ANTIQUITY, Wheeler and Classical archaeology

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My association with ANTIQUITY is shorter than that of some of those present, but I am slightly shocked to reflect that it still covers over half the journal's life. I became a subscriber in 1961 and my first archaeological publication was an ANTIQUITY review in the following year. Closer involvement came only in the late 1970s when, soon after my move to Cambridge, Glyn Daniel wrote inviting me to become a Trustee of the Antiquity Trust — and, by the way, a Director of Antiquity Publications Ltd as well. 'Thank you, Glyn', I replied, 'but I don't think it should be both — one or the other'. I chose the second alternative, preferring the more practical and direct association with the journal's operations. My main feeling was, however, one of gratification that, after decades of cooling affinity and then downright estrangement between these areas of the discipline, Classical archaeology should still find a place in a journal of world archaeology. That sentiment has been reinforced under each succeeding Editor, by such signs as the first publication, in ANTIQUITY, of such a landmark of Greek discovery as 'The hero of Lefkandi' (Popham *et al.* 1982) or of the Special Section 'Classical matters' (Snodgrass & Chippindale 1988). I now want to say a few words about how ANTIQUITY, beyond generally 'keeping a seat free' for Classical archaeology, actually played a central rôle in the development, in the British setting, of one particular branch of it.

This episode was centred on the contributions of Mortimer (or, as always in ANTIQUITY circles, Rik) Wheeler. Three times during the 1960s, Wheeler took up his pen to make deliberately provocative interventions on the issue of what Classical archaeology, or certain branches of it, should be about. I will first take separately the remarkable short paper 'Size and Baalbek' (Wheeler 1962). The title covers, a shade misleadingly, a discussion not so much of size, as of the issue between interior and exterior emphasis in architecture, as represented by Roman and Greek buildings respectively. Among the more forceful passages, first place must go to Wheeler's assault on the Parthenon, one which by comparison makes Lord Elgin look like a timid conservationist. 'Neither the building nor its decoration had any inner life', he wrote. This statement has to be taken strictly in context, and the key word is 'inner': what Wheeler was setting out to establish was that the Parthenon had been planned solely for external viewing. This is not a wholly unreasonable claim: it can, I think, be criticized mainly for that common fault among archaeologists, of judging a monument by what happens to be preserved of it today, and forgetting what has vanished. In the Parthenon's case, we know a fair amount about what was once inside it: in particular, about the gigantic and costly statue of Athena which the Parthenon was built to house, and which accounted for its name, its fame and a good part of its entire cost. That was after all an exclusively internal feature. But Wheeler's real target, one feels, was the surviving relief sculptures of the building, and especially its frieze: 'an impersonal pageant of extrovert mimes with nothing whatsoever in their heads'. Here again, one has to concede that this damning judgment has a degree of immediate plausibility. We are all aware of a kind of all-too-perfect homogeneity in this and other works of the High Classical phase. But what Wheeler was also implicitly dismissing was the generations of work in analysing the gestures and composition, and through them the true meaning and subject, of the Parthenon frieze. In that same year, he was gently taken to task for this by the then Lincoln Professor at Oxford, my own teacher Bernard Ashmole (Ashmole 1962: 213–14). Ashmole had rightly detected here an impatient rejection of some of the central concerns of Greek art historians like himself.

Along with other attitudes, such a rejection comes across more clearly in Wheeler's forays, of the same period, into Romano-British archaeology. In June 1961, he had published a review (Wheeler 1961) of the Jubilee Volume of the Roman Society (*Journal of Roman Studies* 50,

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ANTIQUITY 76 (2002): 1102–4

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00091985 Published online by Cambridge University Press

1960). This had not differed in any very obvious way from an ordinary number of that journal: to print a review of it was so unusual a step that one must surely imagine Wheeler asking his old friend Glyn, as a special favour, to let him have a real crack at the Roman Society. At all events, the review was shattering — as Wheeler himself conceded with the closing words, in his familiar 'naughty boy' persona: 'And if that doesn't shake the local circulation of ANTIQUITY, I don't know what will'. What he had offered was a magisterial and very critical summing-up of the whole course of Romano-British archaeology, from its coming-of-age under Francis Haverfield, through the work of Margery Taylor, R.G.Collingwood and Ian Richmond, and ending with one of his most memorable epigrams: 'Haverfield's work was not merely a monument, it was a tombstone'. Here again, more than a generation's subsequent progress in the subject was thereby consigned to outer darkness. Wheeler elaborated this dismissal: 'the path of minor progress will continue to be strewn with PhD's and Dphil's', but 'for the major attainments of mankind, the young scholar . . . must now look to other periods, other lands'.

In short, what we seem to have here is nothing less than an obituary for a subject. As such it can only seem, to us today, as arrogant as it was premature. But again, to be fair, we must scrutinize Wheeler's aims more closely. The more precise target of his criticism, I believe, was not Romano-British archaeology in itself — Wheeler had himself, after all, been notable among its exponents in the post-Haverfield age — but the traditional approaches to it. Seen in this light, he suddenly turns from being the false prophet of doom to someone with a positive and accurate vision of what Romano-British archaeology was in fact to become. We shall return to this theme in a moment: first, though, we should look at the third, and by far the best-remembered, fracas launched by him through the pages of ANTIQUITY.

