

# Classical Archaeology in Context: Theory and Practice in Excavation in the Greek World.

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**Donald c. Haggis, Carla M. Antonaccio (eds). *Classical Archaeology in Context: Theory and Practice in Excavation in the Greek World*. pp. xiv+426, b/w illustrations. 2015. Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter. ISBN 978- 1- 934078- 46- 4; e-ISBN (PDF) 978-1-934078-47-1; e-ISBN (ePub) 978-1-61451998-0; hardcover paperback £123.99.**

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This volume is a collective, multi-regional, multi-period, and multi-disciplinary reflexion on what is and what should be classical archaeology. The 13 contributions collected are organised in four chapters, respectively paying attention to ‘historical contexts and intellectual traditions’, ‘mortuary’, ‘urban and rural’, and ‘sanctuary contexts’. The study cases presented come from Crete (Praisos, Azoria, and Arkalochori), Rhodes (Kymissaleis), Lycia (Çaltılar Höyük), Macedonia (Platania, Kompoloi, Douvari, Krania, and Vergina), the Peloponnese (Argos, Elis, Megalopolis and the island of Poros), Attica (Athens, Vourva, Marathon), and Sicily (Morgantina). The papers consider archaeological contexts dated from the Geometric to the Hellenistic period. A wide range of archaeological specializations, such as ceramology or bioarcheology (paleobotany, archeozoology, physical anthropology), and technologies (photogrammetry, interrelational database, tomography, geophysical survey, INAA, petrography, pXRF), is represented and discussed by the different contributors.

In their introduction, the editors, **Haggis and Antonaccio**, highlight the problem in defining Greek archaeology – a sub-discipline of classical archaeology – as a coherent discipline with ‘a unified intellectual mission or even a reasonably discrete set of goals, methods, and generally accepted principles’. What they find mostly missing in traditional areas of archaeological practice is close and critical focus on archaeological context. This implies one to free oneself from pre-established narratives, mainly historical, but also to take into account the various biases introduced by the archaeological record, especially in the case of old excavations. This is why their book differs from recent handbooks and companions on classical archaeology. This volume in fact does not intend to summarize and crystallise the dominant discourses on the Early Iron Age-Hellenistic period in the Greek world. To the contrary, it aims at considering archaeological data in their original context, taking into account artifacts (material culture), residues (formation processes), and sources (fieldwork), as defined by Lucas (2012, 10). In this sense, a central role is given to research design, methods and results of fieldwork. This is why, despite its subtitle, ‘*Theory and Practice in Excavation in the Greek World*’, the 13 contributions ‘deal more with practice than theory, methods than methodology, implications of new assemblages and contexts than interpretative frameworks’. They all, directly or indirectly, address the definition of classical archaeology and evaluate the potential of asking old questions of new data in Greek archaeology. ‘This book is meant to explore how new forms of material culture and sites; methods of data recovery and analysis; scientific and analytical techniques and sampling strategies should be affecting the discourse in classical archaeology and the broad range of questions and strategies at our disposal’ is explicitly stated at the outset.

Rather than following the order of the chapters, or the order used by the editors to present the contributions in detail in the introduction, this review considers the various papers with regard

to the peculiar epistemological ‘context’ they deal with, namely old excavations, dominant narratives, traditional mental representations, or big historical questions.

Three papers address the specific topic of old excavations. **Antonaccio** evaluates the potential of older data to answer new questions, using the Morgantina Project and ‘excavating an excavation’. Despite difficulties in recovering and comprehensively reassessing a large quantity of old data, it has been possible to document examples of Classical and Hellenistic Greek technical innovations, e.g. the use of terra-cotta tubes in the construction of domed and barrel-vaulted spaces, tessalated mosaics, and the Roman *macellum*. Thanks to modern analyses (instrumental neutron activation analysis, pXRF, petrography) on the pottery, it is now clear that Archaic Morgantina was a center of exchange and production and that its material culture was mixed, or hybrid (indigenous and Greek), opening a new discourse on identity and ethnicity. In his reconstruction of the history of research at ancient Praisos, Crete, and his evaluation of the way it affects our understanding of the ancient city and Praisian identity, **Whitley** pays special attention to the scholarly and intellectual traditions of the successive (British, Italian, Greek, French and Polish) investigators of the region. This allows him to point out one distinctive characteristic of classical archaeology, which he considers as ‘a nexus for a number of distinct traditions of inquiry’, compared with other sciences: classical archaeologists, he argues, still read with profit the work of scholars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whereas ‘a few if any chemists would now read Lavoisier except out for historical curiosity’. Using the example of the increasing textualisation of inscriptions, which leads to their decontextualisation, Whitley notes that ‘developments of archaeological methods have not been straightforwardly linear or cumulative’, occasionally they have proven to be reactionary. Regarding the specific case of Cretan archaeology, he deplores the persistent gap between Aegean prehistory and classical archaeology and pleads for a fully diachronic approach to the *longue durée* of settlement and landscape history.

