CHAPTER ONE

The Historiography of Archaic Greece

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The Trap of Terminology

“Modern convention sets the start of the Archaic period in 776 BC, the year when the Games were said to have been officially founded at Olympia in Elis.” So it does: but the convention hides a contradiction. Normal practice, as encapsulated by the Oxford English Dictionary, uses “archaic” for whatever is “marked by the characteristics of an earlier period; old-fashioned, primitive, antiquated” – but what the reader will find in this book is the story of an exceptional, energetic, effervescent culture which developed and expanded with extraordinary speed and innovative assurance, in ways which it would be absurd to describe as “old-fashioned” or “antiquated.” Nor is “archaic” the only metaphor in play, for “primitive Greece,” “early Greece” and “medieval Greece” have all been in use among historians at various times to denote the period covered by this book, while “Dark Age Greece” has come to be the conventional label for the period between the collapse of the Mycenaean kingdoms and the Greeks’ re-adoption of literacy by the mid-eighth century.

Such labels have three characteristics in common. First, they gaze backwards, whether from our own modern vantage-point or from that of the higher culture or greater sophistication which we attribute to “Classical Greece” (itself a dangerous label). Thereby they seriously hinder our attempts to re-create the experiences of the men and women who lived through these centuries: such people did not – could not – think of themselves as “primitive,” “early,” or “archaic.” Second, they all imply comparison, whether with medieval Europe or with post-Roman “Dark Age” Britain or with other chronologically distant civilizations. The comparison with medieval Europe has been especially influential, the Greek city-states being seen as politically and economically very similar to the Hansa states, the Swiss cantons, and the Italian communes: but all such comparisons are shortcuts, which mislead more than they help. Third, they reflect decisions about periodization. Of course, all historians have to decide where to start and stop, but it is all too easy to inherit a decision without
identifying and testing the criteria which underlie it. Specifically with this volume: just as 776 is a dangerously fragile peg on which to hang the recognition of a new period, so too the Graeco-Persian Wars of 499–479 might not nowadays be taken as marking the break between “Archaic” and “Classical” if Herodotus’ text had not survived.3

The traps set by terminology do not end there. “Archaic” itself may have started off in art history, since the OED’s first citation, of 1846, comes from a book on the Elgin Marbles.4 “Archaeology” in the sense of “ancient history” is much older, the first citation being of 1607, but the semantic shift towards its present-day meaning was also an early nineteenth-century affair (the two relevant pages of the OED are most instructive for intellectual history). But in fact Greece, like all Mediterranean countries, has a long and intricate human “pre-history,” which stretches back at least to ca. 40,000 BC and includes major sites of the Neolithic period as well as the Mycenaean age (1600–1100) with its wealth, its palaces, and its Linear B writing in Greek. As is clear from myths and allusions in historical sources, the Greek peoples of the “Archaic” period knew perfectly well that they lived in a landscape long moulded by previous inhabitants, with whose legacy they came to terms in various ways. Nor, as contact by sea with the rest of the Eastern Mediterranean gathered pace again after ca. 900, could they avoid awareness that out there, “beyond the noble Ocean” (Hesiod, Theog. 215), lay cultures and societies which could look, and in many ways were, vastly richer and older than their own: Egypt especially made a great impression. That is not to deny that there had been significant disruption throughout the Eastern Mediterranean between ca. 1200 and ca. 1000, or that late Mycenaean Greece in particular had experienced some sort of systems failure, generating depopulation, political and cultural discontinuity, and the felt need to create a new order of society. The currently lively debate about the nature, degree, and duration of that discontinuity is not the direct concern of this book,5 but the reader should bear continually in mind the tension between the new starts which post-Mycenaean societies had perforce been making and the antiquity of the human landscapes which formed their backdrop. Indeed, a neglected short book (Ure 1921) and a now classic volume of papers (Hägg 1983b), surveying what it calls “The Greek Renaissance of the eighth century BC,” use a much more fitting metaphor than “Archaic,” though it too evokes perilous comparisons. Though they are not inserted hereafter, “archaic” should always be read with mental quotation marks.

The modern historiography of Archaic Greece6 is the product of three distinct styles. They emerged at different dates, and remained separate for the best part of a century, but since around 1980 have experienced a complex and very uncomfortable process of convergence. They are, first, the long-established approach of the ancient historians, based primarily on the historical, geographical, and antiquarian traditions of the later Greeks themselves with some admixture from “literary” texts such as the epic and lyric poets; second, the style adopted by cultural historians, who came to be concerned above all with how institutions, habits, cult and mythology could be “read,” both as reflections of a social order and as representations of the ways in which contemporaries interpreted their world and thereby made sense of it; and third, the approach taken by archaeologists, who until the 1970s were concerned mainly
with establishing relative and absolute chronologies for the various genres of artifacts which came within their purview, but also, and derivatively, with establishing the history of the occupation of specific sites such as the major sanctuaries (Delos, Delphi, Olympia, etc.), since these had been the object of the earliest professional attention. Each style has had a very different trajectory. Once their development has been traced in outline, the processes of convergence since 1980 can be traced in slightly more detail.

The Large-scale Narratives

The first “current” to formalize itself was that adopted by the text-based ancient historians, for whom the multi-volume single-authored narrative survey was adopted right from the start as the preferred format. Within that format, and once the writing of what we now term “ancient history” became established as an art-form in the eighteenth century, the Greek archaic period naturally required inclusion. That task at once presented the problems of separating myth from reality and of weaving tiny fragmentary narratives into a coherent whole. Both problems were, and remain, ferociously intractable. Adequately to tackle the former required either formulating usable criteria for isolating possible historical cores in the material of epic, myth, legend, and folktale, or developing techniques to detect symbolic “meaning.” Some progress has been made in “reading” myths symbolically, much less in re-historicizing them, not least because awareness that stories are preserved because they have a purpose (so the purpose is what matters, not the content) has combined with a far more detailed understanding of how the verbal transmission of narratives can transform (or distort) the material. True, the temptation to take the Trojan War as history is perennial, but the only respectable course has proved to be the drastic one taken by George Grote in 1846, in excluding mythic material from the historical domain altogether. That decision drove him to begin his historical treatment in 776 and thereby to set the convention with which this chapter began.

