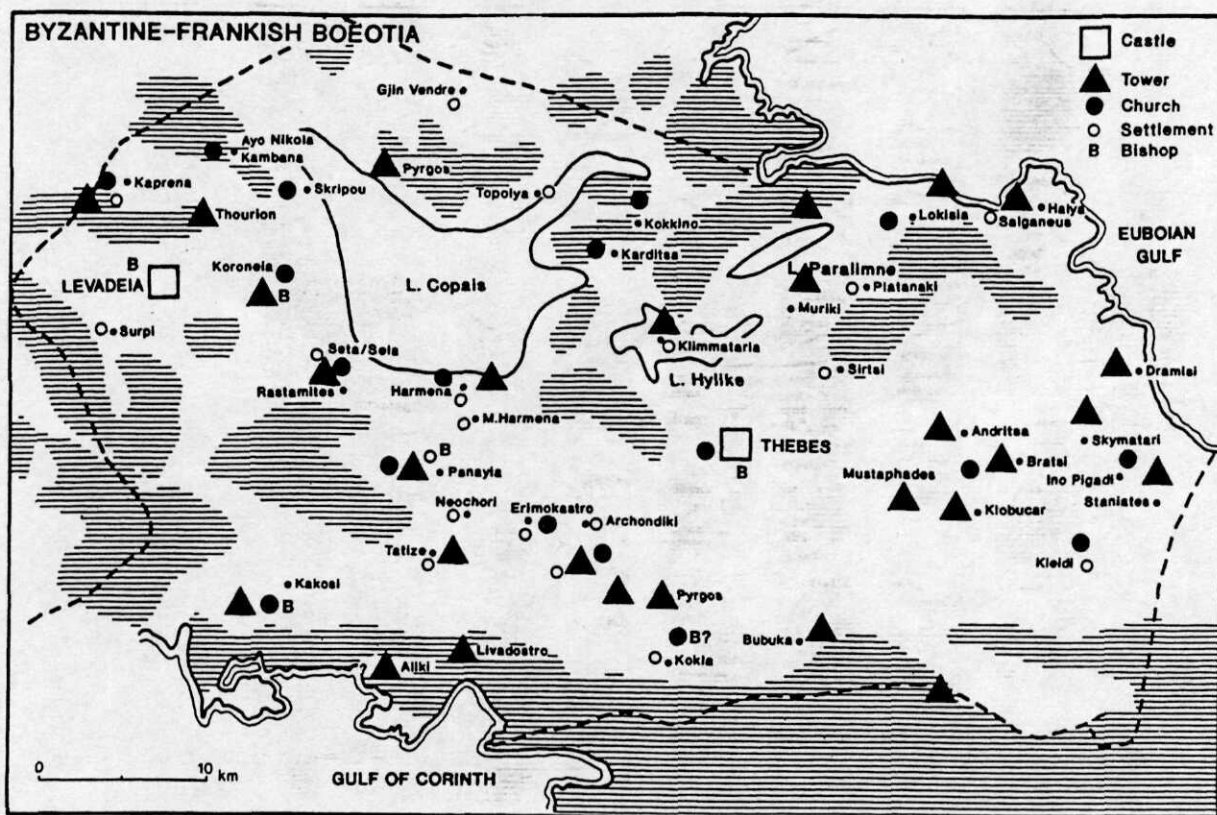


Fig. 2. - Distribution of the major pre-Ottoman medieval monuments in Boeotia, together with medieval settlements (circles) studied by the Boeotia Project or recorded in medieval archives.

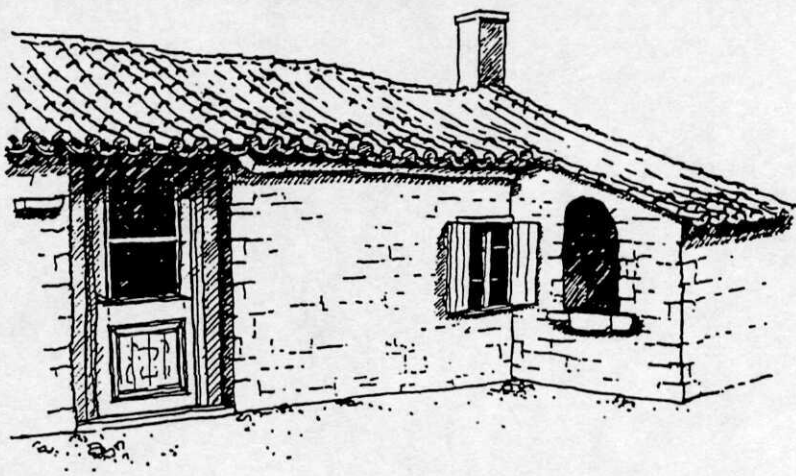
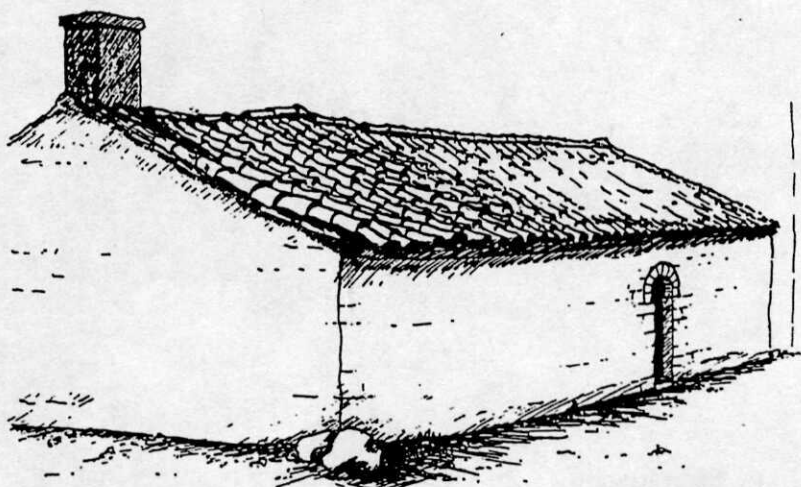


Fig. 3. - The traditional peasant house in post-medieval Boeotia: the Makrinari or long-house. From Stedman 1996.



