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What is Classical Archaeology?

Greek Archaeology

Anthony Snodgrass

A book like this, and especially a chapter like this, must have it as its prime aim to describe and not to prescribe, however strong the temptation to become prescriptive may be. This is all the harder when disagreement prevails, as we shall see that it does today, over any final definition of classical archaeology. The task of this first contribution is to address the question from the point of view of Greek archaeology: it will incorporate certain approaches that are not explicitly confined to ancient Greece, but which would be quite differently formulated in a Roman context.

The first task might be to set out, in simplified outline, some different and rival positions taken today on this issue of definition. The positions are not as mutually incompatible as this simplified form may suggest; they have already co-existed for some years, and direct confrontations between them do not happen that often—thanks partly to the fact that in many cases they prove to divide along the boundaries of nationality and language. Yet we can take the analysis one step further by trying to identify the (often implicit) issues which divide the groups from each other. In first putting together a list of specimen answers to the question “What is classical archaeology?” and concentrating on those approaches that are essentially characteristic of the Greek branch of the subject, I hope we can give a fair spectrum of the views commanding the most support among the practitioners of Greek archaeology, without excluding the beliefs, accurate or distorted, of the educated general public. The list should be not merely an abstract, but also an operational or behavioral one, in the sense of conforming to what classical archaeologists actually *do*. With this preamble, we can attempt our listing:

1. Classical archaeology is by definition a branch of archaeology. It is the term used to denote that branch of the subject which concerns itself with ancient

Greece and Rome; it can employ not only the entire range of methods used in archaeology at large, but also some additional ones of its own.

2. Classical archaeology is a branch of Classical studies; its objective is to use material evidence to throw light on the other, non-material cultural achievements of the ancient Greeks and Romans, preserved for us mainly through the medium of written texts. For this reason, it can hardly participate in the aims, the theories or the debates of archaeology as a whole, which cannot possibly share the same objective.
3. Classical archaeology is essentially a branch of art history, directed at discovering and establishing, in the arts of antiquity, a visual counterpart for the intellectual achievements of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Because its subject matter is more fragmentary than that of many later periods of art history, it must use certain peculiar techniques of discovery and reconstruction; but its aims are not essentially different.
4. Classical archaeology is none of the above. It is an autonomous discipline operating according to its own principles, and pursuing aims which are palpably different from those of non-classical archaeology, non-archaeological Classics, post-Classical art history, or indeed any other discipline. Its over-riding concern is the purely internal one of imposing order on the vast body of material with which it must deal. One has only to look at its output to see the truth of this.

The first three of these are more “idealist” positions than the fourth, though their supporters usually turn out to practice what they preach. No. 1, in particular, purports at the outset to be little more than a tautology; but it may prove to conceal at least as strong a prescriptive element as Nos. 2 and 3. The latter more openly embody an agenda, each presenting the Greeks and Romans as readily separable from all other prehistoric or ancient peoples, with cultural and especially artistic achievements that require special treatment (less obviously, they are also responses much more likely to come from a Greek than from a Roman specialist). No. 4 differs in being a confessedly operational definition, derived from observation of actual practice and telling us nothing about the nature of the subject: as such, it can hardly be adopted as a program, but its supporters might argue that it is nevertheless tacitly accepted by the great majority of Greek archaeologists, even when they protest their allegiance to one of the other three. As already hinted, any suggestion of irreconcilable differences of outlook within Greek archaeology would be an exaggeration. In the end, these are indications of priorities rather than absolute positions: few if any classical archaeologists would embrace any one of them to the total exclusion of the others. But the modern history of the subject is the history of the reciprocal ebb and flow between these four fundamental viewpoints, or combinations of them.

There are certain key issues which tend to determine the individual’s choice of position and, explicitly or more often implicitly, to divide this position from the others. The most important of these relates to the surviving ancient texts, or “sources” as they are often called in historical circles—slightly misleadingly, since the majority of them date from centuries later than the events, or works, which they

describe. The ancient texts explicitly lie at the heart of the argument of position No. 2 above: it is they which have preserved most of the “other . . . cultural achievements” of the Greeks and Romans, and according to this view, the function of classical archaeology is to supplement them with the evidence derived from material remains, on which the texts have much less to say. Even so, there is often some information to be found in the texts which has at least an indirect bearing on the material record: a statue may perhaps be connected with a known work, attributed by some ancient author to a known artist; a deposit at an identifiable site may perhaps be connected with a documented event in the history of that site. It will clearly be a source of satisfaction if the material evidence is found to be compatible with the textual account, and much ingenuity is spent, by the upholders of this view, in trying to reconcile them.

Less obviously, textual evidence is almost as important a factor for the supporters of position No. 3, who concentrate on the products of Classical (and especially Greek) artists. Although unaided archaeological discovery, at first haphazard and later systematic, would in due course have brought to light the magnitude of the Greek achievement in the visual arts, the historical fact is that, long before most such discoveries were actually made, they were confidently anticipated on the basis of the ancient texts. The pioneering work of Johann Joachim Winckelmann in the mid-18th century (see below, p. 17) was directly inspired by his knowledge of the ancient (especially the Latin) sources for Greek art, and characterized by his deference to them; his model for the phases of development of Greek art was directly based on a pattern much earlier adopted for Greek poetry. Many of Winckelmann’s most illustrious successors have retained similar attitudes, and almost all later narratives of Greek art have accepted (though with a very different terminology) the skeleton of his outline for its development.

