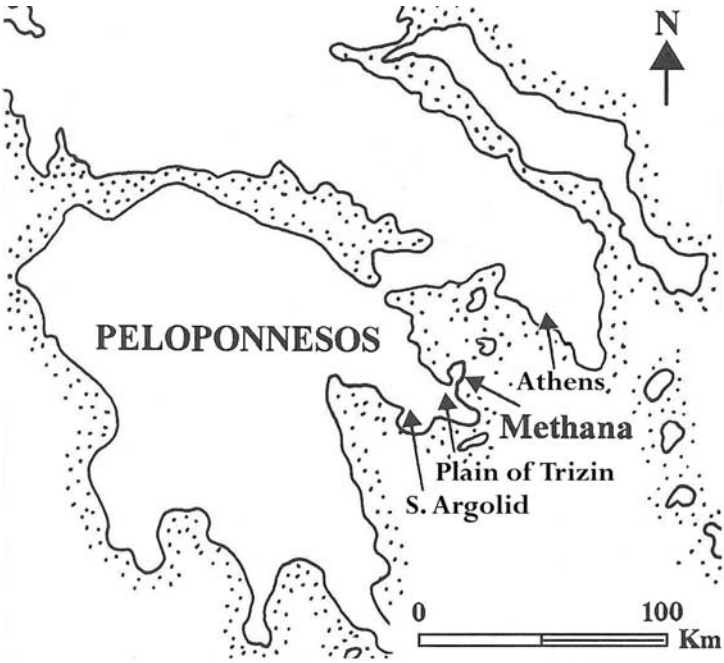
1

INTRODUCTION

> Methana is a rough and rocky place owing to its volcanic origin: it lacks any running drinkable water or flat land. The inhabitants practise agriculture on the slopes and ridges of the gentler foothills, stabilising the cultivable land with walls so that the rainwater does not carry it away.
>
> (Miliarakis 1886, 207)

Landscape as a concept and a practice was originally devised by artists. It has been 'discovered' as a topic of intense interest by academics in several disciplines: landscape history, for example, especially in the form of English landscape history, has an honourable academic pedigree. In archaeology the rise of surface survey has led in the last two decades or so to an emphasis on the ways in which settlements have appeared and disappeared in different landscapes. Geographers, too, have for many years investigated settlement patterns and land use in landscapes, both historically and synchronically. Social anthropologists, on the other hand, with their emphasis on humans as actors in a social milieu and on the organisation of social systems, have traditionally shown much less interest in landscapes, although the situation has changed in the last two decades.

Archaeologists have traditionally focused on 'the site': social anthropologists have likewise traditionally focused on its living equivalent, 'the community'. Despite the development of surface survey in archaeology and the recognition of 'the site' as an inherently artificial construct, it has continued to be the mainstay of most archaeological thinking. Given the multitudes of 'sites' and 'communities' needing research worldwide, most researchers for a long time failed to look



1.1. Location of Methana.

beyond the confines of these narrow but theoretically absorbing loci of attention. More recently, however, scholars, especially in archaeology, have realised that there is more to their study-communities past and present than the settlement. Settlements have been set within areas of land which have clearly had a multitude of meanings – economic, social, political, historical, religious and more besides – for their inhabitants. Furthermore, given the nature of the typical study focus of many archaeological and social anthropological projects, the supposedly empty spaces-between-the-places have taken the form of rural landscapes.

This volume investigates the meanings of the rural landscapes of Methana, a small peninsula in the Peloponnese of southern Greece, of no great historical (or Western tourist) interest (figs. 1.1 and 1.2). I first visited the area in 1971, and since that time it has been the primary focus of my academic research in various guises, anthropological and archaeological. During an initial two-year period of ethnographic

1.2. Panoramic view of Methana.

fieldwork from 1972 to 1974, I gathered a large amount of anthropological field data. I also recognised numerous archaeological sites which I did not have permission from the Greek government to investigate. During the 1980s, therefore, I spent more time on Methana, codirecting an archaeological field research project. The project had archaeological survey as its main focus: a search for evidence of past human activity on the peninsula in the form of artefacts on the land surface. Thus, although sites in general were of primary interest in the research, rather than focusing on a particular site, as archaeologists have traditionally done, the research had a much broader canvas: the landscape as a whole (Mee and Forbes [eds.] 1997).

