Antiquities as symbolic capital in modern Greek society

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The Great Powers — starting with ancient Imperial Rome and running up to the present — have valued Classical Greek culture as embodying the founding spirit of their own, or their own western world. So where does the modern state of Greece stand? It is, more than in most nations, encouraged or required to share what might be its particular heritage with a wider world.

Introduction

The use of archaeology and antiques for political purposes by different interest groups is not a new subject for discussion. As early as 1939, when dramatic social and political developments were taking place in Europe, Graham Clark in his Archaeology and society (1939) dedicated a chapter to this subject with particular emphasis upon the question of antiquity and nationalism. Glynn Daniel's The idea of prehistory set out issues such as the Kassia phenomenon in a chapter called 'The idea of prehistory in the study of language and race in politics'. The New Archaeology with its 'neutral scientificism' and positivism, did not address these matters; it was in the 1980s that the political implications of the discipline regained much interest with the advent of 'post-processual archaeology' [e.g. Shanks & Tilley 1987a: 186–208; 1987b: 46–67; Trigger 1984; Kristiansen 1992: Gathercole & Lowenthal 1990; Bond & Gilliam 1994; Kohl 1992; Fowler 1990; Arnold 1990; Dietler 1994]. This movement in reconsidering archaeology's ontological and epistemological principles, declared the loss of its 'political innocence' in the same way as New Archaeology had meant the loss of the discipline's scientific innocence (Kristiansen 1992: 3).

Discussion of the politics of the past in Greece has increased over the last 10 years (e.g. Andrä 1998; Brown 1994; Friedman 1992; Herzfeld 1991; Kalpaxis 1990; Karakasidou 1994: 41–4; Kotsakis 1991; Lowenthal 1988; 1990; MacCormick 1988; MacNeal 1991; Skopeta 1984; Politis 1993; Morris 1994) following those theoretical developments within western archaeology and in response to recent social and political conditions. Interest has focused on the uses/abuses of the past in constructing national identity and the 'imagined community' of the nation (Anderson 1991), as a consequence of the new climate of nationalism in Europe and elsewhere. Most of these studies have illustrated a feature common in most societies, the use of the past to legitimize a community's existence (Kristiansen 1992: 19). To recall Graham Clark again, 'human societies exist in the last resort because their members are aware of belonging to them, and a major factor in this is the consciousness of sharing a common past' (1967: 255).

Other issues need equally thorough investigation: the active role of the past in everyday life in the negotiation of power among different social groups, in the attempts of authorities to legitimize their existence and in the counter-attacks of ordinary people to resist dominant groups; and the responsibilities of archaeologists and archaeological work in this process. Moreover, the nationalist uses of the past should be examined in more depth and in all their aspects. For example, the particularities of individual nationalisms should be taken

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into consideration whenever uses of archaeology and the past in general are discussed: Greek nationalism is a telling example (cf. Mouzelis 1993 where Greek nationalism, described as 'religio-nationalism', is seen as distinct from north European nationalism). Furthermore, the specific social conditions and historical framework within which the past is used or abused should be analysed, a procedure which has been adopted only by a few studies.

Archaeology and past in modern Greek society

It is well known that aspects of antiquity dominate Greek daily life. This domination, evident in many facets of material culture, is present both in official concerns and in the domain of ordinary citizens; ancient features in architectural arrangement and decoration very frequently appear both in shop-fronts (Figure 1), and in the external decoration of private residences (Figure 2). The fact that these features occur not only in places with obvious commercial character such as shops, but also in the more personal sphere of private houses, makes it obvious that the phenomenon is related to deep ideological constructions.

Our main thesis is that antiquities and the past in general operate as symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1977a; Bourdieu 1990) or, to use a similar concept developed by Giddens (1984), as authoritative resource in modern Greek society. This symbolic capital is often exchanged for economic capital (although never directly, see below) or for national profit. For example, when in 1911 the Greek Archaeological Service was excavating the Temple of Artemis in Corfu, the Emperor of Germany who visited the island at that time showed his great interest in the excavation and the finds; he asked the government to obtain rights to the excavation project. The government, to the dismay of the Greek excavators, granted the rights to the Kaiser and his team. As Kalpaxis (1993: 56-7; our translation) notes:

It is not a coincidence that only two days after the assignation of the excavation rights to the Kaiser, Greek government officially approached the Great Powers ('Megale Dikaiosyne'), among which was Germany, asking them to intervene and persuade Turkey to stop the blockade to the Greeks who lived within the boundaries of the Turkish dominion.