However, the second problem remained, viz. that of combining fragmentary narratives. Whereas, say, the history of Roman Italy or of each of the post-medieval European powers can be presented as a narrative with a single thread (albeit at the serious cost of marginalizing the histories of subordinated areas), not even Classical (i.e. post-480) Greece allows its history to be presented thus, for at a minimum Sparta, Athens, Thebes, Syracuse, Asia Minor, and Macedonia each need focused attention. Pre-Classical Greece is even more polycentric: each island, each micro-state, each sanctuary presents a certain number of pieces of information – but they turn out to be pieces from a huge number of different jigsaws. Either, then, the historian presents a set of simultaneous micro-narratives, at the cost of obscuring links and similarities, or s/he groups them in various ways, at the cost of occluding differences, or s/he identifies recurrent themes and patterns of behavior, at the cost of losing the thread of processes which unfold and intersect through time.

Three multi-volume classics each provide an illustrative example of one of these expedients, while their chronological order of publication also reveals how academic preoccupations and styles of presentation changed over the decades between the 1840s
and the First World War. As is conventional, I begin with George Grote (1794–1871), for though his History, appearing in twelve volumes in 1846–56, was very far from being the first full-dress History of Greece, both its quality, as a careful account soberly based on the critical evaluation of sources, and its tone, reflecting both moral earnestness and a sympathy for democracy and the Athenian Empire, were recognized as setting a wholly new standard of scholarship in the subject, thereby giving it widespread authority and influence for the next fifty years. In organizing his material, his sense that “the history of Greece, prior to 560 BC, [is] little better than a series of parallel but isolated threads, each attached to a separate city” led him to begin his Part II with three ethno-geographical chapters, and then to devote one or more chapters to each of the main Greek-speaking polities or regions. He breaks off only for two chapters on the Panhellenic festivals and lyric poetry before narrating sixth-century Athenian affairs in detail, the growth of the Persian empire as far as the Battle of Marathon, the Ionian Enlightenment and the impact of Pythagoras on the Greeks of south Italy, the Persian wars, the Sicilian tyrannies, the growth of Athens’ Aegean empire, and so on – noticeably marking no sharp break between “archaic” and “classical” in the way which has become customary. Grote’s History can still be read with pleasure, for his style is eminently readable, weaving summaries of the primary evidence into an exposition which always flows attractively while offering the reader a measured interpretative reading. Of course, especially for the archaic period it reflected the clustering of the information available in the literary sources, for Grote was writing just before the discoveries of inscriptions and papyri – first a trickle, then a flood – began to make any serious impact and before the challenge of incorporating archaeological evidence became inescapable. Yet it also reflected how choices could still be made, e.g. by concentrating on peoples rather than on personalities, by giving attention to Greece’s eastern Mediterranean neighbors, by offering regional surveys, and most notably by offering a far more sympathetic reading of radical or populist politics and politicians than his predecessors had done.

By the 1880s and 1890s, however, a younger generation of historians in Germany was developing very different readings of pre-480 Greece. They were influenced in part by their experiences of nation-formation and authoritarian leadership, in part by new evidence from inscriptions and excavations, and in part by the emergence of newer academic agendas in world history and economic history. Of the innumerable scholarly creations of this golden generation two in particular need attention here. The first, the Griechische Geschichte of Georg Busolt (1850–1920), first appearing in two volumes in 1885 and 1888 but best used through the four published volumes of the second edition (1893–1904), was seen at once as the authoritative treatment of the period, offering a very different balance. The archaeological work of Schliemann and others allowed him to start with a 120-page section on the Mycenaean period, followed by an even longer section on the emergence and expansion of the historical world of the Greek states (I 127–509). Especially interesting is the third section of volume I, with chapters on Lykourgos and the Spartan constitution, the Messenian Wars and Phedon of Argos, tyranny in the Isthmos states, and the Delphian Amphiktyony and the Peloponnesian League, for behind the preoccupation with state-formation and the crystallization of power-groups in this section it is hard not
to detect a reflection of the Bismarckian power-politics which Busolt admired. Geographically, the focus has narrowed, to concentrate above all on the better-documented polities of Peloponnese and the Saronic Gulf with their colonial offshoots, at the expense of Northern Greece or the eastern Aegean. Stylistically, too, the contrast with Grote is marked, for, to put it kindly, narrative was not Busolt’s forte. Instead, the focus above all is on constitutional antiquities, documented in close-packed footnotes which usually cover at least half the page. The result is a meticulously systematic and all-embracing but sadly static and stodgy presentation, which traces the growth and expansion of Greek presence and culture with all the grace of a sledge-hammer, while its unfinished state and the total absence of an index make it a penance to consult. These are matters of much regret, for Busolt did not just encapsulate the scholarship of his time but advanced it with critical shrewdness, encyclopaedic knowledge of the sources, and a real if hidden interpretative agenda which even now would deserve a measured assessment.

What it received, instead, was a fierce rejoinder from his slightly younger rival K. J. Beloch (1854–1929). As with Busolt, his *Griechische Geschichte* is best viewed not via its first edition of 1893–1904 but via its second, of 1912–27, for that allows the work as a whole, and especially the volume dealing with archaic Greece (I², in two parts, 1912 and 1913), to serve as the apogee of the comprehensive monograph. Plan, style, and tone are all a world away from Busolt. Putting essays on specific problems and details into a separate volume (I² 2) allowed Beloch to minimize footnotes and to paint a vivid picture of flow and development. His chapter headings alone give the gist clearly: Personality in history, Transmitted information, The Aegean coastlands, The beginnings of the Greek people, The Minoan–Mycenaean period, Expansion across the Aegean, Myth and religion, Heroic poetry, The age of cavalry, Sea-power, The transformation of economic life, The transformation of cultural life, The growth of larger polities, Tyranny, The foundation of the Persian Empire and of Greek hegemonies, Society and art in the age of the tyrants, and Religious reform and the foundation of scholarship. Here at last was a real interpretative essay, giving the period shape, life, and a proper sense of its intensive and rapid development.