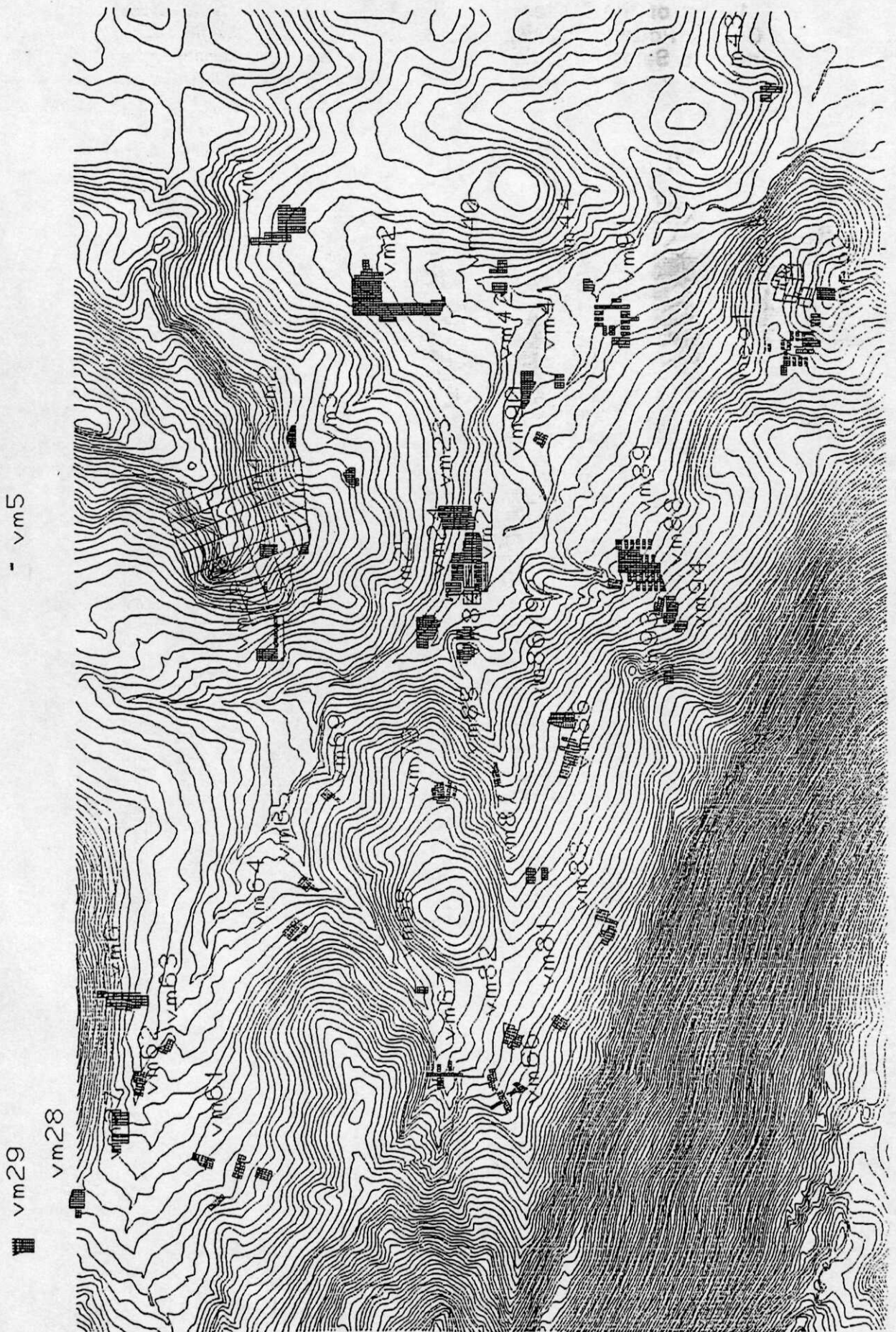


Fig. 6. - The Valley of the Muses (west of modern Palaiopanagia village, S.W. Boeotia), archaeological sites discovered through field survey identified by sample grids. The largest in north-centre of the Valley is the medieval village of Panagia/site VM4 (11 ha).

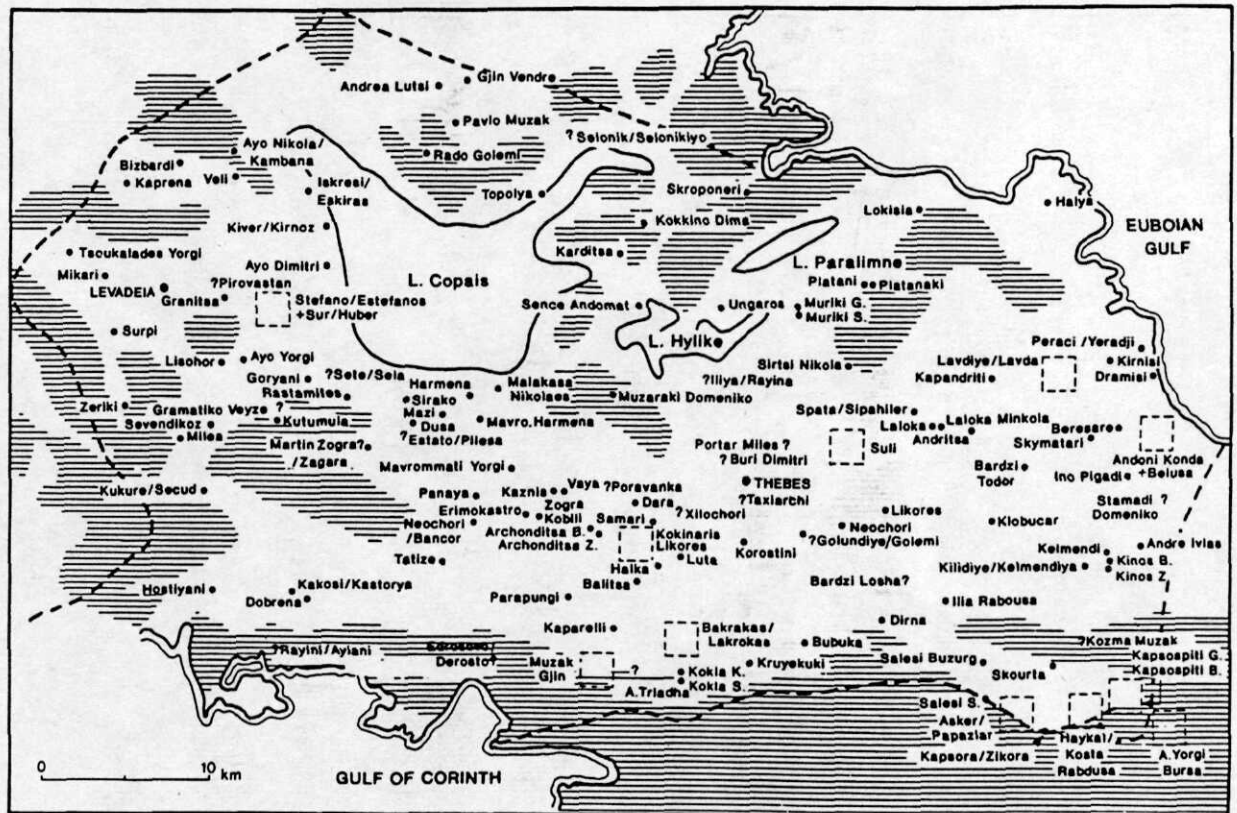


Fig. 4. - Hitherto-located villages listed in the Ottoman Imperial archive census lists for Boeotia, 1466-1687.

