

Archaeological, art-historical, and artistic approaches to classical antiquity

Review of:

Vicky Coltman (ed.), *Making Sense of Greek Art*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2012, xxii + 250 pp., 4 col. Plates, 65 b. & w. illus., £60.00 hdbk, ISBN 9780859898300.

Despite what its title might suggest, this book is not about Classical Greece. A subtitle on the publisher's website reads *Ancient Visual Culture and its Receptions*, but that does not appear on the book's title page, nor does the information that this is a Festschrift in memory of John Betts (1940-2008), which is revealed in the introduction (XIII – XXII). Betts taught Latin and Greek and ancient architecture, sculpture, and vase painting at the University of Bristol from 1966 to 2003, he founded Bristol Classical Press in 1977, and he was active in theatre. The ten essays here by his former students and colleagues address those interests, and although they all relate to antiquity in some way, most of them are not specifically concerned with Greek art.

In 'Contextual Iconography: The Horses of Artemis Orthia' (1 – 16), Nicki Waugh considers two types of votive offerings from the Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia: Artemis seated sideways on a horse; and Artemis placed frontally between two horseheads. The sanctuary was founded at the same time as the rise of the polis in the middle of the eighth century and served as 'a place of conspicuous display' within the polis (8). Although Artemis as the mistress of horses (*potnia hippon*) is seen elsewhere, Waugh argues that the friendly unity between the Spartan Artemis and her horse heads is very unlike the controlling goddess represented in examples from Crete and Corcyra. Artemis as a sideways rider is also a familiar type, but in Spartan examples again she does not dominate her mount. Waugh interprets the tone of these figurines as Spartan self-promotion, an interesting view that is the result of her careful use of available sources and observation of detail.

In 'Reconsidering the Meanings of Athenian Figured Vases' (17 – 38), Zosia Archibald praises the essays in two volumes about the production, distribution, and use of Greek vases: *The Complex Past of Pottery*, edited by Jan Paul Crielaard, Vladimir Stissi, and Gert Jan van Wijngaarden (Gieben, 1999), and *Le vase grec et ses destins*, an exhibition catalogue edited by Pierre Rouillard and Annie Verbanck-Piérart (Mariemont, 2003). She disapproves of what she calls art historians' concern with aesthetics, pointing out that 'taphonomy, ... the human-induced and natural processes that contribute to an artefact's final condition underground', is a difficult approach because so many vases are 'in museum collections worldwide' (23). Archibald asserts that in Britain field archaeologists are more interesting to the

general public, as shown by *Time Team* on television, than 'finds specialists' [curators], except for those who appear on *Antiques Roadshow*. She also believes that the former are more likely to receive grants from the scientific community, but she does not mention the large-scale financial support given to museum exhibitions. Furthermore, Archibald comments that Greek vases published in the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* were acquired mainly through the art market and are therefore without context, with the result that archaeologists are not interested in them, though readers might well argue that the CVA is an important tool for archaeologists and art historians alike. Yet she concedes that 'For any archaeologist who has had to start with unidentified sherds and develop ways of recognising patterns, repetition and similarity are starting points', belying John Beazley's 'admittedly dilettantish manner' (27). To conclude her somewhat anti-curatorial survey of the field, she says that production of pottery has not yet been addressed in its own right [in fact, handbooks on the subject usually address production], that handbooks on Greek pottery consider mostly fine wares, and that quantitative estimates of extant Athenian pottery vary widely. It is surprising that Archibald does not cite the two-volume *Black and Plain Pottery* by Brian A. Sparkes and Lucy Talcott, Athenian Agora 12 (Princeton, 1970), which is valuable to both archaeologists and art historians.

At this point Archibald begins a case study of imported Attic pottery from the river-port of Pistiros in Thrace (near modern Vetren, Bulgaria), which arrived there between the second half of the fifth century and the second century BCE. Athenian black-glazed pottery is more common than decorated pottery, and, as readers might suspect, local pottery is far more common than imported ware. A single house contained local coarseware, imported Attic vessels, and pots made locally in Attic or Ionian shapes but with local decoration. The numbers and types of vessels from Pistiros and Olynthos do not compare 'satisfactorily', having 'different taphonomic histories' (36). The author does not identify the 'Pistiros inscription' (31, 37), though it seems to provide evidence bearing on trade and society, and might help scholars 'begin to explore "user narratives"', using the full range of evidence, ceramic and other, from individual excavated sites' (38).

