

RUDIMENTS OF A SOCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

THE SOURCES

Some questions of archaeology's relationships to philology, to antiquarian interests, to history and to metanarratives and ideologies have been raised. Implicit in many of the points discussed are assumptions about the character of archaeological materials and what can and should be done with them. It was argued that Bernal's reconstructions of social and historical change show little and superficial understanding of archaeological sources. It is appropriate to turn to consider the material remains of the past, archaeological sources, before considering social archaeology, the reconstruction of society through archaeological remains.

According to Anthony Snodgrass, archaeological sources have four assets: independence, directness, an experimental character, and unlimited potential for future expansion. But none of these implies objectivity: he stresses the interpretive character of archaeology and ancient history. A failure to realise this is the source of many problems, he claims. In particular, there is what he calls the 'positivist fallacy'. This holds that archaeological prominence and historical importance are much the same thing, that what can be observed archaeologically is therefore significant. Examples of this fallacy can be found throughout this book.

The asset of independence is that the hypotheses and arguments of archaeologists are independent of historical theory, having been developed in fields that have no written documentation. Indeed, this is true. Many developments in archaeological theory, which deals with the processes of inference which move from archaeological data to statements about the past, make little reference to questions and problems experienced by historians. However, the separation of archaeology from history is an awkward matter to which I shall return.

Archaeological sources, it might be added, are independent also in their irreducibility. It is important to understand the sources for what they are: decayed particles with their own independent character and resonances, with a solidity and density irreducible to the subjective attributes of those with

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whom sources connect. Artefacts are more than their makers. This is to reject archaeology as a discipline aiming to use sources to discover the reality of which the sources are conceived as traces, a position which often involves an emphasis on method, an alchemy that holds that if you do the right things in the right order the past will appear.

As in detection, at the scene of a crime there is much that is irrelevant. It may not even look as if a crime had been committed there. And, of course, the place is not only a scene of crime. Yet it may, if the detective is sensitive enough, yield particles which may be connected to something that happened; though the carving knife is not reducible to the murder. A scene of crime can be used to tell so many other things — witness the genre of detective stories.

So I contend, and in accordance with the last chapter, that archaeology is an *active* marshalling of resources which are not merely the fortunate by-product of the past, but rather independent materials inextricably linked with societies and peoples through the ages. The archaeologist may pick up the items of the past, taking care to disturb them as little as possible, and work on them. There is an ironic curatorial role here, but one that recognises the active agency of the present, for archaeological materials are as much of the present as of the past, depending upon present interest.

The second characteristic of archaeological sources is their directness. Snodgrass contrasts the sources for ancient history. Herodotos (fifth century BC Athens) is taken as a source for Egypt of the seventh and sixth centuries BC; Plutarch, writing in the Roman world of the first century AD, is taken as



Figure 5.1 Akrokorinthos

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a source for the life of fifth-century BC Athenian Themistocles. There is a confusion of primary and secondary sources. Indeed, most works used by ancient historians are secondary sources which only happen to be a little closer (chronologically and not necessarily conceptually) to what they write about.

In contrast, archaeological materials are associated with what somebody once did and not what some writer (often a lot later and with distinct agendas) *said* they did. However, all sorts of interpretive procedures intervene between archaeological object and our understanding of it: excavation, cleaning, identification, description, dating, establishment of origin, conservation, interpretation and publication. In the end an excavation becomes a historical record itself, in need of critical interpretation.

The experimental character of archaeological sources is linked to the supply of fresh archaeological evidence. Archaeologists, within the limits of funding and legal permissions and according to the values of the academic community and discipline, can explore ideas or hypotheses about the past by looking for fresh evidence. And this applies not just to excavation, for, in Snodgrass's analogy, thinking that archaeology is excavation is like identifying medicine with surgery. Survey data do not involve excavation, and museums are full of material that has hardly been looked at. Environmental evidence may be quite independent of excavation and scientific studies may produce all sorts of evidence about artefacts and materials.

Archaeologists are often dealing with the remains of past societies (often and not always because there are environmental data for example). Social worlds are *thoroughly polysemous*. That a social act or product is polysemous means that it can always be interpreted in various ways. Meanings are usually negotiated, that is related to the interpersonal practices, aspirations and strategies of people. A good example often used is that of the safety pin, the meaning of which was radically renegotiated by punk subculture in the 1970s. Forms of social life are constituted as meaningful by the human subjects who live those forms. People are constantly trying to make sense of their lives: constantly interpreting.

The sociologist Anthony Giddens has related this characteristic of the social world (that it is to do with interpretation and meaning) to the hermeneutic or interpretive task of the sociologist. He describes the difficult *double hermeneutic* of sociology. First, it aims to understand a world of meanings and interpretations (society). Second, sociologists themselves form a social community with its own practices, procedures, assumptions, skills and institutions, all of which in turn need to be understood. In dealing with the social world of the past, archaeologists are in a similar position, and there is the added factor of ruin and fragmentation. Careful attention to the sources and the practices used to deal with them is very important if sound knowledges are wanted.

New approaches in ancient history are taking account of the character of written sources from antiquity. It is very clear that they are far from

transparent windows on the ancient world. Written sources are skewed and require interpretation. Two examples should suffice. That short passage from Pausanias given in Chapter 2 (p. 50) referred to wooden statues of Dionysos, gilded and with red faces, in the marketplace of Korinth. The Greek word for these is *xoana*. The concept of *xoanon*, a primitive wooden image, has long been an important part of theories about the origins of Greek sculpture. There are many references to *xoana* in ancient literatures. It is thought that rude wooden statues of the gods marked the beginning of a Greek interest in statuary. A.A. Donohue, in a book about *xoana* (1988), has examined the issue and found that the word *xoanon* can refer to all sorts of things, from connoting a high degree of craftsmanship in an article of any material, to splendid images of gods, to rude wooden images. The word changes its meanings through time, and context is vital in understanding its meaning. In the place of a single concept, Donohue finds heterogeneity. The idea of the primitive wooden statue which is held to be so significant in the origins of Greek sculpture is shown to be based upon a focus by scholars on certain texts to the exclusion of others. The term *xoanon* may thus now have little archaeological value, but close contextual scrutiny of written sources where the word is found can shed light on Greek attitudes towards images. Donohue's negative findings about the theory of early Greek sculpture turn out to be very positive for the historiography of art.

Rosalind Thomas, in her book *Oral Tradition and Written Record* (1991), has considered the literatures and records of Classical Athens. She argues that to understand the sources used for reconstructing fifth-century Athens (and her argument has wider applicability), account must be taken of the interaction of written histories with the oral histories and tradition on which they were based. (Her topic is thus *memoria*.) She delves into family traditions, official recording, the social significance of writing and its permanent record, manipulations of evidence, and genealogies. There are various mediating factors between event and its record: history is a field of interpretation. So histories are located in Athens' present; sources are situated discourses, material effects and affects of the society in which they originated.

Snodgrass takes the example of Naucratis as an illustration of the differences between historical and archaeological sources. Herodotos, writing about the Greeks in Egypt during the reign of Pharaoh Amasis 569-525 BC, says that Amasis gave the Greeks the city of Naucratis to settle in, that Greek trade was concentrated at Naucratis to the exclusion of other sites, and that Amasis withdrew a settlement of Greek mercenaries from 'Stratopeda (camps) on the eastern border where they had been established a century earlier by Psammetichus, and brought them to Memphis as his bodyguard.

This is all contradicted by archaeological evidence. Naucratis was excavated from 1884 onwards and it is clear that the Greeks were there before the reign of Amasis. Elsewhere in Egypt has been found Greek material from before and after Amasis. The sites 'Stratopeda' have not been positively identified. But at

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Tel Defenneh, and another dozen sites in this region of the north-eastern Nile Delta (the general area of 'Stratopeda') has been found evidence of Greek settlement from throughout the sixth century and including the reign of Amasis. Two of these sites are fortified and make good candidates for die site of Herodotos' Greek garrisons. So the reign of Amasis had no archaeological impact on Naucratis, nor does it lead to the withdrawal of Greek mercenaries from any frontier posts found so far, and still less does it coincide with a lack of Greek imports more generally in Egypt.

Attempts may be made to reconcile archaeology and Herodotos: perhaps the 'Stratopeda' have not been found; perhaps the concession of Naucratis was merely legal or honorary; perhaps trade in Greek goods was in the hands not of Greeks but of another class of society who did not come under the edict of Amasis. Snodgrass argues that such strategies miss the more profound and theoretical point that archaeological and historical sources do not relate to the same social realities.

The claim that Herodotos' account has been falsified by archaeology is a relapse into another variant of the 'positivist fallacy'. It assumes that archaeology and history are operating in essentially the same order of historical reality ... In fact the overlap between the two is small.

This raises the question of what archaeology is about: what order of reality.

For many, as has been shown, archaeology is about art history. But what sort of art history? Attention to the character of artefact design is required here. Nor do archaeologists recover only material artefacts like pots and tools. Attention has been turning for a couple of decades now to animal husbandry, agriculture, diet, pathology, industrial techniques and the cultural landscape. This brings me to questions of the sort of reconstructions archaeologists may make of past society. But before turning to these, I wish to continue with some more points about archaeological sources.

IDEOLOGIES OF ARCHAEOLOGY

A message of previous chapters was that Classical archaeologists do not work in an intellectual vacuum. Projects are inseparable from interests, and these may be informed by metanarratives and ideologies such as Hellenism. The question must always be asked: What is on the agenda? After this reminder of the situated character of archaeological interpretation, let me move on.

COMMENTARY AND CRITIQUE: OBJECTS AND THE CHARACTER OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

It might be assumed, as indicated above, that archaeological materials are produced by people and that therefore the task of social reconstruction is one

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of finding ways of moving from archaeological data to the people and society of which they are *expressions*. Material artefacts thus disappear, becoming quite insubstantial emanations of something considered more important. It will be argued that this is invalid as an assumption. The question tackled in this section is an ontological one: just what is the archaeological object? And what does this mean about archaeological interpretation?

The old pot found by an archaeologist is equivocal because it belongs both to the past and to the present. This is its history; it has survived. And the equivocality confers upon the pot an autonomy because it is not limited to the moment of its making or use, or to the intentions of the potter. It goes beyond. The archaeologist can look back with hindsight and see the pot in its context, so time reveals meanings that are accessible *without* a knowledge of the time and conditions of its making. The pot transcends. In this it has qualities which may be called timeless.

