

The Topography of Ancient Tegea: New Discoveries and Old Problems

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The city of Tegea was one of the most important cities on the Peloponnese in antiquity, but it has until now remained strangely unknown in archaeological research. The Norwegian Arcadia Survey (1998 – 2001) focused its fieldwork mainly on the area of the ancient city and we are now beginning to understand some important aspects of the topography of the city. The sanctuary of Athena Alea was located outside the main area of urban settlement, although it evidently predates the urbanization of the area, which seems to have occurred in the second half of the 6th century B.C.

When the Norwegian excavations in the sanctuary of Athena Alea at Tegea came to a halt in 1994, important new information had been collected not only on the archaic temple foundations, but also on earlier, simpler, cult buildings on the site, as well as the layout of the *temenos* to the north of the late classical temple.¹ But even though we were in a position to follow cult-practice at the site well back into the 8th century and perhaps beyond, we were also in a position typical of traditional classical archaeology in Greece, with detailed information on a single, monumental sanctuary and virtually no information on the surrounding landscape. For this reason, it was in 1994 clear that to be able to comprehend the development of the sanctuary in a wider context we needed more archaeological information of a regional kind. Archaeological survey seemed best adapted for answering these questions and from 1998 an interdisciplinary group of Norwegian scholars has been working in the area to fill this gap. (For the survey area, see Fig. 1.)

The present article will present some of the main aims of the project and preliminary results, particularly regarding the difficult topic of the historical topography of the city of Tegea in antiquity.

1. Preliminary reports on these works: Østby *et al.* 1994; Nordquist, 2002; Voyatzis 2002; Østby 2002. See also the papers by Ch. Tarditi, M.E. Voyatzis and E. Østby in this volume.

The topography of the Tegean area and the Norwegian Arcadia Survey

The ancient *polis* of Tegea controlled the larger, southern part of a highland plain in Central Eastern Arcadia. The plain is composed of undulating low hills and the altitude is descending towards southwest, where even today a small lake, the Lake Takka, is situated. Further north, the plain is at its narrowest just north of modern Tripolis, before widening up in an almost completely level plain, which in antiquity formed the territory of Mantinea. The karstic nature of the plain and the poor and precarious drainage system through *katavothra* (or sink-holes) have had important consequences for human settlement in the area. Fluctuating river courses and repeated floodings must until recent times have been an important factor in the location of settlements and in resource management. Today, artificial irrigation and increased private and public consumption of water is constantly lowering the ground water table, and unruly rivers and flooding do not present problems any more. As we will show later, these dynamic landscape features have changed the topography considerably since antiquity.

Since Norwegian excavations had been carried out in the sanctuary of Athena Alea, this locality was a natural point of departure for the survey project. A project area of ca. 50 km² was chosen with the sanctuary in the centre. (Fig. 1) The area was also chosen so as to include different topographical features, from the foothills surrounding the plain in the south, across the central part of the plain and into low ridges to the north, where the suburbs of modern Tripolis formed obvious obstacles to investigation. In this way, the survey area represents a cross-section of the plain, with the sanctuary and the site of the ancient city of Tegea in the centre.

The archaeological survey primarily aimed at documenting find-density patterns. For practical purposes, this entailed that all levels of distribution have been recorded, also what is evidently very low 'off-site' distribution of artefacts. (Fig. 2) Since an ancient urban site, Tegea, was included in the survey area, this approach also seemed a convenient way of documenting different levels of densities inside what may still be termed a single site. All information has been stored in a GIS database that allows interdisciplinary collaboration and statistical analysis.

The extension of the city of Tegea

Compared to the sanctuary of Athena Alea, the city of Tegea has so far not received much scholarly interest from archaeologists. In fact, one of the main contributions was made by V. Bérard as far back as in 1892,² and then in the context of French interest in the archaeology of Mantinea and at the sanctuary

2. Bérard 1892.

of Athena Alea, where large-scale excavations were initiated by G. Mendel and concluded by Ch. Dugas.³ Bérard's work at Tegea followed closely his earlier investigations at Mantinea and one of the main objects was to locate and date the city-walls. Although no traces of these were then, or now, visible on the surface, Bérard succeeded in identifying three certain stretches of the walls through trial trenches. His three points were located in the northern, western and eastern part of the circuit, while another structure of more uncertain function was found to the south of the sanctuary of Athena Alea. This last stretch was by Bérard only hypothetically claimed as belonging to the city-walls. Bérard dated all these structures to the early 4th century, mainly on the evidence of analogy with the better documented walls of Mantinea.