As a consequence, this general position can reasonably be claimed as the “founding definition” for Greek (but only for Greek) archaeology. Already while Winckelmann was studying the collections of ancient art works in Rome, excavations at the Italian provincial sites of Herculaneum and Pompeii were actively under way; but Winckelmann took a disparaging view of these and their potential value. Greek art history had been pointed on a course which it was long to follow: one which distanced it from field archaeology and assimilated it to philological scholarship. More importantly, this approach was to prove so fruitful and so satisfying that, for many of its exponents, Greek archaeology *became* Greek art history, and nothing more.

This discussion of texts may be briefly extended in a different direction. Ancient writings survive not only in the manuscripts of authors, but in the lettering which may occur on the material objects revealed by archaeology, often in association with works of art: on the pedestals of statues, beside painted figure- or relief-scenes in ceramics, very commonly on coins and occasionally on buildings, but above all on stones which have been inscribed in their own right, as records of events or transactions. The study of such writings belongs mainly to two sub-disciplines, epigraphy and numismatics, which are often distinguished from archaeology, though occasionally subsumed within it. Here, the former alternative will be followed: partly on

pragmatic grounds (many distinguished archaeologists do not possess these skills, while most of their own exponents do not also practice archaeology), partly on theoretical: the raw material for these disciplines may often be brought to light by archaeological discovery, but their training and methods, their interests and goals, from that point on proceed according to quite separate principles.

If attitudes to the ancient Greek texts do not create a clear division between positions Nos. 2 and 3 above, then nor does the valuation of Greek art. Its primacy may be made explicit in position No. 3, but study of actual practice suggests that its pre-eminence may equally be taken for granted by No. 2. Throughout the universities of the western world, Classical courses have existed for a century and more in which the study of Greek literature, history, and thought is combined with that of art, but not of any other aspect of Greek archaeology. Book-length studies of Greek art abound, ranging from simple text-books to high-level works of synthesis (Robertson 1975 still stands out among these for its combination of broader insight and close detail); whereas comparable treatments of Greek archaeology as a whole have been few and recent (Etienne and Etienne 1992[1990] is invaluable as an historical summary; Snodgrass 1987 and Whitley 2001 analyze current positions). All this suggests a strong belief in the educational value of Greek art, to supplement if not to match that of literature—just as a brief study of Renaissance art has featured in many a course devoted to early modern European history. What distinguishes position No. 2 is that it does not explicitly privilege art history: for the purposes of research at least, if not of teaching, it keeps its door open to the whole range of material culture. The guiding principle here is one dictated by the accompanying study of history: material discoveries, of a non-artistic kind, have repeatedly been used to throw light on historical events, or to reflect the processes of documented history. Thus, no account of the Persian Wars would be complete without mention of the archaeological discoveries made at Marathon or in the destruction deposit on the Athenian Acropolis; the monuments of the Periclean building program could hardly be omitted from a narrative of the growing centralization of the Athenian Confederacy, or the tombs at Vergina from the study of the rise of Macedon. The status of positions Nos. 2 and 3 can be summed up as embracing, between them, the more traditional approaches to Greek archaeology.

The “operational” definition of classical archaeology in position No. 4, by its rejection of all such high-sounding programmatic pronouncements, keeps both these approaches at arm’s length. The risk is that, in doing so, it lapses into cynicism: from focusing on the activities of the army of solitary scholars producing a corpus of brick-stamps or terracotta revetments, bronze safety pins or iron weapons, or assembling and publishing the undecorated pottery, the lamps or lead weights from a given excavation, it reaches the ostensibly reasonable conclusion that classical archaeologists are making no measurable contribution either to Classical studies or to the history of art. Nor do their activities any longer have a true counterpart in world archaeology as practiced today, as position No. 1 might seem to imply. They are simply “doing their own thing.” This argument ignores the pedagogical and instrumental function of these apparently mundane activities, as a training for higher things. Many of those undertaking such research would rather

be dealing with broader issues, and have every intention of moving on to such activity; those who are in university posts must already do so in their teaching.

But this position has the merit of having incidentally uncovered a more profound truth about classical archaeology: that it is a discipline devoted to the archaeology of objects, one which is traditionally governed and organized, not by competing objectives or theories, approaches or models, but by classes of material. Individual practitioners have for long made their reputations as experts on a given class of artifact, sometimes more than one. Any large library of classical archaeology proclaims this, if not by its subject-headings, then by the titles of the books within them: monographs devoted to categories and sub-categories of arms, bronzes, gems, stone reliefs, terracottas, vases, and many other types of artifact; or multi-volume excavation reports which are divided up according to a similar scheme. It is difficult to find another discipline, in the 21st or even the later 20th century, which remains similarly dominated by taxonomy and typology. This is the basis for the criticism that classical archaeology has become a self-contained, even hermetically sealed, branch of scholarship whose activities and findings are of only intermittent interest even to its most closely related sister subjects, and of none at all to the wider intellectual community.

