BEYOND THE TYRANNY OF THE TEXT:
Complicating the historical record with material culture

Understanding the ancient world in full requires more than classical texts, epigraphy, and papyrology to consider the wider material world of antiquity. For a classical archaeologist invited to join this panel, using material culture in the classroom has long been a habit. But as ancient history risk more and more marginalized, or miniaturized, within academic curricula and university faculties, I believe we should all apply our minds and classrooms as to how material culture might help rescue ancient history from extinction.

In order to do so, we need to interrogate how we currently use it, in many kinds of classes. Too often a "top-down approach" turns to images or monuments primarily to *illustrate* an important event or principle recorded in texts**.** *A vivid recent example would be the mass grave unearthed by excavations for the Athens metro, surely a sad sign of the plague of 427 BC.* Instead, material culture may offer *contradictions* of an ancient "fact," provoking a more critical confrontation with an ancient text, a stimulus to research when such discrepancies become a fresh lesson. *In another recent case, a fresh reading of the archon list of 525 BC (see recent article) now eliminates an Alcmeonid name, once touted as an exception to the historical record of the exile of this family between Cylon and the fifth century (Herodotus)*. Moreover, while innovative visual aids now enrich many different disciplines, and these techniques help students imagine and explore ancient environments, some reconstructions tend to homogenize or simplify ancient life. *Most conspicuous is the flattening of social inequalities within communities in reconstructions of ancient cities, as in the "Haus und Stadt" publication (Hoepfner and Schwandner 1994).* As social scientists we need to monitor how we sample evidence for instruction, and whether or not it may skew social realities.

I have chosen three subjects from the ancient world where a Greek text has become iconic or exemplary—the political and cultural hegemony of Athens versus Sparta, the social environment of Greek domestic life (including the visibility of women and slaves), and the physical health and urban history of populations across the Greek –barbarian divide. I hope to provoke debate from recent research as it contributes to the classroom experience.

FIGURE 3: Thucydides I.10: Sparta vs. Athens?

Too often, this famous passage from Thucydides is introduced to justify a classroom focus on the monuments of classical Athens, and/or neglect of matters Spartan. In fact, the historian was gauging the leadership of the Trojan expedition against Agamemnon's measly kingdom of Mycenae, by invoking contemporary Sparta. In maligning the paltry might of Athens, Th. also became the first to lament the extravagance of the Acropolis program and other classical temples. [This puts him in good company with Plutarch, or at least his source for his report of Athenian discontent with the building program in *Pericles* 12-14, 31]. This passage makes the historian something of a pioneer in the interpretation of history from monuments, and in the use of the present to understand the past. His intent was hardly to discourage us from exploring Laconia, although that has been its effect.

Here I confess that I devoted my first scholarly effort to "hollow Lakedaimon" and her epic, archaic persona, one defined, or so I claimed, as an early maritime power, eclipsed by her later land forces (Morris 1984)**.** For if history is indeed written by the victors, the notorious laconic Spartans, famous for the shortest speech in Thucydides ("we disagree with the Athenians…"), may yet have the last word. But what about the monuments the city is reported to have raised? Here Roman sources serve us better than Greeks, thanks to Vitruvius and Pausanias, who report on famous structures now lost (to which only Joseph Gandy has done justice, in his imaginative view of Sparta as a glorious city). Moreover, surviving monuments (see "Leonidas"; plan of Acropolis, theatre, walls) suggest an impressive material record in classical architecture and sculpture. Concentrated research by archaeologists who ignored Thucydides, including intensive survey in Laconia by the British School at Athens (map), over several decades, reveals a landscape thickly settled over time (Cavanagh et al. 1996, Cavanagh et al. 2002, Cavanagh et al. 2005). So I would suggest we introduce this phrase in Thucydides, not as yet another tribute to Athens and her monuments, but as an opportunity to share with students how much the "Spartan mirage" deserves materialization.

My second topic introduces that perennial yet invisible factor in Greek civilization, slavery. A commonplace of modern instruction on the classical past is for us to praise Greek society for promoting *isonomia*, *isegoria*, and other civil rights, then lament that it did so at the expense of women, slaves, metics and other non-citizens. Plenty of texts and images offer us ways to insert the disenfranchised into the study of history. But we need to do more than (as feminists used to say in the early days of gender studies) "add women and stir," as if that will instantly improve the mixture we prepare and offer to students, update classics, and change history. What methods might enliven and complicate this enterprise, in a way to engage future classicists?

If we take Pseudo-Xenophon at his word in his oft-cited remarks (1.10), citizens and slaves could not be distinguished from each other on the streets of Athens. Yet our instincts and other sources tell us otherwise, since special garments are associated with slaves in Aristophanes (*Lys.* 1150, *Eccl.* 725), and allow us to identify some non-Greek figures of servile status in art (Hegeso stele). Meanwhile, we have done our best to distinguish class and status among figures portrayed at work and at play (on Greek vases), but doubts linger.

What about the Greek home, where we suspect slaves were constant, if invisible? Here we run into the intriguing intersection of gender and class in the Greek household: A much-cited passage in a defense speech by Lysias (VII, *On the Murder of Eratosthenes*) locates men and women on separate floors of at least one Greek house: upstairs-downstairs, reversed in this episode allegedly to keep a mother and her troublesome baby downstairs, in reality to allow a wife to have her lover visit her on the ground floor at night (with fatal consequences for her visitor). Another famous passage in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* (9.5) not only alludes to different areas of the house for men and women, but recommends separating male and female slaves by a locked door, to discourage after-hours socializing (i.e, to reduce unlimited reproduction: an economic measure). How does this allow us to identify different areas and activities of the Greek house, as excavated in numerous locales? (**FIG.** Olynthos, Delos). As scholars have sadly concluded, not very much at all.