From these four points Bérard assumed that one could follow the course of the walls in the modern road network. This assumption was to a large extent built on the example of Mantinea, where it was quite evident that later road-building had exploited the firm foundation of the walls. This analogy led Bérard to assume a similar elliptic shape for the wall circuit at Tegea, an assumption that has since been accepted by most scholars. It has also been assumed that the sanctuary was located inside the walls, an assumption of far-reaching importance for the interpretation both of the character of the sanctuary and of its relationship with the urbanistic pattern of the region.

The centre of the city has since the late 19th century been located in the area of Palaia Episkopí, where the remains of a theatre from the Hellenistic period have been partially visible. This structure can be linked to Pausanias' description of the city, where it appears that the theatre was situated "not far from the *agorá*".⁴ Excavations conducted in the 1980s by the Ephorate of Antiquities of Arcadia and Laconia, directed by Dr. Th. Spyropoulos, found the remains of buildings clearly connected with the *agorá*, such as a Hellenistic stoa, although later rebuilding obscures the original layout.

To the north of the city-area, as defined by Bérard, are the two low hills of Akra and Hagios Sostis. Building fragments and figurines have been found near the top of the latter, which has been interpreted as a sanctuary of Demeter and Kore, mentioned by Pausanias.⁵ It is not at all clear from Pausanias' account whether the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore was situated at "the high place" he mentions later and associates with Zeus Klarios; nor is it clear where this akropolis was located: at Hagios Sostis, Akra or somewhere within the city area, where no significant hill can be observed today.

One aim in our archaeological survey of the city area was to delimit the

3. Mendel 1901; Dugas 1921; Dugas *et al.* 1924.

4. Paus. 8.49.1.

5. Jost 1985, 154-6; Paus. 8.53.7.

urban site and to obtain statistical indications on the development of the city (see below). This aim also included a reappraisal of Bérard's study of the city-walls. Recently, Bérard's maps have been digitized and georeferenced by Mr. Thomas Risan, which has made it possible to locate with reasonable certainty his three trial trenches.⁶ It is not difficult to follow Bérard's hypothetical course of the walls on a general level, since many of the local roads held by him to follow the walls are still in existence. At one point a huge block could still be seen in the ditch running alongside one of the roads indicated by Bérard, so his case may indeed come out strengthened by our research.

The distribution pattern of artefacts in the surface also confirms the general validity of Bérard's argument, with some, but very significant, corrections. (Fig. 3) There was, generally speaking, a significant drop in density of artefacts more or less on Bérard's hypothetical line of walls, with the notable exception of the southern half of his elliptical city area. In this latter area, only insignificant amounts of material on the surface were documented. Since this was both unexpected and difficult to reconcile with the vast amounts of material from the excavations in the sanctuary, situated in exactly the southern part of Bérard's urban area, we had to take into account the possibility of recent sedimentation, covering earlier cultural layers.

Even in the sanctuary area, the French and later the Norwegian excavators had encountered deposits of sterile silt above the foundations of the temple and the ancient layers, so there seemed to be strong arguments in favour of massive flooding in the post-classical period. For this reason, it was imperative to gather more information on the stratigraphy in this part of the urban area.

The Norwegian excavations 1990-94 had included an area to the north of the late classical temple, reaching ca. 35 m northwards, where the present archaeological area is limited by a modern country road. During the excavations, it became clear that the late classical ground level had been sloping towards north. It is also likely that the area had been levelled with marble debris from the temple-construction in the late classical period and that the slope had been more pronounced in earlier times. The marble debris tapered off and ended in the northernmost part of the Norwegian excavation trenches. Below this layer, a large structure in mud-brick, perhaps oriented east-west, was partially excavated in 1993.⁷ For stratigraphical reasons this structure had to be earlier than the late classical

6. Bérard's trial trenches to the east and west have been disturbed by modern building activity, while there might still exist some traces of his trial trench to the north.

