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What Is Classical Archaeology?

Roman Archaeology

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Definitions and Perceptions

To understand classical archaeology we need to appreciate something of its history and also to have some knowledge of its changing status. As a long-established discipline, the origins of which can be traced back to at least the 18th century, it sometimes seems to be unchanging and conservative in nature. I hope to demonstrate that both these impressions are false. Before considering this, we need to define the scope of the subject. Broadly, there are two current approaches that can perhaps be characterized by distinguishing “Classical Archaeology” from “the archaeology of the classical world” (with a deliberate difference in the capitalization used).

“Classical Archaeology” tends to be used by those who think that the material evidence from the Greek and Roman worlds (including architecture, works of art, coinage, etc.) has particular and individual characteristics which set their study entirely apart from any other discipline. The skills required are refined and they provide classical archaeology with a unique toolbox which enables the Greek and Roman worlds to be studied through material culture—but only if deployed by those immersed in the full range of evidence about Greece and Rome. This sets classical archaeology apart from the archaeology of other periods and places. From this perspective, the subject is seen not as a sub-discipline within archaeology but rather as a distinctive and specialist branch of Classics, employing methodologies largely founded in long-established traditions of detailed empirical study based on generations of past work.

In contrast, “the archaeology of the classical world” can be seen as a broadly based discipline, rooted in the social sciences, that shares with the archaeology of

other periods methodologies developed to enable us to “read” the material culture of past societies. These methodologies are generic and, although each individual society studied through archaeology has distinctive characteristics and used objects in different ways, the approach to each is similar and the archaeology of the Classical world is thus the adaptation of archaeological methods to another particular place and time. Hence, the study of Greek painted pots or figured Roman mosaics benefits from the application of approaches developed for the analysis of objects from other periods and places. So too methods developed in classical archaeology can be deployed in the study of other human societies.

I would suggest that in contemporary classical archaeology we should be moving towards a new integration drawing on both these traditions, building on their strengths and aiming to create a “contextual classical archaeology.” This recognizes the separate and distinctive contribution that classical archaeology can make to our understanding of the world of Greece and Rome through its own material-based agenda. Equally, it acknowledges the contribution that the archaeology of the Classical world can make in broader debates, not simply in providing another data set for analysis, but instead in helping to develop ideas that have broad relevance to the archaeology of other periods and places.

Historical Perspectives: Origins

To understand the development of the subject we need to place it within a broader historical and political context. The roots of classical archaeology lie much further back in time than is often acknowledged since a familiarity with, and interest in, the artifacts associated with the Classical past are deeply entrenched in the self-definition of the peoples of Europe. Appreciating the centrality of objects to the definition of cultural identity is essential if we are to understand the role of archaeology in western society. The Romans appropriated art objects from the Greek world, bringing them to Italy and copying them as part of the process whereby they appropriated Greek culture in order to legitimate their own cultural dominance (Strong 1973). They did not confine their interest to the Greeks, taking a profound interest also in the past of other areas like Etruria or Egypt, and it is significant that sculpture and works of art became central to the display of status in the private sphere as well as the public. Objects were thus of key importance, and references to the past were a central feature of cultural definition.

An example of this phenomenon is the way in which the Emperor Constantine removed objects from ancient sanctuaries like Delphi and set them up in his newly founded capital at Constantinople (Figure 1.5). Some objects from Constantinople, like the great quadriga now on the porch of St Mark’s in Venice or the porphyry statue of the Tetrarchs, were later transferred to Venice after the sack of Constantinople in the Fourth Crusade in 1204 (Favaretto and Da Villa Urbani 2003:188–189, 192–193). Here they were again used to decorate the buildings of the new Mediterranean power, providing appropriate linkages back to the Classical—specifically to the imperial Roman—past.



Figure 1.5 Snake Column dedicated at Delphi, later taken to Constantinople (Istanbul). Photo by Martin Millett.

This process of using objects to create and legitimate imagined historical links long continues as a key theme. It is within this old-established tradition that we should place Napoleon's transfer of antiquities from Rome (and elsewhere) to Paris as part of his creation of the cultural identity of his empire (Gould 1965).

Similarly, the modern trend for rich collectors to buy antiquities looted from Clas-

sical sites is part of a continuing obsession with owning and controlling objects from the past in order to define status in the contemporary world. The centrality of Classical material in this process is because—until very recently—the Greek and Roman past has been essential to the self-definition of civilization both in the Latin Christian west and the Orthodox Christian east. An exclusive interest in the Classical world is arguably changing now as Christianity becomes less central to the definition of western society and as the fashions in collecting have become broader and cultural looting has spread to exploit other centers of past civilization across the globe.

The physical evidence of the Classical past can thus be seen to have been widespread in European society throughout the Middle Ages. The systematization of the study of objects also has a deep history, although it is customary to see its roots in that reawakening of interest in the past referred to as the Renaissance. The whole of this concept of a “Renaissance” is questionable, not least since it is certain that the Church maintained an awareness of the Classical past in all its guises throughout the Middle Ages. This is well illustrated by the persistent reuse of classical sculpture, inscriptions, and so on in church buildings in Italy and elsewhere long before the 14th century (Greenhalgh 1989). The process of reworking Classical material nevertheless did become much more widespread, especially from the 15th and 16th centuries.

