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THE LEIDEN-LJUBLJANA TANAGRA PROJECT: THE 2003 SEASON

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With the assistance of Emeri Farinetti, Jeroen Poblome, Kalliope Sarri, Kostas Sbonias, Bozidar Slapsak, Vladimir Stissi, and Athanasios Vionis

This Project is co-directed by John Bintliff (Leiden) and Bozidar Slapsak (Ljublana), whilst the Assistant Director is Kostas Sbonias (University of Corfu). The ceramic analysis is carried out by Kalliope Sarri (Athens) for prehistory, Vladimir Stissi (Amsterdam) for Geometric to Hellenistic, Jeroen Poblome (Leuven) for Roman, and Athanasios Vionis (Leiden) for Medieval to Ottoman pottery. The computer database and GIS manipulation of our results are in the hands of Emeri Farinetti (Leiden). The student participants came in 2003 from Leiden and Ljubljana. As usual we had outstanding assistance from the Ephor of Classical Antiquities Vassilis Aravantinos, whilst our accommodation was provided by Bishop Hieronymus of Livadheia and his assistant Mr. George Kopanyas. Field geophysical research was carried out by Branko Music and his team from Ljubljana. Albert Schachter is the Project's ancient historian.[1]

In 2003 the archaeological and architectural parts of the Project team spent the month of August in the field, whilst the geophysics was carried out in shorter Spring and Autumn seasons. The Roman ceramic team also worked on the finds during the same non-summer periods. Apart from the continuing analysis of the ceramics from this and earlier seasons, the work in 2003 had several aims. Firstly, the Geoprospection team was to complete as much as possible of its programme to study the entire, more than 30-hectare, surface of ancient Tanagra City within its late Classical wall-circuit, primarily deploying electrical resistivity and magnetometry, but with localised use of georadar. By the end of the autumn season this goal had almost been accomplished (plate I).

[1] See his article in this issue of *Pharos*, pp. 45-74. For previous preliminary reports see Bintliff & Farinetti *et al.* 2000, Bintliff & Evelpidou *et al.* 2001 and Bintliff & Farinetti *et al.* (*BCH* in press).

Spectacular results are now available for the exact delineation of the street plan and insula layout of the Classical-Hellenistic town, clarifying and in some respects modifying the excellent previous work on these aspects by Duane Roller in the 1970s and 1980s.[2] Major monuments of Greek and Roman times are being identified, and changes to the city during Roman Imperial to Late Antique times are being carefully unravelled.

