

# AN INTRODUCTION

Here will be outlined the purpose, scope and viewpoint of this book, It is meant as a guide to a discipline and its objects. Considered will be the themes found in Classical archaeology and the questions most usually asked. A genealogy of where they come from will be provided: an inquiry into the historical and conceptual origins of the themes and questions. A rudimentary ethnography of the discipline will be attempted, describing the institutions and people and their practices. Some elements towards a social archaeology of Classical Greece will be dealt with. There is also an analysis of the discourse of Classical archaeology: an account of the writings to be found and the conditions of their production.

There are those introductory guides to Classical archaeology which narrate the Classical past of Greece in the fifth and fourth centuries BC as in a history book, describe its spectacular finds, or provide a guide to ruins and museums. This is not one of them. Much reference will be made to the historical context of the middle of the first millennium BC in the Greek world of the Mediterranean, as would be expected, but the purpose is not to provide a coherent narrative or typology of materials that archaeologists find. That can easily be found elsewhere. The focal point is the interests and energies which lead to people working upon, thinking about and making so much of the remains of times now long gone.

So this book might be profitably considered alongside historical accounts of the life and times of Classical Greece: it will work in counterpoint, and give some insight into why the discipline which deals with ancient Greece has come to look the way it does. It is also intended as an accompaniment to a book of mine (*Art and the Early Greek City State*, forthcoming) which deals with the art and archaeology of an early city state, Korinth. Both form an encounter with the discipline, with the separate work on Korinth being an attempt to work with archaeological materials in constructing an account of the past which joins others in breaking the disciplinary mould a little.

Given this, Korinth and its archaeology will be used as an illustrative focus throughout this book, exemplifying many of the general points. In this way there will hopefully be an interplay of detailed treatment of issues, which is

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so necessary for deeper understanding, with broader strokes sketching the forms of the discipline.

For the history of receptions of the Greek past it should be pointed out here that reliance has been mostly on secondary sources, though with thorough cross-checking and reference of important opinions to original works. I am convinced of the soundness of the general stand taken and account given.

A basic aim is to further what may be termed a prehistory of the ancient Greek past. This is to shift back behind the historical accounts of this time and region, which sometimes appear so familiar, almost a facade, to attempt to defamiliarise on the grounds that what is often taken for the real past is a partial construction, in all senses of the phrase. Here is introduced the term 'metanarrative' which refers to narratives, dispositions, ideological, philosophical and methodological systems which subsume the particularities of local historical textures. All too often Classical archaeology becomes part of grander stories of art or reason or civilisation or European origins. It is important to be wary that these familiarities do not prevent the independence, difference and life of the past from answering back with a challenge to the present. A term that has been used for this is effective history.

Classical archaeology is usually taken to involve an interest in the cultural riches of the fifth and early fourth centuries BC. But it is also part of wider archaeology of Greece, which includes notably Aegean prehistory, the so-called Dark Ages and their archaeology, Hellenistic times, Roman Greece, Byzantium, and the several subsequent cultural epochs. It may be difficult to separate these methodologically in an excavation, account needing to be taken of all. Attention has also come to focus on the Dark Ages (the earliest centuries of the first millennium BC) under the proposal that they are important for understanding what comes later, and here have been made some notable advances in archaeological method and approach. The development of Aegean prehistory from the late nineteenth century is closely connected to Classical archaeology. This book also makes a philosophical case for taking full account of historical continuity. Nevertheless it will deal primarily with archaeologies of Greece from the tenth to fourth centuries BC, that is the study of the period covering the emergence and early maturity of the city state. Reference will also be made to earlier Aegean prehistory. This is the scope of the book.

In order to make the viewpoint of the book as clear as possible, it will be helpful to give some account of the personal background. The project began during seven years of teaching Classical languages and ancient history in a high school in the north-east of England during the 1980s. I had first encountered the fascinations of Classics in a traditional education, learning Latin and Greek from the age of 11. After a first degree in archaeology and anthropology, I worked as an archaeological fieldworker and draughtsman for a year before Richard Smith, of the School of Education, University of Durham, reintroduced me to the importance and potential of Classics. I owe a great deal, and more than he probably knows, to his humanism and energy.

