Special section
Classical matters

This, the Editor's working title for the special section in the December ANTIQUITY has been retained so that we can go on to his punning riposte: '*Why* does it matter?' The papers that follow ought themselves to go some way towards answering that question, but there may still be readers who need to be told why this is not the archaeological equivalent of a special number on stamp-collecting. Part of the trouble lies in an old confusion between the way we choose to regard objects of the past, and the place of those same objects in their own time. For more than 2000 years, the artefacts of ancient Greece – especially pottery, statuary and architecture – have been revered as models of excellence. They have gone in and out of fashion, with neo-classical architecture just now going though yet another revival; generally these 'Classical values' have been in fashion, so much that by degrees they have acquired a timeless feel. Timeless Classical artefacts are not: they were artefacts of their own time, with their own place in the society that made them – and the vagaries of subsequent taste and fashion are quite beside the point. Our choosing to venerate Classical as classical (or to dismiss it as an early apogee of kitsch) says something about ourselves but not, of itself, very much about Classical society.

Some years ago, Bernard Levin remarked that people who complain that opera sopranos are always fat and ugly give themselves away as not having set foot in an opera-house for a long time. In the same way, people who repeat old gibes about Classical archaeology being all antiquarianism and connoisseurship have not been reading much Classical archaeology lately. But the aim of this number is not merely to give ignorant readers a faintly pleasant surprise. There are other important reasons why Classical really *does* matter to other archaeologists.

One reason is that Classical archaeology has acquired valuable experience which should be passed on – partly because of its long existence as a discipline, partly because of its outward contact with disciplines *other* than those in which non-Classical archaeologists are versed. One need hardly add the capacity to test archaeological inferences against documented history, which in any case is at least matched by the value of testing documented history against archaeology. Nor the advantage of being able to generalize from 349 examples of something in the same category and period (page 763), rather than three, four, or nine if you're lucky.

Much more solid than these little things is Classical experience in issues of common concern to archaeologists of Classical, prehistoric and every other kind of society: like, for example, trade. Some 50 years ago, Classical archaeologists were intoxicated with modernizing ideas about the pre-eminent importance of trade in early societies. 'Did trade follow the flag or did the flag follow trade?', asked Alan Blakeway in one of his celebrated articles on early Greek colonization in the west, answering resoundingly in favour of the second. But later on, people began reading the works of Max Weber, or at least of historians influenced by Max Weber. They learned an impressive array of arguments leading to the conclusion that this and other such questions were no more than a colossal anachronism; they learned that, even under the Roman Empire, 'the monetary commercial economy is merely a thin veneer spread over a large subsistence economy'; that, even in modern pre-industrial Europe, international trade is reckoned to have accounted for no more than 2% of GNP. So they toned down claims for commercial activity; the more thoughtful – debating whether archaeological study of the commercial economy deserved to consume more than 2% of the research effort – worried about its apparent predominance in the archaeological record, and the damaging admission which might follow about the bias of the archaeological record. Some came to feel that the predominance had in any case never been more than apparent.

This process ran its course between the 1950s and the 1970s, ending in a virtual consensus

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that the old approach had been misguided: the earlier the society, the more intense the anachronism. But what do we find in European prehistory in the later 1980s? Trade is suddenly a chic subject, its importance roughly comparable with that which it enjoyed in Classical archaeology 50 years earlier. It explains everything from increasing social complexity to settlement-patterns. What is the reason? After nine years of Mrs Thatcher running Britain, perhaps people could be forgiven if they began to believe that societies are generally motivated by individual self-advancement and gain; yet these doctrines are not confined to those of a right political persuasion, nor even particularly to Britain. Maybe it reflects the apparent dominance of contemporary international markets in directing national economies. Maybe it is in part explained by a slackness in the definition of 'trade', which should really be used only of the purchase and movement of goods without the knowledge or identification of a further purchaser; surely prehistorians cannot have suddenly forgotten the existence of all the other processes – gift-exchange, tribute, diplomacy, pilgrimage, dedication and so on – which move objects from A to B. Maybe it is that Max Weber, like his economist contemporary Werner Sombart and his Classical interpreter Johannes Hasebroek, wrote in German, and *avant-garde* prehistorians (Marxism apart) find German thought about as congenial as German archaeology – that is to say, not at all.

Classical archaeology is about a world where acquisition by conquest, rapine and other kinds of constraint was more prestigious than purchase, and where possession, ostentation, largesse and sheer hoarding counted for more than profit. Several of the papers which follow illustrate these aspects. Others exemplify the way in which social and cultural context determine nearly everything that a society does, as Ian Hodder has argued for other regions and epochs. None is irrelevant to the study of real archaeology. If, together, they are taken as some kind of manifesto for a 'new Classical archaeology', then so be it.

In this special section:

David Lowenthal reviews the twin rôles of Classical antiquities as national and as global heritage.

David W.J. Gill examines expressions of wealth in Greek art and society.

Herbert Hoffmann studies the particular meaning of the cicada as a motif in ceramic decoration.

Ian Morris sees how tomb cults in the 8th century BC show how the past was used as an ancient present.

Simon Stoddart & **James Whitley** study, with some simple figuring, the social place of literacy in Greece and Etruria.

Graeme Barker explores the Etruscan countryside, the milieu which made Etruscan cities and their riches possible.

Ian Ralston corrects misconceptions about the social and political structures of Central Gaul at the Roman Conquest.

John Boardman reviews where Classical archaeology finds itself, and where it may be going.

ANTHONY SNODGRASS
& CHRISTOPHER CHIPPINDALE

Book Chronicle

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Anthony Birley. **The people of Roman Britain.** *Paperback edition. 224 pages, 29 illustrations. 1988. London: B.T. Batsford; ISBN 0-7134-5935-2 £10.95.*

Mogens Rud. **The Bayeux tapestry and the Battle of Hastings 1066.** *103 pages, colour illustrations. 1988. Copenhagen: Christian Eilers; ISBN 87-7241-592-4 hardback & ISBN 87-7241-594-0 paperback.*

Lawrence A. Tritle. **Phocion the Good.** *xvi + 230 pages, 3 figures. 1988. London & New York: Croom Helm; ISBN 0-7099-4363-6 hardback £27.50.*

A.B. Bosworth. **From Arrian to Alexander: studies in historical interpretation.** *× + 225 pages, 2 figures, 1 table. 1988. Oxford: Clarendon; ISBN 0-19-814863-1 hardback £25.*

Robert Lamberton. **Hesiod.** *xvi + 172 pages. 1988. New Haven (CT) & London: Yale University Press; ISBN 0-300-04068-7 hardback £22.50 & $35; ISBN 0-300-04068-7 paperback £7.95 & $11.95.*

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