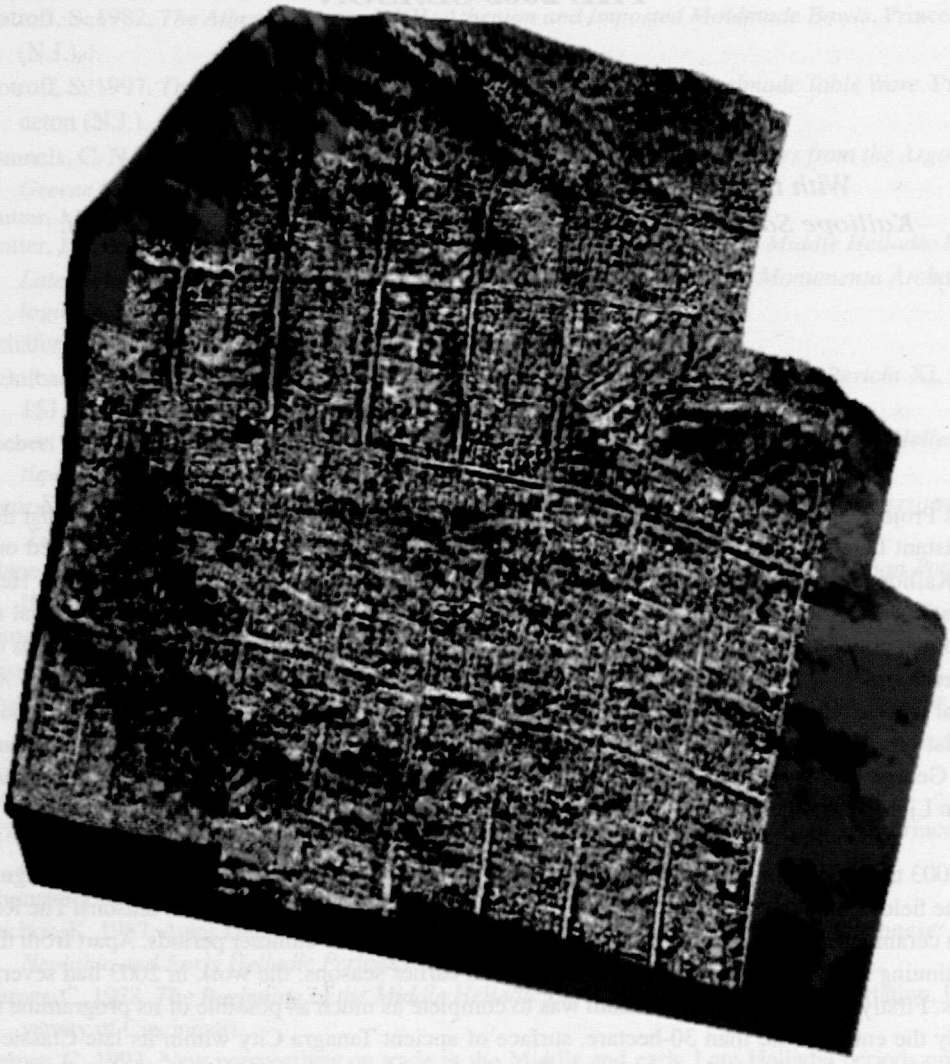

Plate I. *Tanagra: results of the geophysical and topographical survey*

[2] cf. Roller 1987.

Naturally the detailed image provided by subsurface geoprospection is essentially the accumulation of all building changes from the earliest historic town to its end sometime in the 6th-7th century AD, but it is possible to model the dominant town plan which Roller argued to have been set out around the 4th century BC, and then highlight what appear to be subsequent modifications. In one case, for example, a Greek housing block seems by Late Antiquity to have become a single large mansion and a row of street-shops. The Greek agora was dramatically altered by the erection of a giant Early Christian basilican church (the cathedral?) over part of its open space, and on an entirely different alignment to the pagan city-centre structures (incidentally Bozidar Slapsak now believes the ancient agora lies significantly further to the west than where Duane Roller suggested). Analysis of the complex architectural plans is only just beginning, but promises to offer new tools to archaeologists who are faced with long-lived monumental sites where they are not allowed, or do not have the time or desire, to carry out major urban excavations. Tanagra, as a protected monument, will not in the conceivable future – barring major illegal activity there – be open to excavation.

Nonetheless co-director Bozidar Slapsak has been developing a complementary field methodology – surface architectural microrecording – to aid the Geoprospection team in understanding how the Greek town changed through Roman times to its final state when town life ceased in Late Antiquity. The site surface, covered with low scrub, is cleaned mechanically, then the visible walls are planned and photographed in great detail. This study, first applied in the 2003 season, has already answered one of the first mysteries which Duane Roller's studies had created: how could it be that the dominant surface architectural traces in a large Late Roman town were the street lines, insulae and house-walls of the late Classical Greek city? In the small sector of the town so far investigated

