

*Graecia Capta. The Landscapes of Roman Greece* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993). By SUSAN E. ALCOCK. 156 x 235 mm. xxi + 307 pp. 81 illustrations. 10 tables. ISBN 0 521 40109 7. Price £40.00.

*Graecia Capta*, the publication of the author's Ph.D. dissertation, is a remarkably mature work that has rightly become a classic almost from the moment of its publication. The reasons for this instant success go well beyond the undeniable intrinsic quality of the book itself. As Alcock makes clear, a major aim of the study is to give back to the modern Greeks a part of their own history which has far too long been withheld from them by a nationalist educational ideology which neglects all periods of the Greek past when foreign conquerors dominated the land. The Roman era is merely the first phase of academic neglect, with even greater obscurity designed for the Frankish and Ottoman periods. Alcock's book at one fell swoop corrects this bias with a splendid and wide-ranging analysis of Roman Greece; its content is so largely based on recent research that previous studies of the period (by Larsen, Kahrstedt and others) are entirely replaced.

This new research is of a character that also helps to account for the welcome novelty of the book. The focus of the study is 'landscape', since the core of Alcock's reappraisal of Roman Greece rests on the results of a whole series of major regional archaeological survey projects. These intensive regional field projects, since the late 1970s, have brought to light remarkable changes in rural and urban settlement systems between the high Classical fifth to fourth centuries B.C. and the late Roman (fifth to mid-seventh centuries A.D.) eras. Alcock was fortunate to find these projects pouring out data in preliminary fashion, so that her volume was the first to capitalise on a database still buried in academic journals or even in the form of unpublished summaries of fieldwork. She would certainly be the first to acknowledge that her new book is to a large extent a synthesis of these many projects – some of which she has personally been associated with, and indeed many of her major conclusions from the survey data were published from the later 1980s onwards in analyses of several of these projects by their directors. What Alcock gives us, however, is more than a masterly synthesis of Greek regional survey projects, since she brings together a critical review of the relevant ancient historical sources, and takes the analysis several stages further through novel research into topics such as sacred landscapes, mental landscapes and social life. She makes two important general points in this context: firstly, that regional survey excels in complementing the literary sources (which overemphasise the fate of the élite) with the experience of the poorer sectors of society (the 'people without history'); secondly, that our image of Roman Greece from that contemporary literature represents the first version

of 'The Lost Greatness of Greece' scenario which has plagued scholarship ever since, and indeed has been largely responsible for the underdevelopment of a post-Classical archaeology of Greece.

This recurrent ancient image of Roman Greece as a 'run-down landscape' is the central concern of Alcock's analysis of the period. Although both Greek and Roman writers give a remarkably consistent picture of rural and urban decline, modern historians have tended to see this as tendentious writing of a moralistic character and have frequently doubted the veracity or, at least, the complete accurateness of such reports of the era. Indeed, Classical archaeologists have been able to point to a rash of major building projects in Roman Greece, both public and private, testifying to a notable investment of wealth and arguably symptomatic of a prosperous society.

The great importance to this issue of the 'new wave' regional field surveys of the last two decades has lain in their intensive, large-scale investigations of the Roman countryside in Greece, coupled to an increasing number of surface surveys of ancient cities. In 1984 and 1988, for example, the Boeotia Survey, directed by this reviewer and Anthony Snodgrass, was able to publish very clear evidence for central Greece that the early Roman era witnessed a catastrophic decline both in the number of rural settlement sites and the size of associated urban centres. Subsequent publications from several other major survey projects confirmed the trend throughout southern Greece.

Alcock is rightly wary of accepting without question the new evidence as proving once and for all that the ancient writers were accurately portraying Roman Greece as a landscape of deserted towns and a depopulated countryside. For even the latest survey techniques have their biases. She carefully enumerates the potential distortions that the archaeological field survey record may introduce, and re-evaluates the survey record in this light. It is clear that the recent interpretation by survey teams stands up very well to this scrutiny. At this point, the reviewer finds Alcock erring on the side of a new revisionism in nonetheless continuing to harbour doubts about the reality of the decline of Greece during or by the Roman era. One reason is the existence of limited exceptions to the archaeological picture of decay. One such, doubtless influencing Alcock's uncertainty, is the urban survey of the small city of Phlius conducted by Alcock herself. Unfortunately, although she claims here, as elsewhere, that Phlius does not shrink and may even expand in early Roman times, this seems on closer inspection to be an artefact of her manipulation of the surface pottery collection data. The closely-dated pieces show a decline in activity in this period, but by giving 'half a vote' to each period where sherds are only generally dated to a wider time-bracket (for example Hellenistic-early Roman and early-late Roman) the Phlius team

were generally not too onerous until the third century A.D.