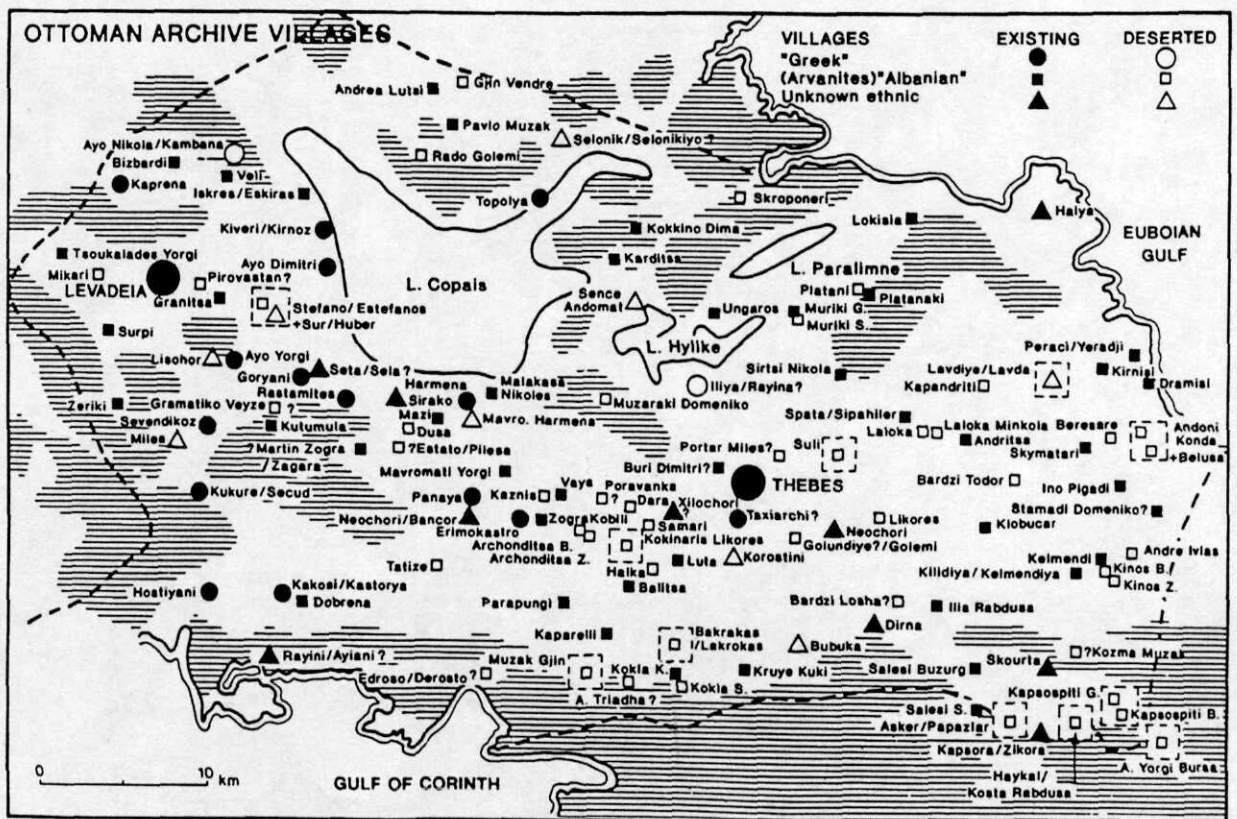


Fig. 5. - Locatable villages listed in the Ottoman census archives, showing current status (deserted, still occupied), and ethnicity in Early Ottoman records (Albanian, Greek, unknown). Urban Muslim population not shown.

### Valley of the Muses Overall Pottery Density and Site Sampling Grids

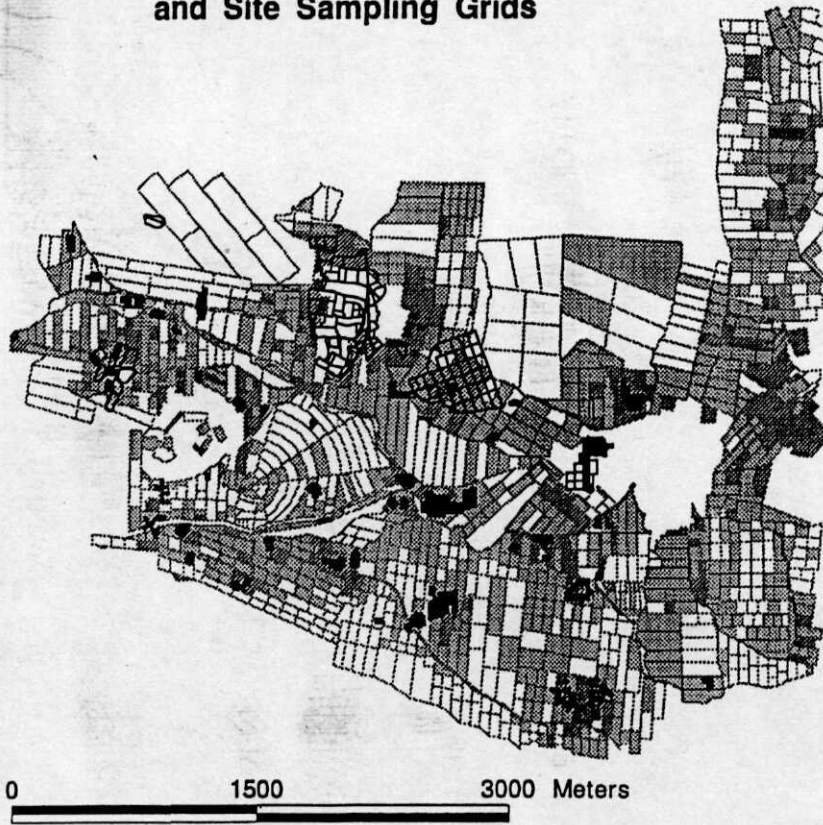


Fig. 7. - Overall pottery density by fieldwalking transect and identified sites (open or black grids) in the Valley of the Muses.



The shading scheme used to represent the overall pottery density ranges from a minimum white to a maximum grey

here; only half of these are still inhabited (Figure 5 shows the ethnicity in the Ottoman records, where known, and the villages still occupied today). Those that are deserted offer excellent opportunities for the study of the development of houses and of pottery assemblages, especially as often their date of foundation and desertion can be estimated approximately.

The fourth major approach is through field survey archaeology; the Boeotia Project has been carrying out surface survey since 1978 both in south-west Boeotia, from a base in the village of Mavrommati, and in the far north around the villages of Pavlo and Loutsi (Fig. 1) (Bintliff & Snodgrass 1988a & b; Bintliff 1991, 1995, 1996a, b, c). Such work involves teams walking every field at close intervals, counting and collecting pottery fragments found on the surface. Where concentrations of potsherds or freshly-ploughed up scatters are seen, a grid is placed across the area so that the site – whether farm, village, cemetery or sanctuary, can be measured for its size and date. After many square kilometres of countryside have been covered in this fashion as completely as possible, we can produce maps of past settlement and other kinds of site. In figure 6 we see the Valley of the Muses (west of Palaiopanagia, South-West Boeotia), with the archaeological sites identified through

their sample grids; one of the two largest is the medieval village of Panagia/ Site VM4 in the right upper centre of the picture (11 ha). The density of pottery across the entire surveyed landscape is shown by grey-scale shades in Figure 7 and mainly reflects agricultural manuring in Greco-Roman times.

Detailed study of particular periods such as the Early to Middle Byzantine era will begin by using maps of sites datable to this phase (cf. Figures 8 & 9, for the South-West survey block which includes the Valley of the Muses), which give an overview of the density and distribution of population. More information comes through intensive study of particular village or farm sites. Some of the key villages with plentiful surface ceramics and archival references are shown on Figure 2: Neochori, Harmena and Archontiki.