Such attitudes, however, traduce traditional classical archaeology and present a caricatured version of it. Certainly there are also more positive things to be said about it. We may briefly look back to the time when the subject first came into existence. Though it would be misleading to try to identify this with a precise historical moment, the nearest approach to such a landmark, for Greek archaeology, is certainly to be found somewhere in the mid-18th century, when Johann Joachim Winckelmann was compiling his ground-breaking works on Greek art (between 1755 and 1767: abridged translations in Irwin 1972), and when James Stuart and Nicholas Revett were measuring and drawing the most important surviving buildings of Athens (Stuart and Revett 1762, 1787, 1794, and 1816). Such a dating reinforces the status of the study of Greek art as the "founding definition" of the subject, as embodied in position No. 3 above. What is often forgotten, however, is that Winckelmann's pioneering work was essentially laying the foundations, not just for the study of Greek art, but for the whole discipline of art history, of all periods. So central was the position that classical archaeology once occupied.

The contribution of the excavation and study of the surviving material remains on the ground was only to come much later. An awkward fact, but one to be assimilated into any history of field archaeology as applied to Classical Greece, is that its great period of flowering, from about 1875, came about largely in response to the challenge from Aegean prehistory, and specifically to the discoveries of Heinrich Schliemann at Troy, Mycenae, and elsewhere (Aegean prehistory is itself excluded from this account because of the quite distinct, and increasingly divergent, course which it has followed). Yet the wide popular interest aroused by the revelation of the Bronze Age civilizations of Greece had convinced the Classicists that they must offer something similar of their own. The result was a whole series of large-scale, long-running excavation projects, some of them continuing with little interruption for well over a century, concentrated on major sanctuary sites. Like much else in



Figure 1.1 The heyday of the “great sanctuary excavation”: Archaic sculptures unearthed at the Sanctuary of Artemis, Corfu, 1911. Museum of Classical Archaeology, University of Cambridge.

Greek archaeology, they have no real parallel anywhere else in the world (Whitley 2001:32–36 gives a good summary of them).

Their relevance here is that, for a period of about two generations’ length, the discipline which they represented was generally seen as occupying the heartland of archaeology as a whole. Until the rapid rise of prehistoric world archaeology in the 20th century, public perception of the nature of archaeology was dominated by the Mediterranean lands in general and Greece in particular. When, for example, the Archaeological Institute of America was set up in 1879, its founders took it for granted that Greece would be its main focus of interest; many archaeologists with other interests, especially those centered in the New World, withdrew from the Institute. The establishment of an American School of Classical Studies in Athens followed soon after (1881) and the first large-scale American excavation in Greece, at the Argive Heraion, in 1892 (Dyson 1998:37–60, 82–85). Several European countries were meanwhile following a parallel path. This era saw the peak of prominence for classical archaeology (Figure 1.1); since then, a decline in scale and in profile has been, for most countries in the world, an inescapable fact. To maintain the goals and methods which had once brought such success, though perhaps a natural human reaction to such an experience, is hardly the answer.

But it is time for something more constructive and less pessimistic. Some may believe, like the present writer, that a way forward can be found through a more explicit association with non-classical archaeology, as intimated in position No. 1 above; but they have to admit that they may still be in a minority. Yet to identify

the distinctive fields of activity in classical archaeology, and its unique strengths, it is not necessary to embrace this or any other prescriptive position: achievements of enduring value can be found in the past more easily than in the present, and in many different areas of the discipline.

Connoisseurship

This field is, by common verdict, the first place to look for such achievements. This is “connoisseurship” in its stricter sense: the close study of works of art with a view to attributing them to an individual artist or workshop. This was a product of the subject’s coming of age, long after the time of Winckelmann; its first main application was to Greek sculpture, and to the lost masterpieces of its greatest artists. Adolf Furtwängler (1853–1907) (Figure 1.2) argued in effect that, if one brought together all the references in ancient literature which described a given work of Classical sculpture—a task already accomplished before his time—and assembled all the copies of Roman date which appeared to derive from one and the same Greek original—his own achievement—then it was reasonable to expect the two classes of evidence, on occasion, to meet up: the lost masterpiece of the texts (the more mentions, the greater its presumed fame) and the lost original of the copies (the more copies, the wider its presumed impact) might sometimes, if there were no contradictory feature, turn out to be one and the same. Nothing could bring the original back into existence, but much that was new could be learned about it and, more important, about its creator (Furtwängler 1895[1893]). His declaration of faith, in the Preface to his best-known book, makes striking reading:

It may be further objected that it is not yet time, while we are still so behindhand in the knowledge of the general development of the separate forms, to inquire into the individualities of the several artists. The study of these forms, however . . . is inseparable from—nay, even identical with—the inquiry into the individualities to whom precisely this or that particular development of form is due. (Furtwängler 1895:ix)

Armed with such respect for the Great Artist as initiator of every important “form,” Furtwängler (who held that even copies of works by Raphael or Michelangelo would be more valuable than any number of originals by lesser contemporaries) would set Classical art history on a new path: the pursuit, not just of art or even of great art, but of the Great Artist. He could (and still can) be credited with a huge, if still provisional, extension in our knowledge of the favored styles of Myron, Pheidias, Alkamenes, Polykleitos or Praxiteles: it is easy enough to criticize him for pushing his evidence too far, often writing of the lost original as if he had it actually in front of him; harder to demonstrate an instance where he was wrong. This is in part because even today, more than a century later, our knowledge of the great age of Greek sculpture, in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., remains a shifting, uncertain quantity: further discoveries have brought to light a steady trickle of major originals, but an invariable accompaniment to such finds has been the disarray of the experts,