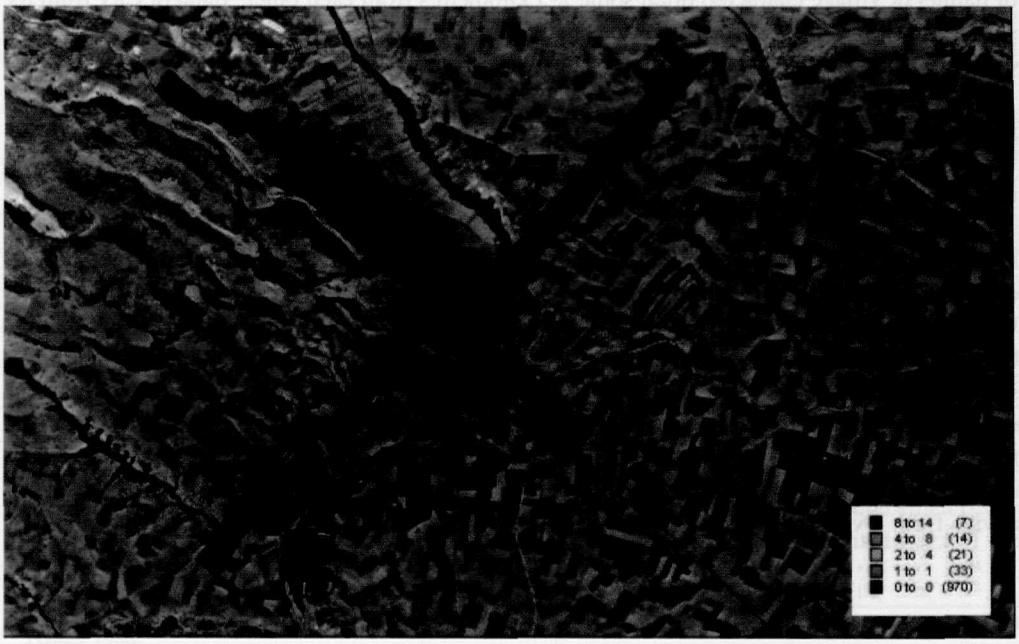

Plate II. *Prehistoric pottery densities 2000-2003*

by Bozidar, all walls appear to have been rebuilt in post-Greek times using a mixture of building pieces of earlier date and new building material, but usually on the same alignments and respecting the older major divisions of the city. As this work progresses, we hope it will show whether parts of the Classical town went out of use in Roman times, and also point to new functions of space, for example whether the intramural gymnasium and other monuments were reassigned new roles in Late Antiquity, such as for domestic housing. The combined geoprospection and surface architectural analysis will also greatly assist the interpretation of the plotted dated surface pottery over the city surface – the recording and collecting stage of this was finished already in 2002 – where we very much wish to know if Tanagra city was reduced in size in Late Hellenistic and Early Roman to Late Roman times in comparison to its Classical extent (as we have shown in the older Boeotia Project studies at the cities of Haliartos, Thespiae and Hyettos[3]).

Outside of the city, the work in 2003 had a number of aims, each associated with a particular period of occupation in the countryside. Let us begin with Prehistory. In 2002 we had discovered that the extremely vestigial type of small rural site of Neolithic and Bronze Age date demonstrated for the Thespiae countryside and discussed in a provocative study in the *JMA* in 1999[4], was also detectable through similar micro-landscape fieldwork in the Tanagra hinterland. This result was announced again in *JMA* in late 2002[5] where it gave rise to further debate. What seemed clear was that two kinds of settlement and land use could be identified, both around Tanagra and Thespiae. Associated with the presentday stream banks we could discover a series of small rural occupation sites, which were essentially of Neolithic age, whilst in the wider terrain of the interfluves – all the land between streams – other small sites were more likely to be of Bronze Age date. At regular intervals in the Thespiae region our older Boeotia Project had found small nucleated settlements of hamlet or village character, often some 2-3 kilometres from each other. Tanagra City from its surface finds was known from our intensive survey to have been one such village, in all periods of farming prehistory, lying not on but close above the river Laris.

In 2003 at the instigation of Kostas Sbonias, the rural field survey team, under his and John Bintliff's direction, carried out fieldwalking along the banks of the river Asopus and its tributaries upstream from Tanagra city (see plate II, in SW). We had not been sure if the prehistoric small farming sites found on small streams feeding into the Asopus in 2002, would also occur on larger tributaries and beside the main river, but we were surprised to find that it did, and indeed often formed a near-continuous occupation surface along the modern river edge of the floodplain. Understanding this location however was problematic. Both the sites found in 2002 beside tiny but still-perennial streams and the new, 2003 prehistoric occupation sites found by the larger streams and the Asopos river faced onto a deeply-incised, gravely bed hardly amenable to past cultivation. In Neolithic times, the absence of the plough till the final phase of that era meant that farmers favoured moist ground for their hand-based, hoe agriculture, and the location of our sites seemed suitable except for the absence of cultivable sediment along the watercourses. However advice from a visiting geomorphologist, Renato Sebastiani, immediately clarified the situation:

[3] cf. Bintliff & Snodgrass 1988.
[4] Bintliff, Howard & Snodgrass, 1999.
[5] Bintliff *et al.* 2002.

the occupation traces were all that was left, the outer rim in fact, of a broad alluvial terrace which had in prehistoric times stretched right across these streams and rivers and was highly fertile. Subsequent stream incision had removed all but the highest level of this terrace, and our ability to find these traces was being helped by the final stages of removal of the terrace, where the farmers had dwelt but whose prime farming land had lain on the lost high-level floodplain.