Yet it had serious defects, which re-echo even now. One was an “Aryan” racism which generated some stupefying paragraphs and led him to down-date or to minimize (in marked contrast to Busolt) Phoenician presence and influence in the Aegean and the Mediterranean. A second, more forgivable, defect was an attitude of deep skepticism towards the veracity of the information transmitted in the antiquarian tradition. It led him *inter alia* to down-date much of the traditional chronology of the archaic period, a view which found some adherents but crumbled once the chronology of Greek ceramic artifacts had been established and calibrated against firm dates from eastern Mediterranean sites. A third, in itself commendable and far-sighted, was to proclaim the importance of economic history, but that led him to embrace wholeheartedly the comparison between the growth of the mini-states of central Greece and the growth, institutions, and social dynamics of the Hansa towns, in ways which few could now accept.

All the same, Beloch’s work offered a framework and a model. The trouble was, as became ever clearer in the 1920s and 1930s, that the increasing flow of new
primary documentation, especially of inscriptions and site reports, rendered exhaustive and knowledgeable coverage of the whole of Greek history by one scholar virtually impracticable. As a result, after Beloch the mainstream narrative genre broke apart. One sub-form, the single-author summary narrative of Greek history as a whole, generated authoritative textbooks, some of astonishing longevity, which however inevitably summarized existing knowledge without breaking much new ground. A second sub-form, mostly initiated by publishers for a student market, comprised a series of monographs, each treating a major “period” of two to three hundred years and each written by a specialist. It is this format which has provided the main narrative surveys of archaic Greece since the 1920s. As their chapter headings show, they all share a strong family resemblance. True, there has been evolution, as scholars ceased to attempt to cover the Bronze Age or the Dark Age, or introduced explicit sections on sources, or gave cultural history a higher profile, but all have clearly found their formats being determined more by geography than by theme. Nor was anything very different offered by the third sub-form, the multi-volume, multi-author production shaped and guided by a team of editors. First applied to archaic Greece in vols III (1925) and IV (1926) of The Cambridge Ancient History, and perpetuated in a far more elaborate and extended form in the volumes of the second edition, the material was again, though with a few exceptions, mostly distributed among a series of narrative chapters, each embracing a geographical region. It is striking how little this genre has changed since Grote.

The other main narrative format has addressed the history of regions and single polities. This genre took a long time to emerge from being histories above all of antiquarian traditions and constitutional development, a preoccupation which the publication of the Aristotelian Constitution of Athens in 1890 merely served to perpetuate. What was needed was to marry that approach with a sensibility for landscape and settlement and for archaeological and epigraphic evidence. Perhaps not surprisingly, the first enterprises in that direction reviewed areas where the paucity of evidence from literary sources both encouraged such a marriage and required a long chronological overview: until recently, books on the Western Greeks and on Delos were unusual in surveying the Archaic period only. However, since the 1970s a convergence of historically minded archaeologists and archaeologically minded historians has extended the genre both to well-documented regions and more recently back to regions and epochs where the discourse still has to start from landscape, installations, and artifacts: activity in northern Greece is particularly lively at present, fuelled by surface survey, by the proliferation of local archaeological journals, and by dedicated monograph series.

Other forms of narrative have been marginal. Of course, the Graeco-Persian Wars of 499–479 have been exhaustively treated, but what little is known of other wars has rightly either been accommodated within large-scale narratives or, as with conflicts arising from settlement overseas, been treated as elements of ongoing processes. Likewise, given the fragility of the source material, narratives of individual lives have been near-impossible (Plutarch’s Lykourgos is as imaginary as his Theseus). Only for Solon, for Peisistratos on his own or with the other pre-480 tyrants of the mainland as a group, and for one or two major Athenian figures of the Graeco-Persian Wars has
it been worth making the effort, 27 but even here it has been more a matter of disentangling the processes by which biographical information (or pseudo-information) emerged and was transformed in later sources than of presenting a documented life within its political context and cultural milieu, in the way that is possible for Perikles (just about), Alkibiades, King Agesilaos, or Demosthenes.

Cultural History

Narrative history, even if envisaged within the generation-long blocks of time which are often the smallest practicable units of description for archaic Greek history, is essentially linear. As such it is liable to bypass the constants of life and to underestimate the extent to which habits, values, and expectations differed from our own. One may, for example, take “expectation” literally, for recent studies of ancient demographic patterns suggest that average life expectancy at birth \((e_0)\) was less than 30, with all that that implies for pressures on child-bearing and for the instability of households – experiences that are unfamiliar in societies which have passed through the great demographic transition. Indeed, it is not just that a multitude of such stabilities and differences has to be identified, described, and knitted together before “the narrative” can be adequately framed, but that in many ways, and for many people, the frame is more interesting and important than the (often tentative or trivial) narrative which unfolded within it.