Here also *historicism* (explaining something by relating it to its historical context) must be denied, otherwise we would only be able to understand a Greek pot by reliving the reality of the potter, a reality which anyway was indeterminate and equivocal. We would be fooling ourselves in thinking that we were appreciating and understanding the art and works of other cultures.

Pots are often used as a means to an end by archaeologists. They are used for dating a context; they may be conceived as telling of the past in different ways. Historicist interpretation reduces the significance of a cultural work to voluntary or involuntary *expression*: the pot expresses the society, or the potter, or the date. This is quite legitimate. But there is also the pot itself, its equivocal materiality, its mystery and uncertainty, which open it to interpretation.

The pot does indeed preserve aspects of its time and it can be interpreted to reveal things about the past. So the integrity and independence of the pot does not mean that it does not refer outside of itself. It means that no interpretation or explanation of a pot can be attached to the pot forever, claiming to be integral or a necessary condition of experiencing that pot. The autonomy of the pot is the basis of opposition to totalising systematics: systems of explanation or understanding that would claim closure, completeness, a validity for all time. We must always turn back to the pot and its particularity. This autonomy brings a source of authority to interpretation, if it is respected.

The autonomy of the past is also the reason why archaeological method has no monopoly on the creation of knowledges and truths about the material past. Does a painting of a landscape by Dodwell reveal no truths of its object in comparison with archaeological treatment? Were there no truths about the material past before the formalisations of archaeological method from the late nineteenth century onwards?

There is a gap between the autonomy and dependency of the pot. If we

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were back in the workshop where the pot was made, we might have a good awareness of its meaning. If we were the one who actually made the pot, then it would very much be dependent upon us. But its materiality, equivocality, heterogeneity always withhold a complete understanding: the clay is always other than its maker; the pot is always more than its classification. People may interpret it in all sorts of different ways, according to their different interests and agendas. The material world provides food for thought, for negotiation of meaning.

There is another source of the tension between autonomy and dependency and one that is the basis of the archaeological. The pot was made long ago in Corinth and depended upon the potter taking clay and giving it form, relating it also to knowledges and structures which went beyond the potter. But the potter, Corinth, its people and buildings, the conditions wherein similar pots were made and used, are mostly gone. The pot remains. It is a fragment, part of a ruined past, and independent through its materiality, temporality, its duration. The pot is autonomous now because it is no longer the past due to the death, decay and loss which have occurred. So the tension within the pot between dependency and autonomy is a tension between its expressive (or significative) character and its materiality. It is a gap between, for example, an image (which has an autonomous existence) and its meanings. Or between the sound of a word and its meaning to which it cannot be reduced. To bridge these gaps requires effort, work, the time of interpretation. This work is one of detection, reconstruction and connection, putting back together the pieces which have been separated.

When a pot becomes part of the ruin of time, when a site decays into ruin, revealed is the essential character of a material artefact - its duality of autonomy and dependency. The ruined fragment invites us to reconstruct, to exercise the work of imagination, making connections within and beyond the remnants. In this way the post-history of a pot is as indispensable as its prehistory. And the task is not to revive the dead (they are rotten and gone) or the original conditions from whose decay the pot remained, but to understand the pot as ruined fragment. This is the fascination of archaeological interpretation.

The transcendence of a work from the past is a condition of its authority and contributes greatly to its fascination. It is a quality of the sacred; this authority once belonged with the sacred image. Consider an icon: the image, the physical painting, is more than the simple form that it represents, that of a saint or deity. Objects can have cult value. This is something that is clearly to do with the perceived character of Greek art. Benjamin relates this to a quality of *aura*. Many cultural works even today acquire a mystique which turns them into 'cult objects': from Harley Davidson motorbikes to Doctor Marten Boots to Leica Cameras. Many of these are 'collectables'. It is also clear that many are closely tied to sub-cultural identities. The concept of a 'designer' article also attempts to tap this cult value.

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Here the artefact is reaching a condition of the inexpressive. The analogy of (material) culture as text is one that has taken a great hold in archaeology and the social sciences. Some antiquarian and philological versions of the analogy have been mentioned. The idea is that things form systems of communication which are like the systems and structures of language. If this analogy is followed in this context, we can say that the fascination held by cultural works involves aspects of language which cannot be reduced to communication. The sacred text may be held to be the word of God, more than what it communicates, and possessing an authority which forbids the posing of those normal questions which test the validity of communication by comparing it with experience (Did the person mean what they said? Perhaps they were mistaken?). Magical formulae and slogans also belong with this aspect of language which is not reducible to communication. Attention is shifted to the *texture* of language itself.

There is a fundamental point to be learned here. It is that things (or indeed words) are not simply signs. They only *become* signs, expressing and standing arbitrarily for something else, in certain circumstances. Language is more than a tool for communication; it has its own texture which is independent of our intentions. So too with objects: they are dependent on people, but also autonomous.

The tension within the (temporality of an) artefact between past and present, between autonomy and dependence upon its conditions of making, corresponds to the complementarity of critique and commentary. Commentary is interpretation which teases out the remnants of the time of the artefact, places it in historical context. Critique is interpretation which works on the autonomy of the artefact, building references that shift far beyond its time of making. It may be compared artistically with artefacts from other times and cultures in critical art history. Critique may consider different understandings of the artefact in our present. Critique may use the integrity of the artefact as a lever against totalising systems, undermining their claims to universality.

Both are necessary. Commentary without critique is empty and trivial information with no necessary relation to the present. Critique without commentary may be a baseless and self-indulgent appreciation of the aesthetic achievements of the past, or a dogmatic ideology, an unedifying emanation of present interests.

Commentary is made on the dependency of things upon their time of making, fleshing out information of times past. But the flesh needs to be brought to life, and this is the task of critique: revealing heterogeneity, yoking incongruity, showing the gaps in the neat orders of explanation, revealing the impossibility of any final account of things. This is a living reality because it is one of process rather than arrest. It is the ongoing dialogue that is reasoned interpretation.

Commentary is not enough. The archaeological past needs reconstructing now. Something edifying can be made of the most meagre things. Janet

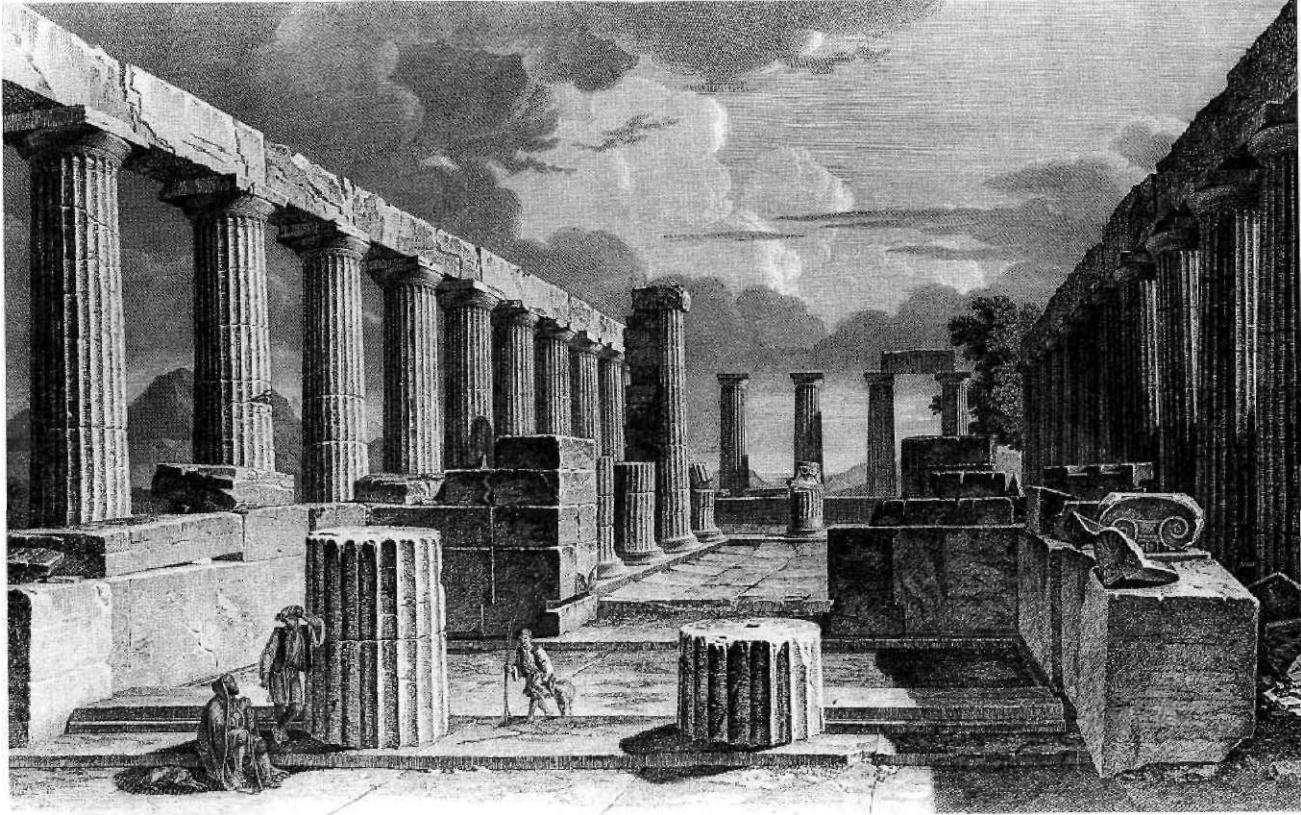


Figure 5.2 Baron von Stackelberg. *Der Apollotempel zu Bassae in Arcadien*. Rome and Frankfurt am Main 1826.
Plate 3. Temple interior

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Spector develops so much from an artefact in her account of a native American society *What this Awl Means* (1992), just as an artist may make much of an ordinary still life, *nature morte*.

Given this character of archaeological sources, the task is not, I argue, to interpret as a means of getting back to the real past, understanding its motivations and interests, in its own terms. Interpretation organises, divides, arranges, composes connections, describes relations, but under no certainty of an origin. The archaeologist can only weave connections that establish insights and plausibilities and are as much about the present as the past.