**Small** reconsiders a ‘master narrative’, according to which restraint in burial ostentation, as decreed by sumptuary rules, is correlated with an egalitarian ideology and the presence of a sense of citizenship, a concept proposed by Ian Morris (1989). Alternatively, Small argues that the social, political, and ideological interpretation of these restrictions in burial ostentation should be considered in the context of a cemetery landscape, a ‘tomb-scape’. He challenges Morris’ narrative using cross-cultural analogies and then turning to ancient Greek cemeteries, and in particular the Kerameikos at Athens, when grave markers ceased but earlier burials were curated and venerated. Small finally suggests that ancestral veneration was allowing ancient families to keep signalling their prominent status, despite restrictions in burial ostentation, and that this action was at the same time excluding families newly burying in the cemetery to use the place for status display. The argument is convincing, but perhaps one should remain a bit sceptical about the value of cross-cultural analogies, precisely because it may be unnecessarily risky and hazardous to compare ‘contexts’ which have little in common from a geographical, historical and cultural point of view (for a recent charge against ethnoarchaeology and its quest for universal models, see Gosselain 2016). **Alexandridou**’s study of offering trenches in Early Archaic Attic cemeteries follows Small’s thread, both in terms of perspective and interpretations. Her point is to show that until recently the pottery recovered from these trenches dominated the direction of research, disregarding the phenomenon of offering trenches itself and its social implication. She sees the trenches and trench ceremonies as an important expression of elite practices, allowing dominant Attic families to advertise and stabilise their social status and role. Both papers clearly demonstrate the importance of contextualisation at the scale of a site or a landscape in our attempts of interpretation of material culture. And both of them explicitly or implicitly challenge Morris’

vision of an egalitarian ideology in Archaic Attica. One can note that at a domestic level, the Archaic pithoi recovered from the Hellenistic houses of Arkalochori, Crete, may constitute a later example of identity and status claim, as shown by **Galanaki, Papadaki, and Christakis**. Although the find context of these pithoi may first be explained in practical terms in view of their durability and utilitarian value, their symbolic value as family heirlooms and prestige items, as indicators of the wealth and status of their users, also deserves mention. A geographical narrative is also reevaluated by **Hodos'** contribution, which shows how the Çaltılar Archaeological Project allows a reconsideration of Lycia within a Mediterranean context, as a field of classical archaeology.

Another recurrent bias in classical archaeology, which is addressed by several contributions in this volume, is our traditional mental representation of specific classical spaces or buildings derived from ancient literature or early excavations. For instance **Donati** clearly and convincingly exposes how the large-scale excavations of the Athenian agora shaped our vision of the Greek agora. His investigation of three under-exploited Peloponnesian examples (Elis, Argos, and Megalopolis) offers new perspectives on urban integration, structure and use of the Greek agora. A gradual process of development is illustrated by the case of Argos, but it remains impossible to tell from when in its history of occupation the space considered can be called an actual agora. In contrast, at Elis and even more at Megalopolis, the agora constitutes a new urban experiment of the 5th and 4th centuries BC, with the construction of monumental stoas in canonical orders. Perhaps mention should be made of recent developments on Crete regarding the Greek agora, since current fieldwork carried out on the well-known agora of Dreros by the French School at Athens and the Ephorate of Lasithi may entirely change our perspective (see the most recent report: Zographaki and Farnoux 2014). Moreover, until now intensive excavations at Azoria did not allow the identification of an agora, although the site is clearly a civic centre, elaborated at the end of the 7th century BC, as convincingly argued by **Haggis** in the present volume. The case of Azoria also harms the traditional mental image of another civic space, that of the andreion. What has been revealed at Azoria is an architectural complex of large dining, kitchen and storage rooms exceeding the capacity needed for a typical household. The excavator has labelled it a 'Communal Dining Building' and it does not correspond to the description of an andreion given by ancient literary sources, but it clearly serves similar functions of public food mobilization and consumption. Whereas this Communal Dining Building was seemingly designed for a number of groups of participants, the 'Monumental Civic Building' in the same site was clearly more suitable for more open or communal assemblies, taking the shape of a large hall without space segmentation and with direct access to a hearth shrine and adjoining a Service Building including kitchens, storerooms and an olive press installation. Lastly, residential architecture at Azoria is also perceived as 'civic', as houses are built into an armature of concentric spine walls as part of an overall plan discontinuing the Early Iron Age agglutinative settlement structure.

Finally various papers presented in *Classical Archaeology in Context* show how big questions of historical nature can be addressed through a peculiar archaeological perspective. For instance, **Margaritis** reconsiders the ancient economy on the basis of archaeobotanical results from Hellenistic Macedonian sites (Platania, Kompoloi, Douvari, Krania) with a residential or industrial nature. In a similar geographical and historical frame, **Kyriakou and Tourtas** examine the role and treatment of the past in periods of crisis by providing a contextual analysis of pit deposits at Vergina, more precisely in and around the sanctuary of Eukleia, and at the cemetery of Stenomakri Toumba. The ancient economy is also addressed by **Mylona** in the particular context of the sanctuary of Poseidon at Kalaureia on the island of Poros. A

careful contextual analysis of the marine fauna and fishing tools recovered allows her to offer a diachronic evaluation of fishing and cult related activities (dining, offering and potential sacrifice). **Lagia** further demonstrates the ability of bioarchaeological remains – anthropological this time – to inform the diachronic discourse on ancient economy and society, using the case of Athens. More broadly, the overview of research goals and description of field methods presented by **Stefanakis, Kalogeropoulos, Georgopoulos and Bourbou** highlights how a multidisciplinary approach supported and articulated by innovative technologies, as exemplified by the Kymissala Archaeological Research Project on Rhodes, allows progressing on traditional core questions.

All in all, *Classical Archaeology in Context* is the first (hand)book of its kind. This volume clearly demonstrates that, if we want to use archaeological data as a proper historical source, it is necessary to purge them from pre-existing interpretations and reconsider them in their original context, at site, landscape or regional scale. It also illustrates the wide range of nature of archaeological data and gives actual methods to record and interpret these. This book will surely inspire historians and archaeology practitioners and can help to develop a best practice guide in our field.

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