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Arkadian Landscapes

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Introduction

People far removed from all things Greek might just about be forgiven for thinking that Arkadia is perhaps not a real place at all. In many people's minds it looms large as an imaginary, idealized landscape, a paradise treated as such by Virgil in the 1st Century BCE¹, employed as the backdrop of landscape paintings by Poussin in the 18th Century and still the subject of modern novels about journeys to paradise.² This view would not be wrong but, unlike the comparable Elysian, Arkadian 'fields' are tangible and can be visited in person. It is a region of both modern and ancient Greece, the landscapes of which deserve a reappraisal. This paper attempts to do just that, during a period that raises questions regarding continuity and change; the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (c.1600-800 BCE). This involves using a post-processual, interpretive approach, which employs an empathic view of landscape – an approach perhaps more at home in British prehistoric archaeology.³

Archaeological Investigation of Arkadia

Located in the central Peloponnese, Arkadia has received relatively little attention archaeologically compared to other areas of Greece. This has been the case particularly for the LBA and EIA, although the 1990s saw a plethora of surveys take place which, due to their diachronic nature have provided evidence for the period in question.⁴ Nonetheless, much of the archaeological work in Arkadia (as in the rest of Greece) has been motivated by a desire to illustrate well known ancient literary sources, concerned with individual sites and well-known periods, for example the temple of Bassae, Mantinea, Megalopolis, Tegea and Stymphalos.⁵ That these sites were located in Arkadia was hardly relevant.

In terms of landscape, it was not until New Archaeology or 'processualism' became the predominant doctrine that sites in their settings could begin to be understood. An essential part of the New Archaeology was the use of intensive, systematic and diachronic archaeological field survey, the use of which was readily taken up by archaeologists working in Greece. In Arkadia, the late 1960s witnessed the first regional survey undertaken by Roger Howell in the eastern plains⁶ (), but the majority of surveys in Arkadia were not carried out until the 1990s with the exception of Lloyd, Owens & Roy's Megalopolis survey in the 1980s.⁷ The Pheneos and Lousoi Survey was published in 1999⁸ and the Swedish Institute's Asea Valley Survey in 2003⁹, although the Partheni Topographical Survey led by Petrakis

¹ *Eclogues*

² Okri 2002

³ E.g. Cummings 2002; 2004; Edmonds 1999; 2001; Exon *et al.* 2000; Thomas 2001; Tilley 1994

⁴ E.g. Tausend 1999; Forsen 2003

⁵ Shanks 1996: 5; *Pausanias* 8.41.7-8; Cockerell 1860; Jenkyns 1980: 5; 'Archaeology in Greece' *JHS* 1888: 131; *Pausanias* 8.9.1; Gardner *et al.* 1892; 'Archaeology in Greece' *JHS* 1889-90: 214; 'Archaeology in Greece' *JHS* 1925: 225; 1926: 247 *Apollodorus* 2.5.6; *Diodorus* 4.13.2; *Pausanias* 8.22.4; *Strabo* 8.6.8

⁶ Howell 1970

⁷ Lloyd, Owens, and Roy 1985; Roy, Lloyd, and Owens 1992

⁸ Tausend 1999

⁹ Forsen and Forsen 2003

and Salowey which had its first season in 1996¹⁰, and the first survey at Tegea led by Knut Ødegard of Oslo University began in 1999 are yet to be published in any detail.

Despite the range of evidence such surveys have produced, the processual framework, under which the majority of these surveys have been conducted, generally discourages any kind of sentimentality, emotional connection or subjectivity, seeking to view landscape in an objective way.¹¹ For the most part, landscapes were and still are explained in detached ways; as a backdrop to events and the activities of humans, as a resource to be exploited, an empty stage waiting to be peopled. In this model the environment is perceived as objective fact, a measurable space usually depicted in two-dimensional map forms, universal and unchanging over time.¹² For such environmentally deterministic explanations 'landscape as a resource' is often as far as it goes, without accepting that the underlying Cartesian view of the world is as socially and culturally determined as any other.¹³

Interpretive approaches to Landscape

That this is one way of viewing the world should not be doubted; we have the ability to distance ourselves from our surroundings, to have an objective relationship with the world.¹⁴ This does not however, authenticate this as the means of establishing the 'truth' or the only 'truth'.¹⁵ As argued elsewhere¹⁶, total objectivity or universal truth cannot be realised. We are able to see ourselves as separate from the landscape, often to objectify it, but this is from our place within the world, which makes it necessarily a subjective experience. There is nothing problematic *per se* with thinking that the environment in terms of economic resources affects human behaviour including choice of location for particular activity, this is known from experiences of living in the world. Nevertheless, this view does not allow a full or rounded understanding of the world today or that which people may have experienced in the past; different cultures across time and space have perceived their environments, their landscapes, their worlds differently.¹⁷ People do not always choose to live, interact and 'be' in places that are most beneficial to them as determined by modern western academics.¹⁸

