Elli Tzavella: Byzantine Attica. An Archaeology of Settlement and Landscape (4th to 12th Centuries). Turnhout: Brepols 2024 (Medieval and Post-Medieval Mediterranean Archaeology 6). 664 p., 196 ill., 10 maps. € 180.00. ISBN: 978-2-503-61120-4.

The expertise which the author demonstrates, spanning settlement archaeology, pottery, and religious architecture, and the wide range of written sources (non-literary and literary) with which regional studies such as this require real familiarity, enables Elli Tzavella to design and deliver a 'model' contribution to Late Roman and Middle Byzantine history at the regional level, of a kind which is much needed but so challenging to realise. Her geographical concentration on Attica might seem to some highly specialised, 'sub-regional' by some yardsticks. But the author shows, again and again, that Attica's comparative density of locationally specific published data, archaeological of all kinds, and historico-topographic, justifies this degree of focus while ensuring the work's feasibility. The three periods covered, including the problematic, and problematically labelled "Transitional" period (here from ca. 650 to the ninth century), could have tested feasibility to the limits in a larger region. And, logically, the archaeology of Athens (the walled city), and its own history, are only evoked when they are needed to clarify aspects of features or finds around the region. A substantive "Introduction" (pp. 17–23 dealing with the competing and overlapping labels for historical and archaeological subdivisions of the period ca. 300 to 1200, is followed by eight thematic chapters, and then (Chapter 9: "Early and Middle Byzantine sites in Attica, 4th–12th c.", pp. 295–468), a rich site-focused Gazetteer, archaeological, geographical, topographical, and historical. This structure works, despite the quantities of data. The thematic chapters exploit the Gazetteer (pp. 295–468), which is highly legible in its layout, cross-referral between all parts is rigorous, and they are illustrated and illuminated by excellent photographs, mostly good plans (mostly, inevitably borrowed), and by Tzavella's own thematic distribution maps (pp. 651–660), both periodised and, within no less than ten spatial subdivisions of Attica, the sites of the Gazetteer are distinguished by nine interpretative symbols, or clusters of such symbols (e.g., "church[es]", "grave[s]", "workshop", p. 650), taking the visualisation of sites or complexes of sites in diachronic and reported functional aspects to a new level.

In chapter 1 ("Attica: A Landscape Surrounded by the Sea", pp. 27–42) Tzavella evokes succinctly but sufficiently the characteristics of Attica's relief, vegetation, hydrology, and pedology, in their considerable spatial variability, with reference wherever possible to ancient and pre-modern (sixteenth to nineteenth century) descriptions ("General Geography of Attica", pp. 27–28). She demonstrates due awareness of changes (even to geomorphic relief) within the historical era and/or the Late Holocene, now captured by palynologists and sedimentologists. This overview is further organised around empirically self-explanatory phenomena such as plains and mountains, also rivers, lakes and wetlands, of which some readers may be unaware. This introduces the reader to Attica's many traditional natural resources and thus to major traditional aspects of land-use, such as forestry, pastoralism, arboriculture, and the extractive industries, which will contribute to the interpretation of many archaeological sites ("Natural Environment and Resources"; pp. 28–42).

Chapter 2 ("Attica in Byzantine History", pp. 43–48) spells out the frustrating paucity of historical references after Late Antiquity to Attica as such (by contrast with references to Athens in some centuries, and to particular high-status institutions such as the monastery of Osios Meletios). But there does seem to be an over-reliance here (p. 45) on Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon's "Byzantium in the Iconoclastic Era"[1] in suggesting that there is no evidence of "an administrative entity" (p. 45) as the 'Transitional' period fades into the Middle Byzantine. In fact 'Attikê' had survived, or been revived, by the ninth century, if not the eighth century, as a division of the centralised fiscal administration, proven by the seal of its *dioikêtês*, while in the same period 'Vyotia' had its own *dioikêtês*. But these fiscal officials (responsible for the census) will have relied upon the services of local officials of the Thema of Hellas, perhaps a *droungarios* or a *tourmarkhês*. An Attic *droungaraton* would seem to be indicated by the Middle Byzantine regional epigraphy cited by Tzavella. Chapter 3 ("Byzantine Attica: Earlier Research", pp. 49–54), like Chapter 2, introduces aspects of Tzavella's data bases, this time the archaeological and topographic aspects. It is an overview of older and newer modes of enquiry or foci of enquiry in Attica: the conventional excavation ("Archaeological Excavations of Early and Middle Byzantine Attica", pp. 49–50), Christian Archaeology ("Studies on Byzantine Churches in

1 L. Brubaker/J. Haldon: Byzantium in the Iconoclastic Era, ca. 680–850. A History. Cambridge 2011.

Attica", p. 50), Rescue Archaeology, the 'Extensive Survey' (typically concerned with one cultural era), the 'Intensive Survey' (multi-period and increasingly interdisciplinary, "Field Surveys and Byzantine Finds", pp. 50–51), and, preceding all of them but continuing alongside them, Historical Topography ("Research on the Topography of Byzantine Attica", pp. 51–53) and Toponymy ("Toponyms in Byzantine Attica", pp. 53–54). Tzavella rightly makes systematic use, as one does, of all these approaches and foci of enquiry to build the most comprehensive documentation so far attempted of the post-Roman settlement archaeology of Attica, from the minor urban sites to pastoralists' rural installations.