Not surprisingly, therefore, for over two centuries scholars have been attempting to construct that frame. That activity began by assembling the evidence for “antiquities” – constitutional, legal, military, social, and familial – but gradually transformed itself from the 1860s onwards into an attempt to reconstruct the experience of the individual person of Greek antiquity within a network of relationships that embraced family members, neighbors and rivals, friends and enemies, formal and informal communities, and gods and heroes with their powers and rituals. Of course, this scholarly endeavor addressed ancient Greece as a whole, not just the archaic period, and since its main source-material comprised the literary texts of all periods, including later antiquarian writers and essayists such as Pausanias and Plutarch, archaic Greece was only part of the picture. Nonetheless, both because that period offered texts of primordial importance for cultural history (Homer, Hesiod, the lyric and elegiac poets, the earlier Presocratic philosophers, and much of Herodotus’ material), and because scholars rightly saw it as the paramount period during which what was distinctively Greek (institutions, customs, mythic representations) was created and developed, the archaic period has got its due, perhaps even more than its due. It is not chance that *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, 28 the prime work of the main creator of cultural history, Jacob Burckhardt, shows precisely such a chronological bias. It used two closely linked bodies of evidence, Greek religion with its cults and myths, and Greek art and literature, in order to paint a portrait of Greek sensibility and experience, and though there was a lengthy quasi-diachronic sketch of “The polis in its historical development,” Burckhardt’s prime aim was to reject the “tyranny of the historical fact” in favor of identifying mentalities, patterns, and beliefs.
His approach combined with other existing genres of scholarship to generate a hugely influential inheritance, as central to the twentieth-century study of archaic Greece as it is impossible to map coherently. Part of that incoherence derives from the ways in which scholarly interests and agendas have expanded, so that it has become more and more difficult to identify themes and processes round which a unified picture could be drawn. Partly, also, it stems from the existence of ongoing debates within specific subject areas. Some of these have been triggered by seemingly contradictory primary evidence (as when scholars attempt to locate women within an archaic Greek world which presents itself as unthinkingly and overbearingly male), while others, such as the emergence of legal enactments and the partial systematizations of custom, derive from the difficulty of identifying actors and processes through the fog of later tradition and political myth. Partly, again, it derives from radical differences of approach. They are nowhere more divergent than in respect of cult and religion, which may serve as a “worked example.” One strand of scholarship, with the Swedish scholar Martin Nilsson as its doyen, has explored and presented Greek cults and religious practices as a more or less autonomous area of life. A second view, influenced by Durkheim, has seen Greek religion as deeply embedded in society, manipulated by its politicians and serving communal interests first and foremost. A third view, owing much first to Freud and then to Lévi-Strauss, has sought rather to understand how rituals and myths evolve, or are constructed, so as to reflect human desires and assuage their fears, via symbolisms which are largely timeless. A fourth view, taking practicality to extremes, has interpreted cult and ritual above all in terms of redistributing surplus produce, providing a locus for meetings on safe neutral ground, and offering a sanctified mode of maximizing personal or communal prestige via display. In sharp contrast, a fifth view takes Greek spirituality seriously and sees its two main manifestations as being, first, the central role which oracles came to play in Greek public and private life in the archaic period, and, second, the evidently strong appeal which mystery cults and ceremonies of initiation had for Greeks of all classes and both genders. A sixth, complementary view sees the gods of the Greek polytheistic system above all as encapsulations of the powers – psychological as well as external – which affected human life and which therefore had to be neutralized or harnessed as effectively as possible. In truth, all these views have some validity, the proper balance among them being still a deeply elusive grail.

While religion and gender subsequently became standard topics in cultural history, another, more recent Kulturgeschichte (Müller 1976) offered a very different picture of archaic Greece, focused above all on modes of production. With or without its Marxist coloring, by the 1960s that theme had already redirected attention towards foodstuffs, raw materials, agricultural techniques, and dietary needs, thereby bringing the countryside and its inhabitants into the picture in ways which after the Second World War came also to be influenced by the findings of anthropological fieldwork. Likewise, the inter-war years brought awareness that substantial quantities of archaic-period pottery made in Greece were being distributed in all directions across the Mediterranean and that, perhaps in return, Greece was benefiting from imports both visible (e.g. high-value bronzework) and inferred (especially iron from Etruria). Debate about how far such movements constituted “trade,” and therefore about whether
“traders” should be seen as economically (and perhaps even politically) significant, began in the 1950s in belated reaction to Hasebroek’s classic statement of minimalism31 and has continued energetically but inconclusively ever since, generating in its turn what was until recently the principal theoretical construct for interpreting the ancient economy.32 Its terms were further transformed when numismatists brought the adoption of coined money by Greek states down to after ca. 550 BC,33 which renewed the debate about the reasons for its adoption,34 forced scholars to devise coinage-free models of economic growth, and fostered a heightened awareness of the symbolic weight which coinage carried in contemporary texts.35 Equally a growing interest in consumption, the third component of elementary economic description, has generated study of its social contexts, especially of banqueting, symposia, and feasting within sanctuaries,36 and consequently also of the human relationships which such occasions created or formalized.

Here four aspects of such relationships have attracted especial attention. Kingship is one, in proportion as the importance of its post-Homeric survival or re-invention has been belatedly recognized.37 The second is “aristocracy,” a term which appears to reflect contemporary terminology from Homer onwards but has proved hard to define save as a loosely connected set of behaviors affordable only by a rentier leisure class.38 Apart from intermarriage and expedients aimed at retaining and maximizing political power, the most striking among them has been seen as the emergence of a culture of competing in various physical and paramilitary contests, a perception which has yielded much work on the “athletic ideal” and the growth of the Panhellenic Games.39 A third preoccupation, mainly fuelled by the antiquarian tradition about pre-Solonian Athens, attempted to create a credible picture of archaic Greek “pre-state” polities as composed of tribes, clans, brotherhoods, etc. Though carried out with much elaboration and scholarship,40 the task ended in disorder when two studies of the 1970s exposed its illogicalities and showed that such entities, so far from being deep-rooted, were constructs created as part of the processes of systematization and segmentation which yielded the well-organized micro-states of the late archaic and classical periods.41

Instead, a fourth quest, initiated in 1937 and still in active progress, has sought to trace and explain “the rise of the polis.” It has constructively superseded older preoccupations with “constitutional antiquities” and has generated, in the shape of the Copenhagen Polis Project, one of the most important and useful international research projects in Greek studies to crystallize since the Second World War.42 It has also focused attention on “citizenship” as an integral component of the polis as an institution. Belated recognition that the idea is not self-explanatory and may have no straightforward congeners elsewhere in the archaic Mediterranean has taken scholars back to the terminology of the Greek texts, with their repeated use of the phrase “to have a share in the polity,” and thereby towards comparing archaic (and later) Greek states to companies or clubs composed of shareholders who share, equally or unequally, in the benefits and the responsibilities of membership.43