This is a case where the Greek state exchanged its symbolic capital — the remains of its past with all their ideological connotations — for political and national profit.

The exchange of symbolic capital for economic capital is well depicted in the poster illustrated in Figure 3 which calls for financial assistance to Greece during the Second World War. Here, the classical past is brought out to remind us that since the establishment of the modern Greek state, Europe and the rest of the western world are considered mere debtors to Greece by both Greek official bodies and ordinary people (Herzfeld 1982; 1987; Skopetos 1988: 211).

As with all forms of symbolic capital, the purely economic transactions are masked. As Bourdieu notes (1990: 118):

Symbolic capital is this denied capital, recognised as legitimate, that is misrepresented as capital (rec-
by Americans that the Hermes of Praxiteles should travel on show in American and European cities in order to collect money for the repayment of the ‘Refugee Loan’ of the Greek State. Again, strong feelings of both archaeologists and public provoked the calling-off of the plan (Petakos 1982: 80–81; EDAE 4[1989]: 24: Figure 4). There was a similar hostile reaction to the proposal by the Greek ambassador in USA to display Hermes to the International Commercial Exhibition of New York in 1963 (Petakos 1982: 81–4). Protests and strong reactions did not always prevent the export of antiquities. In 1970, an uproar did not succeed in preventing the export of the Kore 670 from Akropolis and its display to the commercial exhibition EXPO’70 in Osaka, Japan (Petakos 1982: 85).

More recently (1981), N. Schimmel, an American collector of antiquities, proposed to the Greek Ministry of Culture a loan of Greek antiquities to American universities as a direct financial transaction. A similar idea was expressed by the curator of the Greek collection at the Paul Getty Museum, Marion True, in a conference at Rome on 15 June 1991. Both offers were strongly turned down (see EDAE 17[1991]: 122–7). Vassilis Petakos, the Secretary of Archaeological Society writes (EDAЕ 17[1991]: 109):

We keep the ancients here, they are not industrial products for export. Abroad we will send films, books, magazines in order to convince westerners that their occasional friends are themselves still barbarians of the past, and as dangerous as they were in 1453 and 1529.

It is not antiquities as physical objects which are for sale, but their value and their symbolic meaning. The appropriation of Greek symbolic capital by non-Greek organizations and its exchange for economic profit is considered an offense. This was the case when a Coca-Cola advertisement, printed in an Italian newspaper in August 1992 illustrated Coca-Cola bottles replacing the columns of the Parthenon (Figure 5). Yet, as a minority of intellectuals pointed out, many Greek companies have repeatedly used the Parthenon and other ‘national’ symbols in advertisements (see Boulotis 1988). This was not the first time that Coca-Cola had ‘stolen’ Greece’s symbolic capital, in the public perception. In 1990 Athens had lost to Atlanta, the Coca-Cola company’s home-base, in the competition to stage the 1996 Olympic Games, another form of Greek symbolic capital.

Other aspects of antiquities and the past as symbolic capital are equally interesting. Bourdieu (1977a; 1977b; 1990) has noted that symbolic capital incorporates an immense power, often used to mask and to transform other forms of power. As an authoritative resource, that is, a non-material resource directly involved in the generation of power (Giddens 1984), antiquities and the past in general are subjected to manipulation by different interest groups within Greek society. They are therefore part of the resources which constitute and reproduce the structures of domination in modern Greek society. As Herzfeld has shown (1991), the negotiation of power through the use of the past is an everyday phenomenon which involves not only state organizations and official bodies, but all people. Different acts which compete, clash or co-exist are involved. Neither the official rhetoric, however, nor the discourse on the past generated by ordinary people can hide the fact that the debate is all about the present. It has to do with power, domination and resistance; it is all politics.

The rest of this paper focuses on two aspects of the use of antiquities in their ‘negotiation of power’: its use as a means to legitimate the authority of a regime or a social group, and its use as tool for resistance.