In the June 1968 number, Wheeler turned sorrowfully to the more conventional task of reviewing 'the last book of one's oldest friend'. This was in fact volume 2 of Ian Richmond's *Hod Hill*. The review was, nonetheless, once again a fierce one. Richmond was castigated for his delays in the publication of Chedworth, Bath and Inchtuthil, on top of the criticisms of *Hod Hill* 2. He was charged with inability to organize an excavation team; with preferring to play a lone hand. In all this, no doubt, there was an implicit and unfavourable comparison with the writer himself. The overall sentiment was clear: that Romano-British archaeology, in the person of its most famous exponent, had somehow let 'us' down. But who exactly were 'we'?

Before an answer to this question could emerge, Glyn Daniel had evidently succumbed to pressure for publishing a collective rejoinder, from five of Richmond"s wounded friends. This appeared in the December number of the same year, under the names of Aileen Fox, Jocelyn Toynbee, Sheppard Frere, Kenneth St Joseph and, separately, George Boon (Fox *et al.* 1968); but Wheeler himself was allowed a final riposte — yet again, a scathing one — at the end of their piece. Of his five assailants, interestingly, he spared one, Aileen Fox. The remaining four were dismissed with the words 'The testimony of a distinguished art-historian, a superb air photographer and two defaulting excavators adds nothing to his [Richmond's] case'. The slur directed, in the final phrase, at Frere and Boon was an obvious one (and Wheeler spelled it out to make sure); but I also see here a less obvious implication that the art-historian (Toynbee) could claim no central standing in the proper practice of Romano-British archaeology, and that the air photographer (St Joseph) could by definition perform no more than an ancillary service. Once again, Wheeler is defining his priorities for the subject; and the abstention from criticism of Aileen Fox fits in well with this. Of the five, she was the only prehistorian; and it is as a special branch of British prehistory that Wheeler sees a future for Roman Britain. The community let down by the failings of *Hod Hill*, we now see, is that of British and European prehistorians. Theirs was the one way forward: Roman Britain must assimilate or be shunned.

Maybe in 1968 this appeared an eccentric view; what is certain is that it accurately foreshadowed what was to happen. Romano-British archaeology has in fact increasingly assimilated itself to prehistory — arguably, to the common intellectual benefit of both. There were, of course, potentially negative corollaries to this: an increasing estrangement from Classical studies and the traditional primacy

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00091985 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of texts in the study of this field and, more parochially, the gradual dissolution of that remarkably close linkage to the Roman Society to which the pages of its Jubilee Volume had borne witness; an increasing divergence from the practice of Roman archaeology in most other provinces of the Empire (with a few notable exceptions, such as that in the partially occupied Netherlands); a widening alienation from other branches of Classical archaeology.

Yet, to return for a moment to the first example of the Parthenon and its sculptures, these other branches of Classical archaeology have meanwhile begun to make their own changes, in roughly parallel directions, in Greece, Italy and the other Mediterranean lands. Few if any would propose abandoning such studies as the art of the Parthenon, but there is a detectable move to divert more of the collective effort to very different pursuits. Again, this has implied a degree of assimilation to the practices of prehistory. As someone who has devoted his later career to promoting such changes, I cannot forbear to salute the lead which Wheeler gave, all those years ago, and to the vital rôle which ANTIQUITY played in enabling him to do so.

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The innocents and the sceptics: ANTIQUITY and Classical archaeology

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When I was invited to discuss ANTIQUITY and Classical archaeology, I felt I only had some general impressions to contribute, and they were also largely limited to the last 15 years of the journal, which I had encountered as an undergraduate on the shelves of the British School at Rome. Upon closer examination, these impressions turned out to consist mainly of the disturbing feeling that ANTIQUITY was an archaeological Parnassus that only a handful of us Greek and Roman archaeologists had been able to ascend. Senior Classicists may have thought more highly of other journals specializing in the sub-discipline, but for a lot of young Turks like myself ANTIQUITY had always been for archaeology what *Nature* was for the hard sciences. We thus concluded that if papers dealing with the Greek and Roman world were rather infrequent in the journal, this was simply another reflection of the systemic shortcomings of our sub-discipline. It seemed Classical archaeologists simply did not make the cut very often, and rightly so, since they seldom had anything to say that might interest the wider field of practitioners. We polemically maintained that this was due to the narrow-focused, idiosyncratic and uninspired research agendas that prevailed in the Classics. We had the painful feeling of being theoretically and methodologically impaired, compared to the stuff we were reading in the journal.

As I started gathering my thoughts to put them on paper, I realized that I had not changed my mind much, even after having had a peek at the editorial process behind the journal. Allowing for the wisdom and mellowing that age brings, I still seldom came across papers that I thought suitable for the journal. But in addition to that, having become infected with deconstructionism, I now wondered why things were the way they were and decided for a fresh data collection. While dutifully browsing

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ANTIQUITY 76 (2002): 1104–11

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00091985 Published online by Cambridge University Press