THE NEED FOR A SOCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF CLASSICAL GREECE

I have followed a line of thought concerning the character of archaeological sources, attempting to encompass points from previous chapters about discourse, the construction of knowledges, and the relationship of past and present. Return is now made to a call, which has come from many archaeologists including Anthony Snodgrass and Kostas Kotsakis, for a social archaeology of Classical Greece. With an eye on the aims and methods of anthropological and prehistoric archaeology elsewhere, criticism has been made of the overly narrow horizons of a Classical archaeology content with systematisation of materials, art history and pseudo-historical narrative. The task is to use archaeological materials to generate insights into ancient society. How is this to be done? And how is the character of the sources to be respected?

APPROACHES TO SOCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Prehistoric archaeologists have long had an interest in reconstructing past societies. Earlier accounts, up to and indeed beyond the 1960s, used descriptive narrative of changing material cultures augmented with sketches of social life: outlines of everyday life; craft skills and workmanship; animals kept and plants grown. Inferences of social structure were drawn from diversity in the quality and apparent ownership of goods: rich burials meant a hierarchical society. The limits of inference were held to occur with evidences for religious and spiritual matters: there was no way to get to know what people believed. A popular example of such traditional social archaeology is Stuart Piggott's book *Ancient Europe* (1965).

Culture history is a particular body of theory relating archaeological materials to social change. Pottery style, for example, is carefully defined, classified and plotted in time and geography (chronological scheme and distribution map being two prominent graphical accompaniments to this typology). Different material culture items are grouped, on the basis of this typology and regular association in the archaeological record, into entities termed *cultures*. These are conceived to be the manifestation of a people, an

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ethnic group, who were usually named after an item of material culture (Beaker people) or after a typical site or region (Hallstatt). Understanding social change is a matter of connecting stylistic change to these peoples. Typical processes are invasion, the diffusion of an idea from one people to another, or migration, people spreading and taking their culture with them. For Gordon Childe, culture history 'aimed at distilling from archaeological remains a preliterate substitute for the conventional politico-military history with cultures, instead of statesmen, as actors, and migrations in place of battles'. This is the framework which lies behind Bernal's archaeology in *Black Athena*. It has been superseded.

Challenges to culture history came from anthropological archaeology in the 1960s. The 'New Archaeology' found fault with all its assumptions: the social reality of cultures; the supposed easy relationship between ethnicity and style; the use of migration as an explanation; the use of diffusion of ideas as an explanation. For some the development of an alternative body of theory to explain the archaeological record was a paradigm shift in the late 1960s and early 1970s to 'Processual archaeology'.

There are some good introductions to Processual archaeology, its aims and methods, and its critics, many of whom form another set of approaches under the name Postprocessual or Interpretive archaeology. Rather than provide a general outline of these archaeologies, and so duplicate, probably poorly, these introductions, I have chosen to consider how some Classical archaeologists have been developing a social archaeology, using it as a vehicle for raising the main issues involved in an approach to archaeological remains which aims to provide explanation in terms of social practices and social change.

POTTERY AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

To begin, let me pick up the case of pottery, used to illustrate points in previous chapters. In the last twenty years there have been several programmes to understand pottery in its social context. (References may be found for this section in the Bibliography.)

I have already mentioned the argument of Michael Vickers and David Gill that black and red figure Attic pottery is to be understood as belonging not with the 'artistic' aspirations of contemporary potters, but with social processes of *emulation*. This process had been introduced to archaeology by anthropologist Danny Miller. Pottery style, vessels designed for a class of social aspirants, was in imitation of more expensive metal vessels: 'Rather than being creative artists serving the upper echelons of Athenian society, potters and the decorators of pots had to follow fashions created for craftsmen working in a nobler and more costly medium than clay'. Ian Morris, Cathy Morgan and Todd Whitelaw have agreed that such a social phenomenon is an important process in understanding early Hellenic style.



Figure 5.3 A Korinthian vase painter

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In an approach with closer ties to traditional art history, John Boardman has attempted to explain particular figurative and abstract elements of Geometric pottery from Argos as icons of the city and people that produced them. The idea is that pots were like advertisements for what Argos stood for. He notes references in literature to the horses and waters of Argos and relates these to pictures of horses, fish, water and fishing water birds upon the pots.

More generally, Anthony Snodgrass has interpreted the figured scenes on Attic late Geometric pottery as reflecting a social ethos which valued the heroic. This is something visible in other ways, particularly the 'hero cults' which develop from the eighth century - the placing of offerings in old Mycenaean tombs. Robin Osborne has given a wide-ranging historical account of changing social and ideological conceptions in eighth- and seventh-century Attika, concerning the growth of the polis and general structural characteristics of burial, religious activity, settlement pattern and artistic style. He has explained Geometric and Attic pottery in terms of the structure of their decoration and form reflecting deep and general social outlooks. From regularity, order without subordination, juxtaposition without connection, and a world taken for granted in the Geometric, there was a shift to questions posed (about life, death and myth), and challenges set by the style of Protoattic pottery.

I may also mention approaches to later Attic black and red figure which draw inspiration from Structuralist analysis, which developed in linguistics and anthropology, but has spread *to* many fields of cultural studies. Pot illustration is interpreted as the articulation of deep cultural dispositions and systems of values regarding, for example, sexuality, domestic life, the conceptual world of the city and its environs. An example of such interpretation will be given in the final chapter.

Nicholas Coldstream has applied the traditional archaeological concept of culture (relating clusters of similar artefacts to 'cultures' or peoples on the assumption that style reflects identity and interaction) to pottery decorated in the Geometric style. Variations in eighth-century Geometric he associates with the emergence of the city states, many developing their own version of the Geometric in asserting identity and unity.

Iconography has also been connected to politics. A set of theories has been developed about images of Heracles and Theseus on Athenian pottery of the sixth century. At this time the political scene was in some turmoil with the tyranny of Peisistratos and afterwards with the laying of the foundations of Athenian democracy. So, for example, the Exekias amphora in the Vatican Museum shows Ajax and Achilles playing dice. This has been interpreted as a reference to the tyranny of Peisistratos: when he entered Attika the Athenians, according to a story recorded by Herodotos, were either asleep or playing dice. Vickers and Gill find fault with this particular case and ask how this pot could convey such a political message to its viewers if it were buried

alongside an Etruscan aristocrat in Italy; this would only be possible if it had a history of use before being sold on second-hand for an export market. But there seems to have been a very limited second-hand market in pots. However, if the pot were a copy of a bronze vessel decorated with silver figures, the matter would be different.

Further examples of approaches which consider pottery style in social context can be found in the next section.

THE SNODGRASS SCHOOL OF IRON AGE STUDIES

Processual archaeology developed a systematic body of theory to deal with society, or, in its terms social systems and social process. A major early application was in Aegean prehistory: Colin Renfrew, in his book *The Emergence of Civilisation* (1972), considered the development of social complexity in the Cyclades in the millennia preceding the famous Minoan and Mycenaean 'palace' societies. Another programme of social archaeology has been developed since the 1970s by Anthony Snodgrass and his students.

Anthony Snodgrass and the Greek city state: soft Processual archaeology

Snodgrass was a pupil of John Boardman, having taken a conventional route into Classical archaeology via public school and Oxford. His research topic was armour and weapons of the Dark Age, a conventional one in that it focused on a class of material culture, but, in dealing with iron, which has little 'aesthetic' appeal, Snodgrass moved into a marginal area avoided by art historians. It was relevant also to the historical question of hoplite reform; the field was also that of ancient history and military reform. And it was in social and economic ancient history that demands were being made for quantification and new approaches.

Snodgrass's innovation was to extend the traditional rigour of Classical archaeology to all artefact types and to concentrate on contexts of deposition. His work on weaponry led him to significant contributions to debates in ancient history. Generally Snodgrass has been successful in uniting ancient history and archaeology, drawing eclectically on historical, literary archaeological sources, making use of social and anthropological theory in social narratives of Dark Age and archaic Greece.

From his inaugural lecture as Lawrence Professor of Classical Archaeology in the University of Cambridge (1977), Snodgrass followed a project of developing a social archaeology of the rise of the Greek city state. This can be described as a descriptive and *systemic* model of social change. Greek society is conceived as a social system - an interrelated set of patterned behaviours influencing one another. Snodgrass plotted various 'system factors' and proposed a determining force or prime mover behind the development of the

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city state which ran through the social system in a series of 'multiplier effects' (positive feedback relationships where an increase in one factor reinforces, and is in turn reinforced by, another). Although he later decided in favour of multiple determining factors behind the polis, Snodgrass presented a powerful case, in his book *Archaic Greece* (1980), for demography being a prime mover to state formation in Greece. Using quantification of sites and graves, he plotted depopulation in the early Dark Ages with a population 'explosion' in the eighth century as the numbers of graves per generation increased sevenfold between 780 and 720 BC. His classic graphical representation of this extraordinary phenomenon is given in Figure 5.4.

The state was, for Snodgrass, an attempted solution to population increase as its effects ran through Greek society. Immediate consequences were on communication and the division of labour, with an increase in the pace of change: 'political change was mandatory'. Snodgrass notes that the polis was not a town so much as an idea. The new political form was a cluster of villages in its earliest times, as has been noted already for Corinth. Fortification came early at Smyrna, but nowhere else until later; urbanisation is not a good criterion of the early polis. He rejects continuity in Greece as an origin of the idea of the state and looks east instead, to Phoenicia.

