

**AS EUROPE UNDERGOES RAPID  
CHANGE IN THE PRESENT, HOW  
ARE ARCHAEOLOGICAL VIEWS  
OF THE DISTANT PAST  
AFFECTED?**

**WHY DO THESE VIEWS DIFFER  
FROM COUNTRY TO COUNTRY?**

*Archaeological Theory in Europe* captures the vitality and independence of the new spirit of archaeological debate in Europe. Drawing on the work of contributors from a variety of European countries it charts the development of archaeological theory in recent decades, considered in the light of increased theoretical awareness. Ultimately it demonstrates that the emerging debate in Europe is set to provide a new world focus in the discipline.

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The Last Three Decades  
Edited by IAN HODDER

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THEORY  
in  
EUROPE



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3 DECADES

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## THE ITALIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THEORETICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

*Bruno d'Agostino<sup>1</sup>*

At the beginning of the twentieth century Italian culture was dominated by positivist thought which saw the experimental method as the only valid approach to scientific research. The epistemological basis of the human sciences appeared no different from that of the natural sciences, and a lively interest was taken in ascertaining the possible correlations between these two fields. Within the archaeological arena, this situation hindered the establishment of a rigid division between prehistory and proto-history on the one hand and Classical archaeology on the other, to the clear advantage of the latter. In fact, studies of prehistory paid more attention to ecological problems, to the collection of those excavation data which could cast light on the relationship between humans and their natural environment. It was customary for that relationship to be deduced from analyses of human bones and of animal and vegetable remains. Besides, even though field research often left much to be desired, there was a clear understanding of the stratigraphical method which constituted an obligatory standard of reference.

In this climate of opinion it seemed natural that an archaeologist could move freely from prehistory to the Classical period, and, among the more informed proponents, that the archaeological method could legitimately be applied to everything investigable by means of excavation.

The most significant figure in this picture is Giacomo Boni. Director of the excavations in the Roman Forum and on the Palatine from 1902, he undertook the excavations of the proto-historical cemetery of the Forum, accurately documenting all aspects of the burial place, from the shape of the grave to the appearance of the wooden casing, from the position of the

accompanying grave goods to the nature of the human, vegetable and animal remains. He began to apply a rigorous stratigraphical method to the complex archaeological stratification which had continued without interruption from the tenth century BC to the time of the Renaissance. In the Palatine excavation he paid equal attention to the frescoed Roman houses under the *Domus Flavia* as to the Renaissance layout of the Farnese Gardens.

This conception of archaeology did not last long, yet it left an important mark. For example, many of Giacomo Boni's characteristics came together in the person of P. Orsi, another great archaeologist who dominated the scene in southern Italy and Sicily during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the situation began to change very quickly, for two main reasons. The first can be attributed to a profound alteration in the cultural climate. Since the first decade of the twentieth century, the influence of idealist thought from the Hegelian tradition had begun to make itself powerfully felt through the works of Benedetto Croce.

Crocean idealism, which was characterised by a strongly historicist sense, conceived of history as the history of ideas and therefore coincident with philosophy: history, inasmuch as it is a product of the spirit, could alone be the basis of true knowledge. From this derived the primacy of the human sciences, following a tradition which had both a Hegelian matrix and deep-seated roots in the Italian philosophical tradition, particularly in the thought of G.B. Vico. Thus a strict division was created between the natural and the human sciences. Besides, there hung over the latter the fierce Crocean prejudice against sociology, which was considered to be a farrago of generalisations without intellectual validity. So the way was barred to any possible encounter between the study of the ancient world and sociology: a union which had rendered the French cultural tradition so productive under the impetus of sociologists such as E. Durkheim and M. Mauss, and of ancient historians such as G. Glotz and L. Gernet.

It is undeniable that the influence of Croce had negative effects on archaeology. Prehistory was the first area to be damaged, being unable to justify its reconstructions through the study of ancient literary sources: it came to be seen as the illiterates' way to science. This prejudice caused a rigid separation between prehistory and Classical archaeology: the underlying prejudice against empirical

research and the experimental method was reflected in the poor quality of field research.