On the whole, since the 1960s cultural history has been more inquisitive about archaic Greece, and more innovative in its techniques, than narrative history. It has addressed at least part of the agenda of social theory by attempting to show how
archaic Greek societies worked as systems. Furthermore, its impact has affected both scholarship as an activity and its modes of publication. Whereas in the 1960s the book and the journal article (both single-authored) predominated, supplemented on occasion by a senior scholar’s collected articles in book format, multi-authored and jointly edited volumes of thematically linked papers (with or without a preceding conference) are now the norm. The Copenhagen Polis Project’s volumes illustrate the transformation. Even more striking have been the planning and publication of two major Italian-edited collective works, Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli’s *Storia e civiltà dei Greci* and Salvatore Settis’ *I Greci*. The material contained in the two relevant volumes of the former begins with a brief section on the post-Mycenaean transition and then offers a sequence of century-long periodizations, each interweaving literary, artistic, and social-economic aspects. *I Greci*, more recent, much larger and more complex, has a first volume, *Noi e i Greci* (1996), which uses a long series of sections in order to map the complex relationships between Greece and Greeks as a real community in past time and Greece and Greeks as they are seen or imagined or used. Its plan thus vividly reflects the preoccupation with the “reception” of a culture by subsequent generations which has deeply affected classical scholarship since the 1980s. Similarly, a second volume, *Formazione* (1996), focusing more precisely on the “archaic period,” explicitly reviews the main components of archaic Greek culture, virtually ignoring narrative as such. After a century in which Burckhardt’s unifying vision was clouded by layers of antiquarian specialization and divergent readings, these and other volumes are performing a valuable service of reunification.

### The Physical Evidence

The last, but in many ways the most important and innovative, current of scholarship for the understanding of Archaic Greece comprises the study of the physical record of sites and artifacts. Here, the rhythm and trajectory of work followed a wholly different pattern, for whereas historians have had their texts ready to hand, published and emended by philologists and papyrologists, students of the physical record had first to find, study, classify, and publish the primary material themselves. While the assumptions accepted, the processes involved, and the categories used have themselves become a matter of debate and analysis, the two main traditional focuses of study – objects and sites – are clear enough and are best sketched separately.

Very broadly, objects came first, driven by the tastes of eighteenth-century collectors and connoisseurs but needing over a century’s worth of assemblage and discussion thereafter before dates and origins could be assigned, while remaining close (perhaps too close) to art-historical agendas. From the late nineteenth century onwards the influx of material from graves and the “big digs” (see below) helped to round out catalogues and to allow robust classifications to be established. Because of its profusion and indestructibility, pottery was a prime focus, and the inter-war and immediate post-war years saw the creation and publication of authoritative guides to the main pottery styles of the archaic period. Such activity, which naturally continues, used the changes in style through time of regional pottery industries in order to create
relative chronologies for the major fabrics, while the appearance of pottery of a given stage in such sequences at sites which were destroyed or founded at known dates\(^48\) has (after much debate) allowed the establishment of absolute chronologies which are nowadays accepted for the major fabrics as accurate to within 10–15 years. Not only can phases of occupation at excavated sites thereby be dated, but also the scatter of pottery sherds which is visible on the ground from the field-walking technique known as intensive surface survey can often give a clear – and sometimes surprising – profile of when a given area was intensely or sparsely inhabited.\(^49\) As with pottery, so also for other objects the first task had to be cataloguing and classifying by genre of object. Much work inevitably ranged widely in time, but the archaic period especially was given system by classic older works such as those on Cretan bronze reliefs, decorations on bronze vessels, *kouroi* statues, or dress pins,\(^50\) followed more recently by comparable general works, e.g. on gems and finger rings, on armor and weaponry, *korai* statues and archaic sculpture as a whole, architectural terracottas, and faïence,\(^51\) and throughout by a steady stream of catalogues raisonnées of material from excavations on specific sites.

Here the second traditional line of study enters. Once the initial phase of identifying on the ground place-names known from literary texts had run its course, what had largely been desultory or treasure-hunting activity was transformed after the 1870s into the systematic exploration and excavation of accessible major sites under the auspices of Greek and Italian authorities or of schools of archaeology sponsored in various ways from abroad. Apart from the “holy rock” of the Athenian acropolis, where Greek investigations go back to the 1830s, the earliest “big digs” were on sanctuary sites – initially Olympia, Delos, and Delphi, later Isthmia, Samothrake, Nemea, Perachora, Artemis Orthia at Sparta, Lindos, and Bassai. Cemetery sites such as Athens’ Kerameikos or Perati followed, as too did investigations of major settlements (in whole or part) such as Priene, Pergamon, Gortyn, Akragas, Selinous, Korinth, the Athenian Agora, Argos, and above all Olynthos.\(^52\) Nearly all of these, of course, were multi-period sites, but especially for the high-status sites the hope of recovering some of the major pieces of archaic or classical-period statuary mentioned by Pausanias or Pliny was a significant factor. Partly as a result, but also because of the need to catalogue and classify the finds, the art-historical agenda has been influential in shaping definitive site-publications, which typically devote a separate volume to each genre of find or each site feature.\(^53\) As a result, while there have been numerous presentations of the (mostly figurative) creations of archaic Greek art,\(^54\) interpretative studies, which reviewed the evidence synoptically and placed sites and artifacts within the framework of human needs and social values, were till recently sadly sparse.

**The Story Evolves**

In consequence, until about the late 1970s each of the three currents of activity described above regarded the others with polite incomprehension, not so much because the primary evidence was diverse as because interpretative skills, intellectual agendas, and cultural assumptions had come to diverge substantially. For “Classical” Greece,
that is still largely true, alas, but the study of “Archaic” Greece is undergoing a revolution. It has become ever clearer that none of these currents can flow much further on its own: they have to be made to converge. It is not a comfortable process, for convergence always creates turbulence. Moreover, since it is still in train, its history cannot yet be tidily written. All that can be offered here is a sketch of its main components, coupled with a warning to the reader that a later sketch in fifteen years’ time may present a very different aspect again.