This increased fashion for ancient material brought about, first, a considerable interest in the aesthetics of ancient art—itself deeply bound up with the creation of new works of art. This was followed by two parallel trends: first, the wish to understand the material better and, second, the desire to find more of it. This process intensified during the 18th century as the connections between Italy and Northern Europe developed. On the one hand, the interests of those who traveled south to see and collect antiquities stimulated further exploration and systematization of knowledge since this helped define social and class identities at home. At the same time, such a demand arguably enhanced the status to be gained from knowledge of and ownership of classical objects. It is against this background that we see a burgeoning of the study of Classical antiquities. This is represented both by the collectors and those who worked for them, acting as clerks and agents in collecting and also in ordering and researching the objects (Schnapp 1996:258–266). The development of this knowledge and its dissemination represent the birth of classical archaeology in the modern sense. This knowledge was closely associated with the ruling classes in Europe, with royalty closely associated with the early exploration of Pompeii and with Vatican control equally important elsewhere in Italy. Significantly, in the new American Republic, there was a parallel interest, specifically in Roman styles, stimulated in part by the perceived political relevance of the Roman Republic. This is reflected in the active adoption of Classical architectural styles in public building and the use of Greek and Roman models for public iconography (Dyson 1998:7–8).

Although we should not underestimate the knowledge accumulated by earlier generations of scholars, those who characterized the second half of the 18th century made a considerable new contribution in applying the ideas that were evolving in

other branches of knowledge to further the systematic study of antiquities. In this sense, Winckelmann, whose formulation of a framework within which ancient sculpture could be understood and related to Classical texts, should perhaps be seen not only as the father of art history but also as the first theoretical archaeologist (Lepmann 1971). It is in any case notable that this tradition—of the systematic study of objects—was certainly developing in advance of the tradition of artifact classification in European prehistory (Gräslund 1987; Trigger 2006:40–67).

Of equal importance to the development of classical archaeology in this period was the growth in the scale of printing, with the production and dissemination of engravings of antiquarian topics and ancient buildings effectively internationalizing knowledge and stimulating further interest (Salmon 2000). This fed back to stimulate the exploration of monuments not only in Italy at sites like Pompeii and Herculaneum, but from the onset of the Napoleonic Wars also in the Ottoman world (especially in what is today Greece and Turkey). Previously, excavations of this period have not been viewed as very systematic and those writing histories of archaeology too often consider that proper excavation techniques developed only much later. However, it is increasingly evident that, when considered in their proper context, excavations undertaken to obtain antiquities in this period were well recorded (Bignamini 2004; Bignamini and Hornsby 2010); we have a wealth of publications that describe sites and objects, making sense of them in relation to ancient texts and especially emerging topographic knowledge. Through these processes of travel, exploration, study, and publication, classical archaeology emerged as a distinctive branch of learning connected with antiquarianism as closely as with other branches of Classical learning.

One of the perceptible changes that characterized the growth of classical archaeology during the 19th century is its increasing association with the creation of contemporary political identities. This has already been noted in the United States where the relevance of Rome to the new republic was clear. Paradoxically, another early example is offered by the Emperor Napoleon and his systematic exploration of the buildings of Rome during that city's French occupation. A deliberate association was created between ancient Rome and Napoleon's empire so the physical remains of the past were given considerable and careful attention (Ridley 1992). Later, the newly unified states of Italy and Greece also looked back to the past to create their own individual national identities in the present. In Italy, archaeological exploration and display of imperial monuments were key instruments in creating Rome as the capital of the new state. In Greece, a parallel process involved defining a particular golden age—the great age of Pericles—as a symbol of national identity at the expense of later periods of “foreign occupation,” the evidence of which came to be deliberately cleared away (Beard 2002:49–115). Although from a contemporary perspective this clearly distorts the evidence, creating nothing more than a modern myth, it remains politically powerful, as witnessed in the manipulation of the Classical past for the opening ceremony of the Athens Olympics in 2004. Nationalism has undoubtedly provided an important impetus to the systematic exploration of the past.

The most extreme example of such a use of classical archaeology comes from Mussolini's Italy in the 1930s and 1940s when an ideal of the Roman past was central to the construction of the political ideology of the present. This stimulated the large-scale excavation of Roman sites and the presentation of archaeological remains for public display: examples include the Ara Pacis and the Roman Forum. Not only were objects and excavated sites in Italy and overseas used in this process but the whole grammar of architecture and urban planning in Rome was remodeled to help recreate this imagined past through the construction of such monuments as the Via dei Fori Imperiali and the Piazza Augusto Imperatore (Barbanera 1998:119–154).

A major trend during the 19th century was the desire of the northern European powers and the United States to develop active interests in the archaeology of the Classical world, arguably as a cultural extension of their own rivalries. Learning about the Classics was central to the education of the elites who governed the European powers, largely as a development of earlier medieval systems of learning that were based within the framework of Christianity. This educational tradition was also replicated to a lesser extent in North America in the 18th and 19th centuries. With the growth of increased competition between these various powers, interests in the ownership of antiquities spread, together with the increased association of both collecting and excavating to promote national interests. Involvement with the cultural property of the Classical world became a matter of pride both for powerful individuals (such as Heinrich Schliemann and Arthur Evans), independent archaeological societies (such as the Archaeological Institute of America) and also nation states. The acquisition of material like the Pergamum altar in Berlin brought prestige to museums in the main cities of the great powers. Thus, international rivalries were played out through the development of museum collections and through the sponsorship of great excavations. For instance, Olympia became symbolic of German interests, Delphi with the French, and Knossos the British. Similarly, it was essential for the great powers to establish cultural bases in Greece and Italy to mark their established links with the origins of western civilization. The French Academy was founded in the mid-17th century but the others were primarily late 19th-century creations, albeit growing out of earlier institutions. In Rome, the German Archaeological Institute was constituted in 1871, the British School opened in 1900, and the American Academy was created in 1905.