Nevertheless, it would be unjust to regard the Crocean experience on balance as a purely negative one. The historicist conception put an end to evolutionary determinism, typical of positivism, and opened a wide conceptual door to an understanding of different cultures and artistic expressions foreign to Classical culture. Here, the Crocean aesthetic, which defined art as a prelogical intuition expressed in a directly mediated way in the form of a poetic fragment, had an extraordinary importance.

It is difficult to say at what point archaeology, a discipline little inclined in Italy to reflection upon method, directly experienced the influence of Crocean thought. It certainly felt the cultural influences of the contemporary bourgeoisie, who found a higher and more systematic expression in Croce's thought.

As a result of this new climate, prehistory and Classical archaeology took two completely different paths. While the former strengthened its ties with the natural sciences, Classical archaeology increasingly tended to identify itself with the history of ancient art, understood as the history of great personalities and of masterpieces viewed outside their context. Thus it ultimately ignored the fundamental aspects of Crocean historicism, by lapsing into an evolutionary view which recognised abstract perfection in the art of Periclean Athens.

The changes in the cultural climate were accompanied by important historical events. From the beginning of the second decade of this century Italy became involved in colonial ventures, which reached their peak in the fascist era with the creation of the 'empire'. The task of colonial archaeology became that of demonstrating the 'Roman spirit' of conquered regions, by way of monumental excavations at Leptis Magna, Sabratha, etc. The measure of worth was quantity, to the total exclusion of quality: scientific interest gave way to propaganda. The rhetoric of ancient Rome and its imperial eagles conferred on archaeology the character of an ostentatious display. The archaeological activity in the colonies also exercised a deleterious influence on much that was going on in Italy.

In this situation, for instance, a decision was taken at the end of 1938 to carry out high-speed excavations in ancient Ostia in preparation for the 1942 Universal Exhibition, which in fact was never held because of the Second World War. The same circum-

stances made possible the creation of the Via dell'Impero, which involved digging up the Imperial Forums and demolishing an entire district of Renaissance Rome. All this allowed 'the decisive union of ancient Rome with modern Rome, the resurrection of the ruins and their new symbolic participation in the life of the state' in the words of the director of the German Archaeological Institute, L. Curtius.

It must be said that not all archaeology accommodated itself to the new standards of working, nor did all archaeologists submit to serving fascism. At least one shining example upheld the scientific and moral standard of the discipline, namely U. Zanotti Bianco, doctor and sociologist before he became an archaeologist, who was sentenced in 1934 to police confinement at Paestum. In this situation, together with P. Zancani Montuoro, he dedicated himself to investigating the celebrated Sanctuary of Hera at the mouth of the Sele river. Their excavation of the sanctuary, conducted with the same methodological rigour as in the great European excavatory operations, served to redeem the image of Italian archaeology during those years of provincialism and domination by rhetoric.

The downfall of fascism came about in a climate of strong ideological tension: yet the old guard of archaeologists loyal to the regime succeeded in extricating themselves completely unscathed, still retaining uncontested control of the positions of power. The figure of R. Bianchi Bandinelli dominated in this disheartening scene. Trained in Central Europe, he had begun his scientific career at the beginning of the fascist period. However, his European cultural dimension, and continued interest in what was developing in the capitals of international culture, had enormously extended his own range of observation, thus placing him at the heart of the cultural debate.

Bianchi Bandinelli had no desire to be a theoretician of culture, nor would he have accepted being identified with one particular school or rigid philosophical position. Yet in the immediate post-war period he decided to join the Italian Communist Party, feeling the necessity to make clear the eminently practical character of this choice. Perhaps precisely because he was a free spirit Bianchi Bandinelli always proved ready to understand and try out new approaches in so far as they appeared useful in illuminating the problems he encountered. This interest in what was new enabled him to mediate not only between archaeology and the other

human sciences, but also between the Italian experience and the most profitable ideas emerging in the European arena. His training, which was of a Central European type, had as its point of reference the School of Vienna and the thought of A. Riegl. In this environment artistic expression was seen as an aspect of general culture. Interest centred on the complex relationship between artistic expression and the taste of an environment and an era. The concept of taste (*Kunstwollen*) relativised artistic expression since the latter could assume very different forms according to the society which gave rise to it. This conception, which Riegl had tested in the study of artistic craftsmanship of late antiquity, enabled Bianchi Bandinelli to understand forms of artistic expression regarded until then as 'marginal' and inferior to Classical art, for example the art of archaic Greece and Italic art.

