Art and Archaeology

'Who built the Parthenon? Why? What was it for? How should we understand its sculpture? Why do we find it such a compelling monument? Mary Beard gives all of us, specialists and travellers alike, "food for thought"'. It is unfair to quote a book's blurb, since the task of composing it is regularly devolved to anybody but the author, but here the advertisement is honest enough to suggest that while questions about the Parthenon are indeed raised in Mary Beard's ★*The Parthenon*,[1] they are not directly answered. To those familiar with the Beard approach to Classical art, it would be very surprising if they were. Her project is not to crack codes and solve mysteries but to 'problematize' – to show us what shaky intellectual structures support the podium of art-historical 'authority'. So this is not a monograph to comfort the bewildered. The complex interpretative dilemmas surrounding the Parthenon Frieze, for example, are impatiently summarized as so much wasted scholarly effort: Beard's section entitled 'Making Sense of the Frieze' would be more accurately rendered as 'Making Nonsense of the Frieze'. Rhys Carpenter's (admittedly eccentric) suggestion that Kimon started the monument is not so much as mentioned; and Plutarch's engaging account of the 'Periklean building programme' is deemed to reveal little more than the historian's 'experience of the the vast urban redevelopments sponsored by Roman emperors'. And so on. It all adds up to an eloquent shrug of the shoulders: whether providing 'food for thought' or simply taking away the appetite, I cannot decide. As a *prolegomenon* for students approaching Parthenon topics it must be valuable, if daunting, required reading. And Beard's study throws light upon the Parthenon's monumental *Nachleben* in an unusually searching way. But given that so much of her story is focused upon this 'afterlife' down the centuries, one might begrudge the sheer chill of the 'cool look' cast over the 'Elgin Marbles'. 'Should they, or should they not,' demands the blurb, 'be returned to Greece?' To this question, Beard's penultimate paragraph typically gives no answer, instead lobbing up a series of further questions. It is true that legalistic quibbles about ownership are insoluble. But the case for return is not woolly left-liberal 'cant', as described in some quarters. It has a moral basis – a certitude that can take whatever questions are thrown at it.

Those who believe that we can *know* things about the material culture of Classical antiquity will take heart from the following trio of new arrivals. Nicholas Cahill's *Household and City Organization at Olynthus*[2] offers a reassessment of a site which can be claimed to give more information about Greek urbanism than any other. Excavated by D. M. Robinson between 1928 and 1938, the town's archaeological importance lies mainly in the dismal fact that it never quite recovered from being sacked by Philip II in 348 BC – therefore leaving a relatively undisturbed example of post-'Hippodamian' or even 'democratic' orthogonal town layout. Cahill does not attempt to review all aspects of the Robinson excavations (the cemeteries, partially explored by Robinson, deserve further attention). His focus is upon *oikoi*, households, and their position within a social and economic matrix. A bird's eye view of Olynthus would judge it exemplary of geometric order, and we know from Aristotle and other sources that there were distinct ideals prevailing in the fourth century BC about how a *polis* should be articulated.

[1] *The Parthenon*. By Mary Beard. Profile Books, 2002. Pp. 209, with 23 illustrations in text. £15.

[2] *Household and City Organization at Olynthus*. By Nicholas Cahill. Yale U.P., 2002. Pp. 383, with 4 colour plates and 62 figures in text. £35.

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Cahill's synthesis of the ground plans and localized finds demonstrates that these were indeed ideals. In reality the situation was flexible and organic. No 'ghettoes' of economic activity are evident; the differences between 'household', 'shop' and 'workshop' seem often blurred; and as for the confinement of women and men to separate parts of a house, that simply does not seem to square with an archaeology of houses lacking any obvious pattern of separate interior units, and scatters of cooking and weaving items that similarly defy conventional expectations. Robinson's digging was hasty by modern standards, and field notes (which Cahill has trawled) indicate that many more 'common' objects were found than were published. It was, all the same, a salutary effort to look for relics of Classical lives, not *objets d'art*, and is duly honoured as such by this book. Derelict Olynthus may also attest the dictum of Simone Weil, that the sacking of a city is 'the greatest of griefs for mankind'. For Weil, and perhaps for the Olynthians of 348 BC, the paradigmatic occasion of this grief was the *Ilioupersis*, the fall of Troy. We know there were poetic accounts of the tragedy, though few traces survive beyond Book 2 of Vergil's *Aeneid*. But how was it visualized by vase-painters and other artists? Guy Hedreen's *Capturing Troy*[3] investigates that query. With some caution, Hedreen is in sympathy with the late E. H. Gombrich's argument that the 'illusionism' of Greek figurative art came about largely as a result of the vivid quality of archaic Greek narrative. But it is a truism that while Greek artists were attentive to the 'convincing' depiction of forms that were human, divine, animal or monstrous, they neglected landscape and background. Hedreen's work does not press the case that 'landscape', at least as we understand the genre in Western art, can be dated much earlier than the Augustan muralist Studius (or Ludius). But he does show that Greek vase-painters developed a kind of shorthand *skenographia* or 'scene-setting' in order to add credibility (or, shall we say, 'authority') to their mythical images. Hedreen is not suggesting that a painter prepared to represent the Judgement of Paris by taking a sketchbook and wandering the slopes of Mount Ida. He argues that certain significant details – rocks, trees, cult statues, architectural features – became stock indicators of place. Myths are notoriously 'events without time', but Greeks did not like to think of them without place. So on the shoulder of a grand vase in Naples, the Kleophrades Painter painted what at first sight looks like a 'Sacking of a City', and which may well have had contemporary resonance *circa* 480 BC. But not only the figures identify the scene as Troy Taken – the backdrop is explicit too. 'We are not all of us equally able to appreciate Greek literature; we are apt to think . . . that we can get as much literature as we desire, more easily than by reading Greek. But now, for our voluntary and unvexed eyes, we have the forms of that art in which the Greeks are first and the rest nowhere: the alphabet of their thought, without which their imaginative literature is only half intelligible.' I imagine Guy Hedreen would concur with that sentiment about Greek painted vases, published in the Winchester School magazine, in 1897, to celebrate the opening of a school museum. The Winchester collection of Greek vases was subsequently augmented by the school's alumni and teachers; Noël Oakeshott, the wife of a great headmaster, was active in making the collection known; and now it has the recognition of a volume in the *Corpus Vasorum*