In the beginning: rich merchants and romantic Kings
Before the founding of the Greek state, actually in the last decades of the 17th century, within the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire a merchant middle-class emerged representing the ‘modernizers’ in a struggle with the traditional ‘autochthonous landowning-cum-merchant class’ (Mouzelis 1978: 13; cf. Diamandourou 1972; Moskof 1979: 99–118). The political and economic influence of the Orthodox Church which was mainly ruled by Greek and the use of the Greek language all over the Balkans have been considered the most important factors for the ‘Hellenization’ of this new social class (Tsoukalas 1977: 39). Already economically connected to the west European bourgeoisie, this group imported, together with goods and economic capital, a form of symbolic capital in the ideology of classicism, much favoured by their European counterparts (see also Moskof 1979: 85). This merchant middle class, unlike the indigenous traditional elites and the ecclesiastical authority (Tsoukalas 1977: 44; our translation; cf. Diamandourou 1972):

sought a new form of political organisation which would lead not only to the liberation from Ottomans, but would also enable the creation of a ‘European style’ middle-class which would guarantee political emancipation and primarily economic development.

The ideals of classical antiquity as perceived in Europe at that time — ideals in which the whole concept of European-ness and the ideological foundations of western society were based (cf. Morris 1994) — provided a guiding source for this set of relationships. In this way classical ideals served as a link between Greek and other European middle-class social ideologies. Above all, they legitimized the existence of the middle-class and its political and economic programme (Kremmys 1992; Tsoukalas 1977; Xifaras 1993: 60).

At that period and in this way the classical past was used by a specific social and economic group to achieve economic, political and ideological domination over the other groups within Helladic society. Antiquities acquired the status of symbolic capital and authoritative resource in the early years of the modern Greek state, due to the prominent position of classical antiquity in the ideology of the European educated middle classes. In other words, antiquity became authoritative resource in modern Greek society through an externally originated mechanism of valuation (for discussions on valuation see Thompson 1979; Appadurai 1986; for native perceptions about antiquity before and shortly after the Greek War of Independence see Kakridis 1978; Protopsaltis 1967).

The European powers had played a large role in shaping the political, ideological and social-economic framework within which the War of Independence took place (1821–1829): it remained equally major during the first steps of the new-born Greek state. Intellectual attitudes towards the Greek past during that period were characterized by a promotion of classical antiquity and a matching dislike of the more recent Byzantine past — considered a disgraceful era for the Greek nation, an era of foreign occupation (cf. Dimaras 1989). The words of lakovakis Rizos Neroulos, an intellectual, politician and president of the Archaeological So-
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CLASSICISM AS AN IDEOLOGY WAS POPULAR AMONG THE UPPER AND MIDDLE CLASSES OF THE MODERN EUROPEAN POWERS WHO WERE TO SUPPORT THE MODERN GREEK NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND GUARANTEE IT A SECURE FUTURE. MOREOVER, AT A TIME WHEN THE GREEK STATE WAS SEEKING TO DEVELOP ITS OWN NATIONAL IDENTITY, ITS SOCIETY BECAME MORE AND MORE LIKE THE CARBONARI IN ITALY. THIS SITUATION WAS TO PAY OFF IN THE FUTURE, AS IT WAS TO BE THE FOUNDATION OF THE MODERN GREEK NATION.

THE ISOLATION FROM THE MODERN WORLD AND ITS CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS LEADS TO A SENSE OF ANGER AND DESIRE FOR REVOLUTION. THIS DESIRE FOR REVOLUTION IS TO BE THE FOUNDATION OF THE MODERN GREEK NATION. THE GREEKS WANTED TO BE FREE AND TO HAVE THEIR OWN NATION. THIS DESIRE FOR REVOLUTION IS TO BE THE FOUNDATION OF THE MODERN GREEK NATION.
Some recent examples: legitimation and resistance