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Two authors brought my thoughts on the place of Classics and writing in contemporary culture into focus: Tony Harrison, the poet and dramatist, and the historical novelist Gore Vidal. The former I deal with in the last chapter. Here I need only say that his mediation of schooling and education, a background in a class-based, post-war Britain, and a facility for vital translation and verse represents to me a model of creative appropriation of the past. Gore Vidal's novel *Creation* is a story of one who travels from the fifth-century Athens of proto-anthropologist and historian Herodotos into the rich cultural worlds of Persia and the east. Greece and Europe, historical trajectories, and the scale of an individual's creative agency are brought into perspective.

My ideas on prehistory and matters of archaeological philosophy having taken shape in books with Christopher Tilley, whom I had met at college, I next wanted to explore the potential of a body of material for constructing different archaeologies. Classical Greece, or rather its archaic lineage, seemed an appropriate field. First because I saw how Classical studies has immense evocative power even among those pupils I was teaching, who in no way could have been said to have had a commitment to high cultural prejudices or an interest in European common heritage, both of which are frequently associated with interest in Classical Greece. They just liked the stories and gained immensely from them. Second, Classical studies seemed appropriate because the field is in many ways marginal. Archaic Greece comes between prehistory and historical archaeology; it has been the focus of anthropological, literary, philological, historical, art historical and archaeological interest, and is in this way marginal in a disciplinary sense.

I chose to study Protokorinthian pottery (a stylistic class of the late eighth and seventh century BC) because it comes between eastern stylistic influence and experiment on the part of Korinthian potters, and because the pottery has been interpreted as at the beginning of the Greek artistic miracle, at the edge of Geometric style and the Classical tradition. Edges are frequently creative areas where frictions generate clarifying controversy and debate; different sides are forced to state their position clearly. New ideas start in the gaps of old systems. I wanted to make something of this potential, exploring the new perspectives which were being developed in Classical studies and Classical archaeology, relating these to new thinking in prehistoric archaeology (particularly developments in the understanding of material culture design), and also to explore the effect of the Classical past on the present in a way that I had not been able to do with the wonderful students at my school. So I left teaching, managed to obtain funding for doctoral research, and returned to my college Peterhouse in the University of Cambridge.

There I worked with Ian Hodder in the Department of Archaeology and Anthony Snodgrass in the Museum of Classical Archaeology. Ian Hodder has come to stand for humanistic interpretation of archaeological materials with an anthropological perspective. Anthony Snodgrass has helped pioneer new

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archaeological approaches to Dark Age and Classical Greece, overcoming disciplinary divisions between archaeology, philology and history, and asking questions of the relation of ordinary archaeological finds (not necessarily high art or fine architectures) to historical understanding. Both have supported cross-disciplinary fertilisation of ideas for constructing social archaeologies.

French Classical studies has had a big influence on my work through its anthropological perspective; the way it seeks to make sense of ancient *mentalites*, delving beneath the surface into basic dispositions towards self and other, society and history. Getting beneath the skin is surely one of the fascinations of the archaeological, dealing with the ineffable material basis of past human experience.

Another relevant perspective is that of a body of philosophy which has been developing in a number of disciplines, including archaeology, and is often termed Constructivism. It can be summarised quite effectively with the following illustration. The remains of that late archaic cemetery lying in the ground will not speak up for themselves, will not appear on their own account. The cemetery needs to be excavated and worked upon in many different ways for it to become history. The past needs the interests of the present. Archaeological desire is the condition of the very existence of the past. This means that there can be no pure and straightforward account of the way the past was, no matter how good the evidence may be, because it always depends on people doing something with the remains of the past. The past is constructed. Some worry a great deal about such a viewpoint, thinking that if it is held that archaeologists construct the past in the present, this means that the real past, back in its own time, is compromised at the least. But to argue that archaeologists and historians make the past does not mean they make it up; it does not make the past any the less real, does not mean that archaeologists spoil the past with their interests. A television set is manufactured, but few people get worried about whether the black box sitting in the corner is real or not; the important questions are whether it works and how people get on with it.