Clearly early farmers were very active along all the permanent streams and rivers of Boeotia, and we must probably imagine that the almost continuous occupation layer we could find running along the sides of these watercourses represents centuries if not millennia of horizontally-shifting small family settlements. In the final Neolithic era and through the Bronze Age, the arrival of the traction plough meant that farmers could also cultivate, through rainfed farming, the much larger expanses of fertile land away from the rivers, and this is a time when similar small sites are found in such non-riverine locations, although the attractions of the alluvial valley land would have remained until it began to be washed away. When the latter process became critical is a matter for our further investigations in 2004.

We have mentioned that framing these prehistoric dispersed settlements were regularly-spaced nucleated sites, and we had the opportunity to find out more about the nearest village neighbour to the prehistoric village at Tanagra city when we made a thorough survey of a well-known prehistoric site just a couple of kilometres to its southeast across the Asopos – the hilltop settlement of Ayios Konstantinos.[6] Sherding conditions have become exceptional here due to relatively recent events. Previous to the 1970s the hill possessed an ancient chapel on a terrace below the actual summit, but at that time a large new convent was built around the chapel, in the course of which the real summit was heavily disturbed to build an additional chapel. The entire upper parts of the site now lie within the convent precincts, so that our field teams were required to subdue their usual noisy exuberance in the field as they worked in and around the modern complex. Soft drinks, nibbles and gifts from the nuns were however ample reward at the end of a hot day in exposed hilltop conditions! The prehistoric finds from the upper parts of the hill were in unusually good condition as a result of the severe soil erosion caused by the recent building work, and will prove very helpful in Kalliope Sarri's study of the much smaller and more worn sherds we usually recover from open field ploughsoils elsewhere in the region. Their quality and extent confirm that this hill was the next major nucleated site to Tanagra in an eastern direction. It is already known that to Tanagra's west, but some 5 kilometres away, one or more major prehistoric settlements lie around the modern village of Tanagra.

There was a disappointment at Ayios Konstantinos, however. For similar geographical reasons we have reason to believe that a city such as Classical Tanagra would also have possessed villages or *komai* at intervals of every 2-3 kilometres through its chora, and previous scholars had hypothesized that the Konstantinos hill was the location of such a settlement.[7] To our surprise finds of Archaic to Hellenistic date were very slight, perhaps indicating a sanctuary or small cemetery. As Konstantinos lies just below one of the two modern villages which dominate this district of the

[6] Fossey 1988.

[7] cf. Fossey 1988.

former chora – Kleidi, one is now tempted to suggest that the missing village lies on or around the location of its near neighbour to the north-east – Ayios Thomas, where much material of Classical and Roman date has been recorded.[8]

Now that we have moved this discussion into historic and specifically Classical Greek times, we can note that our fieldwalking in the Asopus Valley south of Tanagra in 2003 was also designed to test our previous model from earlier seasons' work, namely that there was a good spread of small Classical farms and rural cemeteries in the *chora* – but not close to the city – and rare examples of larger Roman villa sites. A second model suggested that the Classical sites tended to favour the hilly valley slopes and plateaux even higher up, the Roman the lower piedmont and historic valley floor with their heavier soils (a pattern already established around Thespiae by Rob Shiel and the preceding Boeotia Project[9]). The 2003 season began indeed with the gridding and detailed study of a large Roman villa – TS 9 – found in 2002, and suitably located low on the Asopus valley piedmont. A new Classical farm was found on a plateau location east of the valley, but as the exception to prove the rule, we also found a clear Classical farm on the historic Asopus floodplain, well below the position of the many Classical farms found in previous seasons around Tanagra. It is very reminiscent of another unique farm found by the river Askris during the Thespiae chora survey of the late 1980s, and this may help us understand the locational decisions and land use strategies used in this period.