In the study of artistic expression in the Italic world, the archaeological culture of the 1930s oscillated between two extreme positions, both of which were incorrect: according to Classical culture of an academic stamp, it consisted of infantile creations without formal dignity. On the other hand, the archaeology of the regime, in its search for 'national roots', exalted Italic art as an expression of an original and 'anti-Classical' taste. It was to Bianchi Bandinelli's credit that he opposed both these simplifications in order to investigate thoroughly the complex relationship between Etruscan and Italic art on the one hand and the figurative culture of the Greek world on the other. His most important work, a collection of essays written before the Second World War, was *Storicità dell'arte classica*. This title had a twofold significance. First, it emphasised the historical character of ancient art and its formal changes consonant with the deep-seated processes of the transformation of society. And second, it signified that the artistic production of the Greek and Roman world was founded upon a tradition which formed the element of continuity and solid *humus* in which all innovations took root. This continuity differentiated Greek from Italic art; the latter had, from time to time, devised expressive new modes, but never managed to organise them into coherent language.

The encounter with the aesthetic of Croce, coming at the beginning of the 1930s, was like a bolt from the blue, but not unproblematic. With its romantic stance and exaltation of poetry as a lyrical intuition situated outside time, the Crocean aesthetic was

unable to satisfy for long the desire to discover through the work of art the complexities and tensions of the society of the time.

Even more important was the encounter with Marxist thought. This had ancient roots in Italy, and since the beginning of the century had given birth to a tradition endowed with its own particular physiognomy. However, the influence of Marxist thought on Italian intellectuals after the Second World War was particularly significant, due primarily to the writings of Antonio Gramsci. This Sardinian political theorist distilled his philosophical speculations and reflections on Italian culture and society above all into his *Prison Notebooks*. Fortunately, these were rescued from fascist censorship and published in 1947. If the Marxist *vulgata* was inclined to present history as a produce of economics, Gramsci regarded the link between economics and culture, and between structure and superstructure, as dialectical. If it is not possible to ignore socio-economic analyses in the study of cultural phenomena, it is also true that culture itself often anticipates and modifies processes which are current in actual society. In the historical field Gramsci united this ability to rethink the Marxist tradition with a strong interest in traditions and popular culture. He directed his attention to the existence of diverse levels of culture and expression which operated in specific ways within a particular society. Although the culture of the ruling classes was certainly the official one, it lived in continual tension with other languages specific to the subordinate classes. This conception turned out to be extremely productive in the study of Roman and Italic art, and permitted Bianchi Bandinelli to place its foundations on a new intellectual footing, while recognising an ever stronger bond between society and culture. Bandinelli died on 17 January 1975, having demonstrated in his most recent contributions a new concern for structuralist method as a complement to historical analysis.

A variety of experiences enriched his methodological armoury, but Bianchi Bandinelli remained, and always wished to remain, an art historian. His aim was to show the articulations and transformations of society through the analysis of figurative language. Economic and social history, which formed the background to his research, became the principal topics of interest for many of his students during the 1960s, (e.g. F. Coarelli, A. Carandini, M. Torelli, N.F. Parise). Italy had emerged decisively from the tunnel of post-war reconstruction, and, as in other European countries,

was in the process of building up an affluent capitalist society. A deep dissatisfaction, ethical even more than political, drove young intellectuals towards Marxism. At first, the new climate was felt to be a reaction against divisions between disciplines, and a lively interest was shown in the reconstruction of those aspects of the ancient world such as its economic and social history which traditional archaeology and even ancient sources left in obscurity. Even in the study of the ancient world, Marx's conception of the forms of production assumed a central role. The essential task appeared to be that of establishing those connections which, in any specified economic and social structure, related the producers and the means of production. At first, the attitude was one of rigid orthodoxy, with more or less explicit recourse to the succession of forms of production as described in Marxist texts, and a strong emphasis on economic processes.