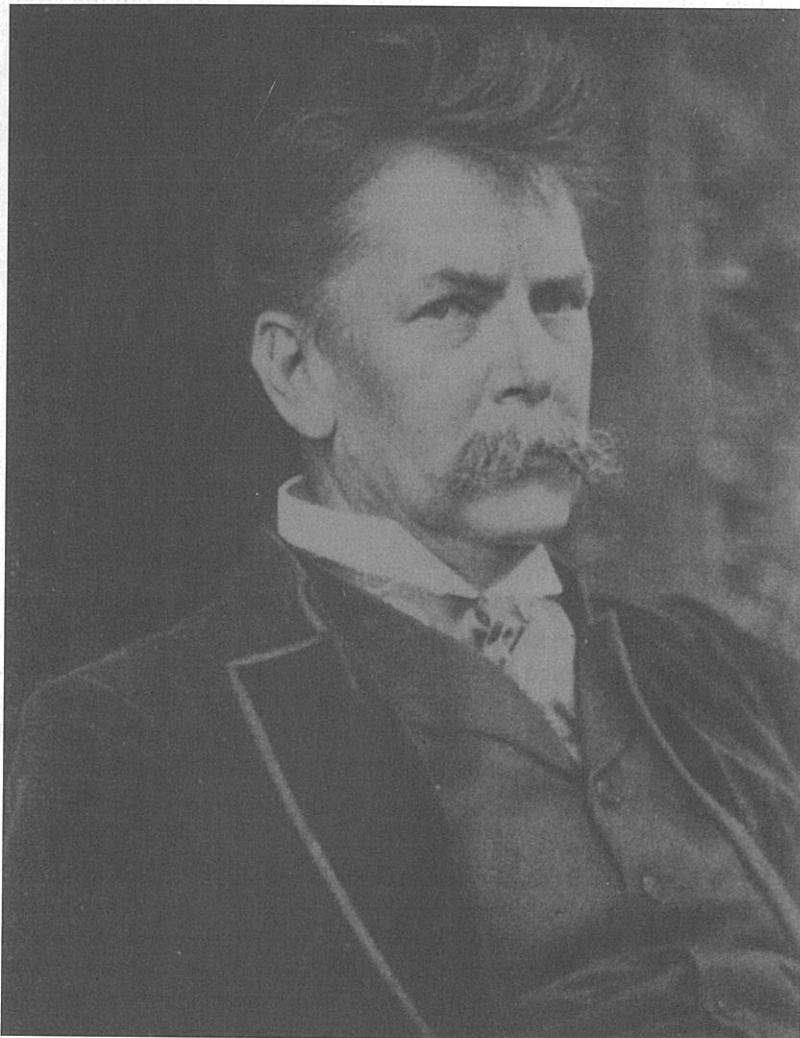


Figure 1.2 Adolf Furtwängler, 1853–1907. Museum of Classical Archaeology, University of Cambridge.

as they seek to assimilate them into existing knowledge by attributing them to one or another great name.

A very different application of connoisseurship followed soon afterwards; and, as with Furtwängler, it is inseparably associated with the name of a single scholar, J. D. Beazley (1885–1970) (Figure 1.3). Beazley devoted almost his whole working life to the study of Athenian painted pottery. Here was a class of material which offered two great advantages over Greek sculpture: it consisted, to all appearances, entirely of original work, and it vastly exceeded surviving sculpture in sheer quantity. The disadvantages were less absolute: there was virtually no ancient literary evi-