A problem seems to be emerging to account for the economic and demographic weakness of Roman Greece, in comparison to the Classical and Early Hellenistic periods. Alcock favours a 'core-periphery' model allied with an internal shift of control of the landscape from yeoman-citizen (intensive) farmers to élite (extensive) estate-owners. The intervention of Rome from the third century B.C. onwards, culminating in a series of very violent and destructive campaigns throughout Greece in the first century B.C., broke up the 'polis' (city-state) communities as socially-cooperative, landholding societies. In some fashion the middling farmer lost land and status and either died out or migrated to a few larger towns. In his place came large estates. In these towns it was the same opportunistic landowners who offered patronage and some kind of livelihood to the landless refugees flocking in from the depopulated countryside.

This reviewer observes a definite degree of vagueness in this scenario. After all, the Classical centuries had been just as full of wars and destruction, and towns can grow alongside a burgeoning countryside where rural population expands to feed them.

One element that deserves rather more attention than Alcock gives, although she does discuss it, is the influx of Italians into Roman Greece. Inscriptions bear witness to something of a flood of immigrants. Some are *negotiatores* – probably 'money-men' rather than 'merchants'. What are they up to? Other new faces are wealthy Italians who insert themselves into the élite landscape and intermarry with indigenous élite families. Was the landscape taken over from the middling citizen by a combination of foreign and local élites, carving out great estates from the patchwork of small farms of Classical times? If so, and I consider this highly likely, how did they accomplish this? We need careful thought about graphic episodes that do survive in the epigraphic record, for example where an Emperor writes to a small Greek city to warn it to stand up to alien landowners encroaching on its traditional territory.

The invasion of Italian financiers and land-owners into Greece, if a central force in the breakdown of traditional landholding relations, would be a factor of core-periphery relations which the Roman military takeover of Greece promoted, as an instance of the abuse of a subordinate and defeated land. Yet the failings of this model, which Alcock seems to support, can easily be seen by reference to other conquered provinces, especially in the West. Despite much warfare and expropriation, the early Roman West is the scene of urban growth and multiplication linked to the explosion of rural estate centres, often of villa type; the central growth sector is likely to be agricultural in terms of wealth creation. Why then did Greece as a whole, with local exceptions, stagnate under the Empire, and moreover why

does its depression last through to the end of the fourth century A.D.?

It is perhaps easier to account for the maintenance of stagnation rather than its origin. If we follow the model recently favoured by survey archaeologists, which sees a de-intensification of land use in Roman Greece though the establishment of larger, often pastoral estates and wide-scale abandonment of land, and link this to Alcock's model of a more élite-based control of the landscape and townscape which rests in turn on the novel pattern of landholding, then we could imagine a persistence of economic stagnation for as long as this socio-economic nexus maintains power. Something occurred around the turn of the fifth century A.D. which broke this nexus and created a generalised economic recovery in Greece.

In seeking the origin of the phenomenon of 'ruined Greece' Alcock occasionally hints at a possible Hellenistic component, without further elucidation. Indeed, it must be said that the exact chronology of abandonment of the flourishing rural landscape of Classical-early Hellenistic Greece remains largely poorly defined. By and large, the ceramic finds from survey indicate that the loosely-termed 'late Hellenistic-early Roman era' (c. 200 B.C.-400 A.D.) is typified by rural and urban contraction. But whether decay occurs in the final era of the early Hellenistic period, the third century B.C., or in the second, first centuries B.C. or first century A.D. is a rather critical issue where one must admit the available data are too coarsely dated to offer a clear answer. My own current preparation of the Boeotia Project for publication allows me to suggest that in central Greece at least, many Classical rural farms probably witness abandonment around the first century B.C. rather than earlier or later, whilst an equal number have arguably been abandoned in the third-early second centuries B.C. In other words, a progressive running down of the landscape may be implied. This gradual breakdown is consistent with both the general and specific written records, with their indications of economic and social problems throughout the final three centuries B.C. in southern Greece.

The negative impact of Rome, as we have seen observable over precisely the same three centuries, certainly played its part in destabilising local society and land use, not least through warfare and expropriation. But it is hard to account for the failure of Greece to recover from these campaigns, both at the time and in the subsequent four centuries of generally peaceable imperial life, unless the general state of the country was already at a pretty low ebb when the Roman impact began to be felt. Now we already know of environmental problems – several surveys have evidenced severe erosion following the intense cultivation of Classical times, which must have debilitated agricultural productivity for many centuries afterwards. Soil fertility may also have declined from Classical over-use. These problems could well have weakened

the ability of the lesser farming folk to sustain their economies and promoted larger estates and land abandonment.