The book thus follows the argument that the past is not simply discovered in archaeological remains. Archaeologists deal with source materials and these require interpretation. How interpretation proceeds depends upon amount of evidence, the ideas and preconceptions of the archaeologist, their interests and aims. And, of course, interpretations differ and change. This is the experience of archaeology: not a set of static images of a past gone by, but a process of detection and supposition, following connections, constructing plausibilities forever rooted in uncertainty. Archaeologists do not discover the past but take shattered remains and make something of them. This is what makes archaeology so fascinating, and it is with this that the book attempts to deal.

More so Classical archaeology, because the history of Classical studies and its archaeological subdiscipline, with their relationships to the cultural

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dispositions of Classicism and Hellenism, their cultural politics and evocations which run through the social imaginary, form a deep and richly textured genealogy. Within are conjoined history and definitions of national and European identity, measures or standards of cultural excellence. The Classical past is a foreign country that many people have wanted to visit and make their own.

There is thus in the book an interest in sources and an emphasis upon source criticism. But sources are not held in a traditional sense to lead to the past, if the scholar is sufficiently critical. The independence and irreducibility of sources is stressed. The remains of the Classical past are decayed ruins; they **are** not to be seen primarily as 'expressions' of something else (such as a Greek spirit, or the social practices of the fifth century BC). Our sources, material and ruined, are both partial and indeed not identical with 'the past'. The ruins of the past are *resources* with which knowledges may be constructed by archaeologists, historians and indeed anyone with the interest and energy to acquire the necessary skills.

So this is a book about Classical archaeology from someone who has taken an unorthodox route into the subject and is as much interested in the reception of the remains of Classical Greece as in stories of what happened in some hectic centuries of the first millennium BC in a sunny country at the margins of some great eastern empires. It is a viewpoint from a social archaeologist who has moved from prehistory to study Greek materials, and who has learned from approaches to material culture taken elsewhere, accepting that a significant aim is to reconstruct and understand the social context of material things, rather than stopping at their inventory, dating, classification and admiration. That this is something of a marginal view of Classical archaeology is proposed as a strength, because people looking in from the outside often see things of great value and importance which those on the inside have overlooked or forgotten.

It is claimed that no apologies are necessary for such a personal, committed, incomplete and provisional viewpoint. If the above arguments are accepted, there is a need for archaeologists and others to take responsibility for **the** knowledges they construct; they should not hide behind ideas such as objectivity, the way things really were. This is being more and more accepted in world archaeology in the context of different types of interest and claims on the archaeological past. A native American nation may have a very different claim on the remains of its past as compared with an academic anthropologist. The formers spiritual traditions and interests may contrast markedly with the scientific aspirations of the latter. There is a strong ethical argument for resolving differences of claim by recognising the right to have different interests, based upon the past being a multiplicity rather than a singularity. There was no one particular past, nor was there ever, even in its own present (to appreciate this, simply try to answer the question 'What is happening now?' - there is no one answer).

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It may be noted that the book is stressing relationships between archaeology and history. This, of course, is not at all new, but with the rise of anthropological archaeology in the 1960s, the initiative in archaeological thinking passed to prehistorians and others who wished to escape what was seen as naive descriptive historical narrative. The task was to develop generalising knowledges (for example relating the remains of a particular society to a set of relationships commonly found at a certain phase of cultural evolution, or relating them to variables of relationship between society and environment). Other archaeologists assumed the disciplinary highground by claiming that historical archaeology was easy because of written records, and that the proof of new approaches needed to be found in prehistoric case studies. Now there is increasing interest in modes of historical narrative which has accompanied criticisms that the aim of explaining a particular event in the past by subsuming it beneath some general social process may often be inappropriate and miss a full understanding. Critical historical archaeology in the United States has produced some fine examples of interpretation which escape this (false) polarisation of approaches into anthropological and generalising or scientific, and those that are historical and particularist. The interpretations of early colonial America via its material culture immediately come to mind. I suggest that a historical archaeology (stressing the links between archaeological and historical projects) does not depend upon the existence of written sources. Another aim of this book is to help show how this can be so.