Chapter 4 ("Land Routes and Maritime Communication in Byzantine Attica", pp. 55–86) analyses thoroughly the archaeological, geographical ("Land Routes: Topographic and Archaeological Evidence", pp. 59–75) and textual evidence ("The Evidence of the 'Tabula Peutingeriana'", pp. 56, 59) for terrestrial roads and "routes", and maritime routes ("Byzantine Megarid: A Forgotten Hub of Interregional Communications", pp. 75–77; "Ports and Anchorages in Byzantine Attica", pp. 77-86), a chapter which could have been placed in Part 2 ("Byzantine Attica: The Archaeology of Human Activity", pp. 87–292) since it examines sites and/or installations in their spatial relations to each other (not that this placing in Part 1 ["Byzantine Attica: The Geography, the History and Earlier Studies", pp. 27–86] interferes with the comprehension of its relevance). The chapter focuses upon an exemplary correlation, with reference to Late Antiquity, of the Roman and Late Roman *Itineraria*, Late Antique evidence for the legal status of the region's towns, the archaeology and topography of roads and "routes", and other written references from epigraphic to sixteenth-to-nineteenth-century Western observers of the region. This exercise enables Tzavella to demonstrate the growing military significance of Western Attica for the Late Roman state (including passages between the Gulf of Corinth and the Aegean) and the Middle Byzantine state's continuing interest in this area. Her correlation of texts and archaeology is crucial for her clarification of the sixth-century *Synekdemos* of Hierocles' attribution of the status of *polis* to the three relatively minor communities of Megara, Pagai, and Aigosthena, and the Late Roman revival of Eleusis. She also identifies the presence of the Middle Byzantine *Dromos* in Western Boeotia, the successor to the Roman and Late-Roman *Cursus*. Western Boeotia, including its refurbished rural fortresses, was, as Tzavella can argue "a hub of interregional communications" that was even-

tually "forgotten" (pp. 75–77). One would just like to see the distinction between 'roads' and "routes" made clearer. Sometimes, implicitly, the latter lack archaeological features (as opposed to 'roads'), but this is not usually clear.

Chapter 5 ["Attica in the Late Roman & Early Byzantine Period (4th to mid-7th c.)", pp. 88–164], concerning settlements and sites of all kinds in the fourth to mid-seventh centuries, is the most substantial chapter, dealing as it does with the now-recognised urban revival, the 'Busy countryside' (with *caveat*/s of course), and the advances in the distinction and approximate dating of the plain and 'coarse' wares of the Late Roman-to-Early Byzantine East which have helped the documentation of these phenomena. Case studies of Late-Roman to Early-Byzantine settlements ("Settlements in all Shapes and Sizes", pp. 89–127), recorded within surveys focused upon Attica in antiquity and throughout naturally defined landscapes (e.g., enclosed plains), enable Tzavella to create points of reference for the exploration of all aspects of rural settlement and land-use in Late Antiquity, for instance informing anyone interested in the evolution of the whole rural "Economy" (pp. 127–132) about the least-understood and reported, and yet still major, aspects of land-use, what one might call 'caprovine pastoralism'. Its relative neglect, and relative significance, lead one therefore to wish for a representative distribution map of the Late Antique stone 'pens' recorded by Hans Lohmann and colleagues in eastern Attica, since they do not appear among Tzavella's nine symbolised types of site. However, several types of site ("Defensive Structures in All Shapes and Sizes", pp. 132–149), such as rural fortifications, fortified villages, and farmsteads, each treated here as a topic and sub-section in its own right, are well served by the distribution maps and so can function more easily as points of reference for students of the archaeology of the Late Antique countryside, including inter-regional comparisons. Some are more developed than others owing to the quality of the published evidence, all of which has been checked on the ground by Tzavella of course. So, for instance, rural fortifications of all kinds, down to the smallest watchtower, enable a discussion of "a militarily organised landscape" (pp. 145–149) in Late Antique Attica. This is an extremely useful new comparandum for use in the study of Late Antique Boeotia and northern Greece. The presentation of so many types of site of this era in Tzavella's standard-setting distribution maps ("Maps of Byzantine Attica", pp. 650–660) – not all of which I am mentioning – also occasionally leaves one wish-

ing for the clarity that a legibly scaled plan would provide for urban or formerly urban sites, or complexes of discreet sites, such Late Antique Oropos or Late Antique Peiraeus (to name but two). And, if it is 'not too much to ask' and not unreasonable to do so, there is a historical (administrative, fiscal, and legal) aspect to the organisation, or re-organisation, of the Late Antique countryside which seems to be overlooked here, namely the institution of the *kômê*/*vicus*. It ought to replace the Attic *dêmoi* and it probably had a complicated relationship with the locations of churches in the countryside (whose archaeology Tzavella has discussed in detail elsewhere),[2] so it deserved a place in the very interesting discussions of nucleation and dispersal, communal levels of decision-making (e.g., whether to fortify a village), and rural markets in Late Antique Attica.

