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New Book Explores Abandoned Settlements in the Eastern Mediterranean

People usually expect archaeologists to study abandoned sites to understand past societies. In the Eastern Mediterranean, however, the most commonly imagined sites are usually buried beneath meters of earth and require careful excavation to reveal their secrets.

*Deserted Villages: Perspectives from the Eastern Mediterranean* published this week from The Digital Press at the University of North Dakota brings together nine peer-reviewed studies of abandoned villages from Greece, Turkey, and North Dakota authored by leading scholars in their fields. Each study not only documents specific abandoned settlements in detail, but also offers nuanced analysis of these sites and the processes that led to their abandonment and current state. The book invites the reader to explore the vegetation overgrowing the hamlet of Pentaskouphi, the abandoned churches of Kythera, the roads and paths of the Western Argolid, and the imposing stone houses of the Mani peninsula. Reflections on sites as diverse as the settlement of Lakka Skoutara in the southeastern Corinthia and the town of Wheelock in Western North Dakota prompt historians and archaeologists to come to terms with abandonment as a process and state.

Dr. Deborah E. Brown Stewart, the book's co-editor and Head of the Penn Museum Library at the University of Pennsylvania, noted that these villages often elicited mixed responses from people who encounter them, "some people dismiss them as unsightly ruins, others photograph them as romantic, and still others might think about the potential for investing and restoring to create a lovely summer place in the country. Archaeologists instead see opportunities to reveal the stories of people and communities that are too often missing from history and our understanding of the past."

The countryside of the Eastern Mediterranean is filled with abandoned villages, hamlets, and settlements that are often still standing. The residents of these sites abandoned their homes in after World War II for many reasons ranging from the convenience of mechanized agriculture to the appeal of urban life, the dislocations of war, and the changing character of the global economy. Archaeologists have regularly made note of these abandoned settlements, but until now, there wasn't a single volume focused on their archaeology.

Dr. Rebecca M. Seifried, the book's other co-editor and Geospatial Information Librarian at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, suggests, "while we focus on work being done by medieval and early modern archaeologists, the topic as a whole speaks to the kinds of questions that scholars of other time periods and even entirely other fields are asking, and this makes our book a contribution not only to Mediterranean archaeology, but also to a much more wide-ranging body of scholarship. I believe that anyone interested in life in rural villages, about the process of abandonment, or about how reuse and adaptation affect material signatures of the archaeological record will find something of delight in this book."

Like all books published by The Digital Press at the University of North Dakota, *Deserted Villages* is available as both a free download and as low-cost paperback. The director of The Digital Press, William Caraher remarks: "It's particularly important for books that seek to draw attention to an often overlooked aspect of the Mediterranean landscape to circulate as widely and freely as possible. Open access publication ensures that anyone with even a casual interest in the sites, methods, and problems associated with these kinds of sites can read and engage the work in this book."

The book is available as a free download from The Digital Press website (<https://thedigitalpress.org/deserted-villages/>) or as a paperback from Amazon (<https://www.amazon.com/Deserted-Villages-Perspectives-Eastern-Mediterranean/dp/1736498681/>)

Here's a description of the book:

*Deserted Villages: Perspectives from the Eastern Mediterranean* is a collection of case studies examining the abandonment of rural settlements over the past millennium and a half, focusing on modern-day Greece with contributions from Turkey and the United States. Unlike other parts of the world, where deserted villages have benefited from decades of meticulous archaeological research, in the eastern Mediterranean better-known ancient sites have often overshadowed the nearby remains of more recently abandoned settlements. Yet as the papers in this volume show, the tide is finally turning toward a more engaged, multidisciplinary, and anthropologically informed archaeology of medieval and post-medieval rural landscapes.

The inspiration for this volume was a two-part colloquium organized for the 2016 Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America in San Francisco. The sessions were sponsored by the Medieval and Post-Medieval Archaeology Interest Group, a rag-tag team of archaeologists who set out in 2005 with the dual goals of promoting the study of later material and cultural heritage and opening publication venues to the fruits of this research. The introduction to the volume reviews the state of the field and contextualizes the archaeological understanding of abandonment and post-abandonment as ongoing processes. The nine peer reviewed chapters, which have been substantially revised and expanded since the colloquium, offer unparalleled glimpses into how this process has played out in different places locations. In the first half, the studies focus on long-abandoned sites that have now entered the archaeological record. In the second half, the studies incorporate archival analysis and ethnographic interviews—alongside the archaeologists’ hyper-attention to material culture—to examine the processes of abandonment and post-abandonment in real time.

Edited by Rebecca M. Seifried and Deborah E. Brown Stewart.

With contributions from Ioanna Antoniadou, Todd Brenningmeyer, William R. Caraher, Marica Cassis, Timothy E. Gregory, Miltiadis Katsaros, Kostis Kourelis, Anthony Lauricella, Dimitri Nakassis, David K. Pettegrew, Richard Rothaus, Guy D. R. Sanders, Isabel Sanders, Lita Tzortzopoulou-Gregory, Olga Vassi, Bret Weber, and Miyon Yoo.

Download or purchase the book here: https://thedigitalpress.org/deserted-villages/

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Photo 1: Abandoned Village on the Mani Peninsula, Greece. Photo courtesy of Rebecca M. Seifried.

Photo 2: Abandoned Village on the Mani Peninsula, Greece. Photo courtesy of Rebecca M. Seifried.

Photo 3: The Abandoned Settlement of Lakka Skoutara in the Corinthia, Greece. Photo courtesy of David Pettegrew.

Photo 4: The Abandoned Settlement of Chelmis in the Argolid, Greece. Photo courtesy of Dimitri Nakassis.

Photo 5: The Abandoned Settlement of Chelmis in the Argolid, Greece featuring Holy the Dog. Photo courtesy of Dimitri Nakassis.