It is therefore an appropriate time for a guide such as this: the interpretive (a word which summarises what has been outlined above) and historical character of archaeology generally is being more widely accepted; foregrounded is the relationship between past and present, as in heritage interests. Also approaches in Classical archaeology and Classical studies are developing readings that challenge or refresh traditional and entrenched accounts. A guide shows the way forward as well as back. This book is intended as an introduction for the future, providing a set of tools and observations for others to make something of the discipline for themselves.

In this increasingly interdisciplinary field it is not appropriate to assume specialist knowledge of the reader: the book is written for anyone who shares a fascination with the material traces of those who created and lived in the city states of Greece and who wishes to understand what archaeologists and others make of them.

Chapter 1 is anecdotal in character, aiming to give impressions and flavours of the discipline. The intention is to show the intersection of an extraordinarily varied assemblage of experiences and cultural themes. The word *poikilos* (many-coloured, changing and ambiguous) captures this density, which is also, I believe, the reason for the cultural power of the Classical - this is the resonance.

Chapter 2 deals with the standard art histories and approaches to style. Connoisseurship, typology and iconology are considered in some detail and

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an interlude on the methods of the Classical archaeologist as detective looks forward to later discussions of the sources with which archaeologists deal and the methods appropriate to a historical understanding of them. The nineteenth-century museum collections and aims of the big excavations are also covered.

The interests and ideologies which have constituted the Classical archaeology of Greece are the subject of Chapter 3. Brief histories of antiquarians and travellers introduce some root metaphors of the discipline (philological and scientific aims). A main topic is Hellenism, an ideological complex which can be traced through Winckelmann and the cultural movements of Classicism and Romanticism, with related matters of taste and German scholarship. That ancient Greek artefacts may be classed as high art is partly examined here through the work of Michael Vickers and David Gill. Other ideological contexts are tourism, modernity and metanarratives of European origin. Bernal's critique *Black Athena* is brought in. Overall the chapter is one of the cultural politics of Classical archaeology in historical perspective, sketching constituting interests.

Interest leads to discourse. With the proposition that the past cannot be understood without considering the present, Chapter 4 moves to provide the tools for an analysis of the discourse of Classical archaeology: its practices, practitioners and products. The context is the branch of the sociology of knowledge mentioned above: Constructivism.

Chapters 5 and 6 together develop some elements which could be held to lie behind a project which aims to use archaeological remains to reconstruct society. Emphasis is on contextual analysis and the mediation of broad social modelling with an attention to the textures of everyday life. Style and approaches to material culture feature prominently, while there is a running commentary on the character of archaeological sources. The purpose is not to provide a programme of research but to consider from where a social archaeology of Classical Greece might come.

The final chapter develops the case for a Classical archaeology conceived as effective history. The discussions about the character of archaeological sources, constituting interests in a study of the Classical past, and relationships between Greek past and 'European' present are drawn upon to argue for pluralism and provisionality, shirting ground and perspective to avoid the petrifying gaze of ideological systems.

### An important note about quotes, references and bibliography

I have not considered it worthwhile to overburden the text with referencing, because it would be out of keeping with the purpose of the book as outlined above. There are many reasons for quoting and citing references, and some points about this and other matters of academic writing are discussed in Chapter 4. I quote simply to illustrate, not to call in authorities. In all cases

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there are many other passages I could have used as illustration, so the reader should not be concerned about following up literatures from the quotes in the main body of text, which is meant to present a flow of ideas. For routes into the discipline the reader is directed to the bibliography at the end of the book. Some remarks about using the bibliography will be found at its beginning.