In 'Reflections of Greek Myth in Etruria: Thetis' (39 - 52), Vedia Izzet proposes to draw 'on postcolonial theory [to argue] that the degree to which a foreign element is incorporated and locally elaborated is indicative of the degree of local understanding of that element' (39). The target of this iconographic study is a fourth-century-BCE Etruscan bronze mirror in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, for which Izzet gives a reference in the *Corpus Speculorum Etruscorum* (CSE USA 3.14) but not its museum inventory number. Peleus discovers Thetis, who touches her hair while looking in a mirror, in the presence of a seated draped woman, Calaina, the names of all three figures conveniently inscribed on the mirror. Izzet proposes that the Etruscan craftsman intentionally transformed this well-known Greek myth.

Hands raised, a nude Peleus appears startled at the scene before him, according to Izzet, but some readers might ask whether he is looking instead at the reflection of Thetis in her mirror. Izzet describes Thetis as fixing her hair/adorning herself, partially dressed or undressed, reference to her upcoming marriage and change in status. She wears an armlet with *bullae* on it, the sign of a dangerous journey, either marriage or death. A creature at the bottom of the scene that appears to have 'the head of a griffin on the body of a dog' may be 'guarding the passage to the world of the dead' (51). Thus 'the mirror materializes the transformation of a Greek myth into an Etruscan one' (52). Izzet confines her study to Peleus, Thetis, and the animal beneath them. Although the poor quality of the illustration makes it difficult to see details, there are other features that would reward scrutiny: the flying hair of Peleus; the neatly arranged shoes and other gear of Thetis; her visible pudenda; Calaina – who is she?; and the resting griffin or dog – surely not both.

Shelley Hales takes on another mirror directed towards the viewer in 'Aphrodite's Mirror: Reflections of Greek Art in Roman Houses' (53 - 69). At Djemila, North Africa, during the fourth century CE, a large reception room was added to a house over what had previously been the precinct of a temple of Venus Genetrix. The floor mosaic in that room features Aphrodite holding a mirror at the center of what Hales describes as an ocean scene. Aphrodite appears only in a drawing, however, and the mosaic is not illustrated. Hales summarizes textual and visual evidence from the fourth century BCE until today, considering how viewers have looked at Aphrodite, at reflections of her, and at how she looks at herself. In this scene, as in many of the later images, she does not look directly towards the 'mirror in which her face was apparently reflected out of the mosaic towards the viewer' (53). Readers may wonder whether the image in the mirror survives.

The reflection of Aphrodite in her mirror encouraged a reflexive reaction: viewers looked both at the goddess and at themselves, the mirror being 'a perfect image for the clash of a wide range of approaches to aesthetics and visuality circulating by the fourth century, and an ideal metaphor for the role of domestic art and its continued reliance on and recycling of motifs that were seen to owe their origins to the public art of classical Greece' (68). With only five illustrations, two of them drawings, the Djemila mosaic is difficult to evaluate, but Hales's discussion and references are nonetheless valuable general resources on the subject.

In his analysis of 'The Archaic Style in Sculpture in the Eyes of Ancient and Modern Viewers' (70-100), Christopher H. Hallett describes modern descriptions of Archaistic works as being generally disparaging (74), whereas Archaic finds like the kouroi and korai from Athens, the 'Kleobis and Biton' and the Siphnian Treasury frieze from Delphi, and even the Early Classical sculptures from the Temple of Zeus at Olympia earn high praise. Indeed 'the *academic* artists of the early part of...[the twentieth] century retained a strong interest in Archaic stylization', including Aristide Maillol, Daniel Chester French, and Paulanship (78 – 79). Readers may

ask whether Hallett sees their work as derived from the Archaic or from the Archaistic.

Archaic art appeals today for its 'large simple forms, powerfully and emphatically modeled, combined with an extraordinary delicacy and variety in the minor forms...lack of contrived sculptural effects...freshness and immediacy to the carving, but an appealing lack of accessibility with regard to the content', whereas Archaistic works 'tend to be slender and elegantly draped; gestures are dainty and delicate... [and artists] produce graceful choreographed compositions' (83 - 84). These Archaistic works 'embody...the formal effects that later Greeks and Romans most admired in the earliest monuments of their culture' (84).

Turning to ancient Rome, Hallett argues convincingly for the use of both Archaic and Archaistic works in promoting the political agenda of the 20s BCE. At that time, Augustus used Archaic and Archaistic sculpture, relief, and painting to decorate such monuments as the Temple of Apollo Palatinus and its forecourt [Porticus of the Danaids]. The reliefs from the Porticus of the Danaids combine late Archaic, Severe, and High Classical features. This Archaizing revival and nostalgia for the past also appear in literature, for example in Vergil's *Aeneid*. 'The *old gods*...[were] the most powerful guarantors of Rome's continued success, and of the values of the ancestors (*mos maiorum*)' (95). Were the 'old Italian gods of clay...being returned to their place of honor?...Were these Archaistic faces perceived as wearing a gentle smile of hope?' (100).