First, the literary texts. As classical scholars have absorbed, and contributed to, the general transformation of the repertoire of literary criticism by applying ideas of critical theory – “gaze,” “genre,” intertextuality, narratology, “voice,” and so forth – to Greek texts, those texts have come to assume aspects ever more complex, more remote, and less usable by the historian: few could now trustingly construct a portrait of archaic Greece round the post-Homeric poets as Burn did in 1960, not to mention the endless debate about “a historical Homeric society.” Herodotus, too, is increasingly seen primarily as a literary artist whose main concern, to construct an edifice as complex and as grandiose as Homer’s, has rendered it very difficult to assess the truth-value of its component narrative-units (logoi) independently of the roles which they are accorded in his narrative. Since, moreover, the degree of difficulty increases directly with the distance of the dramatic date of this or that episode from his own time, while many of his logoi palpably emanate from earlier processes within Greek communities of re-ordering or recreating their own pasts, at least for the period before ca. 550 historians increasingly sense that they are building on sand. Since later historical texts, such as those deriving from the fourth-century historian Ephoros or the local historians of Athens, are even less reliable, a narrative text-based history of archaic Greece such as Jeffery’s is ceasing to be viable.

One constructive response, which cuts across individual authorial voices and therefore offers the cultural historian greater reliability, has been to study the uses of complex words, both those, such as timê, hybris, kalokagathia, aidôs, aretê, or agôn, which are taken to reflect the behaviors and the “values” of the leisure class and those such as dikê, nomos, euthyna, egyê, or telos, which reflect the ways in which legal and other relationships were conceptualized and managed. However, such studies have also raised the questions whether those “values” were consistent or stable, and whether a different set of non-aristocratic values, appropriate for a yeoman or peasant society, can be identified. A second response, similarly standing back from the individual “author” or creator and assimilating the analysis of texts to that of other artifacts, has been to view images (statuary, bas-reliefs, vase-paintings, etc) not just as illustrations and portrayals, whether of funerals or episodes from myth or of individual gods or mortals, still less as stages of development in accurate anatomical rendering, but as conscious or unconscious representations of what individuals or groups felt were appropriate projections of their identity. This development has broadened the ways in which the relationship between “craftsman” and “patron” or “purchaser” can be seen.

A third response, pioneered in the 1970s and similarly viewing artifacts not as items to be catalogued but as components of a complex interwoven culture, redefined the term “orientalizing” to denote not so much an artistic style, as earlier scholarship
had done, but rather a set of choices and behaviors.$^{62}$ That in turn helped to start
a process of replacing Beloch’s model of largely autonomous cultural development
by one which acknowledged the extent to which archaic Greece borrowed, accepted,
adapted, and transformed a huge range of cultural goods and techniques from her
eastern (and other) neighbors. Though of course the most visible borrowing, that
of the alphabet, has always been acknowledged, and though the scholarly process
has had its excesses, it is serving to locate archaic Greece within the economic and
cultural networks of the Mediterranean and the Balkans so as to offer a radically dif-
ferent “narrative”$^{63}$ and to ask how far Greek political institutions were influenced
by Levantine models.$^{64}$

In turn, that relocation is now offering a very different analysis of the polis from
that described above. Partly, it challenges the conventional view of the city-state as
a Greek creation $sui$ $generis$ rather than as a version of a general development within
the Iron Age Mediterranean, partly it insists on the need to distinguish between
state-formation and the growth of towns, partly it wishes to rebut the portrayal of
the ancient city as “consumer” rather than “producer” which Moses Finley influ-
entially took over from Max Weber, partly it warns against being over-influenced
by later political theory and, therefore, undervaluing the importance of monarchic
and cantonal polities such as Macedon or Aitolia.$^{65}$ As the information from survey
and rescue archaeology and epigraphy increases for patterns of settlement and state-
formation in those regions of “Greek” culture which barely feature in the textual
sources,$^{66}$ this alternative analysis is likely to gather force.

In these ways our understanding is gradually emancipating itself from the inter-
pretative frameworks, amounting all too often to stereotypes, which are offered
consciously or unconsciously by the extant source material. Fittingly (though such
preoccupations are perhaps still too influenced by Herodotus’s anachronistically
polarized picture of sixth-century Greek politics), Athens and Sparta have been the
main focuses. Sparta has benefited most, for a simplistic reading of her society once
based above all upon Plutarch and Aristotle, obsessed with Lykourgos and the “Great
Rhetra,” and in some pre-Second World War quarters identifying politically with a
conservative militaristic society, has been able to shake off the “Spartan mirage,” focus
on Lakonia as a coherent economic region, and see Sparta’s society and government
as lying much nearer to the Greek mainstream.$^{67}$ Instead, the focus of ideological
preoccupations has moved elsewhere, for while the tendency to view the history of
archaic Athens as a series of intricate and insoluble crossword-puzzles has weakened,
her later emergence as the flag-carrier of “democracy” has recently generated a torrent
of publication, the themes of which flow back at least to the pre-480 generation, if
not to Solon. Traditional work of a descriptive and largely antiquarian kind$^{68}$ has
been supplemented by monographs and collective volumes which highlight the
Kleisthenic reforms and steer the reader to compare and contrast Athenian with
modern democracy.$^{69}$ Their purpose is two-fold: both to test the appropriateness of
“democracy” as a descriptive term, whether for ancient polities in general or for Athens
in particular, and (especially from within American scholarship) to hold up a mirror
for contemporary society to use and ponder. As with work on archaic colonization
(see below), the danger of collapsing the past into the present has not always been
avoided, but the debate has had the merit of bringing what are often unstated but powerful assumptions and attitudes out into the open.