As a result of conversations with colleagues, I began to realise that there was much more to be said about Methana and its landscape, especially in the context of an increasing archaeological and anthropological literature on landscapes and their meanings. With this in mind, I returned to my field notes, discovering aspects of the meanings of the Methana landscape to its inhabitants that held a significance of which I had not been fully conscious previously. I also visited Methana again in 1998 to conduct further research for the present volume, particularly noting changes since the original fieldwork and consulting archival sources.

In its theoretical orientation, this book lies within the context of recent archaeological writings on landscape. Since the 1980s, archaeology has tended to move away from inherently materialist and processualist approaches to landscapes. In particular, phenomenological approaches in the context of prehistoric archaeology have emphasised the investigation of *meaning* in landscapes. Ironically, most works which use this approach lack a feeling that 'real' people actually

'belong' within the landscapes being studied: in many phenomenological approaches, the 'meaning' of prehistoric landscapes seems to relate primarily or exclusively to the exogenous archaeologist. To overcome such difficulties, discussion here proceeds beyond the confines of archaeological discourse, incorporating recent approaches to landscapes being pursued by social and cultural anthropologists.

As Anschuetz, Wilshusen, and Scheik (2001, 190) note, the 'language' and the meaning of landscapes are more readily accessible to people from traditional communities than is the usual terminology employed by archaeologists. Whereas archaeologists generally consider past places as removed from the present and no longer part of contemporary landscapes, people in traditional societies who are integrated with their landscapes view history as part of a living process which includes the present. The seamless links between present and past are reaffirmed through cultural-historical associations with landscapes: '[a]s archaeologists, it is important to consider the past in terms of indigenous peoples, not just of our discipline' (Anschuetz et al. 2001, 190). Understanding how traditional societies in the present and recent past have related themselves to their own pasts via their landscapes is thus a vital element in this goal.

Although less numerous than archaeological examples, ethnographic studies of the meanings of landscapes to their inhabitants generally escape the tendency to present the meaning of the landscape for the exogenous observer. However, most tend to concentrate on peoples and ways of life far removed from European experiences. Whether Australian Aborigines or indigenous circumpolar zone peoples can provide genuine pointers for understanding meanings of landscapes in prehistoric Europe is perhaps debatable. Nevertheless, these ethnographic studies indicate that there are ways to investigate and understand relationships between people and their landscapes which foreground indigenous views.

Ethnographic monographs have traditionally tended to focus on non-material aspects: social, political and religious institutions or structures. This book is primarily an ethnographic exploration of identity, but it shares with archaeological studies a focus on a visible, material element (in this case, a landscape and its material contents) and its position in a wider cultural system. It is also archaeological inasmuch as

it places its theoretical interests firmly within the historical context of archaeologists' interests in landscape. Hence, it seems fair to describe it as an ethnography for archaeologists.

Landscapes are not an element of material culture like pottery or tombs, but they are nonetheless culturally constructed, and they contain within them elements of material culture. Meanings can only inhere in landscapes when structured through the medium of senses and knowledge informed by a person's culture: without meanings given to them by human groups, they are merely environments. Thus, this study moves inevitably from the particularities of the material environment as viewed by outsiders (non-natives), to the cultural and social institutions through which the landscape's inhabitants have structured its meanings. The end point of the exploration of these cultural and social institutions is a focus on kinship. In this aspect at least, this book resembles many traditional ethnographic monographs.

Unlike most ethnographic works to which archaeologists refer, this one does not concern a highly 'exotic' cultural group, with a lifestyle and world-view far removed from those of Westerners. Rather, it deliberately examines a community with a way of life and a form of religion more likely to be understandable to Western readers. In focusing on a much more 'ordinary' community, more closely approaching the reality of most readers' own lives, my intention is to subvert the tendency of archaeologists to choose examples from peoples least like themselves, thus sometimes unconsciously dehumanising them. Simultaneously, I explore some fundamental aspects of anthropology, which developed its methodologies and outlooks as a discipline historically devoted to cultural and social 'otherness' through a study of a community which is very much 'like ourselves'.