Instead, in another much cited passage in Pseudo-Demosthenes 47.56, *therapnai* inhabit a tower, lock themselves in during a raid on their owner's property: as females, or slaves? Among the many scholars who have tried to realize this passage against excavated houses and farms, John Papadopoulos and I have proposed a way to use this episode to understand conditions under which slaves were kept in the Greek countryside, in connection with towers (Morris and Papadopoulos 2005). While our research does not prove or disprove that Greek rural towers are inevitably connected with slaves, the patterns we detected do demonstrate that such structures coincide with labor-intensive landscapes (devoted to mining, quarrying, and viticulture) where slaves were essential, and are conspicuously absent from environments (such as Laconia) that employed a permanent servile population in the countryside. In the classroom, these issues bring the countryside into the study of an ancient culture largely celebrated in urban texts, monuments and *polis*-centered thought.

FIG: MAP (colonization: Apollonia, Colchis, Macedon)

Finally, my last example opens outside the Greek polis proper to shake up some common notions about Greeks and barbarians, by introducing physical anthropology. When Jason reminds Medea that he rescued her from barbarism by bringing her to Greece (Eur. *Medea* 534-8), or Alexander reminds the Macedonians of what his father did (Arrian *Anab*. 7.9— Philip found them wandering in skins up in the hills, and brought them down to live in cities--) we should beware of taking such statements as some of kind of ancient ratification of the privileges of Hellenism and life in Greek cities. If we examine life outside the polis, among human populations unearthed at the colonial interface, surprises are in store.

The Greek colony of Apollonia in Illyria (Albania), later under Roman control, is well-explored for its classical monuments (**FIG.**). It is also home to hundreds of burials (**FIG**), where Greek colonists adjusted their burial habits to local taste (they continued to use limestone sarcophagi, as in Corinth, but now buried their dead under Balkan-style tumuli). Bioarchaeology offers a sobering health report on human populations at colonial Apollonia, especially in comparison with indigenous tribes both at Apollonia and at the Illyrian burial mound at Lofkënd in the nearby Mallakastr hills (Schepartz 2009a, b). Those skeletons

buried near Apollonia showed higher dental hypoplasia (signs of stress registered in tooth enamel growth rings) and higher levels of cribra orbitalia and porotic hyperostosis (signs of bone loss), due to either poor nutrition (dietary anemia), environment, and/or disease (malaria is likely, given the coastal marshland at Apollonia, the reason it was eventually abandoned). While environment plays a likely role, and signs of pathology increase over time (more recent, early modern skeletons also exhibit poor health), the contrast raises interesting questions. Were early pastoralists native to the mountainous Balkans actually healthier (thanks to a diet rich in milk protein, low in carbohydrates, and a more active/ambulent lifestyle?) than their sedentary descendants living in a Greek polis? Should we conclude that Philip's Macedonians should have stayed in the hills, Euripides' Medea in flock-rich Colchis, and the Illyrians up in the hinterland?

Not quite, for a major question remains beyond archaeological reconnaissance: whose skeletons, precisely, are found at Apollonia?? According to Aristotle (*Politics* 4.4 [1290b]), the city was more of an oligarchy than a democracy, ruled by a minority of high-born descendants of the first settlers, who dominated a larger indigenous majority. The burials excavated in tumulus 9-11 exhibit a significant drop in skeletal health in the archaic period, after colonization, when compared to the prehistoric population, but it remains difficult to tell whether Greek colonists, local natives, or offspring of mixed unions are the ones in poor health. At the very least, these statistics should caution us against the recent "progressive" view of the democratic lifestyle (defended by I. Morris and Scheidel in papers at the same 2010 APA convention, and in Ober's presidential address: see now Morris 2010, Ober 2010), and force us to consider factors other than house size or tomb wealth in assessing the ancient economy. The point is to explore what precisely defined "civilization" in classical antiquity, what its important legacy is for us, in terms of democratic principles and procedures, and conventions of human society.

Conclusion

The point of my presentation is neither to display in triumph how archaeology trumps history, or material culture subverts the text, nor to advocate abandoning textual history in

favor of a “data-first” approach, or one that ignores text entirely (as advocated by recent critics of “text-hindered archaeology”, who promote instead a “text-free zone” of research…). I prefer the term “complicate” to describe the relationship of text, to draw us all in to re-consider Aristotle and Thucydides, their motives and methods, and appreciate how much the field can change as new methods introduce material culture to history.

Making antiquity come alive in the classroom is no longer a distant challenge: the ancient world is more visible than ever on stage, in film, fiction and popular history. But the field of ancient history, and ancient art, continues to shrink within the academic community of historians and art historians. (Here I indicate not so much the vulnerability of positions in ancient history, but the immersion of the field within world history initiatives: it has virtually disappeared as a separate rubric within the fields reviewed annually in the *American Historical Review*, where it is now grouped with medieval history, as premodern Europe shrinks within the horizons of research and teaching). Let’s face it, we still represent, as Bernard Knox put it dismally but memorably in a 1993 book title, the “oldest dead white males” on the planet. Moreover, while teaching classics in translation has expanded our reach and continues to attract students, such that departments of Classics are often far healthier in enrollments than divisions supporting European languages such as German and Russian, we still struggle to save ancient language instruction on university campuses (currently imperiled in public institutions in New York and Wisconsin). Our greater challenge is to make material culture an ally in the campaign for a broader base of support for ancient studies, not necessarily by turning students into historians or archaeologists, but by creating an active research community where learning Greek and Latin is closely tied to other means of understanding the ancient world.

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