Other system factors contributed to this process of social change. Dedications and temples attest to religious association as a factor in the early polis. Increases in metal production point to a higher-energy economy which fed into religion in the form of a considerable rise in dedications at

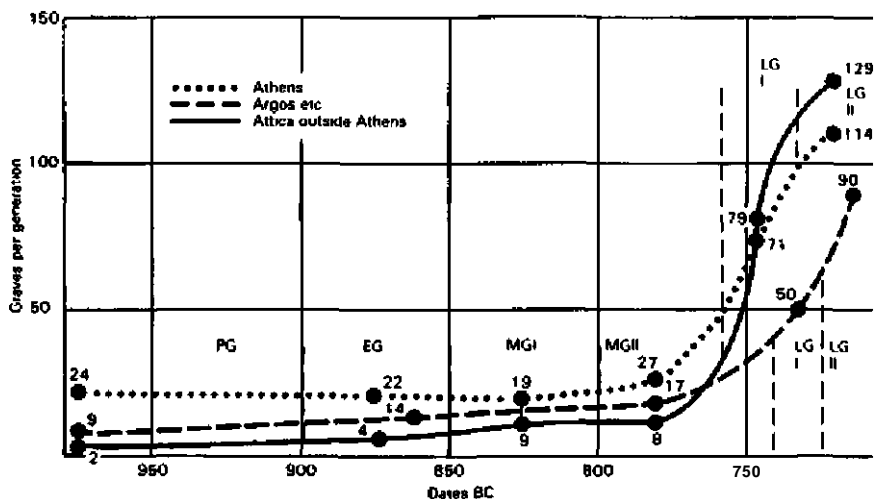


Figure 5.4 Total numbers of burials per thirty-year generation for Athens, Attika and Argos, 1050-700 BC. {Source: Anthony Snodgrass. *Archaic Greece: the Age of Experiment*. London: Dent, 1980. Figure 4)

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sanctuaries in the eighth century. Snodgrass again uses quantification most effectively with tables of counts of artefacts at sanctuaries and compared with the investment of wealth in burial. Monumental temples were a new architecture: with early examples at Eretria, Samos (the Heraion), and Gortyn on Crete. The new cosmopolitan pan-Hellenic sanctuaries became media for interaction with their aristocratic gatherings. They were also a focus for a competitive agonistic ideology, with displays of physical prowess and the heroic ideal (so clear in Pindar's poetry). The ideology of religious legitimation is clear also in the status of Delphi as a centre of knowledge in the colonisation movement. The priesthood was a source of legitimation in political manoeuvrings; it was an instrument of persuasion, which gained a reputation as legal and political arbiter (the traditional role of the aristocrat). The development of a heroic ethos is connected by Snodgrass to the cults of local heroes (with evidences from the eighth century), as previously mentioned. With the emphasis on ancient links to the land, there seems to have been a consolidation of ownership of land. The development of the polis is thus connected to an economic revolution or change: from pastoral to arable farming. Reliance is here mainly on literature (Homer's is a pastoral world; Hesiod's is one of small arable farmers); the importance of ownership of land is very clear later. Population and a factor of land shortage (with the new emphasis on ownership) led to colonisation from 735 BC and the founding of Sicilian Naxos.

Craft technologies (e.g. tripod manufacture, metalwork and ceramics) can be related to religion (the major consumer of goods). Representational art seems a clear ideological interest in heroic ages which connects also with early epic poetry and thereby with new literacy, with its roots in a Phoenician alphabet - another connection with the east. Weaponry and imagery shows warfare close to the heart of the idea of the polis. Later (seventh century BC) changes seem to have involved a hoplite phalanx opened to wealthy non-aristocrats as part of a citizen militia. Political turmoil is known from historical sources and in many polities brought codifications of law which, being open and subject to scrutiny, established the arrival of a new public sphere. Wealth, political and social identity and new ideologies of popular heroism are thus combined in the field of battle, characterised in its early days by ritualistic convention. The basis of the polis was established as a settled population of prosperous soldier-citizen-farmers.

Mercenaries were travelling abroad from the seventh century. They were not the only export from Greece. An expansive economy with its new opportunities combined with colonisation and new political identities in the development, eventually, of a commercial sector and market. Central to this was slave labour, a material base of the city state economy.

Snodgrass listed the key changes as: citizenship taking primacy over kinship; the shift from a pastoral to an arable economy; slavery; the importance of tribal monarchy giving way to state institutions; the growth of the independent

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state - from 'useful aristocratic counterpiece' to an independent force; and commerce moving from prestige goods to partial mercantilism.

I have given some detail here to illustrate the power of Snodgrass's systemic account. It is a powerful integrating model combining many linkages between different parts of the social system (albeit mostly descriptive or circumstantial rather than rooted in interpretation of a social logic), between artefacts and social practices, and between different types of source material. Clearly displayed is the explanatory potential of quantification and statistical treatment of archaeological materials. Categories and assumptions are questioned (urbanisation associated with the state; the category of art, for example). The principle of understanding archaeological materials in terms of social process is shown to have a great future.

Quantitative Processual archaeology: Ian Morris and Attic burial practices

Snodgrass's systemic model upholds many of the precepts of Processual archaeology as developed in the United States, but absent is the emphasis on scientific explanation, the use of formal processes of inference, and explicit hypothesis testing through large-scale quantification and statistical analysis. It is also too *historical*.

In contrast with Snodgrass's more descriptive (circumstantial) and so 'soft' treatment, Ian Morris has presented a much more statistically rigorous explanation of the early city state, drawing heavily on anthropological approaches to mortuary analysis in what may be called a 'hard' processual model of social change.

Burial and Ancient Society (1987) is a confident sweep through the issues and literature that surround the rise of the Greek city state. Morris refines the theory and method of mortuary analysis developed in the 1970s by anthropological archaeologists Binford, Saxe and Tainter, and applies it to the graves from Attika. They developed a general cross-cultural theory of mortuary practices which Morris adapts to his purpose. Burial is conceived as a reflection of social structure (distinguished from social organisation, the actual things people do, in the classic way of structural-functionalist anthropology); burial is a 'mental template' of society. The difference between structure enacted in ritual ('ideal' society) and social organisation (what people may actually be doing) is, for Morris, the manifestation of ideology.

Given this cross-cultural setting, the task of Morris was one of finding a pattern in the cemeteries and reading social structures from it. Morris stresses the limitations and poor condition of the data and the inappropriateness of sophisticated statistical techniques, so often used by Processual archaeologists in mortuary analysis. But he skilfully used descriptive and analytical techniques, presented hierarchically, moving from simple observation to the more complex. Morris considered in turn the age structure of the cemeteries,

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demographic issues (population, grave plots, burying groups), the possibility of exclusion of part of the population from formal burial, the variability of the cemeteries, and grave goods as symbols of wealth.

The thesis is that from 1050-750 BC, and in Attika from 700-510 BC, small adult grave plots and cemeteries represent the *limited* burial of ranked groups. Around 750 BC occurred the emergence of the polis, ideas of the political community, and an ideology of denial of difference in status, hence the number and character of burials change. (Here is a direct challenge to the demographic model of Snodgrass.)

Behind this picture is a class struggle between aristocracy and serfdom, leading to a rejection of dependency of lower classes on aristocracy with the birth of the polis. Burial practices, for Morris, reveal an ideological merging of *agathoi* and *kakoi* in opposition to a new class of slaves. Athens of Solon and the Peisistratid tyranny is a special case of reversion to the old conflicts: Athens began to develop as a polis system, but then reverted to a pre-political relationship with the community after 700 BC.'

Morris approached the 1,400 burials with cross-cultural categories of society and structure; abstract measures of rank, variability and change; models of the polis, of social revolution; and general theoretical definitions of class, serfdom and slavery. He considered the basics of demography, but his view of the structure of society is a narrow one of rank displayed in burial.

Burial is held to represent social structure directly and Morris used componential analysis, pioneered in this context by Arthur Saxe, to discover the 'social personae' of society (a technical term referring to conventional characters and roles). Burials were classified without reference to their actual content, only their difference from others, and cemeteries according to the number and range of social personae, or rather different paths through the componential diagrams. Morris was able to compute a measure of variability (deviation from componential mode) and uses this to plot change in society. Consider, for example, the claim that a rise in variability score from 0.2425 to 0.2975 (the scale is 0-1) represents a rise from 'quite limited' variability to 'much more structure' of society. Morris provided qualification of this abstract and statistical description of society with simple description, but it is not clear what this abstract measure means in social terms. Nevertheless Morris made a case for considering social practices through *abstract* measures of change and variability.

For Morris, archaeological materials are only a set of formal relationships devoid of meaning. The formal patterning is there (hence the use of abstract and general models of structure and variability), but its meaning must come from *outside* of archaeology. Here Morris resorted to ethnographic analogy with other societies, but more importantly to literary sources, and in particular Aristotle's class analysis of ancient society. Material culture is thus epiphenomenal to society and the privileged access to meaning represented by the words of the ancients themselves.

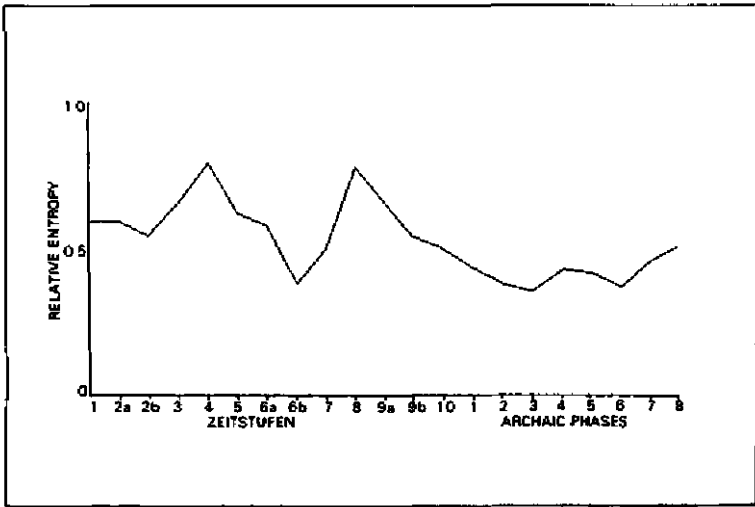


Figure 5.5 Relative entropy scores for the Kerameikos adult burials 1125-500 BC showing high entropy in egalitarian times. (Source: Ian Morris. *Burial and Ancient Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. Figure 50)

The abstractions of variability and change, and of classifying burial, carry, of course, the corollary that particularity, the form and meaning of material culture, is mysterious. Morris was not interested in why Athenians painted pots in the particular way they did. The particular mode of symbolising society becomes random; changes in particular modes of burial could be termed irrelevant, 'purely chronological process'. The significance is in the change. Such mystery is rooted in an old distinction between function and style, much discussed by archaeologists. Material culture functions to express social structure; the *style* of this functioning is inexplicable. As an abstract process function lacks particularity, and Morris took no account of the meaning of style, the reasons why burial may have taken the particular form that it did.

In spite of this issue of the relationship of general modelling and particular historical form, Morris has provided an approach to cemeteries, into which Classical archaeologists have delved for so long, which is as refreshing as it is enlightening. He has dealt with ideas, ideologies and concepts as major factors in social change, and with their archaeological visibility in an approach which makes the most of cross-cultural anthropological theory. In his sophisticated statistical analyses the strength of Processual social archaeology is again revealed to be its ability to summarise, to coordinate and draw into a coherent model of social change an enormous amount of empirical detail.