Given the centrality of such connections with the past and in particular the key role of the study of Classics in the education and self-definition of the ruling elites of Europe, these developments should occasion little surprise. Although some would stress how conscious parallels were drawn and the Roman empire was used as a model for the British and other empires (Hingley 2000), this probably underestimates the way in which the Classical past was implicitly central to the whole perception of those in power (Freeman 1996). This is clearly the case in the United States of America where the impetus for exploration was much more loosely associated with the political establishment (Dyson 1998).

Historical Perspectives: Development

One of the consequences of the growth of economic prosperity and political capital within both the United States and Britain from the second half of the 19th century up to World War I was an expansion of and investment in higher education. In Britain, since the Classics were at the center of elite education, one of the consequences was the growth in the provision for classical archaeology. In Cambridge, the curriculum reforms of 1879 went hand in hand with the growth of the collection of sculptural casts while the first appointment to teach classical archaeology came in 1883 (Beard 1999). Similarly, in Oxford, the Chair of Classical Archaeology was created in 1883. Although such an expansion was also seen in the United States, the pattern of development was different, first, because of the strong influence of German scholarship and, second, through an increased trend towards graduate programs (Dyson 1998:95–102). Nonetheless, on both continents, this period marks the beginning of the widespread academic study of the subject.

It is interesting to note how the development of the subject in Cambridge was initially concerned with broad interdisciplinary approaches encompassing domains such as mythology and anthropology rather than archaeology in any narrow sense. By contrast, the traditions that became dominant in the United States and Germany tended to be concerned more with the systematic study of Classical art. The development of classical archaeology in universities went side by side with the growth of excavations and of research on objects by scholars working in museums and those of independent means. Despite the broad perception of the subject by some, however, a narrower and largely empirically based approach came to dominate the subject and by the last decade of the 19th century its boundaries seem to have become defined both geographically and in terms of subject matter.

Some insight into this is provided by the definition used for the Professorship of Classical Archaeology at Oxford in 1883. Arthur Evans wrote:

I understand that the Electors . . . regard “archaeology” as ending with the Christian Era. . . . Further it appears that a knowledge of Semitic or Egyptian antiquities is to be admitted: anything in short Oriental, but Europe, except for Europe of a favored period and a very limited area (for I take it that neither Gaul, Britain or Illyricum were ever “classical” in Jowett’s sense) is to be rigorously excluded! (Arthur Evans cited in Joan Evans 1943:261)

It is clear from this that the boundaries of classical archaeology had—at least in Oxford—been fairly closely defined by this stage as relating solely to the core areas of Greece and Rome. It is perhaps ironic that Evans served with distinction at the Ashmolean Museum and led the major excavations at Knossos which produced such spectacular evidence for the flowering of Bronze Age Crete and the use of the writing system known as Linear B. The decipherment of this script in 1953 and the demonstration of its importance in the development of the Greek language ensured, of course, that Bronze Age Aegean archaeology has subsequently become central to the discipline of classical archaeology.

Despite the incorporation of the Aegean Bronze Age, the limits of the subject defined in the late 19th century have continued to be widely accepted. However, one present trend is to use a broader definition that encompasses the lands the Greek and Roman worlds controlled and those with whom they had close contacts. For the study of Roman archaeology the origins of this trend lie in the late 19th century. Those trained in Classics in northern Europe had often taken a keen interest in the archaeology of the countries where they lived, although understandably these areas never attracted serious attention from those living in the United States. With the increasing systematization of archaeological knowledge, such study was drawn more into the mainstream. This is perhaps nowhere clearer than in the study of the frontiers of the Roman empire. The empire-wide collation of inscriptions for the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (initiated in Berlin in 1863) included the frontier provinces like Germany and Britain, and a growing interest in the Roman army led to systematic campaigns of excavation designed to understand monuments such as Hadrian's Wall in the years just before and after World War I. Although some of the scholars engaged on this work were parochial in their interests, others like F. Haverfield, E. Birley and I. A. Richmond came to take an empire-wide view of the issues raised.

This established a continuing trend that now enables us to understand Greece and Rome better within the context of the sophisticated but non-literate societies with whom they interacted (for instance, in the Iberian peninsula). Equally it opens up the whole subject of cultural change and interaction, in particular the ways in which classical culture spread across Europe away from the Mediterranean. Thus, the archaeology of the Roman provinces has to some extent become subsumed within the broader domain of classical archaeology.

The range of subject matter incorporated within classical archaeology is, therefore, clearly diverse. This can be illustrated by some of the different interests of those who have worked within the Faculty of Classics at Cambridge since the 1880s, developing a variety of particular and specialist methodologies vital to the study of ancient societies. These include the study of Greek religion and its material manifestations, Greek and Roman architecture, Greek, Etruscan and Roman art history and iconography, Greek pottery, Greek and Roman numismatics, and epigraphy (including the analysis of Linear B tablets). In addition, others have deployed field-work skills through excavation at key sites such as Mycenae, Carthage, and Rome, as well as survey in Italy, Greece, the Iberian peninsula, and Britain. In some ways, this range of activity well characterizes the practice of classical archaeology, although it still has a much stronger connection with art history than other areas of archaeology.

