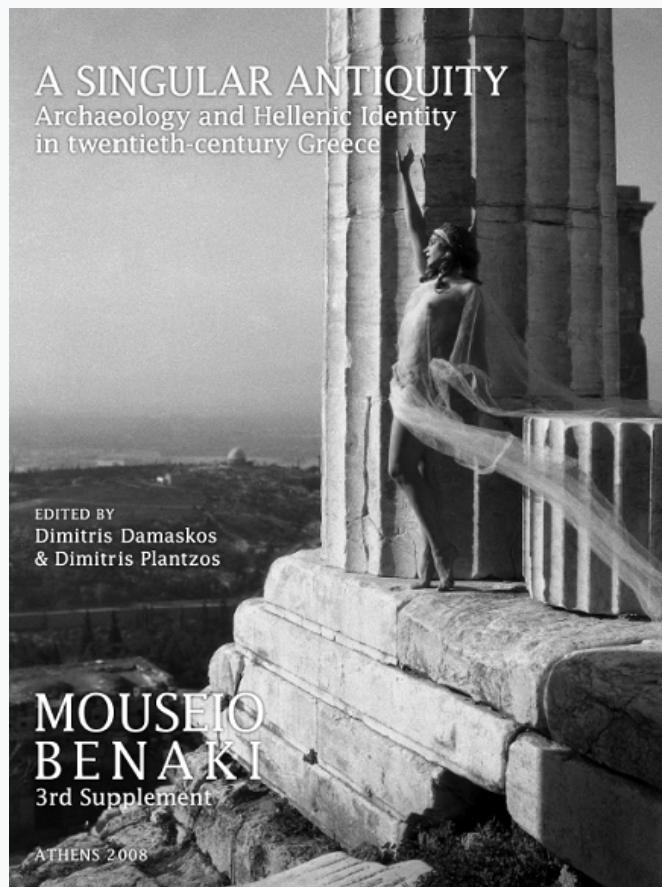


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Ancient texts, classical archaeology and representation of the past: the development of a dialogue

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Ancient texts, classical archaeology and representation of the past: the development of a dialogue

IN HIS BOOK ENTITLED *Hellados Periegesis* (*Tour of Greece*), Pausanias included a short passage¹ on gilded wooden statues of Dionysus, called *xoana* in Greek, displayed in the marketplace of Corinth. The concept of the *xoanon*, a primitive wooden image, has been an important part of the theories developed by classical art historians and archaeologists alike about the origins of Greek sculpture. Based on the many references to *xoana* in ancient literature, it is thought that these basic wooden statues of the gods marked the beginning of Greek interest in statuary. But unlike these traditional but popular ideas, A.A. Donohue, in a book about *xoana* published in 1988, has examined the ancient sources in detail and has found that the word *xoanon* can refer to all sorts of things, from a high degree of craftsmanship in any material to primitive wooden images. The word changes its meaning over time, and *context* is vital in understanding its meaning. Thus, Donohue has replaced a single meaning with a multilayered one; instead of similarity she suggests heterogeneity. The idea of the primitive wooden statue as the predecessor to classical Greek sculpture has been shown to be the result of scholars focusing on certain texts to the exclusion of others and reading these texts in a 'closed', stereotypical way. Donohue's reading may mean that the term *xoanon* now has little archaeological value, but close contextual scrutiny of written sources in which the word is found can shed light on Greek attitudes towards images. As M. Shanks has put it 'Donohue's negative findings about the theory of early Greek sculpture turn out to be very positive for the historiography of classical art'.²

This is one of many examples that we could use in or-

der to demonstrate the change of attitudes towards classical texts witnessed in recent years. Together they mark the beginning of a different approach to ancient written sources and the understanding that our insight into the ancient world cannot be as straightforward, objective and unobstructed as we used to think, when following what we might term the 'traditional stance'.

Since the Renaissance classical texts have been central to all attempts at understanding the Graeco-Roman past. The ancient texts that have survived have been used to analyze, interpret and understand the ancient world. They have been treated as 'traces of the past', equal to and sometimes more important than the ancient ruins and other remnants, by comparison with which they have been thought to offer a direct and unmediated access to the past 'as it really was'. This traditional approach, in its search for the 'true' ancient world, has put itself within a historical discourse that searches for the 'truth' of the past. Thus, by creating 'objective' representations of this world, the temporal distance between the past and the present becomes of primary importance and the researcher is asked to achieve objectivity without perspective.

This way of thinking has been central in the construction of archaeological methodology and narrative in Greece. Classical archaeology has been developed within the academic and intellectual realm of *Altertumswissenschaft*, as a branch of Classics, with an unspoken assumption as to the primacy of the ancient sources³ which can be read and understood 'as they are'. This understanding of classical philology and history gave academics the tools to 'possess' ancient Greece and to trace a line of power from

it; texts became central to the construction of the national (archaeological) narrative. These tools are still in use in the methodology of classical archaeology in Greece, even though philology and history have changed, or are in the process of changing their attitudes towards the past and their understanding of the written sources.

Post-modern approaches, developed mainly from the seventies onwards in relation to subjects such as literature, anthropology, linguistics, sociology, psychoanalysis and so on, have influenced archaeology and have led to a re-evaluation of its theoretical framework and methods. My aim is not to examine the theoretical and methodological developments in archaeology or classical literature, but to highlight the fact that these have influenced not only the way ideas about history and the past are understood, but also the relationship between classical archaeology and ancient texts. Issues, such as the nature of ideas, the relationship between language and what it describes, the power of words to exceed the limits of their meaning, the idea that material culture can be understood and analyzed as text, along with different constructions of the historical past, have offered classical archaeology and literature alike a series of epistemological tools that have empowered new readings of ancient texts and the material world and have contributed to the realization of a new relationship between classical archaeology and classical sources. These readings are based on a greater self-awareness on the part of the reader and they have made the issue of interpretation a central one. Thus, understanding the role and importance of the written past becomes even more complicated when we approach it in terms of the philosophy of history, whereas the notion of representation poses a series of important questions, most important of which is the idea of rhetorical analysis. It is therefore necessary for classical archaeology, too, to reconsider the role of the ancient sources and to develop new approaches to their understanding and evaluation. Consequently, the relationship between ancient texts, classical archaeology, national narrative and perceptions of the past will be redefined and understood from a different perspective.