I will reserve further comment until after I have described two other

archaeological interpretations of the early city state which further reveal the characteristics of Processual social archaeology.

Pottery and politics

In a sophisticated development of the idea that style relates to site of production, Cathy Morgan and Todd Whitelaw, in an article in the *American Journal of Archaeology* 1991, have investigated variability in the decoration of Geometric pottery produced in and around Argos. They have argued that pottery functions as a medium and index of interaction, and so reflects and takes part in changing relations of dominance by what came to be the main city state, Argos.

For Morgan and Whitelaw the style and use of pottery in the Argive plain from 1050-700 BC came to express social status; its iconography reflected status; style was an expression of community identity. Their main focus was on style as an 'index of interaction' between sites. Analysis of 947 pots coded on 16 variables according to 495 different elements of form and decoration aimed to establish a pattern to be correlated with relationships between the settlements around the city state of Argos.

The statistical analysis is again subtle, working from simple to more complex methods. A primary step was to identify diagnostic as opposed to random style: three variables were found to vary between sites in a way that 'deviated significantly from what could be expected due to chance factors alone'. These diagnostic variables concerned the form and placing of the main decorative design element. The three variables were then amalgamated into a summary measure of stylistic affinity which was used to map patterns of interaction: similarity between the ceramic assemblages of sites was compared with distance according to accepted chronological phasing. It was suggested that stylistic similarity at times represents political affiliation, that after experiment with earlier Geometric decoration, style was politicised in the ninth century BC, expressing social and political competition. This is related to what is known from historical references about the politics of the plain of Argos, and it was with this scenario that their paper began.

Morgan and Whitelaw homed in on an issue and region, developed a hypothesis, drew on general anthropological theory, that stylistic similarity is to do with relationships between communities, then carefully analysed relevant variables of a large data set, discarding what was considered irrelevant to the hypothesis. These are characteristics of Processual archaeology. They also related their findings to what is known historically of relationships between communities on the plain of Argos.

There is some reference to style as 'active', and used intentionally or purposefully, but that opposition remains built into the analysis between those aspects of style that are diagnostic and function to express society and interaction, and others that are creative or random, representing 'chance

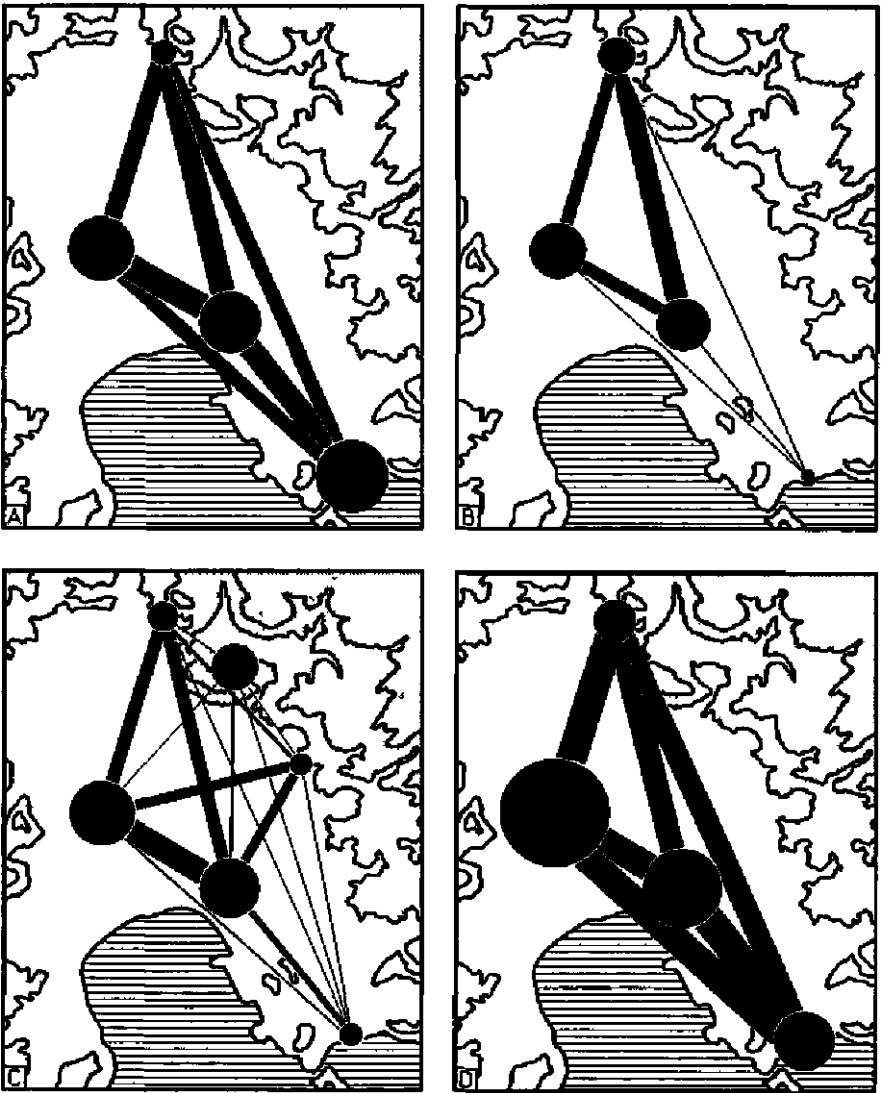


Figure 5.6 Stylistic similarity between sites on the plain of Argos, Greece, separated into periods. The size of the circle representing each site reflects the number of vessels included in the analysis. Width of lines represents the degree of stylistic similarity, wider representing greater similarity. Protogeometric (A); Early Geometric (B); Middle Geometric (C); Late Geometric (D). {Source: Todd Whitelaw and Cathy Morgan. 'Pots and politics: ceramic evidence for the rise of the Argive state', *American Journal of Archaeology* 95 (1991): 79-108}

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factors'. 'Style was a political tool', claimed Morgan and Whitelaw. By this they meant that a particular combination of three elements of the design of pots seems to be non-randomly distributed between sites, given only this attribute index, distance, and an abstract notion of 'social interaction'. Their analysis was purposefully reductive: the style of pots, and all that this represents in terms of aesthetics, was reduced to a single measure, a summary attribute or number. Other aspects of design and manufacture were discarded as irrelevant to this analysis. The actual social practices of pottery design, as opposed to this abstract index, were also considered irrelevant to analysis. It was pointed out that there were problems with the variability of the samples, that often the quantification simply allowed recognition of sample size and did not provide an index of similarity. It may be suggested that the problem is of reducing a complex interplay of social practices and design strategies to one summary measure, an abstract notion of similarity.

The functions of artistic style

James Whitley's book *Style and Society in Dark Age Greece: the Changing Face of a Pre-literate Society* (1991) begins evocatively with two contrasting Athenian amphorae of the sixth and eighth centuries BC — one Geometric, the other black figure - and the problem of appreciating their difference. He does not eschew a humanist language of the appreciation of aesthetic quality, but his project is one wider than traditional art history. With admirable aims of reconciling art history, history and archaeology, Whitley's objective is to show that the ninth-century amphorae 'registers' Athenian society. In understanding the style of such an artefact, he claims reference must be made to its original social and historical context. Citing art historian Michael Baxandall, archaeologist Ian Hodder, and hermeneutic philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, Whitley describes his work as Contextual archaeology.

Most of the pots from 1100-700 BC, which Whitley chose to explain, were deposited with the dead. Consequently there is reflection also on the archaeological analysis of mortuary remains. And it is with concise critiques of art history, other approaches to style, and the processual archaeology of death, that the analysis begins. Under this contextual approach it is accepted that mortuary practices are 'an expression of the society that produced them', but 'the rules governing the transformation and self-representation of society at death are not universal, but culturally specific'. It is thus stressed that death and what people do with the dead are mediated by ideas, institutions and ideologies.

These Dark Age pots occur in graves; understanding comes from considering the social context of stylistic expression, it is claimed. So the bulk of Whitley's study, as presented in this book, has been to determine the patterning behind and of pots in cemeteries, and then to attribute meaning to this patterning in terms of social process or social structures. Computer-based

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factor analysis and a clustering program were used to find patterning, with each grave coded on over seventy variables. The intention was to reduce the complexity of the burying practices to a few dimensions, and to group the graves according to a general consideration of their form and contents (paying particular attention to the decoration of pots). The cluster and multi-variate analysis is accompanied by sometimes close (traditional) qualitative description of the burials, all done according to the chronology defined by traditional stylistic interpretation.

Whitley considers wealth an important factor in describing forms of burial, and devised a method of 'scoring' wealth according to the number and type of artefacts interred with a person. The search for patterning in the burials then became a search for correlation between 'style' and 'wealth'. Whitley claims to have found it; he refers to a process of 'social rationing'.

A major social change occurred between the tenth and ninth centuries . . . Athens underwent a transition from a relatively egalitarian to a more hierarchical society, whose organising principle was the social rationing of valued tokens, exotic artefacts, certain decorative features, and the right of formal burial.

So the development of style is to be intimately linked with social change: in the ninth century being buried in a particular way with some types of pot was a privilege of a social elite.

This picture is fleshed out towards the end of the book as Whitley moves from attributing meaning to social typing and ethnographic analogy. Reflecting on the social origins of the city state, Whitley suggests an analogy between Dark Age Greek society and Melanesian 'big man' societies. But for Athens, he follows historian Oswyn Murray in looking to Nuristan, with its social rationing, as an ethnographic parallel. In this society there is a direct link between style and status: 'art and decoration have a direct and unambiguous meaning, referring to social rank'.

For many art-historian Classicists, Whitley's narrative, indeed the style of his book, littered with dendrograms and factor scores, must be very provocative, especially with its thesis of art as the manifestation of status competition. And in addition to presenting this primary thesis, Whitley performs a useful service of synthesising previous observations on Attic burial practices. Some of these are very interesting and suggestive: for example, the clear differences in treatment according to gender, and the considerable variability of practices within Attika and between Attika and other regions of Greece. In this way too Whitley presents an interdisciplinary study. Coordination of large amounts of data via summarising statistics and the definition of patterning to be related to social structure is again shown to be a powerful feature of Processual archaeology. Ethnographic analogy and cross-cultural anthropological theory is used, with a particular stress upon the function of artistic style to express social status.