To compensate us for the Classical shortcomings of Ayios Konstantinos however, the great surprise of the season was what we found at this hilltop site for Roman and primarily Late Roman times. We should commence by observing that although the hill's pre-convent name was Kastro, we found no significant Medieval or Post-Medieval activity there before the late 20th century AD. What we did find, though, in extraordinary quantities, were Late Roman ceramics, and not only over the entire surface of the upper hill, but there was an extramural settlement at its northwestern foot. Most intriguing was the evidence for a substantial enclosure wall found at several widely-spaced points of the hilltop, behind which great piles of late antique tile and amphorae had built up (surely the reason for its being termed Kastro). In the absence of significant use of the hill after Late Antiquity, we are currently suggesting that this large settlement was enclosed, if not fortified, although its population was large enough to include an additional suburb in the fields below its precipitous slopes. Both Duane Roller and our own team have found good evidence for the repair of the Classical city wall of Tanagra in late Antiquity, so that a fortified *kome* in its *chora* should not at first sight be a surprise, both responding to the increased barbarian attacks on Mainland Greece from the 3rd century and especially 4th century AD onwards, which led to the rewalling of parts or less commonly all of the surviving poleis in Boeotia.[10] But Bozidar Slapsak has wisely queried the point of defending a village less than 2 kilometres from Tanagra, when that city's defences and larger militia force would surely have been a safer refuge against all but an unexpected lightning raid. Maybe, he suggests, the walling of Konstantinos occurred after Tanagra ceased to be defensible. There is a persuasive logic in these admittedly early speculations: after the arrival

[8] Fossey 1988.

[9] cf. Bintliff, Howard & Snodgrass *in press.*

[10] cf. Gregory 1982 for a discussion of this phenomenon in Roman Greece.

of the bubonic plague in the Balkans from the late 6th century AD, population is believed to have been halved, whilst the onset of Slavic invasions left only the larger cities in the control of Imperial forces. In such an historical context, the defence of a 30 hectare enceinte may have been less feasible and necessary, especially as it lacks any natural protection. Konstantinos in contrast is a highly defensible hill, whose weak points were reinforced with a rubble and cement wall in Late Roman times. Did the Tanagra population abandon the city and join the existing villagers across the river? Could the Konstantinos site have survived into the little-known Dark Ages of the 7th-8th centuries AD? To add spice to our speculations, our medieval ceramics expert, Nasos Vionis, has identified a previously-unknown coarseware from the latter site which he suggests could maybe belong to this putative 'sub-Roman' period, whilst our Roman ceramics specialist, Jeroen Poblome, has also pointed to some possible material that might be of 7th-8th century AD date.

There certainly is a gap to be filled between the clearly-identifiable landscape of pre-600 AD times, with a flourishing Tanagra city (several churches and the wall repaired to its full extent, masses of broken sherds of Late Roman types), large villas across the *chora* (with signs of wealth such as pillars, imported window glass) and the extensive Konstantinos village, and the next well-documented period in the landscape, the Middle Byzantine demographic explosion of the 10th-11th centuries AD. Historically the crisis-centuries of the 7th-9th AD, with endemic plague, a countryside only gradually won back from Slav conquest by Byzantine armies, and very few urban sites remaining in active roles for the southern Mainland of Greece, all meant that the countryside of Boeotia should have been little populated and poorly provided with material culture for surveyors such as ourselves. Refuge villages such as we hypothesize for Konstantinos may be exactly what we might expect to find, but they would be rare, and should have succumbed to either destruction or takeover by Slav tribes well before the whole region was reconquered by the Byzantine armies in the 8th century. The older Boeotia Project also found putative Dark Age sites at Askra and Haliartos, both believed to have been Slavicised in this period.[11]