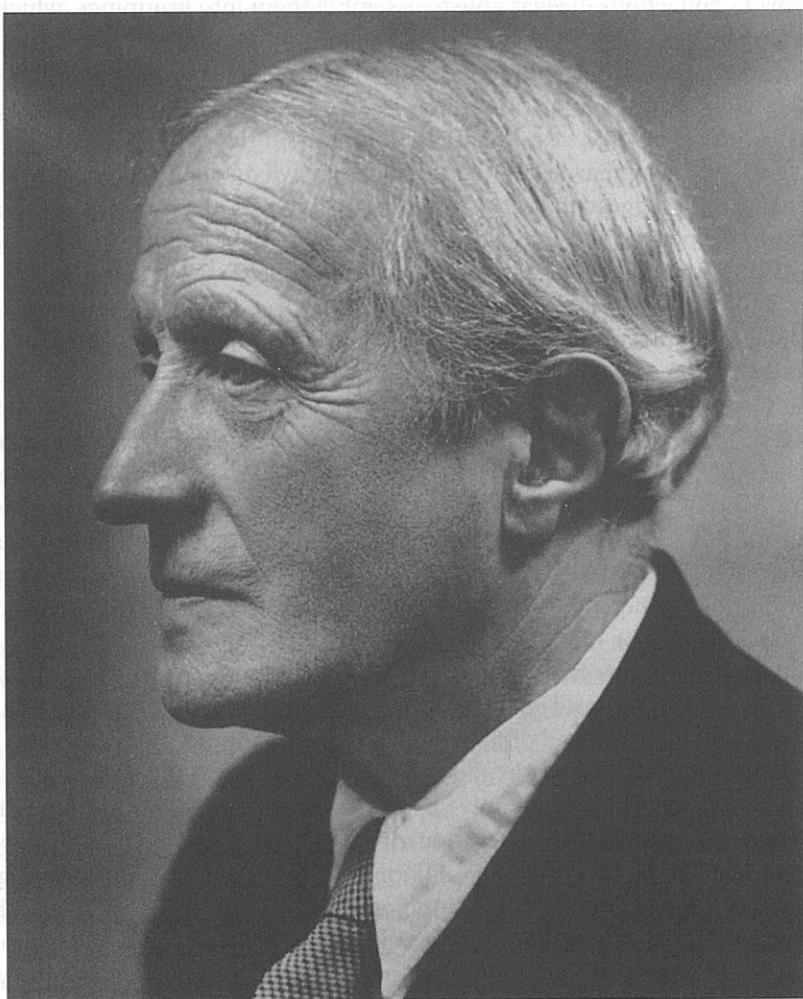


Figure 1.3 Sir John Beazley, 1885–1970. Museum of Classical Archaeology, University of Cambridge.

Beazley's achievement, however, was to go well beyond this. He had the confidence to deploy in this case and, more problematically, the artistic status of even the finest painted pottery was perhaps open to question. Yet, long before Beazley, scholars had noted that decorated Athenian vases, at their best, embodied drawing and composition of a standard that had never been matched in this medium; and had speculated that these works could reflect, at a distance, the vanished contemporary masterpieces of another attested field of Greek art, contemporary wall- and easel-painting. A few had gone further and, making use of the occasional survival of painters' signatures, had put together groups of works which seemed to come from the hand of a named individual.

Beazley carried this last activity to a much higher level. Working his way through a good proportion of the tens of thousands of Athenian black- and red-figure vases

in the world's collections, he was able to assemble them into groupings, which could in each case be associated with the hand, the group, the circle, the manner, or the following of an individual painter (Beazley 1956 and 1963, his canonical works, present catalogues of such attributions). Unlike his predecessors, Beazley did not turn first to the signed pieces: he was looking for subtler criteria. When a body of paintings showed a similar level of anatomical knowledge and technical skills, with other linkages to suggest that they must be of broadly the same date, then how could they be apportioned among individual hands? His answer lay, not in those overall effects for which the painters were consciously striving, but in the trivial differences of rendering which they unconsciously, yet regularly, observed: in their drawing, for example, of the ear or the nose, the knee-cap or the ankle. The analogy with handwriting has been well suggested—with Beazley as a master graphologist. There is plenty of supporting evidence from other media to strengthen the belief that such differences of detail can and do reveal different hands: the most relevant is perhaps that from Renaissance painting where, in the previous generation, Giovanni Morelli had applied a closely similar method, and to a wide measure of acceptance. But Beazley's attributions won a measure of unanimity that was unmatched. During and after his time, too, Beazley's methods have been applied, with varying but generally reasonable success, to other classes of Greek pottery from outside Athens or of earlier date.

Debate in recent years has nevertheless arisen, not in the main about the validity of Beazley's work, but about its value (for a fierce defense of both, see Boardman 2001:128–138). The expected difficulty of securing unanimity, after Beazley's death, over the attribution of new works did not really materialize: the vast range covered by his own attributions could simply absorb them. Instead, some younger classical archaeologists have treated Beazleyan attribution as a closed book, and have tried to put this same body of material to different, and to them more interesting, uses. Sometimes, as in its application to chronology (see below), there has been a hidden dependence on Beazley's system. But other new fields of study have grown up which appear to owe less and less to him: the epigraphy and the significance of the various kinds of painted or scratched inscription on Athenian vases; the whole question of the economic importance (or lack of it) of their production and distribution; above all, the choices of subject in the paintings, their iconography, their meaning and the light that they throw on the cultural patterns, whether universal and enduring or time- and place-specific, of Greek society. This last, the most fruitful of these approaches, sometimes referred to as *iconologie*, has been especially associated with French-speaking countries: one work in particular, *La Cité des images* (Bérard et al. 1989[1984]—a book which uses Beazley only for purposes of reference) has become an indispensable aid to modern study.

A much more direct and radical confrontation with Beazley came with the arguments brought together in Vickers and Gill 1994. Here was an attempt to undermine the very corner-stone of Beazley's work, his belief in the vase-painter as artist and in his work, at its best, as "High Art"—a belief to which he had largely converted the professional world, and which the art market had long taken for granted. Vickers and Gill argue that high esteem for Greek pottery is a purely

modern construct, not shared by contemporaries, who reserved their admiration for the vessels in gold and silver, of which black- and red-figure pots are cheap copies; that even the most exquisite of the drawings, on which Beazley had expended such effort and insight, were themselves no more than copies of original designs on lost work in precious metals. This venture has received a chilly reception: it threatens not only Beazley's achievement, but the whole underpinning of the subject, at least as practiced in the 20th century. The search for the individual behind the work of art had become the crowning endeavor of the discipline: what if the largest known group of "creative artists" of ancient Greece proved to be nothing of the kind? Of what use was the scrupulous and scientific attention to detail in vase-painting studies, if central elements of that detail turned out to have been irrelevant? If and when the threat recedes altogether (many would hold that it already has), it will still leave the memory of a moment of fleeting awareness that perhaps even the work of Beazley, and much more obviously that of other attribution studies in Greek art, has not advanced beyond the status of the highly convincing hypothesis.