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Consider some other features of Whitley's book. The link between material culture (the style of pots and burial) and society is described in various ways. Sometimes society is 'expressed' in material culture, sometimes 'registered', 'reflected', 'realised', 'symbolised', or 'defined'. What, it might be asked, is this 'society' which is so registered, etc.? Whitley writes of 'social personae' and 'social identities': these are the roles of rank and status that people play. It does appear that there are two levels of reality: hard social relationships, and then their representation or expression, here in material culture. In what ways material culture might, in this way, be less real than 'society' is not indicated. The problems of such a splitting of social reality are not considered.

Whitley does make the point that the link between society and material culture is one that is mediated; it is not direct, something comes between. This is a process of 'social rationing' and there are thus four elements in Whitley's argument: burial, the style of pottery, social rationing, and society. Society finds its expression, via social rationing, in what people did with their pots and the dead. This is a reasonable argument: rich people have posh things which others are not allowed to use or have. But Processual archaeology can make society seem quite one-dimensional.

Whitley's argument reduces so much variability to a basic relationship of expression of society conceived mainly in terms of rank and status. Is this all there is to the structure of society? Another question always seems to remain: Why express society in this way? Why with Geometric amphorae? Why express it at all? Because this is art? Because burial is 'ritual' enactment of society? To keep society going? Style itself is treated by Whitley as simply the presence or absence of particular decorative 'stylistic' motifs and traits without considering the processes of design and manufacture, the structures of style. This is the one-dimensional picture.

A great strength of anthropological archaeology and particularly Processual archaeology is the use of statistical techniques, some computer-based, to find patterning in complicated data sets, to make complexity simple. Indeed, Whitley's argument depends on a claimed discovery, via cluster and multivariate analysis, of the emergence of a pattern of social rationing: that there were times when everyone had equal access to all types and styles of goods. Whatever the quality and success of the quantification and statistical analysis, it is designed to play a main part in explanation and dominates the style of processual texts such as those of Whitley, Morgan and Whitelaw, and Morris. This is the *rhetoric* of these archaeologies: not the definitive catalogue or classification (though these are certainly referenced), but the technical display of control over detail through its encompassment in numerical summary.

For early eighth-century cemeteries, Whitley uses factor analysis to group graves and not, as would be usual, to analyse and simplify dimensions of variability. With graves held to be the expression of a social persona, he seems to treat individual factors as social identities. Society is read from a

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factor list. Cluster analysis is certainly used to locate social identities. A group of clustered graves represents 'a socially recognised type of person'; and much space in Whitley's book is taken to present and discuss dendrograms, the graphical display of the results of cluster analysis.

Whitley professed the laudable aim of reconciling art history and archaeology. But where, it might be asked, is the humanism, the aesthetic appreciation in the perusal of pages of factor attribute lists, factor scores given to five decimal places? A re-education of the reader's sensibilities may be required, for what is there to prevent a mathematical figure being appreciated in its beauty? But, in fact, the aesthetic becomes what Whitley admits he cannot explain. Or rather, the aesthetic of Geometric pottery needs no explaining. Decorative change is 'autonomous, aesthetic and technical'; that is, decoration which cannot be correlated with the clustering agents. And with style defined as decorative attribute, just where is Whitley's reconciliation of art history and archaeology? If style does not function, for Whitley it is simply to be appreciated in its aesthetic autonomy from the rest of society. The autonomy of the aesthetic is, as has been shown, the defining assumption of traditional Classical art history.

PROCESSUAL CLASSICAL ARCHAEOLOGY: SOME SUMMARY POINTS

Archaeological theory, anthropological and sociological dealings with material culture, make it clear that style relates to communication between people; it is about interaction, and involves reference to social position and power. Style is to be understood in context, and it is the great value of these three works to have argued this with conviction and, in places, with great skill. The strengths of Processual archaeology in outlining major vectors of change are apparent. Above all, perhaps, is shown how ideas of social system and function can work to coordinate into neat models of social change the considerable amount of empirical detail remaining from these times. The control of the empirical afforded by quantification and theoretical awareness is one that should be taken very seriously.

Some more particular features are as follows.

- The social context, which is conceived as explaining what is archaeologically visible, is given a very narrow definition: it is rank or status, interaction, and the parameters of population and residence.
- In a research strategy of discovering pattern in the archaeological record, which is then held to represent the pattern of society, privilege is given to *abstract* descriptive measures.
- In the use of such abstract variables, analysis is purposefully reductive. There is clearly a case to be made for the 'analytical', that is cutting through the mass of the whole data set to reveal basic constituent

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processes - seeing through the mass of detail to what is really going on. Morris makes a case for being interested in the *structure* of the archaeological record, as opposed to its *empirical content*. But the loss of detail is the price of methodological rigour. Neither Morgan and Whitelaw nor Whitley give account of what to many must be the most distinctive aspect of the design of the pottery they study - it is decorated with geometric figures. Morris gives no account of why people in Attika actually did what they did with their dead. Snodgrass avoids being overly reductive by sacrificing methodological rigour in an impressionistic account of interconnectivity and humanistic narrative, but explanatory emphasis was still placed on a single prime mover: demographic change. The challenge remains of reconciling the detail and particularity of traditional descriptive approaches with methodological rigour and theoretical awareness.

- This is connected with a reliance upon *functionalist* explanation, and a conception of material culture as *representative*. The style of pottery and style of burial are held to reflect or represent society. The primary term in this relationship, given this social archaeology, is *society*. Material culture functions in expressing society, but the question of the *form* of the representation, expression or function is not asked.
- There is a different rhetoric being used by these authors. Snodgrass opts for humanistic narrative with a simple but powerful motor of change. Compare also the dendrograms and factor scores of Whitley's analysis; the Lorenz scores and variability measures of Morris's burial and Attic society; the regression lines and similarity measures of the 'politics of Argive Geometric' with the notion of the definitive multi-referencing catalogue; or humanist art history and the careful illustrative elaboration of traditional Classical archaeological narrative.

What is clear is that these sophisticated social archaeologies do not seem to be attending to all dimensions of the character of their sources, as considered above. How might it be possible to build on the insights represented here?

THE CATEGORY OF THE DECORATIVE: ON MEANING AND MATERIAL CULTURE

In some Processual archaeology, style may have a social function; otherwise its meaning must be sought, if at all, in regions that have nothing to do with social archaeology. Just as those archaeologies discussed above give primacy to the expression of society in material culture, discarding other matters, so conventional Classical archaeology focuses upon iconographic expression in material culture. Meaning is hereby limited to the illustrative, and particularly that of myth or religious significance (subjects of iconology). It has already been discussed in Chapter 2 how a distinction is made between

that which carries (iconic) meaning, and that which does not. The latter is usually called the 'decorative'.

So, for example, the sphinx appears many times painted upon Korinthian pottery. Bosana-Kourou, in her doctoral dissertation of 1979 at Oxford University, undertook a large survey of the sphinx in early Archaic art, and concluded that, for the most part, the sphinx is a purely decorative motif:

There are only a few representations showing sphinxes in scenes involving human beings. At first sight these scenes can easily be taken as mythological, but closer analysis proves them to be of a purely decorative character and usually an unconventional imitation of some oriental model, and without any awareness of the model's original meaning.

Meaning and myth are separated from lack of meaning and the decorative. The argument is also that the oriental borrowing is selective, or alters the 'original', therefore seems to bring no meaning, therefore the motif is decorative. It is clear that Bosana-Kourou considers the presence of human figures as the key to meaning, because they may allow the identification of a scene from myth. Animal art is thereby allocated to the decorative; and much Korinthian pottery depicts merely animals. The decorative is not wholly without meaning, but the meaning is an (art) historical one: the diffusion and copying of designs can be traced. For example, Bosana-Kourou writes: 'Protocorinthian art of the early seventh century is under strong Syrian influence, and we find Syrian motifs copied without reference to their original meaning.' Here also is reference to the idea of *original* meaning: that the graphic of a sphinx has a meaning which is somehow attached, or inheres. This equation of graphic and meaning omits many other possible levels of meaning. It is a restriction to the iconic, omitting particularly the significative and symbolic: sphinxes may have little to do with particular myths, but symbolise things in their relationships with other creatures. In his study of Klazomenaian sarcophagi (1981), Robert Cook also refers to this distinction between meaning and the decorative. He adds another twist, by rejecting 'esoteric' meanings as inappropriate to simple craftsmen.

So the decorative is a general category for all those elements of design that cannot easily be explained by function and iconic meaning. For example, Whitley claims adherence to an approach he terms, after Michael Baxandall, iconographic minimalism: 'there is no need to add layers of meaning in order to appreciate Geometric art. So, recent attempts at rich readings of the decoration and iconography of Geometric and Protoattic vases must be regarded as misguided.' As detailed above, he found no patterning in much of Geometric decoration with which he could correlate social structure or process (the function of style) and consequently attributed this sort of decoration to the aesthetic. Much of the decorative is that which is to be 'appreciated' in its inerrable humanism by aesthetics. The drawing of a

sphinx may be enjoyed, and this is its significance - it is purely decorative. Dietrich von Bothmer, in his article on connoisseurship referenced for the section on Beazley in Chapter 2, refers similarly to overinterpretation of vases beginning in the nineteenth century with such works as C.A. Boettiger's *Griechische Vasengemalde* (three volumes, Weimar and Magdeburg 1797-1800). German connoisseurship emphasised systematisation according to fabric, chronology and shape. For von Bothmer the defining feature of pottery study is attribution.

Some studies have blurred the distinction between figurative meaning and decorative design. Himmelmann-Wildschutz, in two classic studies published in the 1960s, has proposed that many 'decorative' elements of Geometric art are not abstractly decorative (subject only of aesthetic appreciation), nor iconic, but represent concepts or values. Others have stuck more clearly with the distinction between icon and decoration, but have turned the decorative into the iconic. In her survey of Attic Geometric funeral scenes (*Prothesis and Ekphora* 1971), Gudrun Ahlberg claims that some 'filling ornament' has 'substantial and/or symbolic function': some Geometric devices such as triangles and circular motifs provide an environment, architectural and landscape, for the scenes of prothesis and ekphora. Boardman too has interpreted apparently abstract decorative devices upon Argive Geometric as representing a set of themes to do with the city of Argos (see above). There may be an overlap between the meaningful and the decorative, but the distinction remains.