These ideas were particularly apparent in the sphere of influence of the journal *Dialoghi di Archeologia* founded in 1967 following an agreement between Bianchi Bandinelli and a group of young people, many his former students. The journal constituted a unique phenomenon in the Italian archaeological scene. The members of the editorial board were in fact elected and responsible to a group of young 'friends of the journal'. In addition to its scientific contributions, the journal contained a political section, written by the 'friends'. In this way the rules of the consortia came to be challenged, by opening up for discussion the formation of laws, the distribution of finances, and irregularities in the organisation both of archaeological training and of the tutelage of the Cultural Properties.

Particularly important in the history of the journal was the conference on the beginnings of the Greek colonisation of the west. This took place at Ischia in 1968 and resulted in a rapprochement between Classical archaeologists and scholars of proto-history (e.g. R. Peroni) drawn together in a productive collaboration with historians of the ancient world (e.g. E. Lepore). This was not a one-off collaboration but had strong motivations which ensured its survival. An interest in the socio-economic aspects of the ancient world had brought Classical archaeologists to a new conception of archaeology as the history not so much of ancient art as of material culture. In this way Classical archaeologists rediscovered the importance of typology, and of the techniques of seriation of handmade artefacts in everyday use. Thus the work

of the Classical archaeologist became similar to that of the scholar of prehistory or medieval archaeology. It seemed as if the barricades erected during the first decades of this century had at last been broken down. This situation was doubtless favoured by the activity of such scholars as R. Peroni, who aimed at superseding the typological-definitory approach in order to historicise prehistory. Historians of antiquity such as E. Lepore must be given credit for the acceptance among archaeologists of the anthropological method.

The concept of material culture was new to Italian archaeologists, even though it had long been part of the culture of other countries, such as East European countries. A. Carandini can be credited with introducing this new concept of archaeology into Italy in a pamphlet which appeared in 1975. This was the first book to reflect upon the archaeological situation and its significance in a country in which traditionally no love had been lost between archaeology and theory.

The new interest in material culture necessitated a drastic reappraisal of the significance and techniques of archaeological excavation. In this field indeed there had been no attempt at valid theoretical reflection in Italy since the writings of G. Boni at the beginning of the century. The routine procedures of the Superintendencies (central government archaeological authorities) lacked scientific foundation most of the time. Carandini is responsible for introducing into Italy the *open area* method, which in Great Britain had for some time usefully replaced Wheeler's method. The appearance of Carandini's treatise on the technique of excavation, and the translation in the next few years of the principal contributions to the subject from abroad, profoundly altered the Italian archaeological scene, bringing significant improvement in the average quality of operations, even in the troubled area of rescue excavations.

Before discussing the latest developments in Italian archaeology, it is necessary to say something about what happened in the area of prehistory after the Second World War, since here also current developments have their roots in that period.

The tradition of G. Boni and P. Orsi, who rejected the separation between prehistory and the Classical world, was carried on by L. Bernabò Brea, who had dominated the Italian scientific scene from the 1940s to the present. In the field of prehistory he has been responsible for such fundamentally important excavations

as the cave of the Arene Candide near Finale Ligure, those at Lipari, and the scientific systematisation of the excavations at Poliochni (Lemnos). As a result of these fundamental operations and others too numerous to mention, this Genoese scholar has resystematised the prehistory of Italy, Sicily and the Aegean. His excavations and publications relating to Sicily and the Magna Graecia of the Classical era have been equally important. Essential to Bernabò Brea's stance is the rejection of every cultural fashion. So also is the use of whatever heuristic tools seem appropriate for the reconstruction of the historical picture, from the arguments provided by diffusionism to the use of typology as an instrument for defining the *facies* and their succession in time. For him it is important constantly to compare the data documented by archaeology with the traditions about ancient peoples handed down by Greek and Roman writers, in the attempt to historicise prehistory.