Not that revisionism ends there, for other radically different (meta-)narratives have also emerged. Six deserve special attention. The first, Snodgrass’s *Archaic Greece* of 1980, was perhaps the most important, for it took further the convergence of textual evidence with physical evidence by marrying data from various excavated sites or surveyed areas in order to identify various “interacting processes” (p. 55) of change, especially those visible in the fast-moving eighth century: a rise in population, changes in military technology, the growth of sanctuaries, the explosive rise in dedications within them and the corresponding decline in interring valuable objects with the deceased, the recovery of literacy, the growth of monumental temples, major changes in settlement patterns, and so forth. Though some aspects of this portrayal have been challenged, overall, by showing that a unified interpretation using all genres of evidence is both possible and essential, it provided the foundation for a far more satisfying reading. Of especial value was his emphasis on the growth of sanctuaries, which are now being read in terms of usage (cult acts, contests, assemblies, conflict-resolution, statements of status, feasting), user-groups, and changing user-needs, not just in terms of installations and finds.

The impact of literacy has stimulated a second meta-narrative. Prompted by the problem of how and when Homeric poetry came to be written down after a protracted period of oral composition and revision, by the work of Goody and others on the uses made of literacy in different societies, and by the better chronology of extant inscriptions which distinguished epigraphists have given us, a coherent debate about the extent to which being literate changed Greek society has become possible. In turn, this has led to further study of the changing processes and content of formal education, as well as to renewed awareness that effects differed significantly by region. Spartan minimalism, for example, came to contrast strikingly with the abundant flow of dedications set up on the Athenian acropolis before 480, but Crete’s many legal texts may reflect social control and oppression rather than democratization fuelled by literacy.

Warfare, long taken for granted in spite of its prominence in the literary texts and the ubiquity of weaponry in early graves and in sanctuaries, has prompted a third narrative, not focused so much on specific wars (the “Lelantine War” of an earlier generation has largely faded from sight) as on assessing the political impact of its evolving technologies. Though there has been argument about when the trireme emerged, the recognition that serious sea-power wielded by states controlling publicly funded navies barely pre-dated the 540s and 530s and that the predominance accorded to the “naval mob” in the 420s (*Ath. Pol.* i.2) was a fifth-century growth channeled attention on land warfare and especially on the emergence of heavily armed infantry (“hoplites”) as the predominant fighting force. Here scholarly opinion has shown an interesting evolution. Attention focused first on matters of brigading (in what became phalanx formation) and tactics, the mid-seventh century being seen as a major turning-point: this nurtured the hypothesis of a causal link with the emergence of tyrant regimes in Korinth and elsewhere. However, increased awareness that “hoplite” armor and weaponry were well established by the late eighth century, together
with subsequent insistence on the importance of infantry in the narrative of the *Iliad*, made the hypothesis of “political hoplites” increasingly implausible, and fostered an alternative interpretation, couched in social terms, which detected changes in masculinity and social status instead and linked the erosion of the habit of carrying weapons with the growth of leisure class customs such as symposia and ritualized “contesting” at Olympia and other sanctuaries. A simple, perhaps simplistic, explanation has thus given way to one which locates visible behavior within a matrix of symbolisms and (self)-representations.79

The enlargement of geographical horizons, together with the emergence of a reasonably reliable chronology for the Dark Age, is beginning to provide a fourth narrative. Not only is Iron Age and Archaic Crete at last emerging from long neglect,80 but also increasingly detailed archaeological work is bringing the northern mainland, the islands, and the less fashionable parts of Peloponnese back to life.81 Their polities, settlement patterns, and cults are all benefiting from such attention, in a way which complements (but also challenges) the intense preoccupation with the polis which has characterized recent scholarship. It is also allowing the archaic polis as an at least proto-urban settlement to be viewed as the product of a process of concentration of populations,82 a process which must have some connection, not as yet fully understood, with the pressures which created the ethnic identities of the late Archaic and classical periods at the expense of older labels such as Leleges or Lapithai. Indeed, an obsession with “ethnicity” has replaced the earlier discourse about tribes.83

A fifth meta-narrative, not yet fully articulated or appreciated, highlights the recovery and enlargement of craftsman and technological skills, whether in building, in stone statuary, in metalwork in precious or base metals, in ceramics, in mining, in shipping, or in infrastructure projects.84 No economic historian of the archaic period can now fail to acknowledge such progress, not just because it nullifies portrayals of this period of the ancient economy as primitive or static85 but also because it carried two major consequences. First, it stimulated the development of managerial skills, whether in organizing major building projects such as temples or wall circuits or in running workshops and workforces profitably. Second, it drove a major extension of the system of chattel slavery beyond the domestic context which is visible in Homer, for only a bought labor force could be moved forcibly to the locations, whether mines or workshops or households, where extra labor was needed.86 Taken together with recent work on serf societies, both in Lakonia and elsewhere,87 and with the substantial body of known depictions of workplaces, a much fuller view of the roles of labor in production is beginning to emerge.

Archaeological work is also generating a sixth, and the most radical, meta-narrative. Whereas the traditional historian’s instinct is to look backwards from the vantage-point given by written sources, the instinct of archaeologists and of some economic and social historians, influenced by approaches developed within archaeology or adapted from the social sciences, is to look forwards, to construct models which explain development and change, to test them against extant evidence, and to compare the trajectory of one society against that of another. Coupled with an ever more intense interest in the post-Mycenaean “Dark Age,” in “continuity,” and in the construction of ethnicities, it is dissolving the (never very clear) boundary between “Dark Age”
and “Archaic” in favor of portrayals of post-Mycenaean Greece which challenge much conventional wisdom. Two final examples must suffice. The first concerns Greek expansion and settlement overseas, traditionally known by the shorthand term “colonization” and recognized on all sides as a core component of the crystallization of the Greek world before Alexander. Led in part by Herodotus’ detailed narrative of the foundation of Kyrene, historians have seen it as a public process steered by “Korinthians,” “Chalkidians,” and others. However, an alternative view seeks to dismantle it as a guided process, arguing both that historians’ terminology and attitudes have been unduly influenced by nineteenth-century activities and ideologies, that models of “cultural interactions” should replace models of invasion, occupation, or domination, and that antiquarian traditions of datable foundations, of named founders of colonies, and of collective acts by “Korinthians” or “Chalkidians” reflect a later style of foundation and were applied anachronistically to actions which were in fact far more individual and unorganized. A second example cuts even more deeply, by arguing that as applied to any period before the Persian wars, perhaps even before Herodotus’ generation, the term “the Greeks” is an anachronism, asserting a common ethnic identity vis-à-vis the rest of the world which owes more to nineteenth-century nationalisms than to the realities of peoples’ lives and sensibilities. It remains to be seen whether such constructive subversion can also be extended to what still dominates, a reluctance to locate “archaic” “Greece” fully in a comparative perspective.

