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ARCHAEOLOGY IN GREECE 2013–2014

Method in the archaeology of Greece

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Discussions of method, of the different ways in which we may try and answer research questions, are perhaps rarer in the historiography of ancient Greece than discussions of theory. Theory has, quite rightly, played a significant role in historiography, but the comparative unimportance of method is rather mysterious. Methods are central to archaeology because a researcher has to make choices, from the very start of a project, about which methods will be the most appropriate for delivering answers to the chosen research questions. The archaeological journal *Antiquity* has a special section on Method. The content of that section may seem to be rather more technical than the kinds of methods I want to consider here. Nevertheless, all discussions of method, or methodology, help to give substance to theory; they help us to make clearer the connections between evidence and theory. Stewart's paper, in this issue of *AG*, offers a series of reflections on the values and limitations of survey methods. Archaeologists are conscious of the fact that different methods produce different results. This can sometimes be perplexing for historians, as I discuss further below. Method refers not just to the ways in which we go about a particular research project. It also applies to the broad perspectives within which we do research. Catherine Morgan's report on the work of the BSA in 2013–2014 draws together the many new strands that are connecting people and places of the past, but also contemporary preoccupations with environments, societies and their habits in the recent past.

Last year I reflected on the challenges posed by new information emerging from development projects in Greece, data that are often hard to evaluate in terms of existing narratives about the distant past. In the past year or so, two new publications take different approaches to the problem of how to formulate an appropriate framework that will contain and explain what we know about the Greek past. Cyprian Broodbank's *The Making of the Middle Sea* (2013) creates a vibrant story, articulated in a consciously contemporary idiom, which puts the Aegean, and the Mediterranean as a whole, into global perspective. The 'Middle Sea' thus becomes one of the seaways that have shaped human dynamics; it is a highway of communications that stretches back into the early days of hominid evolution (two million years BP). His story breaks off before the grand narratives of the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars, and the conflict between Carthage and Rome. This means that Broodbank does not have to engage with some of the still controversial theories about the development of Mediterranean societies (notably, the degree to which classical Antiquity was a 'primitive' economic environment). His narrative is unashamedly one of environmental and technological success:

> From our perspective the real victor to emerge from the changes on either side of 1200 BC was the Mediterranean, or more accurately, the hugely dynamic, volatile, and potentially destabilizing, power-diffusing cultural and economic practices that people living around and in it were able to promote, once interactions over its surface had reached a critical scale and velocity (Broodbank 2013: 471).

The author's choice of language is likely to arouse surprise, in some cases strong disagreement:

> Much of what tied this world together remained commercial transactions. Except in Levantine waters, the later 7th and 6th centuries saw a further burgeoning of trade, and the final realization of a Mediterranean-wide market, already partly interdependent and governed by the regime of cheap maritime transport costs, specialist production and extensive importation, plus the attendant threats of short-circuiting, undercutting, and substitution, that had arisen over the 2nd millennium BC in the east and survived there in a few economic refuges ever since (Broodbank 2013: 546).

doi:10.1017/S0570608414000040 Archaeological Reports 60 (2013–2014) 22–24

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0570608414000040 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This passage comes from a section entitled 'Far-from-archaic trade'. The author has decisively thrown down the gauntlet to those scholars who still want to put the first half of the first millennium BCE into a remote, under-developed framework. Although the style is a little different, Broodbank's fast-moving, competitive, market-driven universe is not fundamentally so different from the sixth-century BC Attica described by Sanne Houby-Nielsen:

> Turning to the Attic countryside, we find towards the middle of the sixth century the first undeniable sign in millennia of new and much more intense settlement activity; the erection of very large mounds, up to 40m in diameter, elaborate grave stelae ... and the erection of funerary *kouroi*, and occasionally *korai* ... The new importance of the countryside is indicated also by the formalization of the road network, by the setting up of herms (Houby-Nielsen 2009: 208).

Houby-Nielsen uses the principal topographic features of the countryside – the river banks and harbours, the rocky peaks and marginal places – to articulate her narrative of community settlement in Attica. Broodbank also focuses on the degree to which landscapes began to be filled in at this time, although his wide canvas makes comparison between distant regions possible.