7. I am grateful to the director of the Norwegian excavations, Dr. Erik Østby, for permission to study and publish parts of the excavation results. The northern sector of the excavations will be published in Monographs from the Norwegian Institute at Athens. The excavations of the mud-brick structure in 1993 was supervised by this writer.

construction of the temple, and possibly to be dated to the late archaic or early classical periods. The excavation of this interesting structure could for practical reasons not be continued in the final excavation season in 1994, and consequently any interpretation can only be based on an incomplete understanding of the extent and function of the structure. What was certain, however, was that this partially collapsed mud-brick structure could be observed in a rectangular trench 10 m wide (east-west direction) and 5 m long (north-south). Furthermore, to gain a better understanding, it was decided to excavate through the structure in the northernmost part of the trench. The mud-brick structure proved to be about 1.20 m deep, but no stone foundation could be discerned underneath it. Since the full extension of the structure is not known, it is, of course, possible that stone foundations existed under other parts of the structure. Because of the large extension and considerable depth of the mud-brick, the only reasonable interpretation for it was as a massive wall, bordering the northern part of the *temenos*. Since such massive *temenos* walls are, to my knowledge, highly unusual, other explanations might see it as part of the city walls, or perhaps more probable, of some other large structure, such as the stadion.⁸ But since it was clear that only further investigation could clarify the function of this structure, it was natural for the survey project to start a more extensive investigation from the northern end of the Norwegian excavation trenches. The terrain was well adapted for investigation, being completely level, agricultural land without any buildings or other obstructions.

Since the project did not have permission for extensive trial-trenching, the possibilities for study were restricted to core-augering and GPR. The combination of these methods proved to be efficient, since GPR profiles could be checked by core columns 10 cm in diameter that were also collected for pollen-analysis.

The results were as follows: Only about 2 m north of the limit of the Norwegian excavations, the GPR profiles show a steep ca. 30 m wide ditch, about 15 m deep at its lowest point. It is not clear in which direction this ditch was running, since the GPR-profiles were two-dimensional. Core samples confirmed this impression and added some important further information. Small fragments of pottery and tile were present in the samples, and from a depth of ca. 11 m towards the southern part of the ditch a fragment of tile with a *terminus ante quem* in the Roman period was found. From about 9 m depth at the same location came a fragment of a tile, probably of medieval date. This evidence suf-

8. The stadion is mentioned by Pausanias, 8.47.4. It was evidently connected with the sanctuary of Athena Alea and should be located in the vicinity, as is also indicated by Pausanias' phrasing in the passage cited above (Τοῦ ναοῦ δὲ οὐ πόρρω στάδιον χῶμα γῆς ἔστι). A fragmentary block from the starting threshold, not *in situ*, was identified right east of the late classical temple by Dr. Jari Pakkanen during the Norwegian excavations at the site, thus confirming the probability that the stadion was located nearby.

fices to show that this ditch had gradually silted up since the medieval period. There are no indications that this ditch was artificial. It may perhaps more plausibly be interpreted as a meander-lake left by a river. There was, however, no clear evidence for river banks consisting of water-borne gravel.

Although sufficient information has been collected to show that the topography in this area north of the sanctuary has been considerably altered since antiquity, it has proved extremely difficult to map this situation in detail. The most important agent in changing the landscape in this part of the plain is probably the changing courses of the major river in the area, the Sarandapotamos.⁹ Today, this river follows a deeply eroded river-bed from the foothills to the south of ancient Tegea towards the north, where it drains into sink-holes east of modern Tripolis. Several scholars have already supposed that the river earlier flowed westwards, towards the Lake Takka, a course implied already by Pausanias.¹⁰ Such a course would imply that the river once ran very close to the sanctuary of Athena Alea. From the previously mentioned core samples and GPR sections, combined with geological interpretation of surface sediments and maps, we can now tentatively posit the existence of several earlier courses of the Sarandapotamos.

We can therefore conclude that the southern half of the urban area, as defined by Bérard, was in antiquity characterized by wetlands, ponds, and probably also riverine activity. This explains why there are no archaeological finds on the surface: not primarily because of recent sedimentation, but rather because this area was not suited for dense habitation, and certainly not for urban development. There are, furthermore, no certain indications that the sanctuary was included within the walls. It is far more probable that the walls were situated further to the north, perhaps exploiting the deep ditch north of the sanctuary as a defensive asset.

Pottery production

The extension of the ancient city of Tegea has thus been reasonably well established. It is now the time to turn to the more specific information that can be gathered on the function of different parts of the city and, last but not least, the chronology of the urban settlement.

The *agorà* forms one fixed point in the topography of the city. In what we now know to be the extension of the city, the *agorà* forms almost the exact centre. But apart from the *agorà*, where presumably the main political buildings were located, the surface finds of the survey do indicate other areas where

9. The modern name of the river, "The forty rivers", is of course also highly indicative in this respect. In antiquity, the river was identified as the upper course of the Alpheios; see Paus. 8.54.1-4.