However, landscape studies that have accepted the subjective reading and social construction of space¹⁹ have been accused of creating or continuing a binary opposition between nature and culture or the physical, factual world, with the metaphorical, perception of the world that is somehow less 'real'.²⁰ A possible solution found by some²¹ has been Soja's 'thirdspace' – an attempt to approach space that involves the real and imagined worlds of a 'first' and 'secondspace', thus breaking down the binary oppositions.²² 'Thirdspace' is a term that attempts to encapsulate the absolute fundamentality of the spatial aspect to all human lives, that goes beyond being measured and real and imagined and subjective allowing the materiality of the world to have a central role in discussions of space.²³

¹⁰ AR 1997: 34; AR 1998: 34

¹¹ E.g. Binford 1983

¹² Gregory 1994: 53; Exon *et al.* 2000: 9

¹³ Thomas 1993: 22; Moser 2001

¹⁴ Gibson 1968: 200; Webster 2001

¹⁵ Cf Heidegger 1993: 115

¹⁶ Parker 2006

¹⁷ E.g. Ingold 2000; Rodaway 1994

¹⁸ E.g. Bintliff 1977: 111

¹⁹ E.g. Bender 1993a; 1993b; Bird-David 1990; Ingold 1993; 2000; Tilley 1993; 1994; Thomas 1991; 1996

²⁰ Ingold 2000: 44; Gregory 1994: 5; Exon *et al.* 2000

²¹ E.g. Exon *et al.* 2000

²² Soja 1996: 10

²³ Soja 1996: 11

Complimentary to viewing space in Soja's terms is Ingold's 'dwelling perspective' incorporating the idea of 'taskscape'. This allows an appreciation of the way in which 'landscape' becomes through us.²⁴ Elements of the landscape present themselves at different times through our actions within it. Instead of picking up invariants that are wholly present, an organism is tuned to resonate to the invariants that are significant for it as a result of 'hands-on' training in everyday life, an "education of attention".²⁵ Other elements may be there, but a person (or animal or other organism) moving through what becomes their taskscape will not experience them all. Different aspects of landscape will afford themselves at different times, depending on whether the organism is 'fine-tuned' to pick them up. A particular feature such as a river may have different physical characteristics during the year, which will as a result create, give or afford different significances to those living with them, but other features that may be 'static' will also afford different meanings at different times. Consequently, a prominent geological feature may gain a particular significance at one time in the year, for example through practices associated with community rituals, at others it fades away, although perhaps acting as a latent reminder of the order of things that the yearly ritual underlines.

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Thus, the approach to landscape in Arkadia as set out in this paper is an investigation into how people interact and live within landscape, not only how it is used as a resource and not only how it is perceived, but how people are thoroughly enmeshed within it. As its starting point, the methodology used to apply such an approach to Arkadian landscapes of the LBA and EIA relies on the general 'permanence' of the physical landscape, the bodily experience we have of it today. There are no claims to discovering the truth, but it is a truth, as much the author's engagement with the material culture of the time and the places in which it was found; archaeology can be nothing else even when objectivity is the aim.²⁶ As Ingold states in a discussion on his 'dwelling perspective'- it is possible to use such an approach in archaeology, where the people are dead and gone, because "*the practice of archaeology is itself a form of dwelling*".²⁷ Such an approach to landscape requires an amount of familiarity with sites and their settings. For this reason, the plain of Mantinea is used as a case study, an area familiar to the author. The case study and sites illustrated below shows how an region and time that has been dismissed as residing in total obscurity in the past²⁸ can be illuminated and humanized.