There are other less tangible effects that will have begun in Hellenistic times, to do with the decline of the meaning of polis citizenship and the effectiveness of the city-states in supporting their members in the face of interventions of a positive and negative kind from the great monarchs of the post-Alexander era. In many respects Alcock should perhaps have spent more space in delving deeper into this Hellenistic world, which was already one in which the Classical city-state was becoming threatened, undermined and perhaps redundant.

With the inception of the late Roman era (c. 400-630 A.D., so-called, despite its beginning around the sack of Rome itself, from its stylistic and political continuity with Imperial Rome in the Eastern provinces, most regional surveys indicate a great expansion of rural settlement, often of clear villa type, throughout southern Greece. Towns offer a more variable picture: some expand in size – but rarely recover their Classical extent – whilst perhaps the majority of those studied remain at their shrunken early Roman size. Notably these surviving civic centres have almost no inscriptions or public monuments relating to town officials or benefactors.

Faced with a rural boom but urban stagnation Alcock considers the most likely explanation to be tax changes inaugurated in the third century A.D. The shift from cash to tax in kind, she suggests, together with edicts aimed at tying people to the soil in an almost serf-status (the colonate), brought a dramatic move to the countryside. Once again this scenario is rather too vague and ill-suited to reality. Where have all these villa occupants come from? A low population forced to grow crops more directly will hardly account for a density of rural population which in many districts seems higher than in Classical times. Admittedly those survey projects such as Boeotia and Kea, where urban/rural population ratios have been estimated, report that Classical farm populations probably made up a mere 30 *per cent* or so of total city-state population – the balance being urban residents – so that late Roman regional populations, with smaller towns, will still have been far smaller than those of Classical times. But rural growth on this scale is hardly accountable through simple relocation of employment: what after all were people of the villa class living from in most of Roman Greece throughout the early Roman period: not commerce, industry or administration as a primary income for most, but surely exploitation of crops and animals?

Hints of alternative explanations can be sought both in my preceding comments on environmental degradation, and in archaeological information not cited by Alcock. In the first case, soil erosion and fertility depletion on the scale being suggested for post-Classical Greece would have required many

centuries of abandonment or de-intensification of land use to allow recovery. In some cases the severity of soil decline may have been so great that an even longer timescale would be needed: Hans Lohmann's survey in south Attica may provide a good example of this. In the deme of Atene, post-Classical soil erosion was so drastic that minimal soil regrowth has been witnessed to the present day, and significantly the form of land use that follows intensive Classical farmsteads is one of extensive pastoral enclosures even in the late Roman period. But in more elastic environments, where many centuries of recovery of the landscape would enable natural processes of soil nutrient replacement and deepening to ensue, the recolonisation of the landscape for intensive farming from the fifth century A.D. would reflect an environment pre-adapted to agricultural intensification.

Could this of itself have created the stimulus for the shift from extensive to intensive land use in late Roman times? Alcock's tax in kind factor will hardly have affected the nature of income when most taxpayers were farmers already, but her reminder that taxes were now higher could introduce a requirement for intensification that, linked to a pre-adapted fertile landscape, might have produced a positive feedback for sustained regional growth. The failure of towns to share in this growth, by and large, is then a curiosity to be accounted for. Here we might bring in the neglected role of interregional economics. Although Alcock states that the trade regime associated with the new imperial capital of Constantinople is little known, in fact much recent research has begun to underline just how significant Constantinople was to the revival of the Aegean economy in exactly this fifth-sixth-century A.D. period.

The Aegean is after all hardly a 'breadbasket' province likely to sustain a great capital, yet its new proximity to the mushrooming city of this time did have measurable effects on local economies. The city was certainly receiving massive shipments of foodstuffs from the surpluses of Egypt and the Levant provinces, all of which passed through the Aegean. The immense increase in traffic along the Greek coasts will have provided a great opportunity for areas with marine access (almost the whole of southern Greece!) to insert its surplus cereal, oil and wine into a greater shipping endeavour, feeding the capital. It is suggested (for example by Abadie-Reynal) that geopolitics was thus a key stimulus for the generalised late Roman revival of Greece. Significantly, the characteristic type-fossil find on late Roman rural site anywhere in Greece will be a Combed Ware transport and storage amphora sherd.