There are many other cases in modern Greek history where antiquity has been used to legitimize authority and power. An interesting issue is the manipulation of antiquity by military dictatorships or authoritarian regimes. Makronisos, a place of exile and concentration camp for many thousands of democratic citizens and soldiers during the late 1940s, '50s and '60s, was called by the authorities the 'new Parthenon' (Valetas 1975). A replica of the Parthenon (among other monuments such as the church of St Sophia in Constantinople) was built in Makronisos (ICOMOS 1991) (Figure 7), and in propaganda posters (Photographic Album of Makronisos 1949) soldiers were illustrated building their own replicas of that 'National Monument' (Figure 8). The state during that time was trying to implant the belief that the ancient Greek spirit — which had survived through to the present — was at odds with contemporary 'radical' ideologies; this is another attempt to impose monumental time over social time. The inmates at Makronisos, by building the replicas of ancient monuments — which at that context lived another life and acquired a specific meaning and significance, the one given by the dominant ideology — could be helped to re-approach this spirit (Rodocanachi 1949: 6).

Here is what the leaflet, produced for the photographic exhibition organized in Athens on 1949 to present the 'achievements' of Makronisos, said: (Photographic Album of Makronisos 1949: 6):

Makronisos is today a national civilizing capital which has emerged through the struggle of the violent forces of the Slavocommunist darkness against the forces of freedom which were born from the spirit of ancient Greek philosophy.

In the case of Makronisos, therefore, the state used the authoritative resource of antiquity to legitimize its existence and to consolidate and reproduce its domination. It could do so because, firstly, antiquities had a prominent position in the structure of resources of power in Greece and, secondly, the official rhetoric on the ideological interpretation of the Greek past had deeply penetrated Greek society.

In more detail we present here another event of a different kind. At the beginning of 1979, one of the main issues that occupied the daily papers was the decision of the right-wing government to export some 170 antiquities from several Greek museums for an exhibition about Aegean 'civilization'. Initially at the Louvre in Paris and afterwards at the Metropolitan Museum, New York. A heated debate arose among intellectuals on the wisdom of that decision, focussed on the risk of damage to the archaeo-
They all stayed there, day and night, until the Prime Minister backed down from his decision and decided to exclude Minoan artefacts from the proposed exhibition. The ‘victory’ was celebrated with traditional dances in the main square of Heraklion. (Mesogeios 28 February 1979; 1, 2 March 1979; Patris, 28 February 1979; 1, 2 March 1979; Vima 28 February 1979; Kritiki Epitheorisi 28 February 1979; 1, 2 March 1979).

One could say that these people were mobilized by the political parties of the opposition. Or that they were motivated by more self-interest, realizing the economic profitability of antiquities as tourist attraction. There is an element of truth in those explanations, yet the phenomenon is far more complicated. For hundreds of years these people had been subject to official rhetoric about the ‘uniqueness’ and ‘superiority’ of the Greek past (cf. Ditsa 1978: 5). But now, they were experiencing the ‘hypocrisy’ of the state which was perceived as leaving that ‘invaluable treasure’ unprotected.

As was noted above, archaeologists had many criticisms regarding the safety of the antiquities during preparation and transport. During the late 1970s anti-government feelings were running high, especially in Crete. Cretans, who very proudly emphasized their distinctiveness from the rest of Greeks, felt betrayed by the right-wing government of that time. This Cretan attitude of a separate local identity is based, to some extent, on the Minoan past whose distinctive character which separates it from the rest of the Greek prehistory is heard in the local popular verses (‘moniodotes’) where Minoan antiquities are very often present. This attitude is undoubtedly reinforced by the romanticizing mythologies that Minoan archaeologists, foreign and Greek, have constructed (from Evans’ times until recently) where elements such as the ‘uniqueness’, the ‘superiority’, the ‘peaceful character’ and the ‘European taste’ of the Minoan past feature (cf. Starr 1984; Bintliff 1984).