In 'Jacques-Louis David, the Greek Ideal and an Alternative' (101-120), Ed Lilley first observes what Denis Diderot described as "'the grand manner'" in David's paintings derived from Johann Joachim Winckelmann's 'nature, contour, drapery and expression' in Greek art (102). 'David's engagement with the classical, and specifically with the Greek' began in 1764 with a visit to the studio of Joseph-Marie Vien (103). Lilley does not mention that Vien's best-known work today is a Pompeian subject, *The Seller of Cupids*, painted in the previous year. In style and choice of subject, David balanced classicism against current events in France. In the *Sabine Women* (1799), the 'juxtaposition of both Greeks and Romans, two very different civilisations, is initially jarring, but David presumably meant to imply a happy union of Greek conventions and Roman history' (108). Most general viewers probably do not notice any conflation of Greek and Roman imagery, and it was for them that David hung a large mirror in the room so that they could project themselves into the painting, thinking, Lilley suggests, about their own experiences, first with the *ancien régime*, then with the Revolution.

For his painting of *Leonidas at Thermopylai* (1814), David borrowed directly from Winckelmann's engraving of a gem representing Ajax which represented his 'commitment to classicism' (114), but which aroused criticism for being a copy of the figure on the ancient gem. *Mars Disarmed by Venus* was exhibited in Paris with a large mirror, just as the *Sabine Women* had been, only this time viewers could imagine themselves on Mount Olympus. Lilley's consideration of the many

reactions to *Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Graces* recalls Hallett's comments on Roman responses to Archaism and Hales's on the many implications of Venus with her mirror. Unfortunately, the omission of illustrations of works under discussion, such as the *Combat between Mars and Minerva* (1771), *Death of Socrates* (1781), *Marat* (1793), and the *Sabine Women* (1799), makes this essay difficult to read for those who are not familiar with David's work.

"The Most Ancient Monuments of the Fine Arts": Collecting and Displaying Greek Vases in Early Nineteenth-Century English Interiors' (121 - 139) is a fascinating summary by Vicky Coltman of the display of Greek vases in the libraries of stately homes. George Lucy purchased vases in London and Naples during the 1830s and 1840s for Charlecote Park in Warwickshire. The first half of Coltman's essay summarizes letters to and from Lucy, a subject previously addressed by Clive Wainwright (*The Romantic Interior*, New Haven, 1989) but still useful here. In 1839, the Earl of Warwick, Lucy's neighbor, instructed Lucy on the subject of his 'Etruscan' vases: the best ones came from Nola; others were from Calabria and from around Canino, Lucien Bonaparte's territory to the west of Rome. The Earl of Warwick knew the origins of vases, their fabrics, shapes, colours, figural styles, and quality. He wrote about restoration, about where to buy and what to pay, drawing analogies with paintings on canvas.

George Lucy, Sir Richard Westmacott, and Sir John Soane kept their ancient vases on the top shelves in their libraries, as did Richard Payne Knight, "to make the Tops of my cases uniform" (131). Lucy owned a new vase painted on one side with a reproduction of the Alexander mosaic, and Soane had some Wedgwood vases alongside his antique vases. Wedgwood also designed vases decorated on one side only for the tops of the library bookcases at Lord Lansdowne's Bowood House in Wiltshire and 'in 1820, the Wedgwood firm received a similar order from Lord Dartmouth... for "forty five vases, from one foot to two feet high in height, copied from the most approved Etruscan patterns – to ornament the tops of book-cases"' (134). Although vases on the tops of bookshelves were hard to see, 'the "library" tradition of display for these luxury possessions had become canonical by the nineteenth century' (134). George Lucy's display of vases was the modern way to demonstrate one's 'social significance' (139).

'*Sculpturae Uitam Insufflat Pictura*: Breathing Life into Greek Sculpture in the works of Lawrence Alma-Tadema and Jean-Léon Gérôme' (140 - 154) recalls Johann Gottfried Herder's belief that colour on sculpture was unattractive, in spite of plentiful evidence to the contrary for ancient sculpture. Alma-Tadema painted *Phidias and the Frieze of the Parthenon* (1868), with a coloured frieze (Plate A), after traveling to Rome, Pompeii, and the Louvre. Genevieve Liveley notes that no sculpture in his other paintings 'shows any evidence of polychromy – even when they are shown ostensibly restored to their "original" pristine state' (146).

