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**Classical Archaeology**, edited by Susan E. Alcock & Robin Osborne, 2007. (Blackwell Studies in Global Archaeology 10.) Oxford: Blackwell; ISBN-13 978-0-631-23419-7 paperback £20.99 & US\$38; ISBN-13 978-0-631-23418-0 hardback £60 & US\$75; 464 pp., 88 ills.

James Whitley

Cambridge Archaeological Journal / Volume 18 / Issue 03 / October 2008, pp 443 - 444  
DOI: 10.1017/S0959774308000553, Published online: 09 October 2008

Link to this article: [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0959774308000553](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0959774308000553)

**How to cite this article:**

James Whitley (2008). Cambridge Archaeological Journal, 18, pp 443-444 doi:10.1017/S0959774308000553

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### James Whitley

For some, the very title of this volume may seem out of place in a series on 'global archaeology'. For has not Classical Archaeology, that is the archaeology of the Greek and Roman worlds, often seemed an archaeology apart? That Classical archaeology has developed in a manner quite distinct not only from European prehistory but also from historical archaeology; that it has seemed to many of its practitioners to have different, and superior, objects (in both senses of the term) from other archaeologies; these are topics the editors wrestle with in their introduction. Would it not be better to leave the term 'Classical' aside, and instead call this work 'the archaeology of the Iron Age Mediterranean (broadly, 1000 BC–AD 600)'? Would this not better do justice to those other peoples of the ancient Mediterranean world (Phoenicians, Lydians, Lycians, Carians, Sicels, Etruscans, Umbrians, Samnites, and Iberians) too often neglected in standard accounts? And would this not allay the charge of aloofness and elitism that still dogs anything with the word 'Classical' in it? The editors give a clear 'no' to these questions, 'precisely because it is important to acknowledge that the archaeology of the Greek and Roman worlds has a history' (p. 2). Whether we locate Classical archaeology within the classics or within archaeology, it remains entangled with a whole host of meta-narratives about 'the West', democracy, humane values, 'the humanities' and so forth, which cannot lightly be brushed aside.

For this reason, the editors have to be particularly careful about the structure of this textbook. Much more thought has gone into this than, say, its companion volume on Mediterranean prehistory. On the one hand, they have broken with tradition in arranging chapters by theme, and eschewing the more usual focus on objects, arranged by material and type. Yet they have also chosen a Classical (Plutarchian) model for the arrangement of their ten chapters, all but one of which is divided into a 'Greek' and a 'Roman' sub-chapter on a given theme. In general, this arrangement works well. Anthony Snodgrass and Martin Millett both have something new to

say on the question of 'what is Classical archaeology', and Jack Davis and Henry Hurst give vivid accounts of what is actually involved in 'doing' archaeology in Classical lands, concentrating on survey and excavation projects respectively. Lin Foxhall, Hamish Forbes and Martin Jones show the sceptical reader just how much work has gone in to understanding the human ecology of the Mediterranean in recent years, as well as a useful demonstration of how fruitfully ethnographic, epigraphic and archaeological evidence can be combined. The cumulative effect of decades of survey work is also on display in the parallel discussions of the countryside by Sue Alcock and Nicola Terranato. The scope narrows in Tonio Hölscher's and Nicholas Purcell's discussion of 'urban spaces and central spaces', which concentrate on Athens and Rome respectively. 'Housing and households' is an area which Classical archaeologists have made their own in recent years, a fact deftly demonstrated by Lisa Nevett and Bettina Bergmann; and both the diversity and the centrality of 'cult and ritual' to both Greek and Roman life is well illustrated by Robin Osborne and Christopher Smith.