Case Study: The Mantinean Plain

The Mantinean Plain forms the northern part of the modern plain of Tripolis. It is the largest of the plains that characterize the Arkadian landscape in the East, the result of subsidence in ridges caused by the Alpine Orogeny.²⁹ The plain is relatively flat in character and has a thick layer of valuable alluvium.³⁰ This, in addition to an impermeable flysch layer which overlies a substratum of low grade schists, itself impermeable³¹ means inundation has been a problem throughout the centuries, although the plain of Mantinea fares better than most.³²

²⁴ Ingold 1993: 157

²⁵ Gibson 1979: 254

²⁶ Pearson and Shanks 2001: 11

²⁷ Ingold 1993: 152

²⁸ Snodgrass 2000: 135

²⁹ See Bintliff 1977: Chapter 1; Hodkinson 1981: 267

³⁰ Forsen and Forsen 1999: 54

³¹ Hodkinson 1981: 257

³² E.g. *Pausanias* 8.81; Leake, 1830: 84; Howell, 1970: n.2

Ptolis-Gortsouli

Towards the northern end and at the edge of the wide plain of Mantinea is the site of Ptolis, located on the isolated rounded hill of Gortsouli, just north of walls of the ancient city of Mantinea. From the summit of this hill the views are wide-ranging, obscured only by the Mainalon range to the west. To the north the Anchisia hills are visible, as are the Artemision range to the east and the Tegean plain to the south, which stretches as far as the eye can see beyond the modern town of Tripolis.



Figure 1: view of Ptolis from Artemision-Ayios Elias looking to the S (photo: author)



Figure 2: view of the Mantinean plain from Ptolis-Gortsouli (photo: author)

Ptolis-Gortsouli has significant evidence for Mycenaean habitation with reports of a Cyclopean wall standing on the upper eastern side as well as numerous sherds.³³ Karayioria excavated the site in 1962, uncovering evidence that indicated the hill had been used by people from the late Neolithic and unearthing a later sanctuary which showed evidence of worship from the Geometric period (8th century BCE). Only one piece of Protogeometric ware has been found³⁴ that breaks a hiatus from the 12th to the 8th century BCE. Despite Mazaraki-Ainian's assertion that Geometric evidence also points to habitation³⁵, *Archaeological Reports*³⁶ states that from the 8th century BCE, the hill appears to have been reserved for a cult and associated rituals until Early Imperial times and Morgan and Voyatzis' both believe that from the 8th century the hill had a specifically sacred function.³⁷ Voyatzis also makes it clear that the sanctuary fell out of use after the 5th century when the city of Mantinea had been established on the plain to the north.³⁸ Even if this is not the case, activity at the site diminished, as reflected in the quantity and range of artefacts, and its status probably deferred to the temple of Poseidon Hippios established to the south of the synoecised city, Mantinea.³⁹

That a sacred site was located on a hill that was inhabited in the Late Helladic period raises interesting questions. In accordance with other authors⁴⁰ this would certainly have been significant and particularly pertinent if, as evidence so far suggests, the area saw little activity in the years following the end of the Bronze Age. Choosing this place to dedicate offerings to a divinity, a group was (re)stating its connections with the area and legitimising its claim - a return of the same people whether perceived or actual. Although acts of worship at the site could have been associated with a particular divinity from the outset, in addition there may have been a sense of ancestor worship, again almost irrelevant whether real or appropriated. If there were a few existing inhabitants around, such acts may have convinced them of the truth others were espousing, and a growing population may have needed an increasingly common site for religious activity. Such a positioning may have reinforced and/or kept alive a self-styled memory and a tradition which asserted that a group moving away had always meant to come back. Visible remains either convinced them they had come to the right place or inspired such tales.

Ptolis is found in an elevated location. Perhaps not a high place in terms of a peak sanctuary (ref) or of the same 'stature' as Asea-Ayios Elias, in the Asea Valley⁴¹, but if as yet undiscovered settlements were dotted around the plain for the Geometric and following periods (until the foundation of Mantinea) as Morgan believes⁴², then its location meant the sanctuary was distanced from the everyday in a very physical way. The height also necessitates incredible views across the whole of the Mantinean plain, especially from the summit (see fig. 2) framed by the Mainalon range beyond to the west. However, from the site of the temple, views to the south are somewhat obscured by a rise in the natural level, so that clear views around are limited to the west and northern sections of the surrounding landscape. If, as has been suggested, the sanctuary was abandoned when the city of Mantinea was formed on the plain at the end of the Archaic or early Classical period, the positioning of the