> Let us turn to the broader picture, and first to the urban explosion around the Mediterranean's perimeter and right through its heart. Mediterranean towns were singly and collectively more fragile, vulnerable creations than is often realized [citing Horden and Purcell 2000: 89–122; Purcell 2005: 249–72] – witness their mid-millennium abeyance in the Levant, one of their first strongholds, as well as their rise and demise during the Aegean's Bronze Age. But the seventh and sixth centuries saw an immense surge in their numbers and distribution, even if most populations stayed in the four figure range, with a few into five figures, and none attaining six figures until well after 500BC. Most arose *in situ*, out of pre-existing settlements drawn together in advantageous nodal positions or ecological sweet spots. They coevolved with sail-driven shipping, and in this sense both interconnections and complex communities decisively pre-dated the florescence of towns themselves. The latter represented, in the conceptualization of Horden and Purcell, demographic intensification 'congealed', and made visually as well as morally solid and coherent by investment in monuments and infrastructure (Broodbank 2013: 537).

This analysis, from the stratosphere to Archaic community organization, offers a more nuanced interpretation of the physical nature of the collective impact on Greek landscapes than has previously been attempted. This is the context in which we can gain a clearer understanding of the vibrant expansion of settlement in and around the Thermaic gulf in precisely the same period; an expansion that did not, for many hundreds of years, nucleate in a single location. Broodbank challenges readers to set aside assumptions of Classical cultural supremacy, to think in much, much deeper time scales and to look far more seriously at the hinterlands of the Mediterranean, where so much of the content of his story was generated, rather than at the immediate coastal fringe, which we often associate with the civic life and civic values of the past.

Jonathan Hall's new book, *Artifact and Artifice*, on the other hand, develops a set of broad, analytical arguments on the basis of nine historical 'problems'. Four of his case studies concern Roman history and the other five are taken from Archaic and Classical Greek contexts. In each case, Hall applies a scalpel and magnifying glass to the surviving evidence associated with his chosen topics; the vaporous cavern of the Pythia at Delphi, the Persian destruction of the Temple of Apollo Daphnephoros at Eretria, Eleusis and the so-called Oath of Plataia, Socrates and the prison in the Athenian Agora and the identity of the occupants of Tomb II at Vergina are the Archaic and Classical Greek 'problems'. Hall's aim is to explore the relationship between Greek and Roman history and the ways in which material evidence has been used to confirm or reject assumptions about historical events.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0570608414000040 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In assembling his topics and the supporting evidence for each case, Hall provides a series of master classes. The topics he has chosen to elucidate are, however, of varying degrees of complexity. We can happily agree with his analysis of the problems associated with the 'vapours' at Delphi (2014: 17–34), the 'Oath of Plataia' and the rebuilding (or otherwise) of Athenian temples and monuments (2014: 55–76) or the difficulties associated with the dating of temple platforms and architectural sculpture at Eretria (2014: 35–54). His adoption of Eugenio La Rocca's thesis that the architectural fragments and pedimental sculpture (in Parian marble) from the Temple of Apollo Sosianus in Rome may originally have adorned a fifth-century BC Temple of Apollo Daphnephoros at Eretria (La Rocca 1985) is certainly persuasive, although Hall himself offers a number of possible alternative explanations (2014: 43–48). In his discussion of the 'poros' building in the Athenian Agora (identified by Eugene Vanderpool (1980) as the state prison), Hall discusses the probable gap between the scientific evidence of the effects of hemlock consumption and the description of Socrates' death given by Plato in the *Phaedo*. In a further aside, he reflects on whether 'archaeology is especially well equipped to identify individuals' (2014: 94); this is a statement that will have to be reconsidered, following the identification by archaeologists at the University of Leicester of the remains of King Richard III (www.le.ac.uk/richardiii/science.html). Forensic evidence provides a different set of strategies from those deployed in cases where archaeological remains, such as buildings or artefacts, are linked to historical events. For this reason, it is important to consider whether Hall gives due weight to the forensic evidence in the case of the skeletons removed from Tombs I and II at Vergina (2014: 97–117). These human remains should surely command more serious attention than arguments about the introduction of particular architectural techniques or the frequency of lions in ancient Macedonia. Tomb II deserves to be examined with the same rigour as a crime scene investigation.

Our two authors have provided archaeologists and historians of ancient Greece with a good deal to think about. Broodbank wants us to remember the framework within which all our narratives should be located; it is much bigger, geographically speaking, and longer, in chronological terms, than we are wont to consider. Hall, on the other hand, wants us to use the full range of evidence when we think about historical problems. This range should include material data, but we do need to exercise great care in the way that written 'evidence' is matched to, or confronted with, surviving structures and artefacts. 'The ultimate aim is to provide a discursive space for historians and archaeologists of the ancient world to communicate on equal terms and in a vocabulary that is familiar to both' (Hall 2014: 219)

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0570608414000040 Published online by Cambridge University Press