Alma-Tadema's early use of 'his recently acquired archaeological knowledge and sources' can be seen in *Catullus at Lesbia's* (1865), following Rosemary J. Barrow,

Lawrence Alma-Tadema (London, 2001), 30-32 and fig. 22. Liveley does not illustrate this painting or most of the others she considers. She discusses the artist's renderings of artefacts that he transformed by making them appear to be larger or smaller, made of another medium, combined in unlikely ways, and placed 'in new contexts' (144). Greek and Roman works appear together in a single painting, as Lilley notes is also the case in essay on David's works. For further discussion of Alma-Tadema's use of artefacts, readers may wish to consult the magnificently illustrated *Alma Tadema e la nostalgia dell'antico*, an exhibition catalogue edited by Eugenia Querci and Stefano De Caro (Milan, 2007).

Regarding the discovery of the Tanagra figurines in the 1870s, Liveley mentions but does not cite 'contemporary accounts by the French collector and archaeologist, Olivier Rayet' (148). For Gérôme's *Painting Breathes Life into Sculpture* (1893), there is a colour plate (Plate C), along with several paragraphs of analysis regarding 'the boundaries between life, archaeology and art, painting and sculpture' (151). For this and related paintings and sculptures by Gérôme, readers will benefit from consulting *Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904)*, edited by Laurence des Cars, Dominique de Font-Réaulx, and Édouard Papet (Paris, 2010). For forgeries of Tanagra figurines, another important and well-illustrated exhibition catalogue is *Bürgerwelten: Hellenistische Tonfiguren und Nachschöpfungen im 19. Jh.*, edited by Gerhard Zimmer and Irmgard Kriseleit (Berlin, 1994), with illustrations of the seated draped Tanagra figurines.

For Liveley's 'early classical period (450 – 425 BCE)' (151), readers will substitute 480 – 450 BCE. 'The seated [white marble] nude female holding aloft a vibrantly painted female figurine might be seen to represent an ancient type of Tyche or personification of place' (152). On the contrary, the Tyche of Antioch was a draped statue in a three-dimensional pose produced ca. 300 BCE. The frontality of Gérôme's figure recalls a much earlier date, whereas its nudity invokes the many post-fourth-century-BCE sculptures of Aphrodite. Gérôme's apparently intentional juxtaposition of different style and type, along the lines of Alma-Tadema's transformations, will reward future analysis. Patrik Reuterswärd's *Studien zur Polychromie der Plastik: Griechenland und Rom* (Stockholm, 1960) is still a valuable source for the ancient literary testimonia, and for treatment of polychromy in publications dating from 1764 to 1954. Two exhibition catalogues notable for their breadth of treatment are *Gods in Colour: Painted Sculpture of Classical Antiquity*, edited by Vinzenz Brinkmann and Raimund Wünsche (Munich, 2007), and *The Colour of Life: Polychromy in Sculpture from Antiquity to the Present*, edited by Roberta Panzanelli, Eike D. Schmidt, and Kenneth Lapatin (Los Angeles, 2008), which supplies context for coloured antiquities in works by Alma-Tadema and Gérôme.

Michael Liversidge's "'Living Alma-Tadema Pictures": *Hypatia* at the Haymarket Theatre' (155 - 178) is about a play of the 1890s adapted by Glencairn Stuart Ogilvie from a novel of 1853 by Charles Kingsley. Alma-Tadema was 'by far the most frequently commissioned artist-designer of classical plays for the London

stage in the 1880s and 1890s' (158). Like his paintings, his sets and costumes show 'how vividly the classical past inflected the Victorian and Edwardian present' (155). Set in early-fifth-century-CE Alexandria, the story exposes 'corruption of the early (Roman) Church (and) bears on relations between the Roman and Anglican Churches in the aftermath of Catholic Emancipation' (160). The *National Reformer* used the play to berate ecclesiastics of all persuasions for their opposition to freedom of thought and scientific inquiry' (161). One critic felt that the events portrayed 'had lessons to teach a modern empire', and 'another correspondent saw in it parallels with contemporary Ireland' (161).

The minute details and the brilliant colours of Alma-Tadema's sets and costumes (figs. 9.2 – 9.8) recalled his paintings so vividly that the scenes of the play were described as "'living pictures'" (173) or 'moving pictures' (177). The accuracy of costumes extended to hairstyles, helmets, shoes, shields, and weapons, and even to making fabrics as they were thought to have been made in antiquity. 'Theatrical spectacles' like *Hypatia* allowed 'cultural intersection between social strata', and 'brought together painting and performance in recreating and reanimating the past in ways that arguably redefined the Victorians' vision of the ancient world'(177). This was in large part owed to Alma-Tadema's 'vision of the past': advertizements of *Hypatia* bearing his name helped to ensure the tremendous popularity of the play, which Liversidge reports ran for one hundred and three nights.