10. Pritchett 1965, 122-5.

specific activities took place. So far, the most compelling evidence is for pottery workshops and at least one newly identified urban sanctuary.

In an area approximately 250 m to the west of the *agorà* certain evidence for pottery production has turned up on the surface in several adjacent fields (see the paper by V. Cracolici in this volume). This is actually the first certain evidence for pottery production at Tegea, although local pottery production has been assumed also earlier, mainly on stylistic grounds.¹¹

A new urban sanctuary

The sanctuary of Athena Alea has so far received by far most attention among the sanctuaries in or near Tegea documented by written sources. Apart from Athena Alea, only the sanctuary probably dedicated to Demeter on the hill of Hagios Sostis has been archaeologically documented before the survey project (see above, p. 211 with n. 5). Huge amounts of votive terracottas, particularly figurines have been found at Hagios Sostis since the 19th century, and our survey was no exception.¹²

The sanctuary of Athena Alea has been considered of particular importance for understanding the urbanization and the political organisation of the area. It is by now likely that the city did not grow directly up around the sanctuary, but rather at a distance of about 1 km to the north. The Norwegian Arcadia Survey has, however, also collected evidence for other sanctuaries, one of them certainly within the urban perimeter.

Evidence for this sanctuary was first found in several building blocks, many of them reused in the modern village of Nea Episkopi. Few were clearly diagnostic, but one of them was a fragment of a ramp.¹³ Since the area in question was flat and accessible, we decided to employ GPR to investigate the subsurface. The GPR-profiles were highly successful, with clear reflections of substructures of about 16 x 26 meters. That this is a temple is highly likely, not only because of the building blocks on the surface, but also by the character of the substructures. In the profile across the structure, it was in fact evident that the building had two rows of foundations, very similar in distance and size to what is usually found underneath external colonnades and cella walls. So far we have no clear evidence for the date of this structure. There

11. Courbin 1966, 501-2, 549, mentions local traits in the LG pottery from Tegea: Voyatzis 1990, 72-74.

12. Jost, 1985, 154-6. During our survey about 20 fragments of figurines and numerous fragments of painted pottery were found in a small area to the north of Hagios Sostis. The material probably came from a votive deposit and dates to the 6th century B.C.

13. I am grateful to Dr. Jari Pakkanen, University of London, for a preliminary analysis of these building blocks.

were few datable finds in the surface, mainly because of high grasses.

Other architectural fragments were, however, also found during the survey of the ancient city. From two different localities fragments of Doric capitals of the second half of the 6th century were found.¹⁴ None of these have, however, been found in the vicinity of our probable temple, and although capitals of this size can be transported easily,¹⁵ they do seem to cluster in the area around the *agorà* at Palaia Episkopì.

During fieldwork in the summer of 2001, another Doric capital was discovered among rubble and reused building material in a small chapel between the two modern villages Alea and Stadio. This was substantially larger than the other capitals discovered so far, and also typologically different. This had a wide, flattish echinus and the typical early feature of a hollow groove where the echinus tapers off to the column shaft. This capital should probably be dated to the late 7th or to the early decades of the 6th century. This is in fact the earliest Doric capital known from Tegea, and it must have belonged to a large building. One obvious candidate is the archaic temple of Athena Alea, which was constructed exactly around this time.¹⁶

The date of the urbanization of Tegea

The history of the city of Tegea has been difficult to follow further back than the early 4th and late 5th century,¹⁷ when writers such as Thucydides and Xenophon testify to an urban centre surrounded by fortifications. Although some sort of political organization must have existed from the archaic period onwards, it may have been a loose confederation of villages that only at a late stage was fused into one centre by synoecism.¹⁸ This would conform better to the traditional view of Arcadia as a backwards region, more dominated by the *ethnos* than the *polis*. This traditional view has, however, been seriously questioned during the last decades. The survey in the area of the ancient city provides new material relevant for this crucial historical question. As described above, the area of dense urban settlement must have been more restricted than previously thought. Within this area, a consistent pattern has emerged, where the earliest material can be dated to the second half of the 6th century B.C. This observation is confirmed by the Greek excavations in the *agorà*, where the earliest material

14. I am grateful to Dr. Erik Østby, University of Bergen, for a preliminary analysis of the capitals.

15. One of the capitals found by the survey had been reused as a basin.

16. Østby *et al.* 1994, 94 and 99.

17. "There seems to be no evidence for the dating of the συνοικισμός of Tegea" (Andrewes 1952, 3, n. 11.)