It is the aim of this paper to present an alternative approach to the reading of ancient written sources for the purposes of classical archaeology. The argument will be based on the notion of representation; I will use hermeneutics and in particular the ideas of Paul Ricoeur⁴ to support it. A brief discussion of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, will serve as an example.

The traditional approach: representation as *mimesis*

Representation is the term used to describe the process whereby members of a common culture use language or some other system of signs to produce meaning. Aristotle in his *Poetics* and Plato in his *Republic* and other dialogues connect representation to *mimesis*; they suggest that representation is a faithful reproduction of a natural source of truth. This idea acquires a central role in Western thought, so much so that in the future the search for the truth, for the unmediated presence, becomes the centre of philosophical analysis. Thus, the temporal character of the present presence acquires primary importance and truth is the visible presence of real things. Therefore, what is real is experienced in the present. Whatever existed in the past but does not exist any more can be regained through the semiological practices of *mimesis*, through 'traces' that remain.

Within this line of thought, there are two basic axioms that develop: material culture, i.e. objects, is considered a carrier of self-evident truth, and the past can be understood/approached only through extant traces (objects and written texts) of it. The material presence of the trace vouches for its objectivity, offering access to a stable and, most importantly, accessible world. This is the 'mimetic' or 'reflective' approach of the theory of representation, where meaning is confined to its carrier and language operates as a mirror to reflecting the real, the authentic meaning that already exists.⁵

The 'reflective approach' has influenced archaeology and history alike. The task of the archaeologist has been defined as being to discover and present the past 'as it really was'.⁶ Archaeology and history depend upon evidence, i.e. the trace of the past that survives in the present and delineates them. We are able to define the trace as what is left by the past, and, therefore, what 'stands for it' or 'represents it'.⁷ The study of those traces, of the evidence, be they material or documentary, suffices to constitute history and archaeology as heuristic discourses different from the natural sciences. So powerful has been the impact of this documentary character in those disciplines, that positivism claims that we should allow the facts to 'speak for themselves' and that the ideal picture of the past would be the one that we could produce if we collected all the facts, or at least as many as possible to make it transparent and self-evident.⁸

The trace has been studied by the historian⁹ in epistemological terms, in the sense of its value as evidence, rather than ontologically, that is in the sense of it being a source of a kind of knowledge with indirect referential character. These ideas have influenced the aims and methodology of classical archaeology; they have influenced the creation of archaeological and historical museums, and as it was only natural, they have influenced the relationship between classical archaeology and ancient written sources. Archaeological material has been used to fill the gaps in the knowledge transmitted through the written sources (mainly on issues of everyday life), whereas texts offered social or other models that the archaeological material was expected to validate.

Alternative approaches to representation

The theory of *mimesis* in representation, despite its undoubtedly pre-eminence, has not remained without criticism. We could present different voices or tendencies in a synoptic way, by identifying three other theoretical trends.¹⁰ One has developed alongside the positive sciences, and aims to create models, abstract and generalized representations of the world. This theoretical tendency has relied on the idea that the 'real' *does actually exist*, but discovering it relies on formulating a theory that allows each interested person to decode it. New Archaeology was informed in large part by these ideas, relying as it did on methods imported from statistics, geography and the information sciences in an attempt to create a methodology that would allow archaeologists to overcome the flaws of 'traditional archaeology' and provide reliable information about human activities in the past.¹¹

The second trend is a negation of the theory of *mimesis* and proposes the idea that the only existing reality is the power of the researcher. His/her work is to formulate the narrative or the meta-narrative and thus to construct the real which will reflect their personal, subjective presence. The main emphasis is now transferred from the method of representation to the idea of representation and the person who undertakes this responsibility. In order to understand the past, we have to create narratives and then read them. The relationship between the narrative and the trace acquires primary importance, whereas the trace itself is studied ontologically. This view, by giving pre-eminence

to the individual and by questioning the existence of an unmediated reality, often leads to a fragmentary notion of the world and a complete inability to create a definitive strategy and methodology which will allow its description and understanding. It leads, according to many of its opponents, to denial of the content and to the idea of the collage. In archaeology this trend can be related to what has been called 'post-processual archaeology', i.e. a theory that cares about the projection of the present onto the past, the subjective construction of the past in the present and the role of the subjective past in power strategies today. Indigenous archaeologies, feminist archaeologies, post-colonial archaeologies and so on, offer alternative perspectives on the past, while archaeologists have been concerned about their own role in the construction of objectivity and truth.¹²

The third tendency has as its starting point the philosophical approach of hermeneutics. It rejects *mimesis* completely while recognizing the significant role of the interpreter. However, it does not share the idea of the presence of a universal, objective and neutral researcher, nor the complete absence of interpretative possibility and absolute relativism favoured by the previous approach. It recognizes that interpretation is a dialogue between the data and the person who interprets it. This dialogue though is not an entirely personal affair, as the followers of the previous approach suggested, but is understood within a specific environment which can be the spiritual or cultural environment of a specific time and place or the environment of a specific institution (e.g. the museum), or even of a specific academic discipline (e.g. classical archaeology) at any given time. This approach has led to 'contextual archaeology', which aims to identify methods for studying contexts in order to interpret meaning. 'Contextual meaning' refers first to the environmental, technological and behavioural context of action and second to the analogy between material cultural traits and the meaning of words in a written language.¹³

Taking into account the weaknesses of representation as *mimesis* on the one hand and the shortcomings of representation as seen through the positive sciences and post-modernity on the other, we will now focus on the last category in order to examine how hermeneutics and the idea of representation that it suggests can lead us to a different approach to the relationship between classical archaeology and literary sources. In the presentation of these ideas I shall use, as I have already mentioned, the ideas of Paul

Ricoeur. The choice of his work is not accidental; Ricoeur follows the tradition of hermeneutics developed by Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer. He builds upon Gadamer's critique that meanings interpreted are not restricted to the strategies and intentions of past actors and he claims that interpretations are situated historically in the past and in the present. In addition, Ricoeur has introduced the understanding of human action with reference to text, i.e. situated communication, and his work has been extensively used in support of contextual archaeology. Therefore, his views are considered to form a particularly interesting methodological tool for this analysis.