Contrasting Social Contexts: Britain and the United States of America

In Britain, academia was not protected from what Harold Macmillan called the “wind of change” that blew through the world in the decades following World War II. While Classics lost its dominant position in the education of the elites, new

disciplines like archaeology rose in popularity, especially with the expansion of university education from the 1960s onwards.

The manner in which Classics lost its position in British education is complex and has many facets, but the underlying trends are associated with the social revolution connected with the loss of empire and world economic dominance and with the decline in international influence that took place in the middle of the 20th century. The association of Classics, especially education in the Greek and Latin languages, with the traditional elites who had run the empire undoubtedly contributed to the subject's changing position within society. Such social changes lay behind its rejection as politicians sought greater emphasis on subjects of "relevance" within the curriculum of state education.

The development of archaeology in Britain during the same period contrasts greatly with the story of Classics. Before the late 1960s, it was almost absent from university teaching and considered a subject only appropriate for post-graduate study. Two things altered this situation radically. Post-war economic development, particularly the rebuilding of cities and later the construction of motorways, resulted in a boom in field archaeology in Britain. Increased expenditure on rescue excavations followed from political campaigning about the consequences of development for the historical environment and there was thus a huge rise in demand for trained archaeologists. Second, the growth in university education that was a product of 1960s political initiatives drew in students from a broad social range. This stimulated a diversification in provision of courses in new and attractive subjects including archaeology. These two changes fed off each other to ensure that a new generation of people came into the subject which had obtained a certain "alternative" cachet, at least in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Through a complex combination of circumstances, many of the newly created university archaeology departments were also successful in taking advantage of the funding roller-coaster that characterized the public sector in Britain in the last decades of the 20th century. The result was that while Classics suffered a decline, archaeology thrived with a massive increase in staff and student numbers.

The boom in archaeology brought many people into contact with the archaeology of the Roman world through first-hand experience of excavation. At the same time a number of the academics working in the new archaeology departments developed field projects, giving students from a wide social range their first experience of the Classical world. This changed the face of classical archaeology as many, trained in archaeology departments rather than in Classics, developed interests in the subject. This had a social significance, as well as academic consequences, since many of these incomers were beneficiaries of the 1960s widening of access to university education and did not come from the same socio-economic groups as those who still received a Classical education. In that sense, in Britain, the archaeology of Greece and particularly Rome, became democratized. Also significant was the way in which these changes led to a diversification of approach, while the development of a new disciplinary self-confidence has meant that archaeology is less often the "handmaiden of history" and has taken a lead in defining new intellectual approaches.

The story of post-war classical archaeology in the United States provides something of a contrast, for the period represents one of increasing economic prosperity and cultural self-confidence. Equally, while in Europe the study of the Classical world was in inevitable decline, in the United States it had only ever been a specialized interest and its development after 1945 shows strong elements of continuity with the earlier part of the century. However, increased resources became available to support it; not only was there a strong tradition of private philanthropy which continued to fund archaeological work, but there was institutional growth in the universities for which new government research funding became available.

Classical archaeology also benefited from the increased global influence of the United States of America, as it became the country to which others looked as a center of academic power. Links with European countries increased and a number of refugees from pre-World War II Germany, who had made their homes in America, became significant academic leaders. These influences broadened the base of classical archaeology as resources were found for the continuance of major field projects in the Mediterranean. These were, initially, mainly excavations following the models set earlier in the century, with a focus on important sites like the Athenian Agora. New projects were also begun, however, such as the American Academy at Rome's important excavations at Cosa. These endeavors may be characterized as representing a fairly conservative tradition of excavation but the resources were available on a scale that was the envy of many in Europe and as a result there was a continuing strong tradition of field training. Similarly, the resources available to major museums at home ensured a continuing strength in the traditions of art historical scholarship (Dyson 1998:217–285).

Classical archaeology in America was at first relatively insulated from some of the new theoretical ideas that came to dominate other branches of the subject during the 1960s. This was partly because of institutional structures through which classical archaeology commonly remained separate from both contract archaeology and the academic discipline of Anthropology—which included prehistoric archaeology. However, it was also a product of self-confidence in its academic traditions and the economic circumstances which enabled it to prosper while the discipline in Europe suffered contraction. It is perhaps a paradox that these circumstances of prosperity provided less scope for the cross-fertilization of ideas than was seen in Britain in the 1970s.

A New Classical Archaeology

The first wave of disciplinary change in classical archaeology in Britain is closely associated with people such as my predecessor at Cambridge, Anthony Snodgrass. He and others did much to integrate classical archaeology into the mainstream of the broader discipline (e.g. Snodgrass 1980; see chapter 1[a], this volume). In particular, there was a concern with the deployment of contemporary archaeological methodology to address a range of key social issues regarding the emergence and operation of the Greek polis, or city-state. Comparable wide-ranging work also

happened in the United States, particularly among those who turned to large-scale field survey as a result of these new ideas. Comparable work in prehistoric periods was pioneered also by Michael Jameson and others at Franchthi Cave in the Greek Argolid, where a full range of the techniques of environmental archaeology were used to understand an exceptionally long habitation sequence (Dyson 1998:252–253).