Some medieval and post-medieval settlements provide little for surface survey; the deserted village of Palaeomazi, for example (in the mountains between Palaiopanagia and Evangelistria in South-West Boeotia), is under pasture and shows almost no surface pottery. Only a road cutting allowed us to observe medieval occupation material. In contrast the dramatic drying of Lake Ilike in the centre of the province of Boeotia during the late 1980's and the

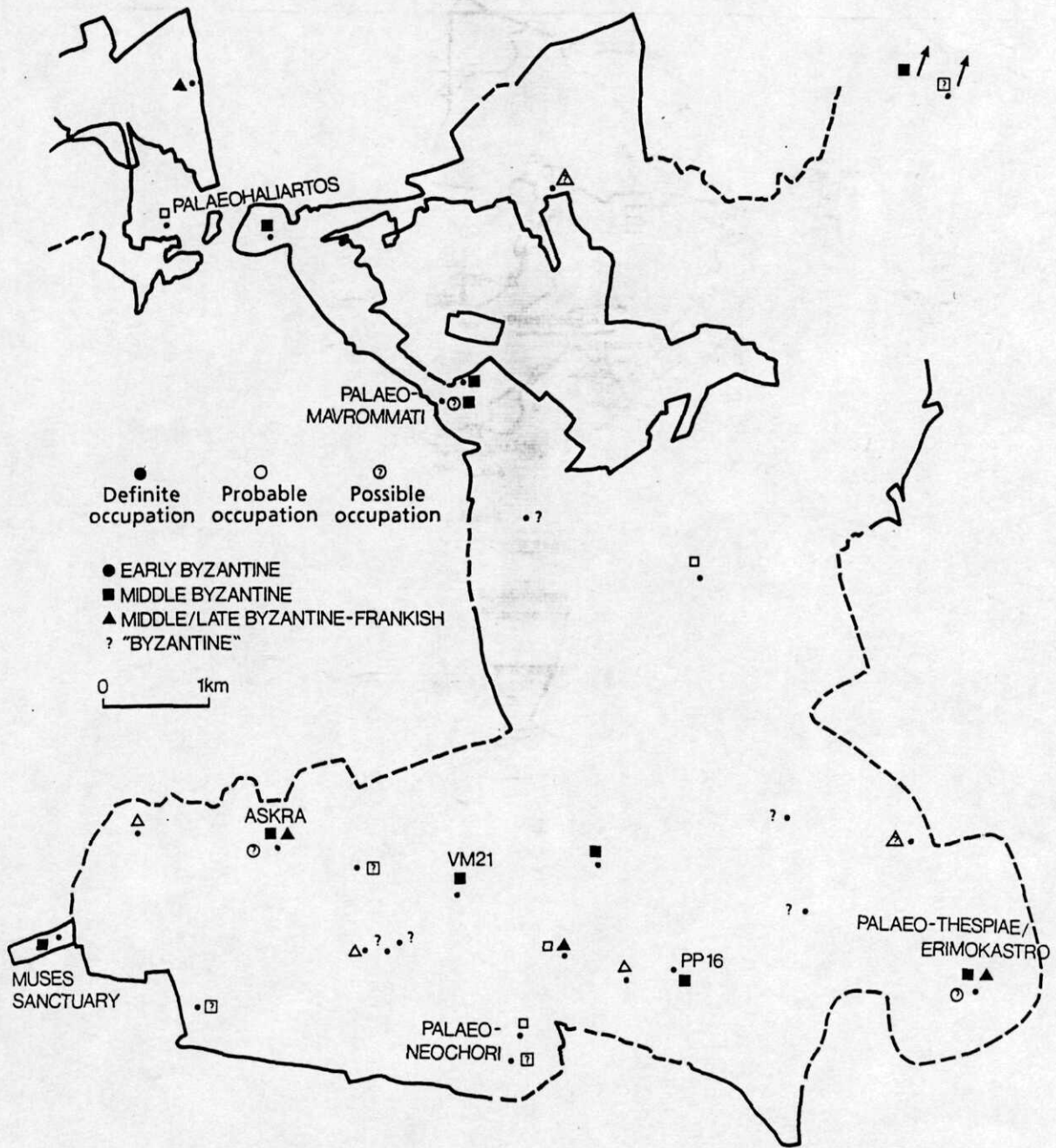


Fig. 8. - Provisional distribution of Early to Middle Byzantine, and Transitional Middle-Late Byzantine (Frankish) sites in the South-West Boeotia survey region.

early 1990's exposed a lost Frankish tower and surrounding settlement at Klimmataria (Fig. 1 & 2), where our project obtained a permit to plan and collect ceramics from a site as clean as an excavation. Usually however, medieval and later settlements show no surface traces beyond the occasional foundations of abandoned longhouses and the generally ubiquitous and abundant surface pottery.

The potential and significance of highly-intensive surface survey can be illustrated through our discovery some 500 m north of the ancient city of Hyettos, at the locality of Gjin Vendre (Fig. 2) near Pavlo, of

five discrete medieval and post-medieval settlement sites, each one showing a slightly different range of pottery; it is possible that the entire sequence here may cover most of the period from Early Byzantine to the late 19th century. It is the pottery of such deserted settlement sites that is the richest and least exploited area of Boeotian medieval history.

Finally I shall mention some of the major conclusions of the medieval to post-medieval project in Boeotia so far:



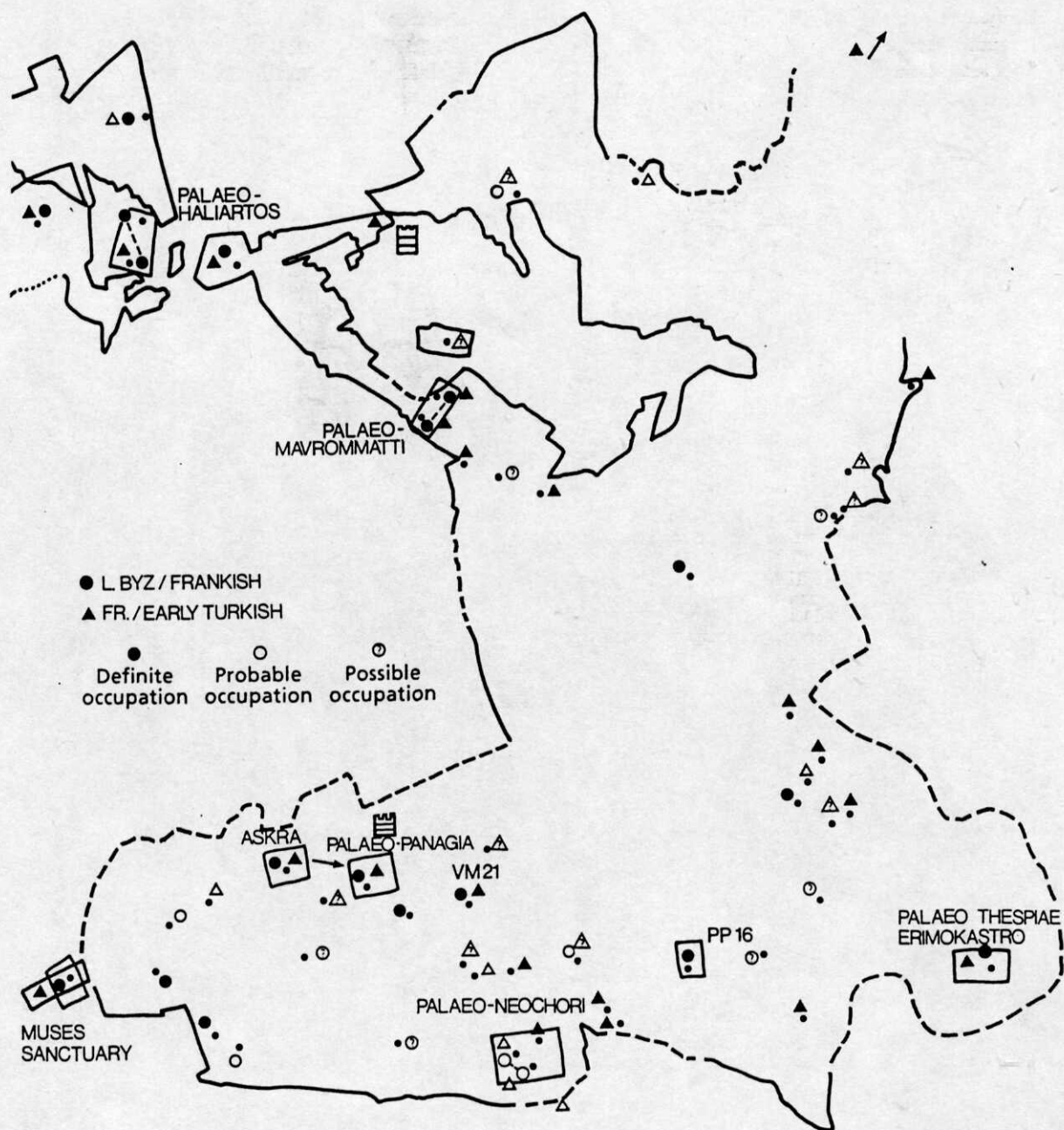


Fig. 9. - Provisional distribution of Late Byzantine (Frankish) and Early Turkish sites in the South-West Boeotia survey region.

1. The map of major Byzantine to Frankish sites for Boeotia as a whole (Fig. 2), and our detailed examination of the sequence in South-West Boeotia (Fig. 8) and at Gjin Vendre in the North, suggest that there was considerable continuity between Greco-Roman settlement patterns (Fig. 10: towns {triangles} and villages {circles} of ancient Boeotia) and those of the early to high middle ages. The colonisation of this landscape by Slavs in the 6th-7th centuries AD probably involved a merging with local populations, often on pre-existing settlement sites. Subsequent population growth through the Middle Byzantine and

Frankish eras, to the 13th century, remained largely within the ancient settlement network.

2. The 14th and early 15th centuries AD appear to have been a disastrous time for Boeotian settlements. Incessant warfare between the Franks, the Byzantines and the encroaching Ottoman state, together with the impact of the Black Death and climatic deterioration, led to the large scale abandonment of most of the countryside, and a nucleation of population into the two regional towns of Thebes and Livadhia and a limited number of large villages. This can be shown

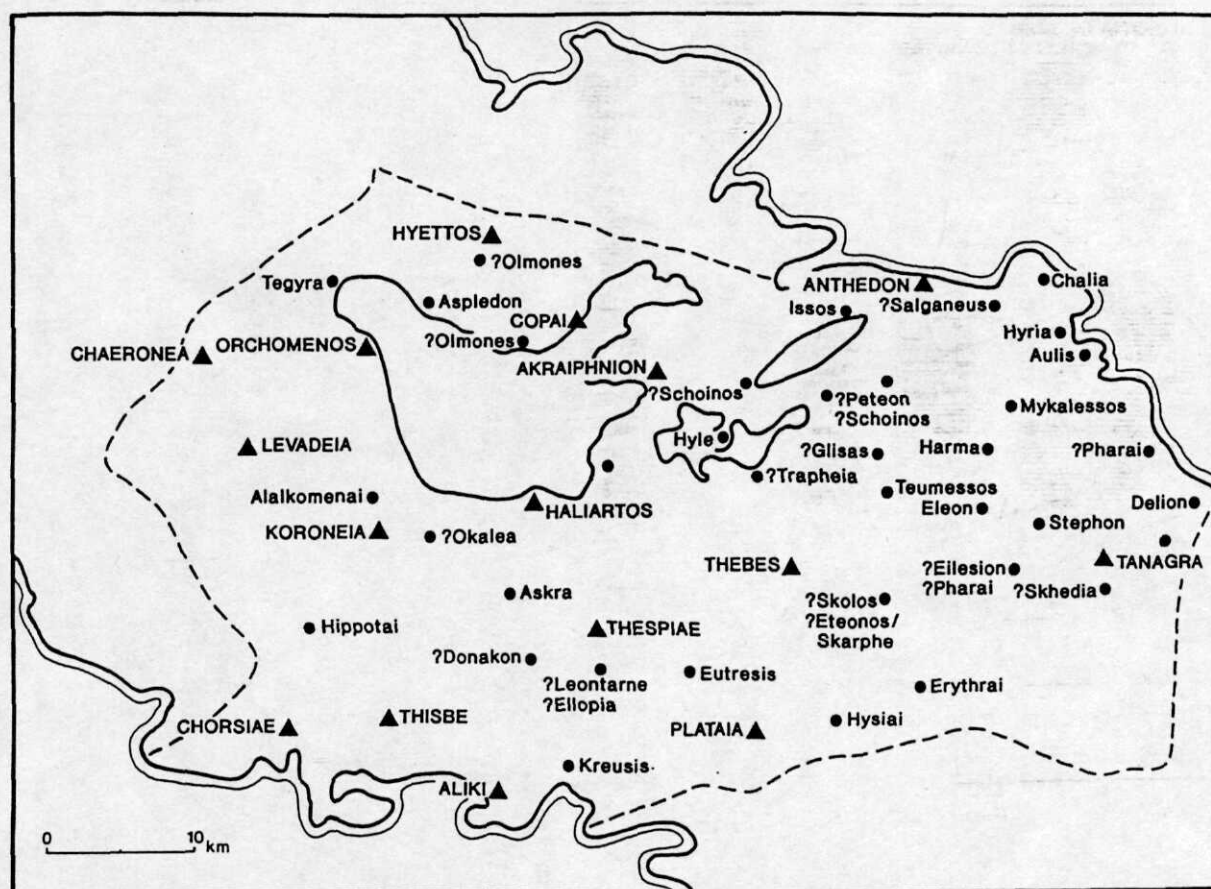


Fig. 10. - The distribution of towns (triangles) and villages (circles) in Classical Greek Boeotia.

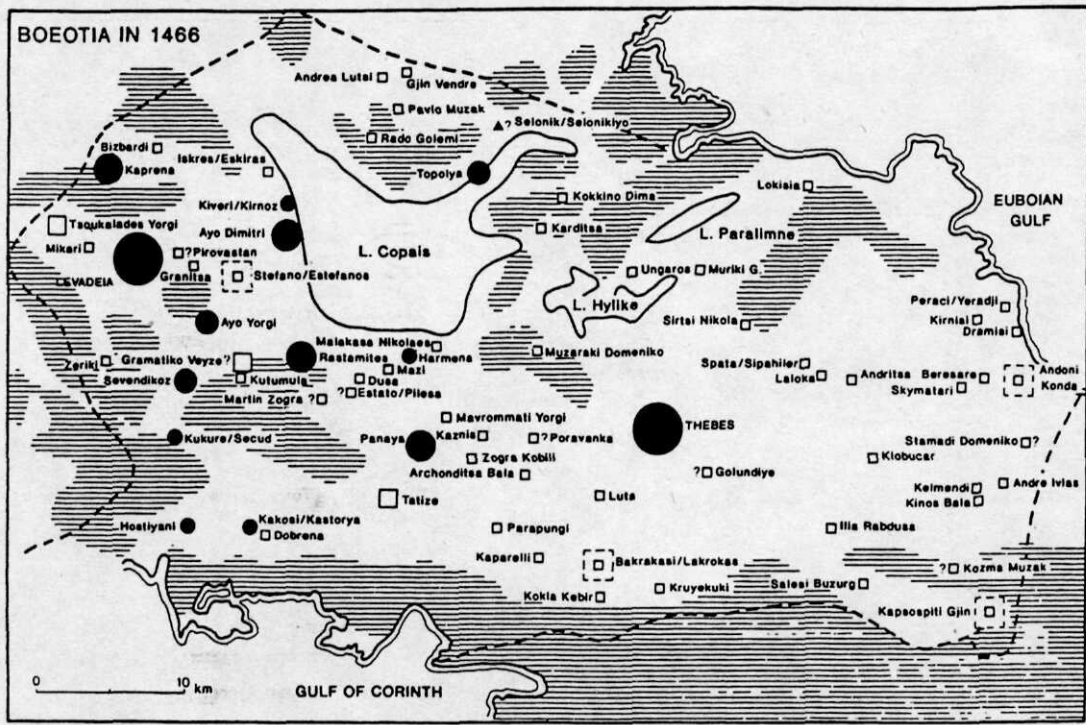
archaeologically through surface survey of several deserted villages but even more clearly from the first Ottoman census map preserved, that of 1466 (Fig. 11): the Greek villages are notable in their size and concentration. During the final half century of Frankish rule the Dukes of Athens attempted to recolonize the landscape through encouraging settlement by Albanian clans (Jochalas 1971); this was continued under the first Ottoman authorities; the tiny new foundations of Albanians seem generally to have been settled close to abandoned Byzantine-Frankish villages.