Very different is the approach of S.M. Puglisi. For a long time he occupied the chair of prehistory in the University of Rome, accumulating an outstanding group of students. He also has ranged freely over a wide geographical and cultural area, from Italy to Africa and the Anatolian plateau. Puglisi, however, has been less inclined to grand systematic syntheses and more interested in problems connected with the interpretation of archaeological evidence. His work shows traces of the ideas which in those years were being developed by V. Gordon Childe. For Puglisi also, the characterisation of a culture cannot be limited to the simple definition of a typological repertory of handmade artefacts: culture is primarily the way in which a human group organises its economic behaviour and its relationship to the environment. In this respect, the definition of a *facies* on the grounds of the typology of handmade artefacts is of secondary interest. A typological inventory is the product of a specified economic and social structure, and can recur over a long period where the structural conditions remain unaltered. Thus it is not possible to establish *tout court* chronological equations between similar *facies*. On these grounds he believed, for example, that the typical *facies* of the Bronze Age persisted in Puglia well after the threshold of the first millennium, preserving unchanged the formal repertory of the second. In a volume published in 1959 Puglisi expressed more fully his ideas about the Bronze Age culture which developed over many centuries throughout a large part of the Italian peninsula. He proposed a global reconstruction of this civilisation, in its cultural, economic

and productive aspects, as well as in its process of formation, which he sought to explain, not in terms of diffusion, but on the basis of what was then known of preceding local *facies*. His attempts at reinterpreting each class of handmade artefact in relation to the prevailing mode of production was also important, thus correcting the symbolico-religious interpretations which were then prevalent. Using these new interpretative models he showed how archaeology could make a valid contribution to the reconstruction of the economic basis of an ancient society.

In essence, Puglisi's approach was inspired by an orthodox Marxism in line with that of Childe. His attention to problems of methodology became an effective stimulus in an archaeological scene little inclined to concern itself with theory. This became even more explicit, and to some extent dominant, in his students, who have retained his essential characteristics (e.g. M. Tosi, A. Palmieri, A. Cazzella). Their presence on the cultural scene has had a marked impact in recent years; this brings us to the last fifteen years.

In this period, in line with a world-wide trend, the most progressive branch of Italian archaeology has been entirely dominated by anthropology. The divisions within anthropology have become more marked, and so in this respect the story of *Dialoghi di Archeologia* is typical.

This journal, in the sphere of proto-history, was first engaged in the attempt at a global reconstruction of the life of ancient communities by some very interesting experiments, particularly those relating to Rome and Latium. Interest in bio-archaeology has favoured the study of the complex relationship between human communities and their environment; at the same time the attention to settlement strategies and multicausal processes gave greater breadth to attempts at historical reconstruction. Behind these new directions in research are the pioneering studies by H. Mueller Karpe and R. Peroni on the political and social structuring processes within proto-historic communities. These scholars undertook the analysis of the necropolises with methods based on typology and the seriation of contexts. These methods, which nowadays would be hastily dismissed as 'Monteliusian', facilitated a new approach to proto-history. Adherence to the models of the New Archaeology matured at the same time as it began to lose its momentum in the United States and the most advanced European culture. The result was a kind of closure against any life still

remaining in the Italian post-war cultural tradition. The necropolises which provide fundamental and controlling evidence for the studies of proto-history are now examined by the use of quantitative criteria and mathematical formulations, seeking in them a direct mirroring of actual society. In spite of these reservations, there is no doubt that this kind of research is contributing to a period of considerable methodological reflection, which imposes a new rigour on the treatment of data and on the verification of models for the study of ancient communities.

A different conception of the anthropology of the ancient world was maturing slowly in the sphere of influence of the *Dialoghi di Archeologia* from the end of the second half of the 1960s. N.F. Parise had initiated this conception by his reading of Mauss and Polanyi, who enabled him to see the problems of the origin and significance of coins in the ancient world in a new light. A specific stimulus in this direction had come from ancient historians. Also, at that time, the culture of the Left in Italy, as in France, was undergoing an important process of methodological revision: at the centre of the debate were Marx's writings on precapitalist economic structures. In French anthropology, this led to the conclusion that economics should not necessarily be regarded as the immediate driving-force of the social dynamic in pre-capitalist societies. To be sure, even simple communities are affected by economic factors, but these are mediated through other mental categories such as religion or family relationships. This reformulation of Marxist thought, due principally to M. Godelier but clearly inspired by Louis Althusser, made it possible to enlarge the field of enquiry considerably, by attempting a reconstruction of ancient societies, including even those aspects which had been relegated to the superstructure. This was the context of a meeting of scholars working in the *Centre des recherches comparées sur les sociétés anciennes*, directed by J.P. Vernant. The study of the ancient mentality is carried out here according to procedures outlined in the 1930s by L. Gernet. These were developed in original ways by a very diverse range of scientists, each with a strong individuality, such as Vernant himself, P. Vidal Naquet, N. Loraux, A. Schnapp and others. The inspiration of the sociological tradition of Durkheim and Mauss, and of the psychology of history of Meyerson, was combined with the Lévi-Strauss's structuralism which was particularly alive in scholars like M. Detienne. Most stimulating for archaeologists was the realisation that, by