NOTES

1 Jeffery 1976: 24; but fifth-century authors saw things differently (Bichler 2004a).
2 The comparison, amounting to an interpretative analysis worked out in detail, was made in different ways a century ago by Meyer and Beloch, and was explicit in Ure 1922. Cf. also Burn 1965: 35 ff.
3 Heuss 1946; 1981; I. Morris 1997c.
4 Further detail in Most 1989.
6 Earlier surveys include von Pöhlmann 1902; Lenschau 1905; Bengtson 1950: 1–16; Christ 1972; Starr 1987: 1–17; Gehrke 1995b (on ancient history in general); Ampolo 1996; Ampolo 1997; Raaflaub 1997a; Davies 2000a; Davies 2002.
Beloch 1924: 66–7 with 67 n.1; 94. Not that Beloch was alone: Dinsmoor’s early account of the origins of Greek monumental architecture (1927: chs. 1–2) is equally “Aryan,” as noted by Wright 2003: 39.


“Darum sollte, wer den historischen Werdeprozeß verstehen will, mit dem Studium der Wirtschaftsgeschichte beginnen” (Beloch 1924: 2).

Notably (von) Pöhlmann 1889 (1914), eventually replaced in the Handbuch by Bengtson 1950 (1977); itself soon to be replaced by a multi-volume work by Niemeier, Gschnitzer and Gehrke; Wilcken 1924 (1962) eventually replaced by Schuller 1980, and above all Bury 1900 (1975 revised and corrected reprint 1978).

Thus Glotz-Cohen 1925 for P.U.F. (Pierre Lévéque’s replacement did not to my knowledge appear); Burn 1960; Jeffery 1976 for Benn; Murray 1980/1993 for Fontana/dtv; Osborne 1996a for Methuen; Baurain 1997 for Nouvelle Clio.

E.g. in III: 3, chs. 45a “Economic and Social Conditions in the Greek World” (C. G. Starr) and 45b “The Material Culture of Archaic Greece” (J. Boardman), and in IV 2 a five-section survey (ch. 7) of “Archaic Greek Society.”

E.g. Stählin 1924 (Thessaly); Kophiniotis 1892 deserves honorable mention for its initial pages on the topography, flora, and fauna of the Argolid.

Dunbabin 1948; Gallet de Santerre 1958.

Tomlinson 1972 (Argos); Buck 1979 (Boiotia); Cartledge 1979 (Sparta and Lakonia); Griffin 1982 (Sikyon); Salmon 1984 (Korinth).

E.g. Morgan 1990 (Phokis); Archibald 1998 (Thrace).

Especially Meletemata and Studien zur Geschichte Nordwest-Griechenlands.

E.g. Andrews 1956 (tyrants); Masaracchia 1958 (Solon; cf. Blok and Lardinois 2006); Sancisi-Weerdenburg 2000 or Lavelle 2005 (Peisistratos); Podlecki 1975 (Themistokles); Berve 1937 (Miltiades). Lévéque and Vidal-Naquet 1964 is not really a biography of Kleisthenes.


See ch. 22 for discussion of aspects of religion.

Hasebroek 1928/1933; Boardman 1957; Coldstream 1977: 17–21 for overtly mercantilist language.


Drews 1983; Carlier 1984; Ogden 1997.

Toepffer 1889; Arnheim 1977; Herman 1987; Morris 1996b; Duplouy 2006.

See ch. 27.


Improved travel opportunities, the quest for individual or institutional prestige, and the need for student textbooks have also contributed.


Hannestad 1996; Morris 1996a; Whitley 2001: 60–74 for evidence and references.


For publication details, see OCD or Der Neue Pauly.

Thus also genre-specific monographs or collaborative volumes such as Berve and Gruben 1961 (temples); des Courtils and Moretti 1993 (general); Coulton 1976 (stoa); Lavas 1974, Tomlinson 1976, Marinatos and Hagg 1993, and Alcock and Osborne 1994 (sanctuaries).

E.g. Homann-Wedeking 1968; Charbonneaux et al. 1968; Schweitzer 1969; Robertson 1975; Pedley 1993.


Luraghi 2001c; Bakker et al. 2002; Derow and Parker 2003; Marincola 2006.


Forrest 1968, with bibliography of earlier work; Cartledge 1979; Powell 1989; Powell and Hodkinson 1994; Hodkinson and Powell 1999; Hodkinson 2000; Powell and Hodkinson 2002.


70 For critiques, Anderson 2003; Davies 2003; Rhodes 2003.


74 Cartledge 1978.

75 Whitley 1997 (shorter version Whitley 1998); Davies 2005.


77 The controversy can be followed from Morrison and Williams 1968 via Lloyd 1980 to Wallinga 1992.

78 De Souza 1998.


80 Prent 2005; a far cry from Willetts 1955 or Willetts 1962.

81 See n. 66 above.


83 Hall 1997; Hall et al. 1998; Hall 2002.


85 Sherratt and Sherratt 1993.

86 E.g. Lauffer 1979; Burford 1993; Osborne 1995.


88 See e.g. Deger-Jalkotzy and Lemos 2006.


90 Morgan 2001a; Hurst and Owen 2005.