What does it mean to describe a frieze painted upon a pot as decorative? To decorate is usually taken to mean the addition of ornament, texture and colour, etc. to make more attractive: there is a sense of addition and of taste. The category of the decorative places primary emphasis upon appearance, order, formal rather than substantive content, an aesthetic. A decorative choice is therefore one that is based upon an aesthetic sense, upon taste: some things look good together, others do not. The question then becomes one of the source of this taste, and there may be discussion of form and beauty, the sense of the aesthetic.

The decorative may refer to something of a sense of cliché — that certain scenes became meaningless (and perhaps 'aesthetic' or 'tasteful') through repetition. The passage from Bosana-Kourou cited above mentions oriental *models* for sphinxes, copied without reference to their original meaning, therefore 'decorative'. The decorative here is the use of 'stock' scenes, formulae, traditional or otherwise, which have lost their original meaning through use and transmission. In this claim by Bosana-Kourou, the use of stock scenes is equated with the decorative, which in turn is taken to indicate an absence of meaning. So sphinxes are often found in pairs throughout near eastern and early Hellenic art. Other creatures are also found in such 'heraldic' pairs. Lion hunts and lions leaping upon animals are other subjects frequently found elsewhere. The animal frieze itself is not an invention of Korinthian potters.

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Elements of figured scenes in Orientalising design may well be observed elsewhere, before and after, but this does not explain their appearance, which may or may not have to do with the scenes being generic. The key question remains: why paint the scenes, stock and generic or otherwise? This is partly answered by arguments such as that of Carter (in an article in the *Annual of the British School at Athens*, 1972), who made much of the borrowing by Greek artists of generic and traditional scenes from eastern art for the eventual purpose of depicting narrative. He proposes an interest in depicting action and narrative as the reason for the adoption of eastern convention. Hurwitt (in 1985) has referred to cultural anxiety upon contact with the east, and a conscious decision to be influenced. But why Geometric 'decorative' devices and not others? But why these borrowings, not others? And a historical question — whence the interest in eastern art?

To write that the painting upon a Corinthian pot is decorative means one of two things: that the painted designs are an (aesthetic) ornament, and/or that the painted designs are the choice of convention or tradition. The first allows the painter the choice of taste; the second implies the painter is applying or following a taste established elsewhere. Both imply that meaning and signification are subordinate to form or convention. So, the decorative finds its meaning in that division of the aesthetic into art and craft, fine and applied art:

decorative	meaningful
formulaic	purposive
tradition	beauty
craft	art
application	decision
ornament	form
artisan	artist

The distinction is an old one, belonging with a valuation of the genius of the individual artist, whose identity lies in creativity, over the technical skill of the artisan, whose identity lies in labour. The anonymity of the traditional skills of the artisan is subordinated to the individual ego of the artist. Both art and craft share the realm of the aesthetic, of perception and the production of things, but craft remains less than art. The cultural field to which this distinction belongs is vast. A parallel is at the root of the capitalist division of labour into management, reason and decision, over workers, operations and execution of tasks. Hence the origins of the Arts and Crafts Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The discourse to which this distinction belongs allows two routes to understanding the decorative: through an abstract aesthetics of beauty and form, appreciating how some decorative devices are better or more 'beautiful' than others; or through tracing the 'life of forms', *the* creation, use and

transmission of graphical conventions, devices and schemata. Both tend to idealism (argument over the nature and appreciation of 'beauty') and/or a detachment of design from production and its social origins, as described above.

It may be held that to decorate is to add a surface of adornment or aesthetic enhancement. The dualism of the category extends also to a distinction between some essential form to which is added decoration. Something is created, then decorated. In this way, decoration is a supplement both to the pot and to the potter-painter creating a functional vessel and expressing meaning. The decorative is surface finish. But everything has a surface or outside; and every surface has a finish of some sort. Finishes may vary: some may be described as more or less elaborated; the potter-painter may choose to invest more or less time and interest towards the end of the production process. But finish is not supplemental; it is the dimension that supplies form. The term decorative may be used for an artefact that displays more concern with elaboration and labour investment in the final stages of production. But a simple textured surface could be described as decorative. The initial choice of material, such as fine Corinthian earthenware, may well imply (or *intend*) a certain finish; the process of production (black-figure firing, for example) also. A process of production is not often an accidental amalgam of separable activities: black-figure surface and painting requires a set of practices from clay extraction to brush manufacture. In this way the finish is *internally related* production. So I argue that the term 'decorative' has no specific field of reference, because everything can be described as decorative or decorated. The decorative is simply the appearance of the form of an artefact.

The corollary is that the aesthetic is not an abstracted and separate field of meaning or activity (as in Art, 'beauty' or 'taste'). The aesthetic is that which pertains to perception; it is an adjectival concept, not substantive.

In the decorative, meaning is subordinated to form and tradition. But can there ever be a limit case of a purely decorative or formal surface empty of meaning? I would argue that there cannot, because a graphic or design always implies at least the conditions of its production. The decorative must always be the outcome of a set of relations of (artistic) production, and these can never be without meaning, purely 'technical' or functional. A pair of miniature sphinxes upon a Corinthian pot implies the fine brush and slip, the manufacture of both, the acquisition of the skills necessary to paint them, knowledge of the firing process, the belief that such a design will enhance the surface and help the sale of the pot, and much more. All this can hardly be called meaningless.

I have already also commented how meaning has a most narrow reference in Classical art history and iconography or iconology. It is restricted to the iconic or representational (see, for example the monumental volumes of *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*). But there are many levels of reference and meaning to be found in cultural production. This has been

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a major contention of anthropology and the social sciences at least since Freud and Marx. A key concept is that of structure, or of a system of relations lying beneath or beyond the surface appearance of things and in which their significance or meaning can be found. So what seems to be required is a shift of attention away from the individual artist as transcendent creator of culture and meaning, away from the evolutions of abstract artistic style. This is happening in approaches to be described in the next two chapters.

In summary, the term decorative (or decorated) needs to be carefully qualified.

- The term usually belongs to an unhelpful division of production: culture and the aesthetic, a division that is rooted historically in a view of the individual as autonomous, the artist as transcendent creator of culture. The category of the decorative exists as a supplement to this idea of the artistic expressive ego; the decorative is what is left over when the artistic ego is removed.
- Use of the term has tended towards an idealism of the aesthetic, or of traditions of style: decoration is assessed either according to formal principles of taste, or according to the transmission and use of 'stock' scenes and designs.
- When used in the sense of a supplement (of finish or adornment), the term decorative or decorated has no specific field of reference; everything can be called decorative. The term is thereby meaningless or redundant.
- The discourse to which these uses of the term belongs is one that has too restricted a notion of meaning, no concept of structure.

In this section I have tried to build on the insights of Processual archaeology by considering an aspect of material culture - the investment of meaning in design. A purpose was to show how important it is to consider carefully the character of archaeological sources, and the different contexts which may help in their understanding. Those Processual archaeologies dealt with above may have discarded a little too much from their analyses.

JOHN BERGER, PETER FULLER AND LESSONS OF IDEALIST ART HISTORY

To what extent is a work of art independent of society? Is material culture design to be wholly explained in terms of the conditions of its social production? These questions have appeared several times. Marxist aesthetics, particularly after such popular works as *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger and others (1972), has seen art as social production, and responses to art conditioned by social circumstances. Art is to be explained by its social context. But other traditions, and some in Classical archaeology have been outlined above, hold that sociological explanations miss a key feature of art - its relative autonomy. This is something I have tried to deal with in the

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outline of the character of material culture as source at the beginning of the chapter. Some items of material culture, let them be called art, seem to maintain an aesthetic appeal. What may be made of this?

On 5 April 1928 the SS *Lotus* left Marseilles and cruised around the Mediterranean taking members of the Hellenic Travellers' Club to some of the sites of Greece, Crete and Sicily. On board, Dr T.R. Glover, Fellow and Lecturer of St John's College, Cambridge, and Public Orator in the University, delivered a lecture on 'The Influence of Greece on Human Life'. He began: 'Suppose that the sturdiest of all opponents of Greek studies ... had been standing by when the Venus di Milo, or whatever the archaeologists would have us call her, was discovered in Melos in 1820, would he have wished her to be buried again?' Glover picked on one of the most famous artefacts of antiquity to make his point. 'Here is a thing in itself, which, without associations - with never a Greek word to add to it or subtract from it - untouched by history - yet by its unexpected and inherent beauty, has in modern times made life a fuller and a happier thing.'

A goodness untouched by history: thus did Peter Fuller, the art critic, consider the Venus de Milo, the armless statue of a woman now on prominent display in the Louvre, in relation to ideas of art, continuity and history. His essay, in the book *Art and Psychoanalysis* (1980), reveals many issues central to the history of Classical art in the last century and a half. Fuller begins with the story of the discovery of the statue on the island of Melos in 1820 and its extraction from the Ottoman Empire. There seems to have been a fight on the beach of Melos between French and Turks over the statue which was damaged, possibly quite severely. A later French writer Aicard was convinced that what had originally been found was a statue of a woman with an apple in her hand and that the arm was broken off in the battle on the beach. But the statue immediately answered a demand in France for antiquities, brought on after the forced return of 5,000 works of art looted by Napoleon and stored in the Louvre. And upon its arrival in Paris arguments began over attribution.

Quatremere de Quincy, Permanent Secretary of the Academie Royale des Beaux Arts reckoned, on a 'spiritual' estimation of its qualities of truth and beauty, grace and nobility (a method discredited by Morelli), that it was by Praxiteles. This went down well with King Louis XVIII who wanted a famous and great sculptor's work in France's possession. A problem was the inscribed plinth which said that a sculptor called (Ages)andros made the work (and with epigraphy later dated by Furtwangler as anywhere between 200 BC and the Christian era and hence too late for Praxiteles). The inscribed plinth was argued away in various ways (as incidental restoration, for example); then it was lost (conveniently?). Argument continued over its date and attribution.