Interpretation and representation according to Ricoeur

Ricoeur responded to what he considered the inadequacies of structuralism¹⁴ by developing a hermeneutical approach, which addresses precisely these weaknesses. His ideas stem from a theory of language based on the sentence and on the fundamental distinction between system and discourse.¹⁵ According to Ricoeur,¹⁶ all discourse is produced as an event, making it the counterpart of language, but is understood as meaning. Initially the notion of meaning may be analyzed into two basic dimensions, comprising both an objective aspect, or that which the sentence means, and a subjective aspect, or that which the speaker means.¹⁷ Following Frege,¹⁸ Ricoeur further distinguishes between two components of the objective aspect of meaning: the sentence has both an ideal sense and a real reference. It is only at the level of the sentence that language can refer to something, that the closed universe of signs can be related to an extra-linguistic world.¹⁹

‘The “objective” side of discourse [...] may be taken in two different ways. We may mean the “what” of discourse or the “about what” of discourse. The “what” of discourse is its “sense”, the “about what” is its “reference”’.²⁰

This distinction is directly connected to that between semiotics and semantics. As opposed to language, where signs refer only to other signs, discourse refers to the world. This dimension of discourse is further linked to the creativity of language, and to the necessity for interpretation.

The polysemy of words inherent in any natural language

is linked simultaneously in a process where ambiguity is reduced through interpretation, and by extension through metaphor. Ricoeur challenges the traditional idea, which sees metaphor as a type of trope, and argues that it is a semantic innovation, which takes place at the level of the sentence.²¹ ‘Metaphor is [...] a contextual change of meaning’;²² not the actualization of one of the meanings of a polysemic word, but a solely contextual action opposed to lexical changes.²³ Thus Ricoeur's working hypothesis proceeds ‘from metaphor to text at the level of “sense” and the explanation of “sense”, then from text to metaphor at the level of reference of a work to a world and to a self, that is, at the level of interpretation proper’.²⁴

Ricoeur turns to hermeneutics for his concept of the text. The text is a work of discourse, and hence it is a *work*: a structured totality irreducible to the sentences whereof it is composed, with a codified form, which characterizes its composition, and produced in a unique configuration which can be called its style.²⁵ Unlike the ‘logocentric’ tradition criticized by Derrida,²⁶ Ricoeur does not prioritize the spoken discourse over the written; they are alternatives and both equally legitimate. But being written discourse, text is characterized by four traits, the four forms of *distanciation*: i) the fixation of meaning as opposed to the event of saying; ii) the dissociation of meaning from the mental intention of the author; iii) the non-ostensive nature of the text's references and iv) the universal range of the text's audience.²⁷ These features provide the text with an autonomous status and determine Ricoeur's theory of interpretation.

According to the first two forms of *distanciation*, the ‘objective’ meaning of the text is different from the ‘subjective’ meaning of its author.²⁸ Hence ‘the problem of the right understanding can no longer be solved by a simple return to the alleged intention of the author’.²⁹ Furthermore the other two forms lead to two attitudes toward the text: the first is that of structuralism, that is an attempt to explain the text through its internal relations; the second is to turn from ‘sense’ to ‘reference’ and to seek to understand the world toward which the text points. This is what Ricoeur calls ‘interpretation’.³⁰

This line of thought leads to a series of important conclusions. First, it means that Ricoeur does not exclude structuralism, but accepts its methodology, although not as the complete answer. Second, it bridges the contradiction between explanation and interpretation, which had

been a very distinct difficulty in the early hermeneutics. Third, Ricoeur changes the emphasis, from the ability of the reader to enter into the spiritual life of the writer to the world, which the work unfolds.

The culmination of Ricoeur's interpretation theory is his views on appropriation, which he defines as:

'[T]he process by which the revelation of new modes of being [...] gives the subject new capacities for knowing himself. If the reference of a text is the projection of a world, then it is not in the first instance the reader who projects himself. The reader is rather broadened in his capacity to project himself by receiving a new mode of being from the text itself'.³¹

As a result, and in conjunction with hermeneutics' efforts to reduce cultural distance and historical alienation, interpretation is understood as a process of 'bringing together', 'equalizing', 'rendering contemporary and similar'.³²

'To understand is to follow the dynamic of the work, its movement from what it says to that of which it speaks. Beyond my situation as reader, beyond the situation of the author, I offer myself to the possible mode of being-in-the-world which the text opens up and discloses to me. That is what Gadamer calls the 'fusion of horizons' [...] in historical knowledge'.³³

With this definition, Ricoeur does not aim to avoid the structure known in the Romantic hermeneutic tradition as the 'hermeneutical circle'. The thinkers of that tradition believe that the understanding of a text cannot be an objective procedure, in the sense of scientific objectivity, but that it was determined by a prior understanding on the part of the reader producing a circle between self-understanding and text-understanding. Ricoeur embraces this idea, which he identifies with appropriation, but he disagrees with the idea that the 'hermeneutical circle' connects the subjectivities of the author and the reader on the grounds that 'the emergence of the sense and the reference of a text in language is the coming to language of a world and not the recognition of another person'.³⁴ Secondly, he disagrees with the idea that the projection of the subjectivity of the reading itself relates to the previous suggestion.

'To understand oneself in the face of a text is quite the

contrary of projecting oneself and one's own beliefs and prejudices onto it; it is to let the work and its world enlarge the horizon of the understanding which I have of myself. [...] Thus the 'hermeneutical circle' is not repudiated but displaced from a subjectivist level to an ontological plane. The circle is between my mode of being – beyond the knowledge which I may have of it – and the mode opened up and disclosed by the text as the world of the work'.³⁵

Consequently, interpretation encompasses both the apprehension of projected worlds and the advance of self-understanding in the presence of these new worlds.