Greek Architecture

To nominate this as the next field of achievement will doubtless cause surprise in some quarters: notably in Britain, where as a branch of study and teaching, it is today in rapid retreat, in Classical courses as in schools of architecture. But, to illustrate a point made at the outset about national differences, the same by no means applies to France, Germany, Greece, or the United States: in these and several other countries, the subject is still pursued assiduously. One reason for this is pragmatic: without continued expertise in the identification and interpretation of Greek architecture, it would be quite impossible for these countries to maintain their long-standing field projects at such sites as Olympia, Delphi, the Acropolis, or the Agora of Athens. These are sites which constantly bring their explorers face to face with major remains of Greek (and Roman) architecture: they are places where "marble rules" (note the anecdote in Whitley 2001:57 and the title of Dyson 1998).

If, in this kingdom of marble, Greek sculpture had always claimed precedence, it is architecture that holds the advantage in other ways. Its symmetry and precision make it obviously more susceptible of accurate measurement, and therefore of restoration on paper or in the round. Unlike sculpture (and like painted pottery), it is largely free of the pitfalls posed by ancient copying: Greek buildings have seldom been mistaken for anything else. The ancient sources offer relatively little, nearly all of it in small, isolated pieces of testimony: the one continuous text that survives, the *Ten Books* of Vitruvius, belongs to a time and place too far removed from the heyday of Greek architecture to be a genuine "source." Indeed, the modern study of the subject can be more or less dated from the time when it broke free of dependence on Vitruvius. What grew up instead was a uniquely mathematical, even "scientific," branch of classical archaeology, and this probably has something to do with its current lack of academic popularity.

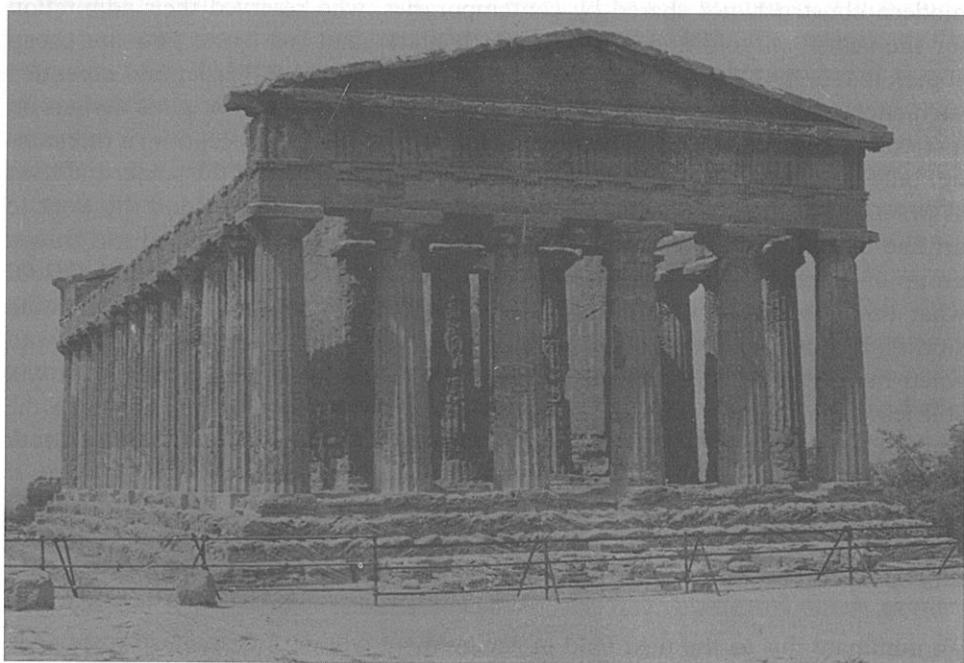


Figure 1.4 The heyday of Greek temple building (so-called “Temple of Concord”) at Akragas in Sicily (c. 425 B.C.). Photo by Robin Osborne.

But there is another unusual dimension to the study of Greek architecture: its influence on later practice, which has excelled that of Greek sculpture in cross-cultural diffusion and in sheer duration, if not in the power to arouse the passions. The Classical, it has been well said, is the only universal style in architecture, and Greek temple building stood at its heart (Figure 1.4). Its influence extends, with interruptions, through time, via Roman architecture, the Italian Renaissance, Palladio and Inigo Jones, into Neo-Classicism and the specific “Greek revival” of the 1780s, and across huge geographical distances. Even in the practice of today, its reign cannot be said to be over in the same sense, or to the same degree, as can that of Classical Greek sculpture.

The drawings of Stuart and Revett (above, p. 17) began a tradition of learned investigation which can match that of any branch of the subject. For, despite many appearances of repetition and homogeneity, Greek temple architecture, in particular, embodies frequent, subtle variations (Coulton 1977 is the most accessible account). These are carried to an extreme level in the Parthenon (447–432 B.C.) which, despite repeated protestations of its untypical quality, continues to exemplify Greek architecture for most people. As has been known for some time, the deliberate deviations from the horizontal and the vertical in the Parthenon mean that, for example, every one of the 46 external columns differs from every other one; but during the current program of restoration, it was also found (summer 2002) that

each of the hundreds of rectangular blocks that made up its inner walls is also unique, and has only one placement in a correct reconstruction. The expertise required for analyzing such complexities today is considerable; but it is dwarfed by respect for the mathematical and engineering skills of its original builders. The author of the most learned and detailed handbook of the 20th century, William Bell Dinsmoor (Dinsmoor 1950, with earlier editions) also presided over the construction in the 1920s of the millimeter-accurate reproduction of the Parthenon in Nashville, Tennessee.