The Venus became one of the sights of Paris. Various authors and artists enthused over it, proclaiming Romantic rapture:

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*Salut! a ton aspect le coeur se precipite.
Un flot marmoreen inonde tes pieds blancs;
Tu marches, fiere et nue, et le monde palpite,
Et le monde est a toi, Deese aux larges flancs. . .*

(Leconte de Lisle, *La Venus de Milo*)

In the Victorian High-Renaissance of the 1870s and 1880s the statue became a model of excellence. 'For the insipid idealising fantasists of British Classicism, the Venus was not so much an object which excited passions as an unsurpassable ideal', and Fuller notes many specific and general references to the work in, for example, the work of Leighton and Alma-Tadema. He also remarks on a tension in the work and its reception between Naturalism and its idealisation, its fragmentation and its supposed formal perfection, between its energy and formal stasis (particularly naked upper and draped lower halves).

Romantic and Classical attitudes were accompanied by various desires for restoration and repair expressed up to the 1890s. The Venus de Milo was seen to have been part of a group such as the Judgement of Paris, or to have been linked to an Eros. Some had the statue holding a spear. Another had the Venus defending herself against the unwanted attentions of a man. She was envisaged holding a shield; dealing in various ways with Ares; arranging her hair. The distinguished Classical archaeologist Furtwangler took a close look at the statue and some associated fragments (particularly of the arm perhaps broken off on the beach on Melos) in the 1890s and decided that the Venus originally had been positioned in a niche in the Gymnasion on Melos, and was the combination of a Venus of traditional type and a goddess of Good Luck (Tyche). Her left arm, holding an apple, he restored resting on a pillar while her right arm reached across to support the drapery above her knee. He admitted however that 'the two arms thus restored lend neither unity nor harmony to the composition; in short, their loss is one less to be deplored than might at first appear'. Regarding date, he put the statue in a late second century BC renaissance of High Classicism, part of a reaction against Hellenistic excesses; hence it looked older than it was. Furtwangler's study marked the end of the prevalent types of speculation about the statue.

We do not now follow the nineteenth-century attitude of reverence and interest in the sculpture. Fuller refers to changes of taste with reference to the Apollo Belvedere, revered from Raphael to Winckelmann and, as judges Kenneth Clark, one of the two most famous works of art in the 1820s. This has been relegated to relative obscurity. But the Venus de Milo has been transformed into a symbol of another kind. Look now not for poems about the statue and artistic reconstructions, but to posters, advertisements, slimming foods, beauty products.

As the Fine Art tradition, and its related literary and critical activities, began to appear perilously historically specific, the Venus slid right out

of it into the new, emergent Mega-Visual tradition. . . . The floor of the Louvre still wears away disproportionately in front of her every year, and who knows how many soap-stone maquettes find their way into living-rooms and greenhouses everywhere.

Fuller is dealing here with questions of the reception of a work categorised as art. He asks the question of how we are to understand the work. What are we to make of all this? He proposes that the Venus is not one physical thing, but countless images and ideas, each of which has a history of its own - the reconstructions, advertisements, attributions, and tourist souvenirs - different things in different historical circumstances. So the social and historical context makes the artefact what it is, at that time. The artefact becomes transient, though it has a material substratum which may bear witness to its times (wear and chipped surfaces). The Venus is not just an image; it is three-dimensional. Fuller argues that changes in the surrounding space constitute a change in the original artefact itself. It is displayed in isolation, within an inlaid circle and upon its pedestal in the Louvre, exposed on all sides. But it was originally designed for a niche, something very evident from the less finely worked back. The Venus is now a mutilated fragment, not the original. He criticises attitudes that refuse to take account of these changes and instead see in the work some eternal, unchanging verities to do with craftsmanship and expression of the human form. Instead he points out that the Greeks would not hold such views of the work now, because of where it is and because it is broken and worn.

Fuller ascribes the success and fascination of the work to social and cultural conditions in the nineteenth century. Specifically he draws attention to the statue being a fragment from the earth. The cult of the fragment was central to Romanticism which had superseded the neo-Classicism of the French bourgeoisie, and its embodiment of universal, true and eternal ideals in the new republic. The monster and the ruin came to prominence, for example, in the sentimental humanism and scientism of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*: a creature of fragments joined through the application of reason (just as were the efforts to restore the Venus). Fuller brings in the development of archaeology and dispute over the antiquity of the human species centred upon fragments drawn from the earth. With respect to the emergence of what he calls the mega-visual tradition, Fuller points to the ambiguity of the statue as a signifier. With no arms and drapery appearing as if it were about to fall, the Venus is on the point of exposure. This sense of timing and view of women he relates to the development of the photographic pin-up, the helpless available woman. The Venus was transferred to this idiom and achieved further success.

For Fuller such contexts help explain the Venus de Milo and its place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is a relativist posture which attempts to account for the continuity in a response to an artefact by emphasising the

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variability of both signifier and signified. (The signified is the message or idea contained within a sign and the signifier is vehicle of that message: so the word statue is signifier while the signified is the concept of a human form worked in a durable material.)

But it is not enough, he claims. The concrete statue is dissolved, he thinks, into a series of *disembodied* relations, to do with ideas in the nineteenth century and such. Fuller has argued elsewhere that to reduce a work of art, or any artefact, to its conditions of manufacture and to contexts of reception and consumption cannot explain why some works of art are more aesthetically successful than others. Sociological context is not enough to explain why some works continue to fascinate people.

Here Fuller makes an argument which I connect with some ideas that are coming into human geography and indeed into archaeology; they are commonly called phenomenological approaches. Some have been arguing that to understand people's relationships to landscape and architecture, we need to appreciate the characteristics and experiences of the human physical condition. This is something that has a basis that has been constant since the human species emerged tens of thousands of years ago. We all have bodies which age, which have certain physical characteristics and attributes, and these help condition our responses to natural and cultural environments. Buildings have different scales and ambiances; landscapes and cityscapes are structured with respect to our movements through them and experiences of others within them. The social and historical construction of things is shot through with the biological. There are sculptural elements of the Venus de Milo which transcend class and history, according to Fuller, who follows the view of many art historians. These pertain to areas of the experience of reality which are common to all those who have human bodies. So the Venus de Milo as an artefact communicates to us not just as a museum piece, but because we share a common human condition with its maker. He quotes Delia Volpe: 'Sculpture is the expression of values or ideas by means of a figurative language of non-metaphorical volumes and surfaces leading into depth. It is a language of free three-dimensional visual forms.' This language is rooted in common physical conditions of human existence such as being in space, subjection to gravity, etc. Hence it is possible to see the Venus not just as a product of nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideologies but also as an aesthetic working with the human form which is more or less successful on aesthetic and formal grounds. We might appreciate here Furtwangler's comment that the statue is better fragmented than whole, when it would not have worked aesthetically as well. This brings me again to the point that the statue is an archaeological fragment. If Furtwangler is right, the statue is a complex composition involving a modification of traditional images of Venus according to a cult of Tyche, associated also with a symbol of Melos, the apple, and applied to Greek athletic practices. Its style is a reference to contemporary taste, which criticises its archaicism. We may also note the

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gender factors in the positioning of the statue in the Gymnasium, focus of masculine gender definitions. This is all mostly gone. We have very little left of the ideological and social context of its making. The statue has become more of a floating signifier, and its fragmentary character directs attention to those elements of its composition that are relatively constant, the biological. So too, many other archaeological remains, stripped of context and as worn traces or relics, fascinate according to their attestation to mortality, frailty and perhaps creativity. The presence of the person in the past who made the pot now broken and worn, signified in the marks upon the surface of the sherd, allows us to touch what seems intangible.

Fuller relates these biological constants to psychoanalytical constants to be found in the physical and psychical development of the human child and he picks up the ideas of Melanie Klein. Whether or not we follow this line, he has posed some questions of sociological and aesthetic understanding (that is, rooted in the formal characteristics of a work), which have considerable relevance to Classical archaeology. Different contexts form the basis of understanding. Of course, Fuller is not dealing with the conditions of design and consumption of the Venus de Milo in the last few centuries BC, but all that he decides about its reception can be applied also to its design, if the contextual information were available. The interesting comment here is that on the reincarnations of the Venus de Milo, which makes us think of the life-cycles of material and archaeological artefacts, those (ruptured) continuities from design and manufacture through consumption and deposition, loss or discard, through to recovery by contemporary archaeological interest and the different receptions thereafter.

UNDERSTANDING THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND A PREHISTORY OF THE CLASSICAL PAST

The central concept of this chapter has been context. Different contexts combine with different interests, and questions are raised regarding the object of social archaeology - its purpose and what it is that may be reconstructed using archaeological materials.

Two major themes identified in Processual social modelling are conceptual shifts (the relationship of ideas to social practices and their archaeological outcome) and social power. Snodgrass and Morris in particular stressed the importance of ideological factors in understanding the social changes of the city state. Archaeology is not just about material forms, but also about how these relate to structures of meaning. Their topic was the early state. Central to the formation of the state is a reorganisation of class and power. There is thus an institutional focus on social systems. Meanwhile Vickers and Gill have brought the study of Greek ceramics down from lofty aesthetic heights to the accoutrement of everyday life. This is a quotidian focus which has been stressed by many prehistoric archaeologists, such as John Barrett, who argue

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that material culture is the location of the everyday construction of those institutional structures considered by the likes of Snodgrass and Morris. The issue is one that has been implicit in this book so far: the relationship of the individual and their creative powers and talents to the societies and histories they inhabit. The material reality of the early state could thus be argued to be the everyday environments of those living then: the 'city of images', in the words of a fascinating work of French Classical archaeology. New phenomenologies in Prehistoric archaeology attend to everyday experience as the locale of people's agency, their creative power, investigating how people relate to architectures, landscapes, in all their lifeworld. I am thinking of the work of Richard Bradley, Ian Hodder, Chris Tilley and John Barrett. Some Classical archaeologists are making much of what they term viewer-centred art histories, and that French book just mentioned can be classed as such. These approaches, and more will be said of them in the next chapter, mark a significant meeting of viewpoint between Classical and Prehistoric archaeologies.

This, however, is not *the* place to describe recent developments in Prehistoric archaeology and debates about social theory. But what can be concluded perhaps is the possibility of a 'prehistory' of Classical Greece that comes before the interpretive complexities of written sources: a prehistory that recognises a fundamental difference and mystery to the remains of the past, and which is not modelled on a notion of transparent textual communication of what the ancients were thinking when they were writing. In all there is expressed a need to theorise the object of archaeological interest, its location in social practices past and present. The result cannot be a homogeneous account of the Classical past.