Many researchers would have stopped here (ca. 650 AD), but not Tzavella. Chapter 6 ("Attica in the 'Transitional Period', mid-7th to 9th Centuries", pp. 165–182) is a different kind of point of reference for investigators. Published mid-seventh-to-eighth century material from the countryside and related directly to habitation is still very scanty. But Tzavella assembles enough arguments to persuade one that, based on a range of artefacts, including coins, seals, traces of continuity at Early-Byzantine churches, architectural sculpture (but not *in situ*), and published pottery from adjacent areas such as Aigina, Attica did not experience rural discontinuity, nor that "collapse of state and social structures" (p. 165) which was once envisaged by archaeologists and some historians under the influence of archaeologists. Indeed, further afield, e.g., at Corinth and on Crete, seventh and eighth-century ceramic material is now quite well documented. But in Attica the eighth century is not yet definitely represented by pottery (pp. 179–180). The nature and extent of Slavic settlement ("Attica and the 'Slavic Question'", pp. 168–170) is evaluated on the basis of the limited and ambiguous, as she argues, toponymic evidence in a measured way, which clearly does not illuminate the seventh to ninth centuries either. However, Tzavella has interesting hypotheses about eighth-century phases at particular rural sites such as the fortified Ovriokastro, which may yet be illuminated as eighth-century deposits from Athens mentioned by Tzavella (pp. 171–179) are published by the archaeologists responsible.

[2] E. Tzavella: Christianisation of Attica. The topography of Early Christian churches. In: Pharos 20.2, 2014, pp. 121–158; DOI: 10.2143/PHA.20.2.3117845.

Chapter 7 ("Attica in the Middle Byzantine Period, 10th to 12th Centuries", pp. 183–266) is in one way markedly different from the thematically comparable chapter 5, in that Tzavella seeks to explore the challenge of the relationship between surviving imperial legislation governing the economy of the 'village' (as defined by the administration), Middle-Byzantine rural estates' archives, and the archaeology of rural settlement. She extrapolates (pp. 185–188) from the arguably most useful historians' assessments of the implications of those sources, offered by Michel Kaplan and Jacques Lefort, for rural settlement patterns and the relationship between fiscal divisions of the landscape between fiscally defined rural 'communities' (the *chorion*), and the distribution of, and differentiation between, actual units of settlement (typically central and perhaps nucleated, and peripheral and dispersed, units). Tzavella is circumspect about the interpretation of actual Middle-Byzantine archaeological patterns of contemporaneous nucleation and dispersal in Attica vis-à-vis the state's definitions of *choria* and outlying small settlements, which could have several origins, involving peasants, secular landlords, and monastic communities (or their dependencies). Some Attic sites, with evidence of chapels, could as Tzavella suggests, be small-scale monastic properties of some kind that were technically within a *chorion*. Anyway, this ambition to think about the rural sites of Attica within the framework of Middle-Byzantine institutions of the state and of elites, which is much easier in Macedonia, is highly commendable. The localisations of Middle-Byzantine monasteries is also a revelation of what can be achieved at the level of a small region by the systematic study of all kinds of sources (and in the absence of all but fragments of their medieval archives: pp. 246–266 and the map at Fig. 158). Tzavella, just as ambitiously, also here offers a very well researched historical analysis of Attica's Middle-Byzantine agricultural and artisanal productions, the latter mostly involving the exploitation of Attica's own natural resources. This section (pp. 224–245) is a model of the exploration of the written sources, mostly concerning Attica, and mostly Middle-Byzantine, but drawing on studies that survey the empire so as to both clarify problems in local sources and to test generalisations based on cross-regional studies, and, as one should, draws upon descriptions of pre-modern agriculture, land-use, and technologies, to clarify the interpretation of medieval sources.

Tzavella's work is the result of many years of archaeological and historical research, including fieldwork, and presents a rich, one must admit surprisingly rich, body of archaeological and historical evidence, all of which is de-

ployed to analyse important questions about the evolution of settlements in Attica, and their significance for the history of this small region (district, one might say) of the Late-Roman and Byzantine empires. She reaches carefully argued positions on a range of important questions which will be of great interest not only to people studying any region of the empire between ca. 300 and 1200 AD, but also of interest to scholars who concern themselves with issues in the rural economic history of the empire, the 'Transitional Era' or 'The Byzantine Revival', and others. As a contribution to an ongoing regional level of the rewriting of Byzantine history it also sets a new benchmark.

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