3. Under the *Pax Ottomanica* Boeotian populations and economy flourished. This can be shown not only in the census statistics (Figure 12 compared to Figure 11 evidences a generalized population boom up to 1570), but also in the surface archaeology of villages studied by the Project. Thus at the village of VM4/ Panayia in the Valley of the Muses, the dramatic expansion of the community between Frankish (Fig. 13) and Early Turkish (Fig. 14) times is clearly recorded from the spread of diagnostic surface ceramics, mirroring the Ottoman census statistics where

well over 1000 people are recorded for the village by the later 16th century.

4. The severe decline in Boeotia's fortunes during the troubled 17th century is likewise documented both at the province level through census records (Fig. 15, for 1687/8), and through the study of deserted village sites using surface ceramic distributions. Figure 16 shows the contraction, followed by abandonment, of the village of VM4/ Panayia which took place during the late 17th century.

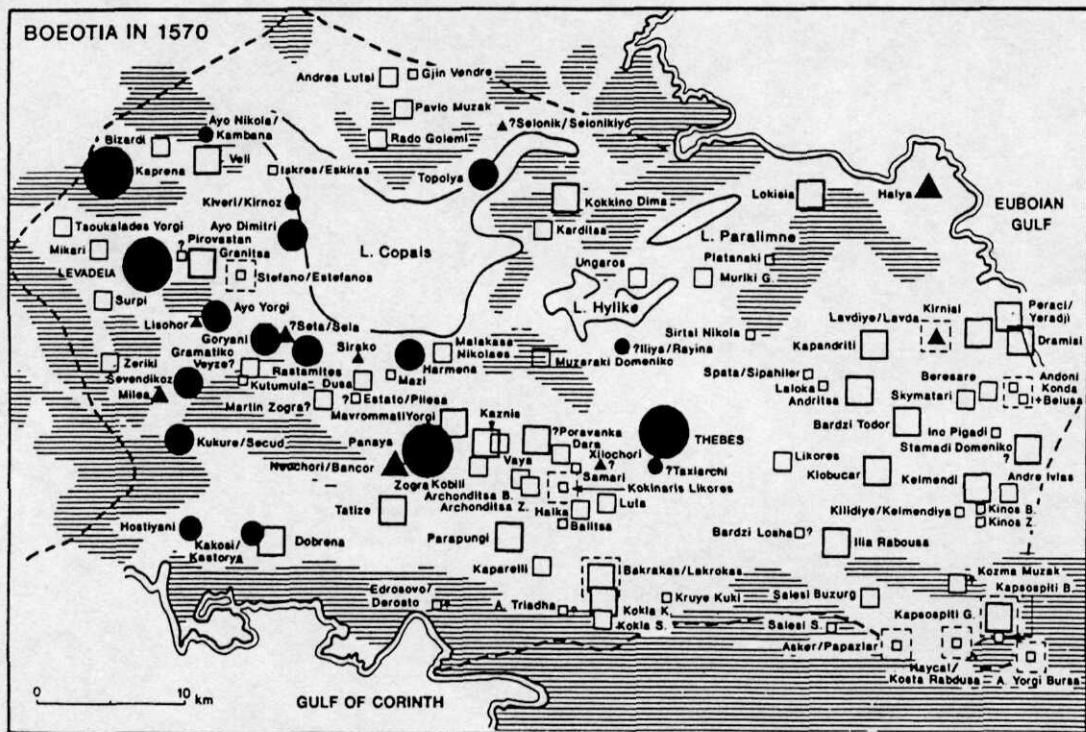
5. The richness of archive materials and the extraordinary abundance of surface ceramics of post-Roman date in Boeotia, together with the growing recognition of discrete assemblages of ceramics for each major phase of medieval and post-medieval times (the work of Professor John Hayes and Joanita Vroom), offer an unusual opportunity to bring together historic sources and field archaeology, so that the development of both landscapes and townscape in post-Roman Greece are becoming increasingly better understood. Figure 17 provides a comparison between demographic change for 16 Boeotian vil-



OTTOMAN ARCHIVE		1 - 30	31 - 50	51 - 134	135 - 199	200+	LEVADEIA	THEBES
"Albanian" village		□	□				Muslim 51	Greek 487
"Greek" village	FAMILIES	●	●	●	●	●	Greek 184	
Unknown ethnic		▲						

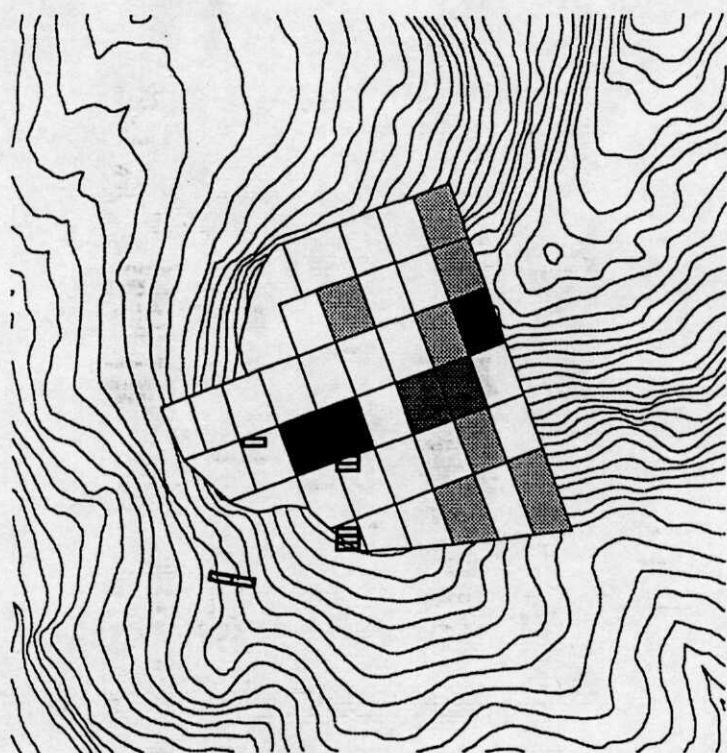
Fig. 11. - Population and ethnicity in Boeotia in 1466, after Ottoman census records.