As Herzfeld (1991: 227) notes, ‘once the rhetoric of national heritage has entered the protesters’ vocabulary it can be turned to their advantage’. In their protest, these Cretans used the tool that the state had provided — the rhetoric on the uniqueness of Greek antiquities — in order to resist state and government. Yet, their target was not only the government. The antiquities were to be exhibited in New York; by resisting their transportation, the Cretans were also resisting the strong military presence of the United States on the island. The contemporary newspaper made it clear that the target of opposition was moving progressively from dispute about the ancient artefacts to more general issues of government policy and national independence. It was also a fight against the economic super-powers of the West perceived as attempting to remove from Greece, from Crete, one of the few strong and valuable ‘weapons’ left — its highly acclaimed, and internationally praised and admired antiquities. The West may have money, political and military superiority and influence; Greece, and in this case Crete, had its invaluable symbolic capital which as authoritative resource organization, and legitimizes its position in time and space (cf. Giddens 1984: 258) and helps to negotiate a more balanced, fairer role in international relations. Furthermore, what is evident through reading the local press reports is that for the protesters, the West represents evil in an almost binary opposition: the West is equated with the Mafia, dishonesty and pollution, whereas Greece (Crete) has honesty and tradition and is, therefore, pure and humane (cf. Douglas 1966). The local newspaper, Eleftheri Gnomi (2 March 1979), explained: ‘Dances of satyrs with millions of dollars will be organized around the ancient figurines and the unique ancient culture.

The fight against the governmental decision (and subsequently against the Western super-powers), which, undoubtedly, incorporated chauvinist and nationalistic attitudes, can be viewed as a successful appropriation of Greek symbolic capital by ordinary people (Dore 1981: 301), and a successful use of symbolic power for resistance to state and supra-state mechanisms.

Conclusions
Antiquity, playing a crucial role in modern Greek society, is constantly used by the state, for different interest groups and by individuals for a variety of purposes. The construction of national identity is one such use. In order to understand both the diversity of uses/abuses of antiquity and their social, political and ideological implications, we have to build a certain theoretical framework within which these uses and functions have to be seen. In this paper we tried to show that the concepts of symbolic capital and authoritative resource provide the basis for such a framework. The nationalistic use of the past can be better understood and studied as one possible use of antiquity as authoritative resource. Other uses of this authoritative resource in modern Greek society — in legitimizing authority and in resisting the state and dominant structures — are equally interesting and worthy of investigation. Future study of the socio-politics of the Greek past needs to confront a number of problems:

1. Is antiquity and the past a plastic resource which can be freely manipulated or are there certain norms that limit this manipulation, as Appadurai (1981) suggests?

2. In what ways does the political use of the past affect archaeological research? (see, for example, the implications for the teaching of archaeology in Greek universities — Hamilakis 1993; in press).

3. How do archaeological research and material remains shape public perceptions of the past and affect its socio-political use? What is the archaeologist’s role in this process?

The answers to these questions will contribute to archaeology’s ‘critical self-consciousness’ (Clarke 1973) and will set the political agenda of archaeologists’ work. Otherwise, as Kristianstens noted (1994), ‘others will do it for us, and we will always have it run our day-to-day lives.

We can expect the role of antiquities in the contemporary Greek society to alter, for its exchange value in the West has dramatically decreased. The influence of multi-culturalism has seriously undermined classicism as a dominant ideology, and exposure of the use of classical antiquity for the ideological justification of domination and suppression (cf. Bernal 1987; 1991) has diminished its value. Practical reasons — the decline of classical studies, due to the priority on ?of? or emphasis on? financially profitable and directly applicable research (cf. Herzfeld 1994) have the same effect. Are antiquities being de-valued as symbolic capital in Greece today, or will the methods of their ‘financial’ management be simply adapted to the new situation?

Acknowledgements. We would like to thank Kostas Kotsakis for inviting us to participate in the session ‘Theoretical developments in Greek archaeology’ of the TAG 1993 meeting at Durham, where an earlier version of this paper was presented. We have benefited from the comments and criticism of the participants at the session. Thanks are also due to Charles Stewart and Chris Tilley for their comments.
suggestions and encouragement. Harriet Blitzer improved the English of the oral form of the paper. Special thanks must go to Michael Herzfeld: not only did he provide inspiration through his work but he also generously commented on an early draft; moreover, as an Antiquity referee, he offered much-needed encouragement and detailed comments. Another anonymous referee must be also thanked. Conventional rules of responsibility apply. The staff of Ekkdemos Library (Athens) helped with some of the illustrations. YH would like to acknowledge the financial help of the American School of Classical Studies, Athens which enabled him to participate in TAG 1993 at Durham.

References

EDEA: Newsletter of the Athens Archaeological Society (from no 15 «MENTOR»).
Elgin (Greece): Daily newspaper (Rethymno, Crete).