The genesis of both approaches lies in the “New Archaeology” or “processual archaeology” of the 1970s, but the success of integration is shown by the way in which classical archaeology has since become more central to methodological and theoretical debates, making contributions to various schools of thought and approach. Furthermore, through the development of field practice in archaeological survey, classical archaeology has also made a distinctive and original contribution to the repertoire of the broader archaeological discipline, while at the same time setting its own agenda of historical questions to be addressed in Classics as a whole.

This development needs to be put in context with increasing methodological sophistication of work on the archaeology of the Classical world. Although conventional skills in object analysis and description remains vital, the framework within which they are discussed is now more open. Equally, contemporary classical archaeology routinely deploys an enormous range of techniques drawn from the natural sciences as well as more traditional disciplines. For instance, archaeobotany aids in the understanding of agrarian systems; geomorphological and soil studies contribute to our knowledge of the processes of environmental change; the chemical analysis of clays provides new dimensions to our knowledge of pottery production and distribution. At the same time, approaches drawing on other social sciences have provided insights into topics such as the evolution of houses and have encouraged provocative rethinking about issues of cultural identity.

These changes have resulted in something of a blurring of the boundaries that once seemed to separate our subject from the rest of archaeology. At the same time there has been an increasing interaction between archaeologists and those working on other aspects of the Classical world. This has been characterized by a greater readiness on the part of both ancient historians and archaeologists to learn from each other, to respect each other’s approaches and to use information in a genuinely interdisciplinary manner. In both these respects, the field has arguably become more difficult to categorize, and it would seem we are increasingly concerned with a mixture of approaches to the archaeology of the classical world rather than with classical archaeology as such. In many ways this takes us back to the interdisciplinary ideal of Cambridge Classics in the late 19th century.

Classical Archaeology Today

Within what is now a diverse and vibrant discipline it is difficult to identify particular trends as being of especial significance. Instead I would like to pick out a series of issues which interest me, simply to illustrate something of the character of the contemporary subject. This approach is arguably itself typical of the move in con-

temporary archaeological theory away from broad generalizing, or processual, approaches towards an interest in the way material culture is deployed by human societies in historically particular contexts. Through this shift in theoretical perspective, it is notable that the tradition of context-specific and interdisciplinary archaeological study of the Classical world has become increasingly relevant to the broader discipline. The particularly rich and diverse sources of evidence available to us, together with the supply of developed and sophisticated studies of other data sets, mean that it is possible to approach the historically contingent circumstances of the Classical world with unusual subtlety. The examples I am going to explore are related to my own research on the Roman world, but there is an enormous range of other research in other areas on which I could have drawn.

One core theme has been the attempt to understand cultural change within the Roman provinces. I believe that classical archaeology more generally has much to learn from the experience of Roman provincial studies which, by their very nature, rely much more heavily on material evidence than on texts. It is notable that, although the Roman empire was a large and long-lived political structure, its archaeology displays both common characteristics and enormous diversity. Indeed, far from the standardized and culturally uniform entity that is sometimes portrayed, the empire's development and operation have wide interest and broad contemporary relevance. There has long been a realization, through study of the provinces, that the Roman empire was not monolithic but rather—given the slow speed of communication and the strengths of local traditions—that it was a heterodox grouping of societies under a single political structure. More recently there has been an increasing appreciation of the *bricolage* that comprised Roman identity itself and the broad mix of influences that created the metropolitan character of the empire.

An illustration of these issues concerning the character of empire can be provided with reference to the very northwest of the Iberian peninsula, a zone far from Italy that was only finally incorporated by Augustus. Here, a strong and independent pattern of cultural identity was emphasized in particular by the establishment of distinctive fortified hilltop settlements known today as *castros*. These seem to have formed the foci for close-knit social groups who had a reputation as warriors. The houses in these settlements were distinctive, stone-built, round houses, very different from the traditions of the Classical Mediterranean. Following the Roman conquest of this area, we see the successful incorporation of these people into the imperial system. A particular contribution of the region came from the soldiers recruited to serve Rome as auxiliary troops—indeed, the people of the region contributed one of the largest numbers of soldiers in the western empire. This form of service certainly represents integration into the empire, but the region does not show strong evidence for the adoption of the new forms of building and settlements that are generally seen as typical of Roman cultural identity. Instead, there is a very strong pattern of continuity of sites and traditional forms of building, with only some modification at the margins. Although some *castros* were abandoned, they seem to have remained central to the perceptual geography of the region with rural sites carefully placed to be able to see them (Millett 2001). Some would certainly see this as evidence for some form of cultural resistance to Roman imperialism, but