This book, a distillation of a relationship among myself, Methana's inhabitants, and their landscapes which has continued for more than thirty years, explores how the people of a small European community have experienced their own landscapes. It investigates how they have integrated a wide variety of aspects of the recent and more distant past into a range of present meanings which their landscapes have held for them. I also investigate how they have seen themselves belonging to the local community and within a local landscape and how these aspects of belonging have informed each other.

To achieve the presentation of how Methanites have experienced their own landscape, I have combined the results of ethnographic studies, archaeological survey, and study of local archival documents. I have also utilised two opposed but complementary anthropological styles of description. In the first part of the book, I set the stage, describing a variety of aspects of Methana – its geology, history and aspects of its social system – very much from the point of view of the outside academic observer. This etic viewpoint is transformed in the second part of the book into the opposite side of the descriptive coin, by presenting an emic description: that is, the insider's view – or rather my attempt to represent that view. The purpose of the work is to present the multiple complex meanings of a specific landscape for the inhabitants who have lived there: how they have belonged within it, how it represents their historical roots, and how their relationship to it has changed over generations.

However, the goal is more than simply a particularistic description of a society in a limited geographic area. It is a holistic view of a set of relationships to landscapes presented as a counterbalance to some archaeologists' presentations of prehistoric landscapes whose single-focus studies tend to use ethnographic comparanda drawn from highly 'exotic' societies. Although the details of the situation described here are unique, Methanites themselves have at another level been ordinary Greeks, living out their lives in a way thoroughly understandable to many of their compatriots. As I note in the next chapter, however, many of the features of relationships with their landscapes found among much more 'other-ly' peoples around the world are also directly comparable to what is described in this volume.

At base, therefore, this work is about bodies of *knowledge*, which can be viewed at more than one level. Unlike more overtly political studies, it is not primarily about knowledge as power, although that element appears occasionally. Rather, it is about the knowledge that Methanites have of their identity as Methanites, living on the peninsula of Methana: what is important to them and known in detail and what is unimportant and therefore unelaborated. That body of knowledge is vast. It is my contention that it is also not neatly stored and systematised like a series of directories and sub-directories in computer programmes. It is unsystematised but nonetheless coherent. In

the context of *how* Methanites know the things they know and under what circumstances their knowledge is triggered, the landscape is vital. It is full of meaningful features – prompts – which bring a relevant element of knowledge to the fore for a particular person in a particular context. Frequently, questions concerning these meaningful features would produce a recitation of the body of knowledge associated with them: in other words, the knowledge would not simply be divulged but would be *performed*.

From this perspective, the landscape represents a stage on which issues of social relations, production and reproduction have all been played out over the generations. Physical structures, such as houses, as well as land ownership within the landscape have likewise acted as important social props which have simultaneously acted as monuments connecting individuals to their pasts through the histories of their inheritance. These props–monuments have also connected individuals to others through kinship, via shared aspects of those inherited pasts, giving meaning or significance to the dramas of social relations. This monumentalised landscape has also linked individuals with the future by the fact that land and houses would in due course be passed on as meaningful props to new inheriting generations.

Finally, overarching this level has been the religious landscape of numerous churches scattered across the peninsula. They have provided the stages on which have been enacted the relations between time-bound humans and the community of divine beings who lie both inside and outside the human world and its necessary temporalities. Yet, these churches have once more connected ordinary humans as they have met together to worship. Ultimately, all these features make the physical environment of Methana into a landscape; at the same time, the body of knowledge relevant to these prompts is what gives meaning to that landscape.