Ancient documents and historical reality

Ricoeur distinguishes between three tropes of historical writing: History-as-Same, History-as-Other and History-as-Analogue.³⁶ Each of these is characterized by a particular understanding of the relationship between past and present, or rather each attributes a different status to the written past.³⁷ The first form, History-as-Same, is related to the re-enactment of the past in the present. It follows the idea of Collingwood,³⁸ and calls for a conception of the past as history's *absent partner*.³⁹ By re-enactment, Ricoeur⁴⁰ means the *rethinking* of events, and definitely not their reliving. In order to reach this conclusion Ricoeur poses the question: 'Of what are the documents the trace?', only to answer immediately: 'they are the traces of *thought*', or what he calls the 'inside of events'. Naturally, physical action cannot be ignored, so Ricoeur suggests that thought and physical changes together form *action*. The term 'thought' is defined very broadly to include motivation, intentions, desires. Thus, the historian has to think of himself in action, in order to discern the thought of its agent. Thus, we are able to claim that knowing *what* happened is knowing *why* it happened.⁴¹

These limitations on the concept of historical evidence lead to the idea of re-enactment, which means rethinking and incorporates the critical moment; this remains far from being a methodological tool. Re-enactment abolishes the temporal distance between past and present by re-thinking what was once thought, and becomes the 'medium' of survival for the past in the present: 'One could say, paradoxically, that a trace becomes a trace of the past only when its pastness is abolished by the intemporal act of re-

thinking the event as thought from inside. Re-enactment, understood in this way, resolves the paradox of the trace in terms of identity; while the phenomenon of the mark, the imprint, and that of its perpetuation are purely and simply sent back to the sphere of natural knowledge'.⁴²

In opposition to re-enactment stands the concern with recovering the sense of temporal distance.⁴³ History in this sense attempts to make the past remote from the present and to produce an effect of strangeness. Thus, looking for the past becomes a sort of ethnological enquiry, at the service of the historian who attempts a spiritual decentring of our traditional Western history.⁴⁴ Consequently, the idea of temporal distance is understood today in similar terms to the idea of the Other. This becomes the best analogue of historical understanding. Thus, the special characteristic related to the survival of the past in the present is eluded. Moreover, the otherness in this sense introduces the idea of difference, and we pass from the pair same-other to the pair identity-difference.⁴⁵ The idea of difference may serve several uses. Ricoeur considers two of them: the question of individuality and deviation. He argues that: 'in order for the individual to appear as difference (*sic*), historical conceptualisation must itself be conceived of as the search for and the posing of variants. [...] The historical fact would then have to be grasped as a variant generated by the individualisation of those invariants'.⁴⁶

As far as deviation is concerned, it leads to a philosophy of history where the past is a 'pertinent absence'.⁴⁷ But the question remains: 'how could a difference take the place of something which today is absent and lost, but once was real and living, being itself relative to an abstract system and as detemporalised as possible?'.⁴⁸

The difficulties inherent in both History-as-Same and History-as-Other can be overcome by History-as-Analogue. In order to define Analogue, we have a rhetorical theory of tropes, in which the primary position is held by metaphor.⁴⁹ Ricoeur is concerned about the idea of reconstructing the past, and in his attempts to elucidate this he relies on the efforts of White to present the 'representative' dimension of history through the theory of tropes.⁵⁰ Ricoeur uses his ideas on History-as-Analogue to bridge the gap between his theories of narrative and metaphor. More specifically, in the *Rule of Metaphor*, he argues that metaphor makes an ontological claim and has a referential import.⁵¹ He hopes that the concept of refiguring time

through narrative – i.e. the core of his mimesis III⁵² – will be enriched by an enquiry into the role of figures in the constitution of the relation 'taking-the-place-of' or 'representing'.⁵³

According to White,⁵⁴ historical discourse has to comply with both the constraints related to the privileged type of plot and to the past itself, through the textual material available at a given moment: 'Before the historian can bring to bear upon the data of the historical field the conceptual apparatus he will use to represent and explain it, he must first prefigure the field – that is to say constitute it as an object of mental perception'.⁵⁵ In order to understand, then, what happened in the past we need to prefigure as a possible object of knowledge the whole set of events reported in the documents. The tropes of rhetorical discourse offer a variety of figures of discourse for this prefiguration (metaphor; metonymy; synecdoche; irony).⁵⁶ The most representative function among these belongs to metaphor.⁵⁷ Thanks to the tropological frame of reference, the *being-as* of the past event is brought to language. Summing up his reading of White's theory, Ricoeur concludes that 'a certain tropological arbitrariness must not make us forget the kind of constraint that the past exerted on historical discourse through known documents, by demanding an endless *rectification* on its part'.⁵⁸

Although Ricoeur accepts White's ideas about the importance of metaphor and rhetorical tropes to the analysis of historical events, and believes that these offer credibility to his own ideas about the need for the progression through the Same and the Other to the Analogue, he cannot fail to notice that without the Same and the Other, White's ideas run the risk of erasing the dividing line between fiction and history.⁵⁹ Thus, Ricoeur assigns to Analogue the role of fighting the prejudices which maintain that an historian's language should be transparent and that fiction can have no claim on reality. More specifically, Analogue presents the problem of the reality of the historical past with the solution of offering meaning to 'really' in terms of 'such as'. It holds within it the ideas of both re-enactment and distancing, in the sense that *being-as* is both being and not being. These ideas of Ricoeur's do not aim to expose fully the relationship between 'taking-the-place-of' and 'representing'. They are offered more as a contribution to what remains enigmatic in the *pastness* of the past as such.⁶⁰