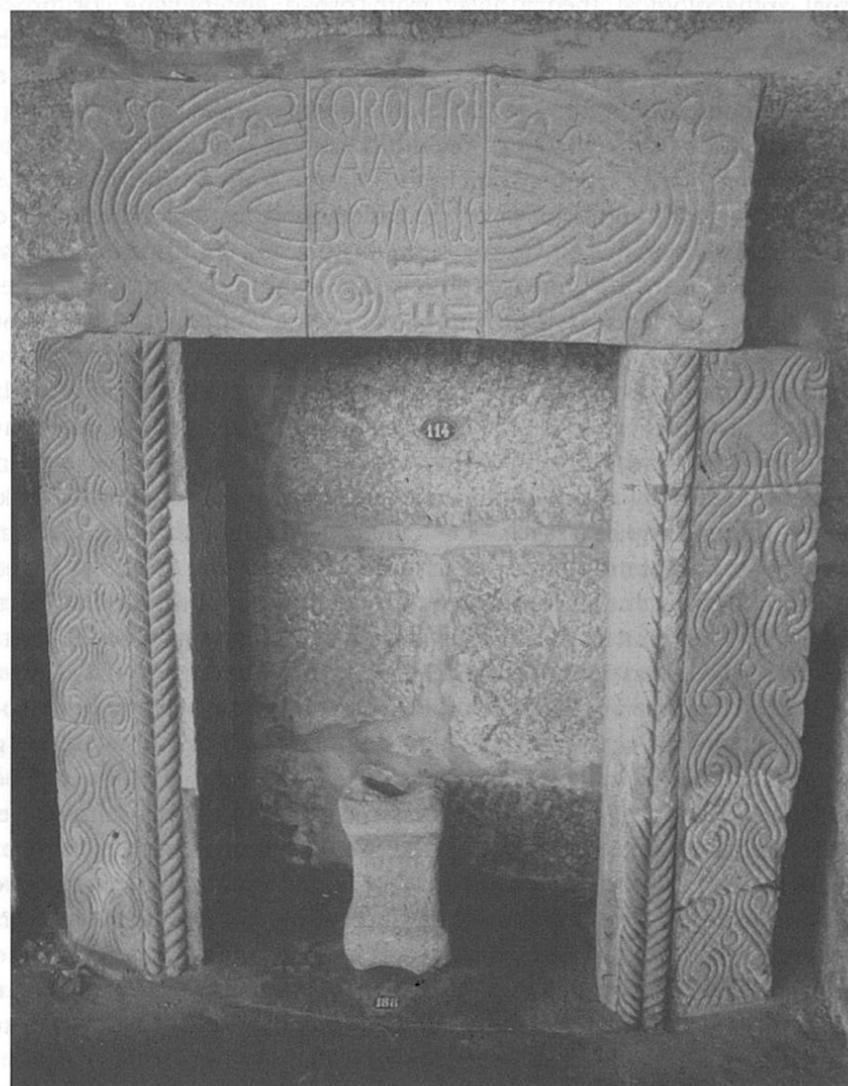


Figure 1.6 Lintel inscription from Citânia de Bríteros, Portugal. Photo by Martin Millett.

such explanations are too simplistic—as illustrated by the way in which at the castro site of Citânia de Bríteros, Latin inscriptions are added to the door lintels of some houses (Figure 1.6). Neither the form of the inscriptions nor the names recorded suggest particularly Roman characteristics while the decoration and house form are strongly traditional. However, the very act of adopting Latin and inscribing it illustrates an internalization of Roman ideas within a distinctive traditional context.¹²

Brilliant historical work has been done on issues such as these, drawing on archaeological evidence, especially in Gaul (Woolf 1998). Archaeology has a unique contribution to make as it provides voices for the many peoples of the empire who have left no literature and who are represented now only by the anonymous evidence

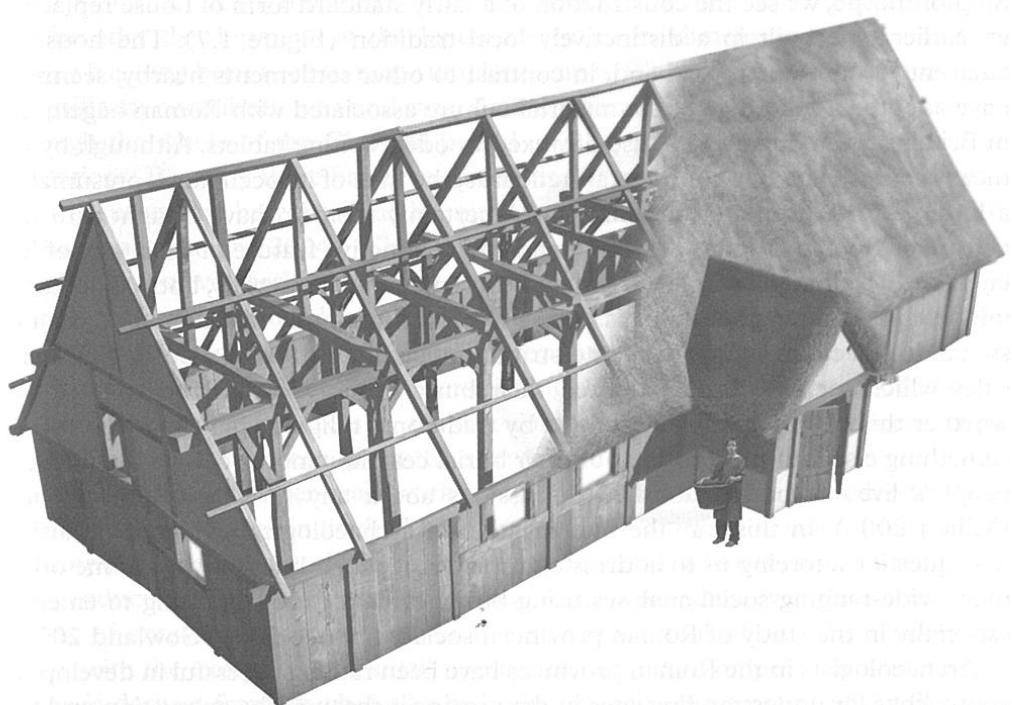


Figure 1.7 Hall reconstruction, Shiptonthorpe, East Yorkshire. Courtesy of Mark Faulkner, based on architectural analysis by Martin Millett

of their settlements, possessions, rubbish, and graves. It is thus important that the archaeological methodologies followed are not determined simply by an agenda derived from textual sources. Such work has recently been pioneered by Louise Revell (2009) in an examination of the construction of identities in the Roman provinces. In such endeavors, archaeology has different strengths at two particular scales of analysis.