There is also another level at which knowledge is being performed. This is the knowledge of the person who describes the body of knowledge. Modern anthropology contains a strong element of reflexivity in understanding the complex relationships of the anthropological researcher with a host community (see Chapter 4). Whether many anthropologists in the past ever considered ethnographies to be a form of ultimate truth is debatable: they certainly are not considered so in

modern anthropology. No knowledge is perfect, and this must be particularly the case when the presenter of Methanites' knowledge is not a native. I did not learn Methanites' body of knowledge by growing up on the peninsula: I had to learn it during a series of visits and through a language which I have learned but which is not my own. This description of a body of knowledge is thus derived as a result of a complex interplay between an outside observer who was neither fully outside (isolated from and dispassionate about) the community nor fully part of it. One advantage I have had, however, is an upbringing in rural communities, which has allowed me a closer understanding of what it is to live in a rural landscape rather than a city. Nevertheless, the 'native view' presented here is a non-native's view – my attempt at putting Methanites' unique body of knowledge into writing. The result is a description of a landscape as ethnography in which from one point of view the landscape is both stage and scenery for the generations of humans who have acted out their lives on it. From another point of view, however, the landscape itself is the protagonist.

2

LANDSCAPE STUDIES: FROM FRAME-AND-TAME TO VISCERAL FEELING

When God had finished making the world, He found a pile of stones which He had not used. Picking them up, He threw them over His shoulder. They landed in the sea and formed Methana.

(A Methana folktale)

THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANDSCAPE ARCHAEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

To a western European, Methana's landscape is spectacular. Its precipitous volcanic slopes, tamed by terraces and fruit trees or covered in verdant wild scrub which often seems to grow straight out of the barren rock, are far removed from the rolling hills of English landscape paintings or the landscapes typical of central Europe or North America. Greeks not native to Methana have described its steeply sloped mountains as disturbing looming presences, threatening to topple down onto visitors to the seaside resort there. Yet others have described Methana as 'nothing but rocks and prickly oak bushes'. This book is about what Methanites themselves think about a landscape in which they have been born, in villages in which their grandparents were also born; where they have grown up and made a living from the land, and where they in turn have brought up families. It explores the multiple, complex meanings of a landscape to the inhabitants who have lived there and who have inherited it over the generations (fig. 2.1). This chapter provides the theoretical background to the book, starting with a history of changing archaeological approaches to landscapes before

examining recent and current theories of landscape in archaeology and anthropology.

The word 'landscape', derived from the Dutch *landschap* (Schama 1995, 10), first appeared in the late sixteenth century used by painters as a technical term. The word's gradual change of use, and its application to rural scenery itself, occurred especially in the eighteenth century simply because it reminded the spectator of landscape pictures. Thus, the term as applied to actual places and spaces originated with a sub-text of 'picturesqueness' (Hirsch 1995, 2, 7–8). The history of our understanding of what is meant by 'landscape' therefore relates not so much to an actual environment but to a way in which that environment is visualised: what elements and aspects are highlighted or ignored – indeed, in landscape painting, which elements are changed to accommodate cultural preferences in visualisation. For example, the popularity of landscape painting in nineteenth-century Paris was associated with new ways in which Parisians saw the actual countryside (Green 1995, 38–40). In the twentieth century, the geographer Carl Sauer introduced the concept of the 'cultural landscape', which is created from a natural landscape by a cultural group. His concept has been taken up in more recent years by anthropologists such as Strathern (2000, 49–53), who focuses on the interaction between the kinds of environments which different Papua New Guinean societies inhabit and the patterning of their activities within them. Drawing on the work of Gell (1995), she notes that landscapes become primarily auditory rather than visual in situations where thick forest obstructs the view beyond a few metres (Strathern 2000, 49–50).

In indicating that archaeologists first appreciated the potential of landscape studies in the 1950s, Bender (1996, 323) ignores the work of Cyril Fox in the interwar years. Publication of *The Archaeology of the Cambridge Region* (Fox 1923) set the stage for later developments in British landscape archaeology by employing a geographical approach to understanding settlements and the relationships between past societies and their environments, rather than using the artefact-based, antiquarian or site-based perspectives current at that time. Fox applied this approach to the whole of Britain in *The Personality of Britain* (1932). His intention was to 'illustrate as effectively as possible the physical