Fig. 12. - Population and ethnicity in Boeotia in 1570, after Ottoman census records.



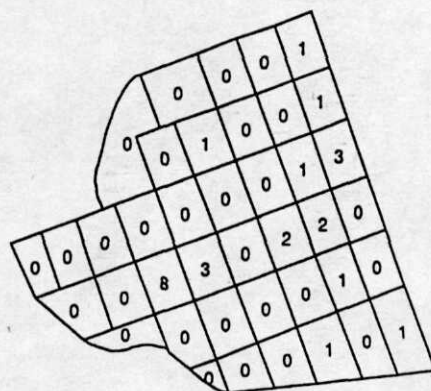
OTTOMAN ARCHIVE		1 - 30	31 - 50	51 - 134	135 - 199	200+	LEVADEIA	THEBES
"Albanian" village		□	□	□			Muslim 210	Greek 1497
"Greek" village	FAMILIES	●	●	●	●	●	Greek 542	
Unknown ethnic		▲	▲	▲				

### Site Vm4 (f)



0 100 200 300 400 500 600 Meters

Fig. 13. - The occupation surface of the deserted medieval village of VM4 in Frankish times, based on surface sherds.

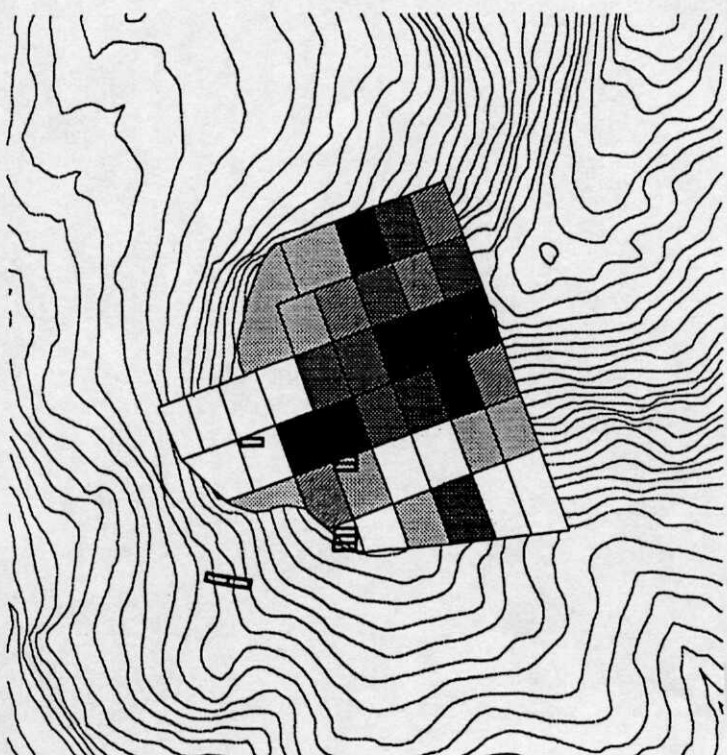


Grab Sample = 8 Sherds

N

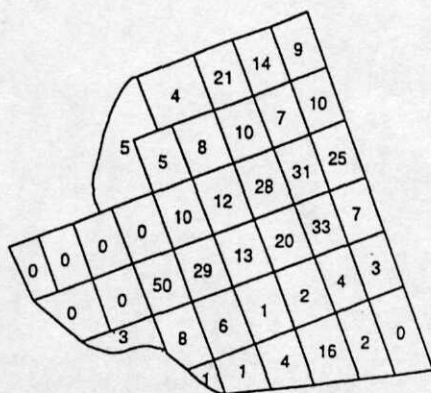


### Site Vm4 (lf-et)



0 100 200 300 400 500 600 Meters

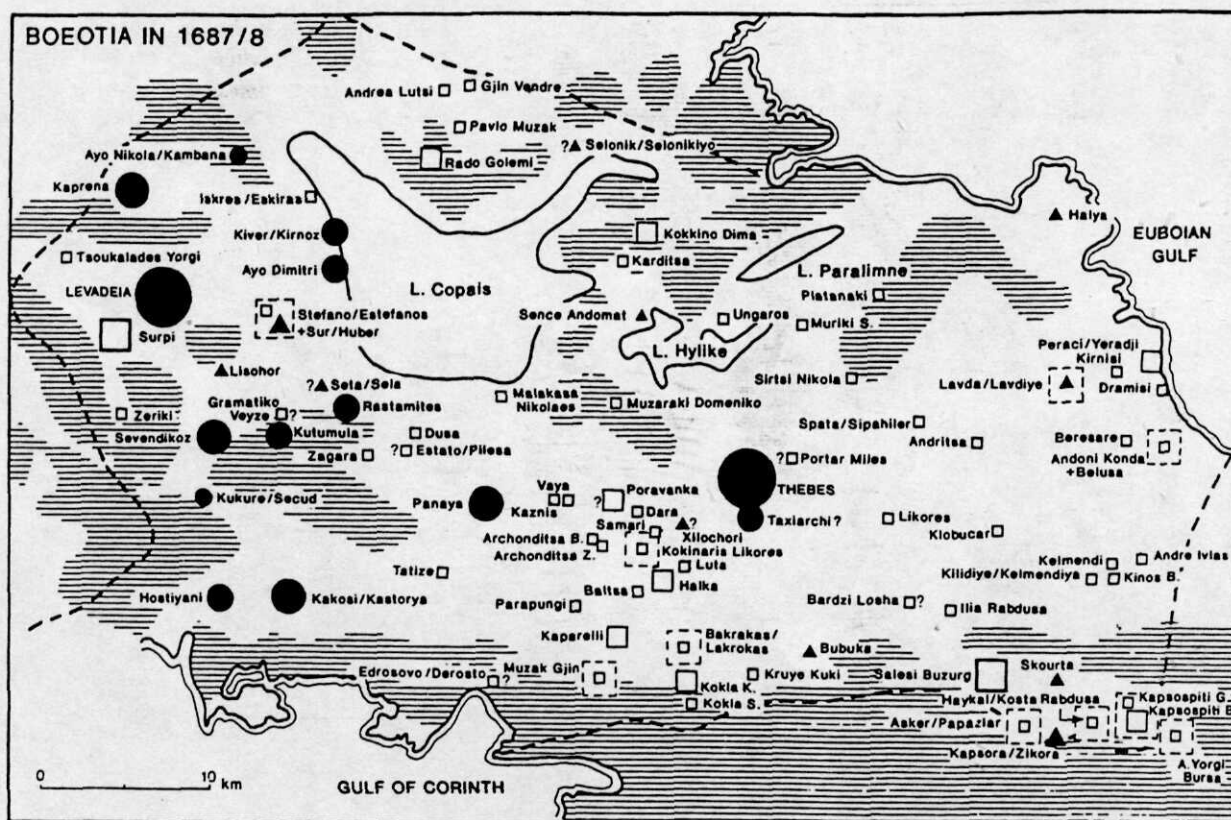
Fig. 14. - The occupation surface of the deserted medieval village of VM4 in Early Turkish times, based on surface sherds.



Grab Sample = 34 Sherds

N





OTTOMAN ARCHIVE	1 - 30	31 - 50	51 - 134	135 - 199	200+	LEVADEIA	THEBES
"Albanian" village	□	□	□			?	Jews 35
"Greek" village	●	●	●	●	●		Greek 654
Unknown ethnic	▲	▲					

Fig. 15. - Population and ethnicity in Boeotia in 1687-8, after Ottoman census records.