First, archaeology is the only source of evidence for life at the local scale, from which we can establish something of the rhythms of everyday existence in the domestic sphere and how they changed. Archaeological excavation and associated artifact studies provide an array of techniques through which we can establish patterns of development of houses themselves and explore how the households who lived in them were structured and how they evolved through time. Both in the Mediterranean and in the provinces, we now possess interesting syntheses assessing the character of architectural development and its social implications, but the exploration of individual households provides fascinating insights into the complexities of people's lives and into how both individuals and groups used artifacts to create their identities within the broader context of Roman power structures (Wallace-Hadrill 1994; cf. Nevett 1999).

An instance of this type of approach in a far-flung province is provided by work on a small block of landscape in eastern Yorkshire. Here at one excavated site,

Shiptonthorpe, we see the construction of a fairly standard form of house replacing an earlier type built in a distinctively local tradition (Figure 1.7). The house is adjacent to the Roman road and, in contrast to other settlements nearby, seems to have adopted a full range of the material culture associated with Roman hegemony in Britain—even down to the use of waxed wooden writing tablets. Although by no means sophisticated by continental standards, the lives of its occupants, presumably a family of the aspirant “middling sort,” certainly seem to have bought into the culture of Roman Britain. The only markedly distinctive feature of their way of life lay in the way that the whole settlement was peppered with burials, both of neonatal infants and of a range of animals. These were not randomly distributed across the site; indeed a careful study of their distribution has enabled us to identify the social rules which seem to have governed their burial. It is very difficult to establish whether this behavior was determined by traditional religious beliefs or represents something else, but the grammar of their burial certainly moves debate about these people’s lives beyond established discussions about any so-called Romanization (Millett 2006). In this way the interrogation of archaeological evidence is raising new questions, forcing us to address cultural change in a different way. Some other more wide-ranging social analyses using burial evidence are beginning to emerge, especially in the study of Roman provincial society (Pearce 2000; Gowland 2001).

Archaeologists in the Roman provinces have been rather successful in developing approaches for understanding sites in the provinces through the excavation and the analysis of patterns of artifact use and distribution, both locally and regionally. They have been less successful in using similar approaches for the detailed understanding of the much larger-scale settlements that typify the center of the empire and where monumental art and architecture could also contribute. The problems are understandable as the sheer scale of the sites and the quantities of finds make the task daunting, but progress on understanding local patterns of society in the core of the empire demands that we rise to this challenge.

The enormous scale of the Roman empire also defies approaches which are based on the small scale alone. This does not imply that its investigation should attempt to write grand narratives based on simplified explanatory frameworks. Nevertheless, it seems very important to acknowledge the role of the unintended consequences of the growth of imperial power on indigenous societies. This means that we have to take approaches that acknowledge the agency of individuals but also pay due attention to the powerful overarching forces that shaped their worlds and with which they had to interact. Thus, for instance, the historical events that led to Roman military expansion into northeast Spain during the Second Punic War created new circumstances for the peoples who lived at Cesse. The selection of their settlement, Tarraco (now Tarragona), as a Roman base and its subsequent choice by Augustus as his center of operations during the Cantabrian Wars changed the circumstances within which they lived (Keay 2006). This is not to deny that individuals influenced the shape of the settlement that developed, only to emphasize that bigger events had consequences, like the creation of major communication links and the stimulation of large-scale movements of goods and people, which must be understood if the complexities of the empire are to be understood.

At a practical level, this involves moving above the level of the site to appreciate the broader development of the landscape in all its dimensions. Archaeological survey has long been used to map rural landscapes. While these methods have made a significant contribution to understanding the broad patterns of landscape change through the whole of the Classical period and beyond, they are not without their limitations. Recently there has been much discussion of the methodological limitations of survey and how these can be mitigated (e.g. Francovich and Patterson 2000; Alcock and Cherry 2004). These debates represent an increased maturity of approach to survey archaeology but can be rather inward-looking. Equally important issues are often overlooked, including whether the scale of analysis and the level of chronological resolution are appropriate for making comparisons at the supra-regional level and thus for understanding changing imperial systems. Although there has been some success in making comparisons across broader areas, these issues have too rarely been given the attention they deserve.

Another form of larger-scale work is also important if we are to understand the Roman empire. Large individual sites, particularly cities and towns, characterize the empire and are presently far too poorly understood. While there has been a long and productive tradition of excavation on ancient urban sites, even the largest campaigns of excavation can only examine a tiny proportion of an urban landscape. Thus, with the exception of a small number of sites, like Pompeii, our evidence for towns is derived from “keyholes” which give an immense amount of detail about very small samples of the site—forming a doubtful basis for broad generalization. One product of this is a heavy reliance on more extensively excavated sites combined with composite generalizations derived from a mosaic of limited excavations in a variety of towns. Given the current emphasis on local variation and particular local histories, this is clearly unsatisfactory.