Analysis of ancient texts and classical archaeology

All the issues presented above concerning the nature of meaning, the relationship between language and what it describes, ‘the capacity of words to exceed their allotted functions of argumentation, demonstration and proof’,⁶¹ and the different constructions of the historical past, present classical scholarship with a series of new epistemological tools, capable of offering more profitable and thought-provoking insights into the classical texts.⁶² The main argument inveighs against the monolithic approaches to classical texts that scholars (philologists and archaeologists alike) traditionally espouse,⁶³ and urges a more flexible appreciation of their polyvalence. The positivist and historicist approaches, which still dominate the study of ancient texts, can be, and are, severely criticized in the light of these epistemological advances.⁶⁴ The new ‘readings’, which come to replace the traditional ones, are based upon a greater self-awareness on the part of the reader/scholar. The notion of interpretation then acquires a further dimension beyond simply being a ‘deciphering’ of meaning; the appreciation of the status of the written past becomes more complex in terms of the philosophy of history, and the question of representation raises a number of important issues, the most timely among them being the rhetorical system of analysis.

Traditional approaches, in their search for the ‘real’ ancient world, invoke the notion of, and inscribe themselves within, a discourse of history, which seeks to ground itself in the actuality of the past.⁶⁵ Hence an artificial distinction is created – in the sense that it is projected as determining, whereas it is not – between past and present actualities, each supported in practice by historicism and textualism respectively. Historicism, on the one hand, aims to present the past as ‘it really was’ by constructing ‘objective’ representations of it. Thus it leads to a presentation resembling the idea of the Same (in Ricoeur’s terms), in the sense that the temporal distance between past and present acquires the leading role and the historian gestures towards a non-perspectival objectivity. Textualism, on the other hand, asserts that historical events are discursively selected, shaped and organized under a teleological shadow, and therefore, history is an accommodation of the past in the interests of the present. Kennedy therefore argues that the distinction created between these two modes of thinking about the past and its texts, far from being determining,

is enabling.⁶⁶ Following literary criticism and the renewed concern with representation in all its forms, from which stems the idea of language and textuality as operative metaphors for cultural production, he denies the existence of any world of objective facts to which language provides unobstructed access; instead he supports the notion that systems of representation always problematize and obfuscate the real as much as they reflect it.⁶⁷ Therefore:

‘[I]n order to depict and argue for the multiplicity of representations, it is necessary to project “representation” as a foundational term of transhistorical validity, a preoccupation ‘present’ in the texts of the past; in order to argue for ‘differences’ it is necessary to posit sameness or identity, and vice versa. A discourse of ‘representation’ provides a set of terms which enable and determine the articulation of issues of reality, identity, control etc’.⁶⁸

‘Representation’ thus becomes a key issue in the study of classical texts due to its consequences. First, it provides a more accurate way of thinking about the past as Analogue, that is by substituting the ‘real’ with the ‘such as’ and thus combining History-as-Same and History-as-Other; it consequently becomes the enabling aspect of the distinction. Second, as a discourse it opens up the way towards a rhetorical system of analysis, providing a new epistemological tool. Third, in representation as a discourse the key trope becomes metaphor, which is not only a very useful epistemological tool, but also leads to a different appreciation of interpretation. Finally, in the light of this interpretation the single meaning is questioned. If we approach the past in terms of representation, the meaning of the past cannot be single and unique. Each of those points is important for our understanding of the ancient texts.

Ricoeur defines interpretation as an activity culminating in the act of appropriation. These two terms and ideas are closely interwoven (and therefore in accordance with the need for a ‘reading’ which combines both the Same and the Other). Interpretation though does not merely mean the projection of one’s own world onto the text. The deconstructionist ideas of Barthes and Derrida concerning the open-endedness of the text diminish the role of the author too much for the aims of classical archaeology (and this argument). Certainly, neither does this mean that the text had/has an ‘original’ meaning, pre-conceived

and intentionally pre-addressed to us nor that it opens up a window to the 'real past'. The writers of the texts wrote them with different aims in mind. Therefore, our task today is very different from theirs. Appropriation, as defined by Ricoeur, bridges this gap between the reader and the world of the text, and leads to the 'making of one's own something that was initially alien and distant'.⁶⁹

The notion of representation, as shaped within hermeneutics, denies the existence of a world of objective facts to which language or some other system of symbols (e.g. objects) can offer unobstructed access. By contrast, it claims that all representation systems create more questions than they answer. Therefore, in order to present and describe the multitude of representations, it is necessary to focus on the notion of representation itself as a basic characteristic of the inter-historical validity and to recognize that it is present in all *texts* of the past, material and textual. Thus, in order to talk about differences, we should stress similarities and *vice versa ad infinitum*. This approach relates to the past as a totality and is valid for both classical archaeology and classical literature.

Therefore, the study of ancient texts gives us access to the truth of the past, but it also offers the reader-researcher an insight into the world of the text and therefore into self-knowledge and the extension of self-knowledge. The emphasis is thus transferred from searching for the intentions of the ancient writer and/or reader and validating his/her accuracy and truth to the fact that a world becomes language. This metaphor helps us to understand the importance and the operation of material culture as text and of the text as a symbolic system of representation, the one an extension of the other and both together extensions – languages – of the world from which they originate. Therefore, metaphor operates on many levels and ensures multiple meanings. Material texts are related metaphorically to the world, while the references to these texts by ancient writers become in their turn metaphors of the world and metaphors of the material texts. Thus, the need for the creation of rhetorical schemas for understanding and analyzing material, for the creation of knowledge about the past is born. Simultaneously, the relationship between classical archaeology and the ancient sources becomes more complicated and more challenging.

Mistrust of the positivist approaches, combined with an understanding of the multiplicity of interpretation and the role of the interpreter, interprets (*sic*) in its turn the intro-

duction of a new field of studies, only recently developed as far as classics are concerned, namely reception theory.⁷⁰ This is based on several of the ideas we developed earlier, and mainly on the idea that there is a living continuum of elements that structures the tradition of classical studies and contributes to its development in time. Their reception and interpretation is added to the sources anew and therefore each generation of researchers in reality faces different texts, since they have been altered by their reception in previous periods. It becomes obvious that all these ideas influence and redefine the relationship of classical archaeology to the ancient sources, putting them into a continuous and continual dialogue.