Site Vm4 (t)

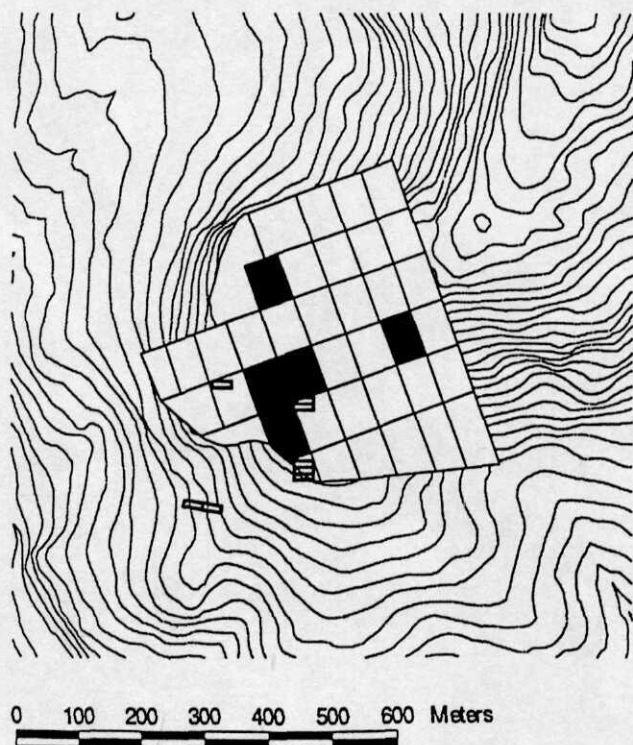
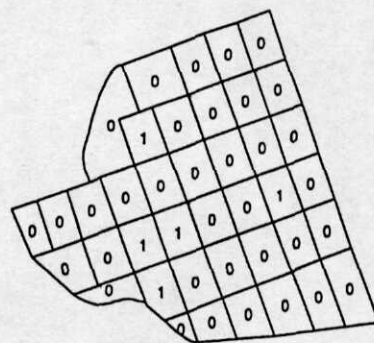
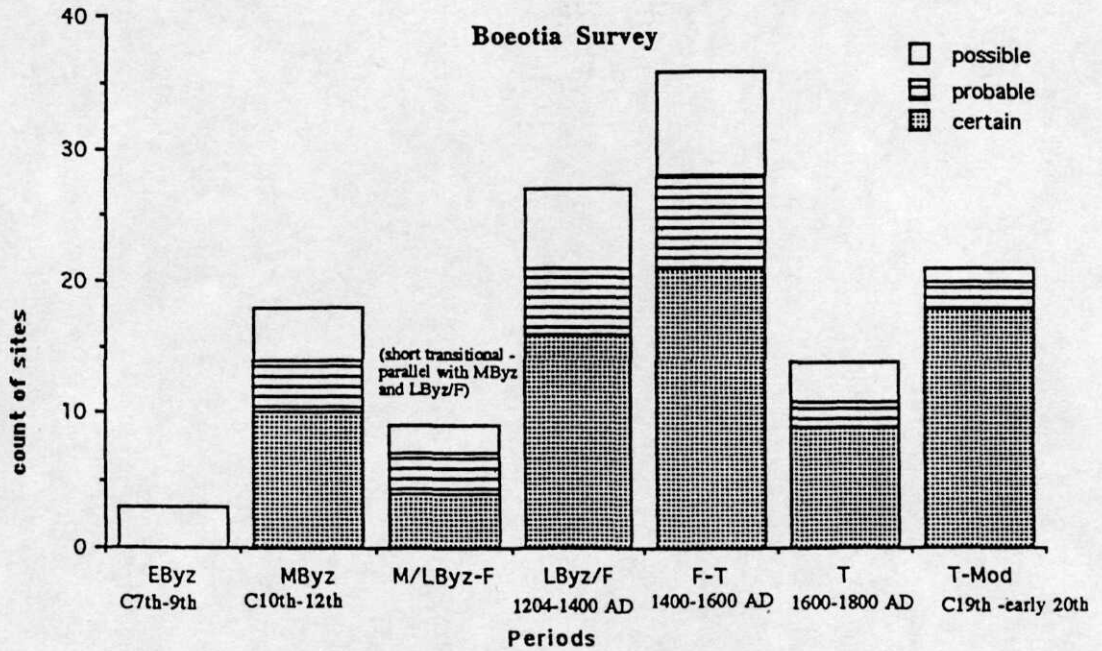
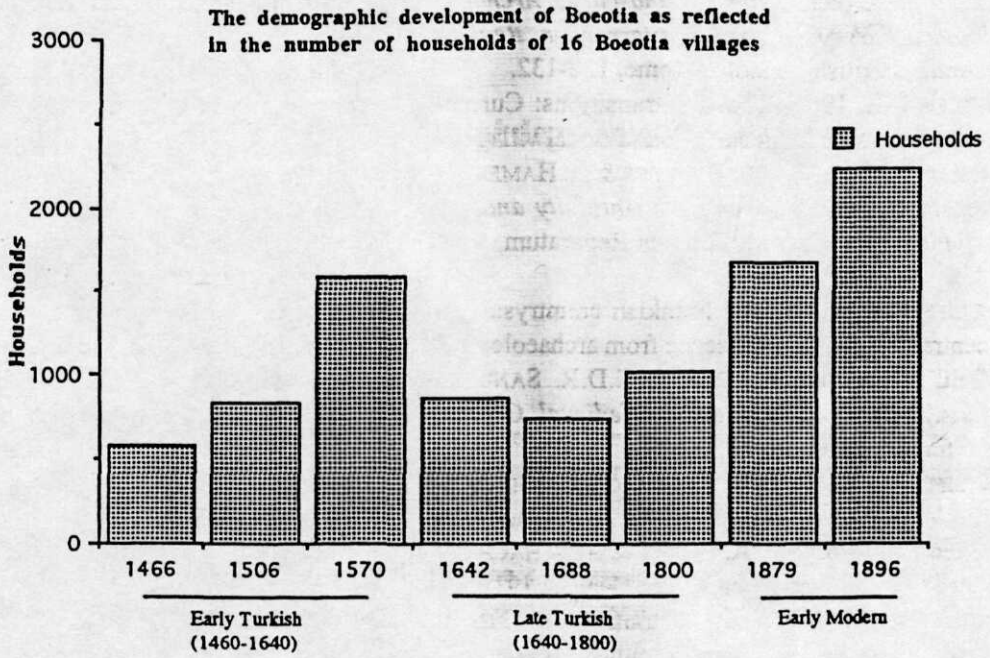


Fig. 16. - The occupation surface of the deserted medieval village of VM4 in Later Turkish times, based on surface sherds.



Grab Sample = 4 Sherds



Settlement trends of the Early Byzantine (EByz), Middle Byzantine (MByz), Late Byzantine/Frankish (LByz/F), Late Frankish-Early Turkish (F-T), Late Turkish (T), and Late Turkish-Early Modern Period (T-M)

Fig. 17. - The comparison between demographic change for 16 Boeotian villages from the 15<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries (based on research by Dr. M. Kiel) and the statistics of settlement numbers over time based on archaeological field survey in S.W.

lages from the 15th-19th centuries, based on Dr. Kiel's Ottoman archive research, and the statistics of settlement numbers over time based on the Project's surface field survey evidence (collated by Dr. K. Sbonias).

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