18. This view is largely built on the evidence of Strabo, 8.3.2.

could also be dated to the late 6th century B.C.¹⁹ As we have seen, this is also the date of the earliest architectural fragments from the city, as well as the votive objects from the sanctuary probably dedicated to Demeter on Hagios Sostis.

The new evidence from the survey in the area of the ancient city therefore points to drastic changes in the pattern of settlement and in the political organization of Tegea around the middle of the 6th century. It is difficult to avoid connecting this with the hostilities with Sparta and more precisely with the establishment of the Peloponnesian League, usually dated to this period. In some way the relations with Sparta are likely to have influenced the development at Tegea, but it is far more difficult to establish with any certainty or even probability whether the urbanization was a response against the Spartan threat or whether it was precisely the opposite, caused by the establishment in power of a pro-Spartan faction among the Tegean aristocracy.

It is also possible to exclude all Spartan influence on the urbanization of Tegea and instead focus on internal factors. We are unfortunately not yet in a position to evaluate changes in the settlement pattern in a long chronological perspective, simply because we still lack vital information on, for instance, the Geometric period, which is still virtually a blank page in the settlement record of the territory of Tegea. There are, however, some interesting points that should be made. First of all, one should expect that the construction of the large and expensive monumental temple for Athena Alea undertaken by the Tegeans in the late 7th century (the first monumental stone temple dedicated to the goddess) depended on an organization of some complexity. When the construction was brought to conclusion, one would also expect that the sanctuary, although of importance also previously, would become an even more important common symbol and focus for the Tegeans. In this perspective it is hardly a coincidence that the fiercest hostilities with Sparta probably took place exactly in the first half of the 6th century. These hostilities may in turn have created the stimulus for a more centralised pattern of political organization. Whatever the details and the driving forces in the process, we can now with reasonable certainty establish that Tegea became a city around the mid-6th century. The sanctuary of Athena Alea must have played its part in the process towards urbanization, but the city did not grow up around the sanctuary, but rather in the more salutary environment about one km further north.

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19. I am grateful to Dr. Th. Spyropoulos for information regarding his excavations in the *agorà*.

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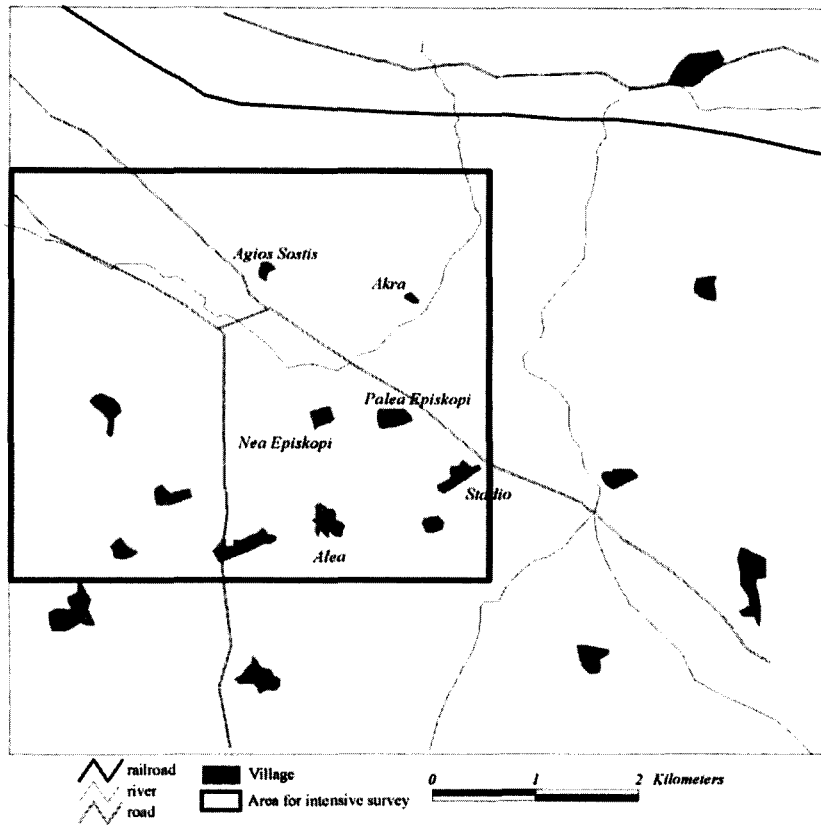


Fig. 1. The survey area of The Norwegian Arcadia Survey 1998 – 2001, including modern villages and infrastructure. (Map: NIKU – Norwegian Institute for Cultural Research.)