Such a model does help to explain why local towns fail to respond to rapid growth of villas in their countrysides. Whereas in Classical times the main market for surpluses produced in the

landscape would have been the local market town, or in some cases the regional leading city, shipping surpluses via a flourishing coastal trade directly towards the capital and other major towns of the north such as Thessalonika obviated the involvement of local towns.

Finally, a comment should be made on Alcock's innovative work on Sacred Landscapes, where she has much of value to offer on the manipulation of traditional and new symbolic reference points by the dominant Romanised élites.

In conclusion, this is a truly excellent book, highly readable, thoughtful, well illustrated and tabulated, which has certainly revolutionised the wider understanding of a neglected period of Greek history and archaeology. Suffice it to say that promotion is probably unnecessary as it has immediately become essential reading for all academics with an interest in Greece that goes beyond traditional period specialisation.

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*A Mediterranean Valley. Landscape Archaeology and Annales History in the Biferno Valley* (Leicester University Press, London, 1995). By GRAEME BARKER. 174 x 250 mm. xix + 351 pp. 113 illustrations. 14 tables. ISBN 0 7185 1906 X. Price £40.00.

*The Biferno Valley Survey. The Archaeological and Geomorphological Record* (Leicester University Press, London, 1995). Edited by GRAEME BARKER. 208 x 296 mm. x + 176 pp. 77 illustrations. 32 tables. ISBN 0 7185 2375 X. Price £25.00 (paperback).

The Biferno river rises in The Matese mountains in the heart of the Apennines and flows north-eastwards to reach the Adriatic sea near Termoli. It is the main river of Molise, one of the least developed regions of Italy. In its geology and physical geography it is typical of much of Apennine Italy: the Matese mountains are a limestone massif rising to just over 2,000 metres, broken by deep river gorges, and containing a series of karstic basins. Below the massif the limestone is overlaid with Pliocene sands and gravels, and the hills become more rounded. Towards the sea the landscape opens into rolling plateau lands. The land use varies with the altitude and the soils. In the lower Valley there are olives and vines as well as cereals; the olives fade out first; then the vines; then the cereals. The mountains are given over to forest and rough grazing. The relative importance of crops, orchards, forest, and grazing has changed continuously over time, and the visible landscape that we see differs in many respects from what it was a century or a millennium ago. The main aim of the books under review is to track and document the processes of change

through a wide-ranging study of the archaeological, geomorphological, and documentary evidence.

*A Mediterranean Valley*, written mainly by Barker, but with substantial contributions by others, is a general synthesis of the results of an archaeological survey in the Biferno valley, published in hardback in handy form, and evidently intended for a wide market. *The Biferno Valley Survey*, paper-bound in A4 format, contains catalogue material and more specialised studies by various authors: the survey gazetteer, the geomorphological analyses, the reports of test excavations and geophysical surveys, the catalogues of Samnite- and Roman-period finds, slags, quernstones, and faunal remains – in effect the evidence for the discussion in the more general book. The two volumes will make an awkward pair on library shelves, and will be a bibliographic nightmare for students. Serious scholars will need both. What follows deals primarily with *A Mediterranean Valley*, since this contains the interpretative material.

Barker began the project in 1974, at the invitation of the new Superintendency for Antiquities of Molise. The Superintendency has sponsored much other relevant work, which is summarised and integrated into this study. Most of the evidence, however, was accumulated by Barker and his team during five years of archaeological survey carried out in a series of transects across the river valley. Test excavations provided faunal and botanical evidence, as well as stratified sequences of artefacts to help date the material collected in fieldwalking. Several sites were investigated by augering or by magnetometric survey, and sequences of sediments in river banks and back-hoe cuts were analysed (by Chris Hunt and the late Derrick Webley) to obtain evidence for changing patterns of erosion and deposition. The links between settlement, land use and alluvial fill are constantly stressed.

A recurring theme is the difference between the upper and lower parts of the valley. As elsewhere in the Apennines, where the problems of flash floods and malaria made the valley bottoms treacherous, the roads or tracks clung to high ground, and it was not until the construction of the *superstrada* in the 1970s that the valley acquired any cultural or economic unity.

Although there are some traces of human beings in the valley in the middle and perhaps in the lower Palaeolithic, it is not until the upper Palaeolithic that anything like continuous occupation begins. The period corresponds to the last ice age, when the landscape was largely open steppe, and the human settlers, who hunted mainly red deer and wild horse, lived in the lower Valley (or on the coastal shelf since the sea level was much lower), only rarely penetrating into its middle reaches. As the climate warmed up at the end of the Palaeolithic, other forms of subsistence began to appear; first fishing; then (as the agricultural revolution of the Neolithic period reached Italy),