Two points should be noted here. First, there is a heavily 'Cambridge' bias in the choice of authors – both the editors and many other contributors were either students (Nevett, Hall) or colleagues (Millett, Hurst, Cherry, Jones) of Anthony Snodgrass, and may thus not be entirely representative of what the majority of Classical archaeologists actually do. Second, many of the themes are as much historical as archaeological, and many of the best chapters are written by scholars who are thought of primarily as 'historians' (Purcell, Osborne, Smith, Wallace-Hadrill). But there is a good reason for this – the growing recognition that texts, inscriptions and material culture are telling us different things about different aspects of the ancient world, and that the best kind of cultural, social and economic history/archaeology is written by scholars who can command both fields. This is particularly true of the last three chapters, all of which touch on the subject of identity, acculturation and hybridity. In 'the personal and the political', both John Cherry and Penelope Davis deal with the problem of representation, particularly in sculpture. This is not really Cherry's field, so he opts for yet another essay on Alexander the Great. Davis is better at bringing out the cultural connotations of apparently 'realistic' ancient portraits. Jonathan Hall's and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill's is a much more successful pairing on 'the creation and expression of identity'. Wallace-Hadrill's is the best essay in the book, one that fully explains what the long-standing debate on Romanization is all about, while finally giving

the neglected Umbrians their due. Expectations are therefore high when we come to the final chapter, by Sarah Morris and Jane Webster, 'linking with a wider world'. While Webster usefully develops the theme of Romanization in Transalpine Europe and Britain, Morris's lapse into old-fashioned diffusionism, in explaining the 'Orientalization' of the Iron Age Mediterranean, disappoints. The final essay, by the editors, raises the tone with what is, in effect, a rousing speech on the importance of Classical archaeology and Classical studies.

The book then succeeds magnificently in introducing interested readers to what is most intellectually exciting about Classical archaeology at present, and gives the lie to those who think that it is always prehistory that leads, and Classical archaeology that follows, when it comes to theory. Indeed it is precisely because Classical archaeology is historical that theoretical approaches are tested more rigorously than they can be in prehistory. Yet the idea that Classical archaeology is 'untheoretical' persists, for two reasons: one is that many Classical archaeologists still have a distaste for theory, some even believing that archaeology can be practised 'without preconceptions'; the second is that Classical archaeologists, unlike prehistorians, are not in the habit of producing theoretical manifestos at regular intervals, preferring to use theory in specific case studies or within larger historical themes.

Is this then the best way to introduce undergraduates, particularly first-year undergraduates, to the subject? On balance, I would say yes. Undergraduates are more likely to grasp the importance of, say, epigraphy or iconography if an inscription or image is seen to be used within a larger historical theme than if they are introduced to a specific primer on the subject, that begins with letter forms or pottery styles. That having been said, undergraduates still need to know some facts, and will want somewhere they can turn to for them – terms like 'Archaic', 'Hellenistic' and 'red-figure' often turn up unexplained, and no general chronological framework (particularly one that links the material and literary records) is provided. But this book can be used in combination with the many handbooks (such as the excellent Edinburgh companion) on Classical studies, which do not lack for basic facts, so perhaps this is not a major problem.

There is nonetheless a downside on the book's concentration on themes that are as much historical and archaeological. While some subjects are dealt with twice (Roman villas, survey), many of the major methodological innovations of Classical archaeology of recent years are simply neglected. Interested

readers will get little sense of how ceramic petrology has transformed not only the study of ancient trade, but of the question of acculturation and technology transfer; the importance of alphabetic literacy, and the diversity of epigraphic habits within the ancient Mediterranean, is not highlighted; and the contextual analysis of pottery and mortuary practices is hardly touched upon. There is moreover little sense of the sheer oddity of regional patterns within the Iron Age Mediterranean (Cyprus, Crete, Macedonia or Sardinia), patterns which often diverge sharply from an Athenian or Roman norm, and of the attempts by scholars to deal with the strange cases that archaeology throws up.

More peculiar is the neglect to address the central question of art – one of the features that has defined Classical archaeology for centuries. Though many objects conventionally classified as 'art' (such as statues) are discussed, the validity of the term itself for distinguishing between the classy and less-classy objects of the ancient world is not. Certainly, the Greeks before 300 BC had no term corresponding to our term 'art', and what the Romans chose to call art does not in large part correspond with how modern scholars classify the material remains of the ancient world. But the answer here might lie in the Cambridge connexion. Robin Osborne's close colleague, Mary Beard, has for decades now been promoting the concept of 'Classical art history' as a subject distinct from archaeology. She has dressed the traditional image of Classical archaeology in a new *peplos* of post-modernism, and given her literary colleagues leave to treat the material and visual representations of the ancient world as a kind of 'text'. It might seem, to a Cambridge colleague, little short of a sacrilege to criticize, and so to desecrate, this image.

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