Topography and Regional Survey

For our third example, we turn to an aspect which has a long and honorable tradition, but which has also taken a new lease of life in the past three decades. At its origin there lay the notion of *mapping* the Greek landscape of antiquity: of drawing on to the largely blank outline of a modern physical map the cities and villages, rivers and mountains, frontiers and routes of the Classical world. If the ancient sources, yet again, provided the starting point for this endeavor, they proved to be defective in more ways than usual: geographical texts are few and impressionistic, with sparing use of distances and bearings and virtually no description of the landscape; maps are largely displaced by itineraries; historical sources, preoccupied with the urban and religious scene, tend to ignore not only rural settlements, but even such features as physical relief. The results can be seen in the small-scale, sparsely lettered “modern” atlases and maps of Classical Greece, some of which were reproduced without change for nearly a century, until their welcome replacement by the Barrington Atlas (Talbert 2000); only for a few select regions (Curtius and Kaupert 1881–1900, for Attica and other contemporary work, also mainly German, elsewhere) was a fuller coverage achieved.

The pioneering age of this activity had begun very soon after 1800: for all the distinction of early French work in the Peloponnese (the *Expédition Scientifique de Morée*), it became and for a time remained a specialty of British travelers, with their propensity for rural rides and small-boat sailing (see Whitley 2001:44–47, for a convenient summary). They took as their prime task the location of the documented sites of Greek history, but even this limited aim encountered many obstacles: genuine survival of ancient toponyms was relatively uncommon, relief features—ignored by the ancient texts—intruded, and the actual 19th-century landscape differed in every way from their often false and idealized visions of its ancient counterpart. Many of the more important problem cases of identification were still solved, though a few have survived to divide scholarly opinion right up to the present day.

On the foundation of these tireless labors, the late 20th century was to build a new kind of archaeological concept: regional surface survey. Although not perhaps explicitly conceived as an alternative to excavation, that is what it rapidly became. Economic factors, with the growth in the cost of funding an excavation team and its accessories, played a part here; but there was also a methodological dimension,

almost an ideological one. If excavation, at its best, could only recover the detailed sequence of deposits in a limited sample of a single site, then might not more be learned from discovering a lot less about a much larger area? Excavators of towns and cities had long since recognized that any conclusions that they drew, as to the population, the prosperity, the occupations, the rise and decline, the external contacts, or any military involvement, and consequent damage of their site, were no more than inferences, based on an assumption that the excavated sample had been representative; and that it was, at the very least, a useful check on these findings to examine the whole surface of the unexcavated parts of the site to see if any discordant evidence were visible there.

Now this kind of ancillary activity was to become an end in itself, but with a marked change of direction. Attention was diverted from urban sites to the open country. This meant relinquishing the aid of the ancient sources, which had little or nothing to contribute on the rural sector. The existing political map of the ancient world was to be supplemented by an economic one. The previous focus on known and identified sites was replaced, first, by investigating any location with the characteristics known to have been favored in certain periods—naturally fortified hilltops, for instance; later, by a completely open-ended search of an entire sector of the landscape, without any preconception of what might be found. By the 1980s, this last practice, known as intensive survey, was prevailing all over the Greek world and beyond: region after region was traversed by teams of fieldwalkers, spaced evenly across the fields. From the start, there were surprises: none greater than the general density of the finds which could be picked up on any piece of cultivated terrain. But this material was unevenly spread, in space and in time: the small but dense concentrations, which sometimes occurred at intervals of only a few hundred meters, were widely interpreted as marking the locations of farms or other agricultural structures. It was a further surprise to find that these reached their peak of frequency in certain relatively short historical periods; and that, in many regions, the Classical and earlier Hellenistic era (the fifth to third centuries B.C.) had witnessed the high point of this exploitation of the cultivated landscape in the whole of its 5,000-year-long history from Neolithic times to the present day. For the first time, the ancient city had been given a local context: its imagined history, as an island of habitation in the otherwise empty territory on which it depended for its maintenance, had to be re-written. Classical archaeology had also been able to draw on one of its most priceless assets: the huge quantity and density of finds, and the availability of vastly larger samples than in most areas of world archaeology.

Chronology

No account of Greek archaeology would be complete without brief discussion of this, the intermittent concern of every archaeologist, working on anything from the early hominids to the recovery of a recent murder victim. Classical archaeology can achieve a precision in its dating which, at least if taken in proportion to the distance

in time, is probably as high as anywhere in the world. This is not merely because, for much of the period between 500 and 100 B.C., a documented history exists with fairly close calendar datings of events: it also results from the nature of the material evidence. With painted pottery and buildings, in particular (to say nothing of coins), a whole series of contexts have been found which link the surviving materials with the calendar dates. In rare cases, this can be both direct and datable to the year: for example, the inscribed building accounts of the Parthenon and a few other temples survive, enabling us to date their completion exactly, thanks to our knowledge of the sequence and dating of the annually-elected magistrates at Athens; while a series of late Athenian black-figure pots (Panathenaic amphoras of between 379 and 312 B.C.) actually carry the name of the magistrate for that year.