Pliny and his *Natural History* as a source of knowledge for classical archaeology

Recent approaches to classical archaeology take into account new perspectives in the study of classical sources, such as the example of the *xoana* elaborated at the beginning of this paper. It is clear that ancient texts are far from transparent windows onto the ancient world; they are complex and unclear and require interpretation. We are going to focus on a work by a Roman author, Pliny the Elder, entitled *Natural History* (*NH*), and to attempt a reading that will take into account the ideas of Paul Ricoeur and hermeneutics as presented above.

NH was dedicated in AD 77 or 78 to the heir to the imperial throne, Titus. It consists of 37 books which cover a number of subjects ranging from cosmology and geography, to anthropology, zoology, botany, medicine and metallurgy. Books 33 to 37, which according to Pliny himself are devoted to mineralogy and metallurgy, have been considered a major archaeological source, as this is where Pliny discusses works of art, classifying them according to their materials (marble, bronze, etc). Classical archaeology uses these books as its main source of knowledge on matters of attribution, identification, ways of display of art in antiquity, or even provenance. Often, Pliny's accuracy is tested against actual archaeological finds. Alternatively, archaeological discussion is transferred from the actual assemblages, to Pliny's sources. Other classical treatises discuss the work of Pliny in terms of its political role, i.e. they try to reconstruct the intentions of the author in the broader context.⁷¹ In general terms, these books are con-

sidered separately from their companion volumes; Pliny's attitudes toward art are kept separate from his attitudes toward science; his aesthetics are thought of as different from his natural philosophy and his moralism as distinct from his curiosity.

Based on the ideas presented above, I decided to study *NH* using as a conceptual tool the idea of 'collection'. My argument has been that Pliny's work should be understood as a totality and the above shortcomings should be addressed. Taking analogy into account, I suggest that Pliny created the most complete textual collection that survives from the ancient world. And this is not limited to the 'art history' chapters but refers to the whole of his treatise. He has also offered a unique account of actual private art collections that decorated the city of Rome and other parts of the Empire, that were amassed by collectors, whose motives and discourse Pliny has preserved and interpreted for us. For that reason, Pliny's *NH* is important in any discussion regarding classical archaeology today: not only as a source of information about individual objects but because it offers a unique insight into a totality. Attention is usually paid to *NH* as a source of information about the objects themselves, rather than to their assemblages and to its own character as a collection and as a paradigm of collecting that drew enthusiastic followers many centuries after its formation. Using the idea of representation, Pliny's encyclopaedia, in the sense of a list of information about various objects and data, has been understood as a representation of the world from which these objects and data derived. In that sense, *NH* is a systematic collection itself. Furthermore, it is a meta-language of the phenomenal, factual world, a 'reading' of other practices and discourses. The main argument has been that by tracing the formation, taxonomy and aim in both cases, it is possible to comprehend first the way in which the classical world is related to its material culture and second how indebted the categories of art and culture which we have inherited today are to the past. Both these issues are vital for classical archaeology and offer a different approach to various periods of the past, but also to the present.

NH has a broad subject matter that exceeds the limits usually set for encyclopaedic works. Its broad perspective had been shaped by Pliny's perception of the world, which in turn defined was determined by Stoic naturalism. Nature is a passive and an active element in life, and as such it is contained even in the humblest little thing. In this

sense, Pliny's belief that he can assemble the world in his books seems absolutely rational and justifiable. Furthermore, *NH* is an historical work, in the sense that it presents an attempt at recording for posterity the accomplishments of the Roman people and the power of the Roman state. This accounts for many of the decisions taken by Pliny, such as for instance the inclusion of the 'art history' chapters, as well as his attempt to write a history of culture and technology, along with a natural history. The genuinely historical character of *NH* ascribes the work to the tradition of antiquarianism. In his search for the remarkable and the noteworthy, Pliny expands the horizon of the traditional historical account, and provides a *Natural History*, in which all the aspects of nature and culture are included. We can define the antiquarian as a student of the past, who unlike the historian writes in a systematic order (instead of a chronological one), collects all the items that are connected with a certain theme, whether they can be of any assistance in solving a problem or not, and deals with subjects that are considered better suited to systematic description than to a chronological account.⁷² Pliny's work fits this description remarkably well: influenced by Stoic conceptions of nature and the world, he undertakes the role of a systematic recorder of all the *thaumasia* ('the wonders') that the city of Rome and the Roman world have amassed, in order to preserve their memory for the future, but also to provide his contemporaries with a treasury of knowledge about the history of civilization, and in particular, about the history of Roman power.

Furthermore, Pliny is actually a unique source of information on the subject of collecting in the Roman world. More important than the actual collections of information about specific statues and artists, Pliny records for posterity and interprets the reception of art. The writer defends a hierarchy of values that he defines as distinct from those of his contemporaries, and he exemplifies this in his own work and in his own 'collection', as opposed to the actual collections that others had assembled. Collections in the public domain, which are the product of the beneficent intervention of emperors and generals, as well as collections made up of spoils from victorious wars against the enemies of Rome, are very explicitly valued and appreciated. By contrast, private collections are discouraged, at least as long as they are deemed to express a sinister relationship with material culture, ignorance, or neglect of the natural values, and lack of rationality.

Pliny does not deny the existence of or the necessity for collections; on the contrary, he offers a definition of the notion of collection in the classical world. A collection becomes a set of works of art, artefacts, and natural curiosities set aside as a vehicle for propaganda and comparison between the morally accomplished and the degenerates, as well as symbols of military prowess and Roman superiority. The central spine of the items in a collection therefore is their political and ideological messages and not their aesthetic value. This is so because of the role of the collection as a space of artificial memory. Therefore, collections operate as *monumenta* of illustrious men, and as 'evidence' of human achievements and Nature's grandeur.