[3] *Capturing Troy*. The Narrative Functions of Landscape in Archaic and Early Classical Greek Art. By Guy Hedreen. Michigan U.P., 2001. Pp. 297, with 50 black and white plates.

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Antiquorum series, compiled by John Falconer and Thomas Mannack, *Winchester College*.[4] It is the model of a good teaching collection; an even better one, if the fourteen vases that went missing in the 1960s are ever recovered.

NIGEL SPIVEY

[4] *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum, Great Britain Fasicule 19: Winchester College*. By John Falconer and Thomas Mannack. Oxford U.P., 2002. Pp. 26, with 16 plates. £45.

Philosophy

The word 'morality' carries an air of gloom about it: we somehow recognize the legitimacy of its imperatives even while thinking that they conflict with our own best interests. The nice thing about Greek ethics is its commitment to leading us away from such inner torsion: Greek philosophers encourage us to pursue personal happiness safe in the knowledge that virtue is the eradication of conflict, that what really is in one's own interests always coincides with what one 'ought' to do. That, in any case, was always the story; but it is one challenged by Nicholas White in his *Individual and Conflict in Greek Ethics*.[1] Focussing on Plato, Aristotle, Stoicism, and Epicurus, he suggests that their treatment at the roots of modern history of philosophy (especially at the hands of Kant and Hegel) has led to a simplistic view of Greek thought as straightforwardly eudaimonistic – i.e., based on the (unargued) premise that duty and happiness ultimately coincide. In fact, so White argues, no-one in antiquity thought that rational pursuit should be directed single-mindedly towards personal happiness except Epicurus – and no-one claimed a perfect harmony of all rational aims except the Stoics (the strength of whose theoretical commitment to eudaimonism White casts in doubt). This is an important exercise in adding shade and nuance to a term ('eudaimonism') that is without doubt too often invoked as a way of papering over difficulties. White also shows beautifully how ancient and modern philosophical thought can play off each other without either being given the upper hand. The bulk of the discussion centres on Plato (remember that his philosopher kings *must* rule the city despite their own inclinations towards the ivory tower) and Aristotle (note the conflicting models of happiness in his *Ethics*). It is striking, as I think these two major examples show, how much harder the work and more controversial the passages required to make the point for Aristotle: it does not, after all, go without saying that there are *conflicting* models of virtue in the *Ethics*. (Indeed, a fresh and attractive attempt to reconcile them is made by Sarah Broadie in her introduction to a new translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* discussed below.) And one can see why there might be a difference between Plato and Aristotle here: through his discussion of 'political virtue', Plato needs to keep something in reserve to make purification worthwhile for the immortal (part of the) soul. Aristotle is diffident about the existence of such a thing, which perhaps makes him more likely to expect ethical virtue to work out. Still, White knows his discussion is corrective, not Copernican, and as such it should be compulsory reading. Broadie's discussion of Aristotelian happiness is but a small part of an 82-page survey of Aristotle's ethics which introduces her commentary on Christopher Rowe's excellent new translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[2] Her thought, both here and in her

[1] *Individual and Conflict in Greek Ethics*. By Nicholas White. Oxford U.P., 2002. Pp. xv + 369. £35.

[2] *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*. Translation (with historical introduction) by Christopher Rowe; philosophical introduction and commentary by Sarah Broadie. Oxford U.P., 2002. Pp. x + 468. Paper £14.99.

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