The reincorporation of Boeotia into the Empire, achieved by the mid-9th century with security, is famously symbolized by the erection of notable churches at Skripou-Orchomenus and in Thebes, but our field survey has given a new breadth to this phenomenon of regional growth. By the beginning of the 2003 season we had already shown that the district around Tanagra city was cultivated in Middle Byzantine times from a village 1 kilometre to its east, around the 11th century church of Ayios Thomas. We might now ask if Tanagra and its possible successor at Konstantinos were replaced as population *foci* by this small community, which lasts into later Frankish times, since neither older site shows significant settlement during those periods. Upstream, above the Asopus Valley, we had found in 2002 a small Byzantine hamlet marking a second new foundation of the Middle Byzantine revival. In 2003 we discovered at least four more small nucleated settlements of the same period, scattered at regular intervals across the wider landscape. Thus, for example, to the west of Tanagra city lies another long-known Middle Byzantine church at a similar distance to Ayios Thomas but on the opposing side of the ancient town – at Ayios Polycarp. Earlier visits had not shown a settlement by the church, but deep ploughing on its north side in 2003 revealed a dense if limited site of the same period as the church and continuing into later centuries.

[11] cf. Bintliff *et al.* 2000.

As part of a 'Siedlungskammer' or Settlement Chamber approach to the long-term settlement geography of Boeotia[12], we are attempting at Tanagra as in the areas studied by the previous Boeotia Project, to follow the shifting location of settlement foci around small landscapes period by period. Knowing the Byzantine and Frankish settlement system comes essentially from surface survey, but before the modern villages we have the advantage of being able to combine fieldwork with the detailed Ottoman imperial tax archives for the Boeotian villages, previously studied by John Bintliff and Machiel Kiel (currently Director of the Dutch Institute in Istanbul).[13] Not every settlement in these archives can yet be located in the landscape, but we have been able to pinpoint closely or approximately some 70-80% of the villages named. Today the district formerly dominated by ancient Tanagra is divided between the villages of Kleidi and Ayios Thomas to its southeast, the village of Tanagra to its west, and the burgeoning town of Schimatari to its north. Kleidi seems to have already been in existence in Byzantine times, belonging thus to the network of settlements set up in the 10th -11th centuries, but we have reason to believe that this and all the other Byzantine communities of the district were wiped out or abandoned during the 14th and early 15th centuries, in a crisis era reminiscent of that of the late 6th – 8th centuries AD: bubonic plague, invasions and civil war were all involved. As a result, a complete recolonisation of this and most other parts of the Boeotian countryside was required. This was begun by the last Frankish dukes of Athens and the Venetians from Euboia , and continued under the first Ottoman provincial governors. The colonists were warlike and semi-pastoral Albanians or Arvanites from beyond the northwest borders of modern Greece. By the first surviving Ottoman village censusses of 1466 and 1506 the only communities of the Tanagra district are at Kleidi, at modern Tanagra (then called Bratsi), at Schimatari, and at a now deserted pair of related villages called Ginosati – all described as Arvanitic in ethnicity. Modern Ayios Thomas village is then a relatively recent foundation and seems to have replaced the Ginosati settlements around the time of the Greek Revolution in the 19th century AD.

Old maps and local informants had led us in 2002 to the location of one of the Ginosati deserted villages, and in 2003 a team led by Nasos Vionis scoured and gridded its overgrown surface for pottery, and recorded the standing walls of the last phase of its longhouses. The finds so far confirm the historical sources. But a spin-off of our work here, a beautiful fertile upland valley several kilometres south of modern Ayios Thomas and hence 5 or 6 kilometres distant from ancient Tanagra, was that the same local informants were knowledgeable about other lost villages in this area. Several turned out to be non-sites or Classical farm sites, but three were definitely medieval villages. The first lies immediately south of and on the outskirts of modern Ayios Thomas, and is a Middle Byzantine to Frankish hamlet. The second lies 1-2 kilometres east of Ginosati around a recently rebuilt church, presumably originally Middle Byzantine to judge from its associated settlement. The third also lies 1-2 kilometres from Ginosati, this time in a north-east direction, and may be associated with a ruined chapel, and an extensive Graeco-Roman settlement too.

[12] cf. Bintliff *et al.* 2000.
[13] cf. Bintliff 1995; Kiel 1997.

The accumulated information we have gained from these extensive researches in the wider *chora* of ancient Tanagra for the patterns of medieval and post-medieval settlement are very consistent with the general models outlined above and evidenced also in regions covered by the earlier Boeotia Project in Central and Northwest Boeotia.

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