Most other fixed points for Greek archaeology are more indirect and inferential. It is, for instance, an exceedingly probable conjecture that the Athenian burials in the mound at the battlefield of Marathon, with their associated pottery, date from immediately after the battle in September, 490 B.C.; it is a much less trustworthy assumption that every one of the works of art found damaged and buried in pits on the Athenian Acropolis was a victim of the Persian destruction of the city in 480 B.C. From this level downwards, there is a gradation from near-certainty to probability to reasonable likelihood, and from datings to the year to approximations of about a generation. The historical sources may give only a rough guide; the identification of an historical event or individual may be uncertain; and allowance has often to be made for human propensities, such as the retention of old objects for several generations (to take an uncomfortable instance, both the Marathon mound and the Acropolis deposit contained works by a vase-painter, Sophilos, who is reckoned to have been at work getting on for a century earlier).

The framework of chronology for Greek antiquity, gradually built up by scholars during the 20th century, was tested towards its end by two new and radical proposals for revision. One of these (James et al. 1991) affected only the later prehistoric and protohistoric periods of Greece, leaving later eras undisturbed: its result, by way of an adjustment of the Egyptian chronology, would have been to bring down the date of the fall of the Mycenaean palaces from about 1200 to about 950 B.C. Even so, if only about five hundred years, rather than eight hundred, intervened between the Greece of Agamemnon and that of Pericles, this would not be without its effects on broader Classical studies. The other project (Francis and Vickers 1983, with a series of later articles) took over in time more or less where the first left off, addressing historical times down to and including the earlier fifth century B.C.; again, the proposal was for the lowering of dates, in this case by the less drastic margin of some two generations. While neither attempt has convinced more than a handful of scholars, both have had the salutary effect of focusing attention on the framework of superimposed conjectures which makes up much of the traditional chronology, and of inculcating a more flexible attitude to it.

Such flexibility will undoubtedly be needed when, in the not too distant future, it becomes possible to apply the more accurate scientific dating methods to the historical period of Greek and other Mediterranean civilizations. Obstacles to this have persisted: the radiocarbon determinations for the first millennium B.C. are,

for technical reasons, too imprecise to offer any improvement on traditional means. Tree-ring (dendrochronological) dates are potentially of an unmatched precision, but Greece offers few appropriate settings for long-lived species and, so far, the long sequences of tree-rings and closely datable episodes have only been established for locations and periods at some distance from the Classical world. Meanwhile, both these methods have proved applicable to the Aegean Bronze Age where their results, when confronted with the much looser conventional chronology adopted for that era, have created some disarray. It is surely only a matter of time before a datable tree-ring sequence emerges for historical Greece, or for some region in close enough touch with it to produce a match of archaeological sequences, and it would be folly to expect that, when this happens, the traditional datings will be confirmed at every point.

Before we leave this topic, there is an important link to be established with our earlier discussion. In the material record of ancient Greece, it is above all to the pottery sequence that we turn for dating purposes. Pottery can be depended upon for two vital assets, full seriation and quantitative profusion. In relative terms, the Athenian and a few other series can be followed without a break for more than half a millennium, with enough historical fixed points to make up a credible absolute chronology as well. And it is pottery which, more than any other kind of artifact, can be relied on to occur in whatever context is being investigated, not excluding the surface finds of the fieldwalker. Yet when we ask on what foundations the dating and continuity of the series rest, the answer is often a surprising one: for in many cases, it is not from observation of stratified sequences in excavations, still less from association with dated historical events, but from the practice of connoisseurship. By building up a sequence of painters' careers, one is also (thanks to the limited duration of any individual's working life) building up a series of chronological phases. A long-lived painter may be represented in more than one such phase, but this will merely increase the chance of synchronisms with the work of others; by the end, the network will retain its collective validity even if attributions are questioned. Yet even beyond the realm of painted pottery, in areas where attribution can hardly operate, we can find some at least of the same potential: the plain black wares, produced in the later historical period by many Greek cities, have also proved susceptible of detailed seriation (Rotroff 1997 is a good example of what can be done with it).

Conclusion

Our selective survey of four topics has, it is hoped, fairly represented both the traditional and the more recent activities within the archaeology of Greece. Several connections between them, some unexpected, have emerged. Connoisseurship, for instance, widely seen as an "extreme" development within the subject, taking it further and further away from the practices of other archaeologies, has turned out to be vital even in strictly archaeological fields: not only for chronological studies, but also for modern surface survey, which depends heavily on such museum-based

research for the understanding of the damaged and fragmentary materials with which it must operate. It could be added that, even in architectural studies, there are many buildings which, though provisionally dated by means of historical texts, have acquired a more detailed and sometimes conflicting chronology through the excavation of pottery and other artifacts which underlie their foundations.

Returning for a moment to the four representative positions with which we began, we find that each of them makes a continuing contribution to the progress of the subject: classical archaeology needs them all, provided that none is allowed to usurp the whole discipline. If position No. 1, with its insistence that classical archaeology is a kind of archaeology, has now become the ruling principle in some quarters, it will never reach the point of eliminating the study of the ancient texts and works of art, championed respectively by positions Nos. 2 and 3. The more cynical attitude displayed in position No. 4 has proved to embody only a part of the truth: the archaeology of Greece *is* a discipline which can speak to others, and can be expected to do so more and more widely in the future.

NOTE

The references for this chapter are on pp. 48–50.