³³ Hope-Simpson 1964: n.87; Howell 1970: n.11

³⁴ Howell 1970: n.11

³⁵ Mazaraki-Ainian 1997: 336

³⁶ *Archaeological Reports* 1993-4: 17

³⁷ Morgan 1999: 390; Voyatzis 1999: 133

³⁸ Voyatzis 1999: 146

³⁹ Morgan 1999: 391

⁴⁰ E.g. Gadalous 2002

⁴¹ Forsen and Forsen 1999

⁴² Morgan 1999: 390

temple may have been significant, sitting as it does in a relatively peripheral location. If it could not be seen from the city site on the plain it may well have gradually slipped out of the new community's consciousness, especially when concerned with developing new sanctuaries within the city limits. It was located outside the physical taskspace or temporal landscape of those living in its proximity. As Voyatzis points out, Ptolis, although considered to be ancient Mantinea was not included within the new city's walls built in the 4th century BCE⁴³ and this too was significant. Perhaps the old site had too many links with the past and a particular community, group or family. It may have been a place that had acquired negative values, which prohibited future activity there, or contributed to a decline.⁴⁴ If it was too politically charged, a neutral ground including neutral sanctuaries may have been called for, onto which new political and power arrangements could be mapped; Ptolis was physically excluded from the newly founded city.

What are both suggested and highlighted especially in the case of Ptolis-Gortsouli, is the change in organisation of the landscape in which people lived and thus the relationship they had with it. As has been argued by Mazarakis-Ainian⁴⁵, in the LBA religious activity was located close to habitation, often sharing the chieftain or leader's dwelling, and for this reason it appears to have had much more integration into everyday life. Although, religious ritual activity by its very definition consists of atypical behaviour that is removed from the everyday⁴⁶ the landscape in which activity took place would have been familiar, albeit affording different characteristics depending on the circumstances. Aspects of the landscape that may have been passed over in the course of everyday activity could become the focus of intense awareness during religious ritual.⁴⁷ The separation of religious activity to a site that was isolated and distinctive may have been intended to create a reverence whenever it was seen.

Artemision-Ayios Yioryios

Just to the north of the hill of Gortsouli is a site known as Artemision-Ayios Yioryios. It is very similar in its physical nature and setting, an isolated hill to the edge of the plain although lower in altitude. This hill however has only two pottery sherds that have been identified as Mycenaean, clearly not enough to interpret as evidence of settlement and very little from other periods to suggest such either.⁴⁸ Quite what this evidence should be interpreted as is difficult to judge, but of course people were not confined to their settlements.

The hill today is wooded and from the summit nothing can be seen of the surrounding landscape due to the Aleppo pines which are a relatively recent addition⁴⁹, although the hill may very well have been wooded in the past (fig.4). In the Geometric period the site became reserved for burials, interestingly at a time when Ptolis-Gortsouli seems to have been reserved for religious purposes (see above). This cemetery consisted of cist graves and *pithos* burials. These are both burial types that housed single burials and are indicative of single use, a characteristic of this period found in many parts of Greece.

⁴³ Voyatzis 1999: 146

⁴⁴ Cf Chapman 2000: 188

⁴⁵ Mazarakis-Ainian 1997: 290

⁴⁶ E.g. Garwood 2002

⁴⁷ Thomas 2004b: 175

⁴⁸ Howell 1970: n.10

⁴⁹ Cf Nestani-Paniyiristra: Howell 1970: n.14



Figure 3: view of Artemision-Ayios Ilias from Ptolis looking N (photo: author)



Figure 4: view of pines at the site of Artemision-Ayios Ilias (photo: author)

The site of the cemetery on Artemision-Ayios Ilias, allows for interesting discussion. This hill, set aside for burial is situated at the north of the plain. It is a visible physical entity in the landscape, 'rivalled' by Ptolis to the south. For people to bury their dead at this place it must have been the result of a conscious decision. The fact that it is a raised feature, against a backdrop of high mountains, but protruding in an otherwise flat plain, at the very least suggests that the living community thought that the dead were sufficiently significant to be physically separated from where it might be assumed people lived everyday lives. However, there are numerous other places that the dead could have been buried if separation was the most important factor. In the cases of Lafka on the Stymphalian plain and Alea-Palaiokhori south of Tegea⁵⁰ the position of the tombs is also separate from associated settlement, but in these cases the dead are hidden from view. The Anchisia hills was perhaps an alternative for placing the dead on the Mantinean plain if separation was the only factor, unless access to them was prevented by those living in the Kapsia valley.⁵¹

However, the hill of Artemision-Ayios Ilias not only separated the dead from the living but it also placed them in a setting that was highly visible from the surrounding plain. Whether the hill was wooded or not may have been of no consequence, it did not matter if the living could not see the plain from the summit, but it mattered if the hill could be seen from below. The hill is also at a point where the plain begins to narrow at the north where there is a way through, between the Anchisia hills and Artemision range, but which cannot be seen either from Artemision Ayios Ilias or from Ptolis; it appears as if the plain is completely enclosed. The hill that signified the end of life may have been equated with the hill at the end of the living space – not necessarily that people were forbidden from going any further, but that it signified the end of a community's territory. Connected to this is the fact that running close to the hill would have been the probable route from the upper Orchomenos plain (plain of Levidi) to the Mantinean plain, as it is today. Having a cemetery of dead ancestors close by would convey a message to visitors and travellers about the community's connections to this landscape. Even if this particular function or purpose of positioning of a cemetery on this hill was not foremost in the minds of those who buried their dead here, it would have been a consequence, intended or unintended. The place, direction and orientation of the hill would have acquired (further) significance and importance, reaffirmed as people moved through the landscape and lived as part of it.