This essay introduces a lesser known aspect of the work of Alma-Tadema, whose influence extended well beyond the paintings for which he is most famous today, and makes a link to the interests of John Betts in the theatre. It also provides a useful summary of Victorian uses of the decorative aspects of antiquity.

In 'Marbles for the Masses: The Elgin Marbles at the Crystal Palace, Sydenham' (179 – 201), Kate Nichols stresses 'how widely Greek and Roman history and society – in the form of reproductions of its [sic] material remains – was [sic] available to mid-nineteenth-century publics' (181). Her focus is upon the Greek court of the Crystal Palace, designed by Owen Jones, evoked a temple, an agora, and a stoa. Reconstruction, unlike museum display, was intended 'to educate and entertain the masses' (192). Criticisms were leveled at the lack of authenticity of reconstructions displayed out of context, like the painted panoramas of events, places, and reconstructions or excavations of ancient cities. But the idea was 'to provide visitors with the experience of viewing monuments in a state as close as possible to their original, pristine condition, ...and... a demonstration of nineteenth-century technological prowess'(193). Whereas the directors of the Crystal Palace felt that seeing beautiful ancient sculpture would improve 'the moral standing of the nation' (194), Joshua Reynolds, like Herder, felt 'how inappropriate the sensual appreciation of sculpture encouraged by colour is to the medium,... [associating] paint with entertainment and ignorance' (195).

The Greek court of the Crystal Palace was dominated by the Venus de Milo, with a large model of the Parthenon serving as a backdrop (fig. 10.3). Casts of some

of the Parthenon's pedimental sculptures and of the east and west friezes were displayed close by, along with a fully restored and painted version of the north frieze, with a 'blue background, golden hair, white flesh, pale blue and pink drapery and red and grey horses (all taken from archaeological precedents, Jones is keen to emphasise)' (188). Nichols observes that in the British Museum the whiteness of the Elgin Marbles set them apart from 'non-Western, "primitive" art' and presented them as 'the culmination of the "chain of art"', whereas the coloured Parthenon casts in the Crystal Palace linked them with painted non-Western art and made Greek art 'one of many ancient civilisations on display, and not the conclusion of any prescribed journey through world art' (200). The didactic function of the display in the Greek court was complemented by its use for entertainment: Nichols illustrates a dog show with the 'Theseus' from the east pediment of the Parthenon reclining in the background.

These essays address four very different groups of potential readers, extending far beyond the 'Greek art' implied by the title. One essay relates directly to Greek archaeology (Waugh) and one does so indirectly (Archibald). Etruscan (Izzet) and Roman topics (Hales, Hallett) form a second group. Three essays on David, Alma-Tadema, and Gérôme (Lilley, Liveley, Liversidge) address artists' uses of the classical past, and two essays (Coltman, Nichols) are concerned with collectors and display for social and political purposes. The analogies drawn in each essay to twentieth- and twenty-first-century artists, television, advertising, or non-western cultures may have been intended to link the essays, but instead these modern comparanda tend to obscure the authors' starkly contrasting methodologies.

A traditional archaeologist considers excavated evidence from her site and from other sites, and makes use of typologies, ancient literary testimonia, and modern scholarship. Another archaeologist offers a survey of Greek vase painting that makes light of the work of John Beazley, ignores Talcott and Sparkes, and appears to eschew relative chronology and the appearance of decorated pottery in favour of "'user narratives'" developed at a site in Bulgaria. The third author offers a purely art-historical iconographic study of certain aspects of three figures in a scene on an Etruscan mirror. These last two authors seem unaware of their diametrically opposed views. In contrast, the two Romanists share a balanced and inclusive approach to their topics, both of them making use of ancient literature and history alongside archaeological evidence and ancient and modern receptions.

Art-historical forays on the part of classicists and archaeological efforts by art historians are to be commended, though these sometimes reveal limited background in other disciplines. This is not always the case. The letters and documents bearing on nineteenth-century display of vases and of plaster casts, like the evidence from newspapers, posters, photographs, and drawings for nineteenth-century theatre, will make these three subjects fascinating to students of ancient Greece, a field in which the textual evidence is severely limited, and in which the

Mattusch Archaeological, art-historical, and artistic approaches to
classical antiquity

surviving monuments and texts are sometimes difficult to recognize, let alone identify or reconstruct. What is constructed from the sparse remains of antiquity in modern minds may be the most important thread to follow in *Making Sense of Greek Art*.

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