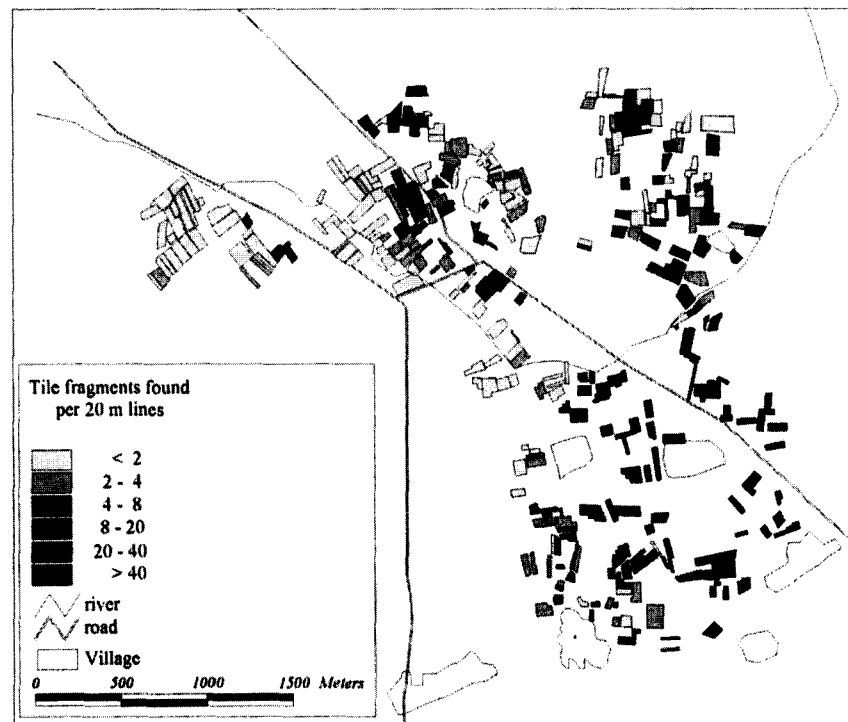


Fig. 2. The Norwegian Arcadia Survey. Density of tiles in surveyed fields. (Map: NIKU – Norwegian Institute for Cultural Research.)

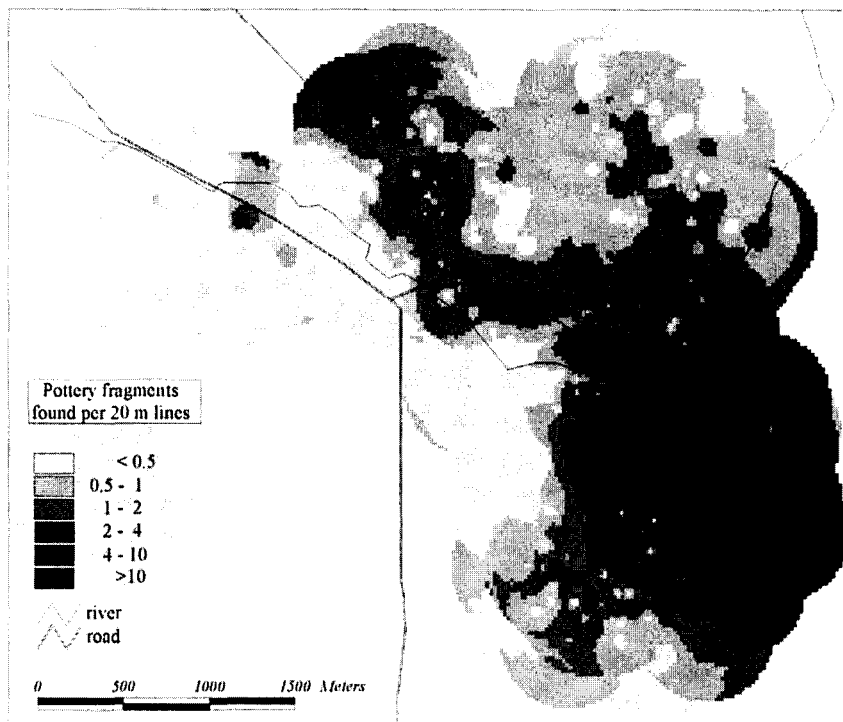


Fig. 3. Statistical interpolation of density of pottery fragments from surveyed fields, showing probable extension of the city of Tegea. (Map: NIKU – Norwegian Institute for Cultural Research.)