If funeral processions were among the rites enacted when burying the dead on the hill of Artemision-Ayios Ilias, as argued generally for Geometric funerals⁵², then such a procession would have been widely seen, a public spectacle, more so than any processions that may have taken place at Lafka, Alea-Paliokhori and even Vourvoura.⁵³ The wide open plain would have enabled people who were not directly involved to watch from a distance, with those conducting the ceremonies probably having very little control about who could do this and perhaps little desire to do so either. In addition, although there is a stream relatively close to the site, it is not prominent, and the association with water that is very much in evidence at many LBA burial sites, appears diminished.⁵⁴ Again the openness of the landscape may have facilitated the importance of the sky, its expanse very evident as one moves from place to

⁵⁰ Parker 2006

⁵¹ Hodkinson and Hodkinson 1981: 245-6; Pikoulas 1990: 479

⁵² E.g. Dickinson 1994: 229; Cavanagh and Mee 1995; Kurtz and Boardman 1973

⁵³ Parker 2006

⁵⁴ E.g. Pikoulas 1988: 188-191; Parker 2006

place on the plain. Rather than water as the transporter of the soul, it may have been the air, enhancing the ethereal quality of the spirit of the deceased.⁵⁵

Contemporary literary evidence that we have for attitudes in the 8th century towards their dead is confined to Homer, and as Sourvinou-Inwood argues it is during this period that a belief in the dead as retaining reason and wisdom is apparent, as opposed to the earlier belief in the witless dead.⁵⁶ The change from multiple to single burials may go some way to support this; if the spirit retained its sense and thus a connection to its remains, it would not be considered wise to interfere with the deceased again, something observed in LBA tombs.⁵⁷ However, graves could still be revisited on occasion, without disturbance and, whatever the grave marker, the dead still had a material presence and occupied a location in space. When that space was approached or looked upon during the course of everyday living, the memory of the dead would have come to the fore. On the hill and observing individual grave markers, the memory of that particular individual would be brought to mind. On the plain, the whole hill may have served to recall the memory of past members of the community collectively, as the marker over a multiple tomb of the LBA may have done. The extent to which this occurred for individuals would have been dependent on numerous factors, whether one had recently buried a relative or prominent member of the community, the age, and knowledge of the person doing the experiencing. Perhaps in situations where prominent members were buried, the whole hill, for a time at least, could be synonymous with that certain individual.

Conclusions

Those choosing to settle in this location during the Geometric period, who designated the hill of Artemis-Ayios Ilias for burials and Ptolis-Gortsouli for religious worship, did so whilst acknowledging the past that they could see around them. The substantial remains of walls on Gortsouli, presumably more upstanding in the 8th century BCE than they are today, could have prompted the decision to define this hill as a sacred place, access to which would now be controlled to preserve and enhance the sanctity of the place. The hill of Artemision-Ayios Ilias, where there were few archaeological remains, may have suggested itself as an appropriate burial ground, with no visible signs of past human activity. These early 'Mantinean's' inhabited an easily definable landscape that enabled a new or growing population to assert its control on their territory, where the elite could appropriate the past and impose control, mapping the 'new' order on their surroundings. It has been proposed that Geometric settlement would have been scattered on the plain⁵⁸; the people who worshipped at Gortsouli and buried their dead on Artemision would need to have lived somewhere in the vicinity. Thus the plain was the landscape of the everyday, the hills around associated with religious and sacred rituals enacted during worship and burial of the dead. The hills would also have been part of the everyday, perhaps viewed and comprehended to various extents and degrees depending on the current activity or time of year, serving to remind those tilling their fields, driving their flocks, meeting with friends and family, cooking, creating, or teaching their children, of the order of their reality, reinforcing the mythological and cosmological beliefs of their community.

⁵⁵ Cf Goodison 1989: 179

⁵⁶ Sourvinou-Inwood 1995: 116

⁵⁷ Lewartowski 2000: 104

⁵⁸ Morgan 1999: 390

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