Based on these remarks, we can conclude that Pliny was putting his own views into practice when he wrote *NH*, and that the latter is his own 'collection'. Naturally, this development relates to a more general understanding of collections in the classical world, and Pliny simply offers the culmination of a long-standing tradition, in which the collecting of facts and information was as important as the collection of material objects, if not more so. Already in the classical Greek world, antiquarians had introduced the tradition of assembling in one book the 'objects' of their interest, whether this be votive offerings in Greek sanctuaries, *euremata*, or information about practices, beliefs, institutions, or even people. This antiquarian tradition was taken over by Varro and Atticus in the Roman world, not to mention the paradoxographers, and the writers of *mirabilia*. Their collections were textual, of course, confined within the pages of books, but serving the same purpose that the actual ones were called upon to serve. They were assemblages of facts, intended for future generations as well as contemporaries, as sources of knowledge, admiration, political and national pride, that would testify to the grandeur of their own society.

Pliny's work was part of this tradition, and in many ways summarized it for future generations. It was not only his collection *per se* that was important for his followers, but also his collecting mode. Pliny's encyclopaedic spirit, his classification principle, his understanding of collections as methods of commemoration and *loci* of memory influenced the Renaissance collectors directly or indirectly. The textual character of Pliny's collection influenced their view about the dialectic relationship between *res* and *verba*. Their 'museums', 'cabinets' or 'theatres' were the tangible illustrations of their 'museums

on paper', which aimed to serve the same purpose and ensured accessibility and popularity. In other words, the early museum catalogues, instead of being a result of the collecting activities, have to be seen as a cause, a reason for them. *Natural History* is undoubtedly the guiding light behind them, and a unique monument whose importance goes far beyond the limits of its era and far beyond its role as a source of information about the genealogy of Greek art. This understanding offers classical archaeology a far more theoretical standpoint. It connects classical with modern art appreciation, early collections with museums (as they have developed since the Renaissance). In addition it has created an understanding or appreciation of the relationship between classical archaeology and classical sources ever since. In other words, such a reading of Pliny, offers an insight into the basic theory of classical archaeology itself.

Conclusions

To sum up, in this paper I have focused on the notion of representation as a basic theoretical approach for the study of ancient sources and the creation of a new relations between them and classical archaeology. I have suggested a reading of ancient sources based on a hermeneutic approach. To this end I have appropriated post-modern ideas which contribute to the formation of theory in the field of classical archaeology and research. I suggest that the relationship between ancient sources, classical archaeology and representation of the past is not a positivist unilateral one; on the contrary, it is multileveled, complex, open and profound. It is a dialogue in progress and it can contribute to a better understanding of the past and the present.

The discussion of representation offers a multitude of terms that empower and define the way we deal with matters of truth, identity, control and so on. Interpretation, as understood in the work of Ricoeur, becomes through metaphor the necessary requirement for appropriation and inclusion. At the same time, the 'ideal' relation to the past as presented above is understood as interpretation; this ideal relation can be defined as the 'horizon for the waiting of new questions' and not as a taboo or a comprehensive solution. The past (texts, symbols, objects) speaks to the extent real people ask it questions and its true heirs are those who interpret it.

We are thus led to the conclusion that representation is a key term for the study of key term classical texts. First, because it allows us to understand the roots of many contemporary ideas and therefore confronts us with the need to re-evaluate and re-frame them. Second, because it offers a more accurate way of thinking about the past as Analogy, in other words to replace the notion of the 'real' with the notion of the 'same' (such as), and to combine History-as-Same and History-as-Other. Therefore, an intermediate, empowering connection is created between multiple opposing and often contradictory tropes of thought. Third because, as discourse, interpretation leads the way towards a rhetorical system of analysis and therefore it offers us new epistemological tools. The most important and useful of these tools is probably metaphor, which apart from its usefulness, also leads us towards a different appreciation of interpretation. Finally, the idea of there being just one meaning is considered doubtful and untenable. Under the prism of representation, the past does not acquire a single meaning, but multiple ones, complex and flexible. By their emphasis on metaphor, rhetorical co-expressions of appropriation extend the initial meaning both semiologically and

through content-based terms, providing multiple meanings. The task is not to interpret as a means of accessing the real past, understanding its motivations and interests, on its own terms. Interpretation organizes, divides, arranges, composes connections, describes relations, but without the certainty of an origin. The archaeologist can only weave connections that establish insights and plausibilities and are as much about the present as about the past.

Classical archaeology today cannot afford to ignore this understanding. It is essential for classical archaeology to develop a different approach towards the ancient sources that will contribute to a reconsideration and restructuring of the narratives that it has created for itself. This is the only way for classical archaeology to retain its relevance to contemporary, multifarious, complex, polyvalent, interesting societies.

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NOTES

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1. 'On the market place, where most of the sanctuaries are, stand Artemis, surnamed Ephesian and wooden statues (*xoana*) of Dionysos, which are covered with gold with the exception of their faces; these are ornamented with red paint' (Pausanias 2.2.6).

2. Shanks 1996, 121-22.

3. Snodgrass 1991; Morris 1994.

4. French philosopher (1913-2005). He combined phenomenological description with hermeneutic interpretation in order to study human reality (Reagan 1996; Dosse 1997).

5. Hall 1997; Spariosu 1984.

6. 'Wie es eigentlich gewesen': Ranke's agenda, from the 1830s, quoted and discussed in Carr 1986, 3.

7. Ricoeur 1984, 1-3.

8. Thomas 1990, 18.

9. I use the term 'historian' from now on to include archaeologists and all those whose interests lie in the past.

10. Duncan & Ley 1993.

11. Seminal to this approach is the work of D.L. Clarke (1937-1976); see, in particular, Clarke 1968; Clarke 1972.

12. See, for a general introduction Hodder 1986, Ch. 8.

13. For arguments in favour of this methodological approach to archaeology, see Hodder 1986. Post-processual archaeological theory has argued against contextualism and has questioned the relationship between material culture and text. Nevertheless, given the strong relationship between classical archaeology and written sources as well as the positivistic stance towards the past that classical archaeology takes even today, I believe that the hermeneutical approach of contextual archaeology is particularly well suited to become the transitional phase in the development of classical archaeology in Greece and to meet the post-modern theoretical concerns of today. Hellenic archaeology is not yet ready to accept the inherent subjectivity of its discourse and therefore hermeneutics and contextual archaeol-

ogy offer an interesting 'middle ground'. I should stress at this point that this is not a theoretical suggestion for an approach to classical archaeology, but an attempt to discuss ancient texts in such a way as to render them useful to classical archaeology.