One answer to this lies in the deployment of new technologies for understanding whole towns. An example of this type of work is taking place in the Tiber valley around Rome where we are attempting to examine the variability in Roman urban settlements. This work exploits basic modern technologies to map large areas, allowing us to look at varying urban forms of entire sites rather than the small samples that can be examined by excavation. The main technique is geophysical survey, principally magnetometry, which is widely used in rescue archaeology in Britain and enables a rapid survey to provide a plan of buried archaeological deposits. Such work can offer some spectacular and surprising results although whether it works depends on the characteristics of the soil. At Falerii Novi we were able to produce a good and detailed plan of most of the town (Figure 1.8) using this technology (Keay et al. 2000). Although the level of detail produced is variable and the complexity of the development of a site is not revealed in its entirety, it is wrong to suggest that the method can only be used in conjunction with excavation. The detailed analysis of the plan of Falerii Novi, combined with the addition of surface survey and topographic detail, provided an overall understanding of the site’s development that would otherwise have been impossible without very extensive excavation (Millett 2007). While it is true that some of these hypotheses can only be tested with further work—either different forms of survey or excavation—the



Figure 1.8 Plan of Falerii Novi, based on the results of geophysical survey. Copyright British School at Rome, reproduced with permission of The British School at Rome

same is invariably also true of excavation results; we must learn to value such urban survey work in its own right rather than thinking of it always as an *hors d'œuvres* to digging. Most important is the scale at which geophysical survey can operate. For example, my colleagues and I have recently completed a new survey of the Portus, the port of imperial Rome at the mouth of the Tiber River (Figure 1.9). The field-work here has covered in excess of 175 ha. At this scale, it has become possible to provide new perspectives on a key imperial monument at the center of the empire in a way that would have been simply inconceivable through excavation (Keay et al. 2005). The magnetometry survey of Portus is now being complemented by selective excavation, but given the sheer scale of the harbor structures this project is also deploying a range of other remote sensing methods as well as geological boreholes in conjunction with conventional excavation (Keay et al. 2009; <http://www.portusproject.org/> [accessed December 11, 2011]). It is also pioneering the use of computer-generated reconstructions during the dig to aid interpretative process. Such work is providing new perspectives on Roman Italy which should be extended to other parts of the empire in future.

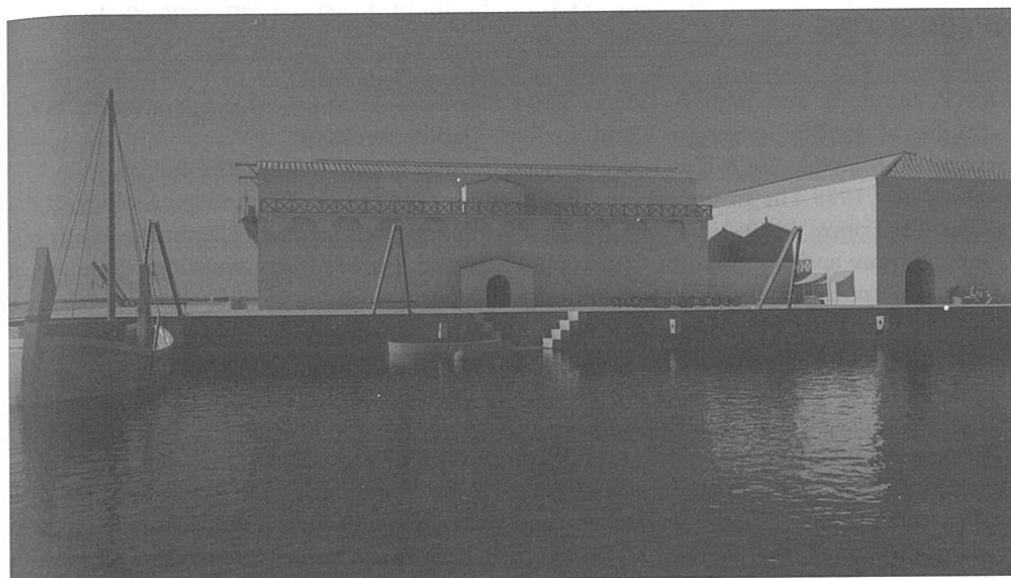


Figure 1.9 Portus, the port of imperial Rome at the mouth of the Tiber River. Computer graphic simulation of part of the harbour of Portus. AHRC Portus Project: <http://www.portusproject.org>

Prospects

It should be clear from this review of the discipline that an integration of classical archaeology into a broader discipline is the product of historical trends and that we are consequently seeing something of a renaissance in the subject. Contemporary classical archaeology should continue to develop, forming a fine bridge between Classics and archaeology. We should not allow it simply to be a structure that is scarcely visible yet functional; rather, it ought to develop its own distinctive engineering and elegant architecture. This will transform classical archaeology into a laboratory for investigating the use of material culture in literate and proto-literate societies alike. In creating this laboratory and developing this subject, we will combine the sound use of traditional methods of study with the best innovations from the contemporary world.

One of the unique aspects of archaeology is its ability to discover new evidence through fieldwork and finds analysis. Discovery is not enough, re-thinking meaning is also vital. It is the constant process of discovery, combined with the questioning, re-envisioning, and expanding of horizons, that makes classical archaeology so invigorating and absorbing a subject.

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