studying the ancient mentality and changes in the conception of reality, it was possible to get a feel for the great socio-political and structural transformations. For the scholars of the Centre, as already for L. Gernet, interest focuses on the moment of birth of the Greek *polis* and the great changes which accompany it, in religion and law, in philosophical and scientific thought, in art and in literature.

For the archaeologist, this engagement with the study of ancient societies opened a new field of enquiry, alternative to that of the material culture proposed by Carandini. The latter had correctly put forward as evidence the 'unintentional testimony' appropriate to archaeological documentation. This definition was adequate for the 'everyday refuse' contained in the strata which cover an ancient settlement. But alongside this kind of evidence, there is another, which, by contrast, is invested with the maximum of intentionality. For example, in necropolises and tombs, each element, from the arrangement of the burial-places to their shape, from the funerary rites to the choice and disposition of the grave goods, has been considered and arranged in advance for the moment of highest social performance in the ancient world, i.e. death. Studying a group of tombs or a necropolis involves the reassembling of a system of structured signs which represent the society of the living in its social and functional hierarchy. It is not, however, a mechanical type of mirroring; rather the representation is organised according to its own rules. These can reflect relationships to the real, or render them in a reversed way, transformed, so that, between the real and its representation, there is established a metaphorical type of relationship. In reconstructing the system and understanding its relationship with the real, what counts is the analysis of qualitative differences. It would be illusory to rely upon quantitative criteria and statistics as if they reflected *tout court* the articulations of actual society.

The stimulus provided by the study of the ancient mentality has led, in Italy as in France, to the pursuit of iconographic and iconological research. In this connection, there existed in Italy the important tradition of research associated with the name of Bianchi Bandinelli, also responsible for publicising in Italy the methods of research employed by the school of Vienna and the followers of A. Warburg. An important contribution in this direction has been made by M. Taddei with his iconological studies of Indian art. A new field has been opened up in the study of the figurative

cycles of Greek and Italic tombs by A. Pontrandolfo and A. Rouveret. By applying the semiological method to this kind of evidence, they identified various systems of funerary representations which have complex implications for social and cultural history. This current in Italian anthropology, which is keeping an attentive but critical eye on the experiments of the New Archaeology, has remained substantially faithful to the Italian Marxist historicist tradition. It emphasises both the synchronic and diachronic dimensions in the search for a point of equilibrium between structure and history.

## Note

This chapter was translated into English by Margaret A. Wilson.

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## THE POWERFUL PAST: THEORETICAL TRENDS IN GREEK ARCHAEOLOGY

*Kostas Kotsakis*<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction: A Historical Perspective

For a small country like Greece, archaeology has always had a much more central role than in other European countries. Even though European archaeology had constantly identified itself with the reconstruction of a European past (Leone 1982a; Trigger 1984), in Greece this past had at a very early stage acquired a social and political significance of a very high order (Skopetea 1984). This concern with the past – 'our past', as most of the Greek scholars of the nineteenth century would have it – was not only a central theme of the Greek intellectual background at the end of the eighteenth century (Dimaras 1985) but also a firm political issue with obvious links with national patriotic aspirations.

Archaeological monuments were soon to become the very emblems of the new Greek state which emerged after the struggle against Ottoman rule in 1821. One of the symbolic acts which vividly describes this close relationship was the restoration of a Parthenon column drum to welcome King Otto, the Bavarian prince who was assigned to the throne of Greece, to his new capital Athens in 1835 (Skopetea 1984: 179). But even before this symbolic act of ideological unity between the classicist ideas and the expression of state power, the emerging Greek state had already announced its determination to ensure the protection of its 'antiquities' – which in the terms of the period meant exclusively monuments of the Classical Greek past – through concrete administrative measures (Kokkou 1977: 39–46; Petrakos 1982: 16–19). State patronage was thus officially introduced into Greek archaeology.