14. That is the dichotomy of *langue* and *parole*, the subordination of diachronic to synchronic and the emphasis on language as opposed to the 'real world' (Tilley 1990, 58-60).

15. 'The transition to the level of discourse creates the possibility of a genuine semantics of the sentence, as distinct from the semiotics of the sign' (Thompson 1981, 11).

16. Ricoeur 1981, 137; 167.

17. Moore 1990, 91; Thompson 1981, 11.

18. Frege 1970.

19. Thompson 1981, 11.

20. Moore 1990, 91.

21. Moore 1990, 92.

22. Ricoeur 1981, 170.

23. Ricoeur 1981, 169.

24. Ricoeur 1981, 172.

25. Moore 1990, 93; Thompson 1981, 13; Ricoeur 1981, 136.

26. Derrida 1976, 101-40; Derrida 1978, 278-93; for a commentary regarding the 'reading' of material culture, see Tilley 1990, 60-66.

27. Moore 1990, 95.

28. Thompson 1981, 14.

29. Ricoeur 1981, 161.

30. Ricoeur 1981, 153.

31. Quoted in Moore 1990, 97.

32. Ricoeur 1981, 185.

33. Ricoeur 1981, 177.

34. Ricoeur 1981, 178.

35. Ricoeur 1981, 178.

36. The idea of 'analogy' is often related in archaeological interpretation to the 'Middle Range Theory', developed mainly by Binford in the seventies. According to him, archaeologists should create a methodology that would allow them to make valid correlations between the material culture of the past, which they can observe, and social behaviour, which they cannot. It is suggested that they should turn to the identification of patterns, using ethnographic methods. The main argument against this theory is that the creation of these patterns involves uniformitarian assumptions and generalizations which cannot be applied to the past. For a discussion of 'Middle Range Theory' see Trigger 1989, 361-67; Raab & Goodyear 1984; Hodder 1986, 107-20. The notion of 'analogy' I discuss in this

paper does not relate to the above understanding. It is used as a rhetorical tool of interpretation and it rejects any prior assumption of the existence of universal laws simply by emphasizing the role of the non-universal, non-uniform individual who puts the questions (this is a central notion in hermeneutics) and understands/creates meaning.

37. Thomas 1990, 18.

38. Collingwood 1993.

39. Ricoeur 1984, 5.

40. Ricoeur 1984, 8.

41. Ricoeur 1984, 7.

42. Ricoeur 1984, 11-12.

43. The destruction of the notion of historical time is the disadvantage of re-enactment (Ricoeur 1984, 15).

44. Ricoeur 1984, 15.

45. Ricoeur 1984, 17-18.

46. Ricoeur 1984, 18.

47. Ricoeur 1984, 23.

48. Ricoeur 1984, 24.

49. Ricoeur 1984, 27.

50. Ricoeur 1984, 27; White 1978.

51. White 1978, 28.

52. *Mimesis* is a central idea in Ricoeur's theory of history, time and narrative. Narrative leads to the creation of a new work of synthesis: a plot. Plots mimic action, through a poetic refiguring of action. The dynamic of emplotment is central to the understanding of the relationship between time and narrative. Emplotment consists of three moments of mimesis: mimesis I, mimesis II, and mimesis III. Mimesis I involves the realization that to imitate or represent action is first to 'pre-understand' what human action is, in its semantics, its symbolic system and its temporality. Mimesis II has a mediating function which derives from the dynamic character of the configuring operation known as emplotment. Mimesis III marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader; that is the world configured by the plot and the world in which real action occurs and which unfolds its specific temporality. The transition from Mimesis II to Mimesis III is brought about by the act of reading (Moore 1990, 102-5).

53. Ricoeur 1984, 28.

54. White 1973; White 1978.

55. White 1973, 30; cf. Ricoeur 1984, 29.

56. White 1973, 31-38; White 1978, 121-34.

57. White 1978, 90-91; cf. Ricoeur 1984, 30.

58. Ricoeur 1984, 33-34.

59. Ricoeur 1984, 33.

60. Ricoeur 1984, 36.

61. Bryson 1994, 282.

62. For contemporary literary theory see Suleiman & Crossman 1980 (esp. 3-45) and Fish 1980.

63. For contemporary literary hermeneutics and the interpretation of classical texts see Kresic, 1981; Galinsky 1994; Martindale 1993; de Jong & Sullivan 1994 (with extensive bibliography: 281-88), as well as the volumes of the journal *Arethusa* devoted to the subject, mainly, 7 (1974[1/spring]: Psychoanalysis and the Classics), 8 (1975[1/spring]: Marxism and the Classics), 10 (1977[1/spring]: Classical Literature and Contemporary Literary Theory), 16 (1983[1-2/spring-fall]: Semiotics and Classical Studies) and 19 (1986[1/spring]: Audience-oriented Criticism and the Classics).

64. At least when they are used as historical evidence. Nevertheless, alternative approaches have been, and are currently being, developed, as the examples cited previously indicate. For a similar example, see Thomas 1992.

65. Kennedy 1993, 7.

66. Kennedy 1993, 7-13.

67. See also Dougherty & Kurke 1993, 5.

68. Kennedy 1993, 13.

69. Ricoeur 1981, 159; Moore 1990, 96.

70. Martindale & Thomas 2006.

71. For instance Rouveret 1987; Gualandi 1982; Becatti 1951; Becatti 1973-1974; Beaujeau 1982; Isager 1991.

72. Momigliano 1950, 286.

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