

In this innovative study, James Whitley examines the relationship between the development of pot style, changes in mortuary practice, and social changes in the Dark Age of Greece (1100–700 BC). He focuses on Athens, whose sequence is divided into five phases, where the Protogeometric and Geometric styles first appeared. He considers pot shape and painted decoration primarily in relation to the other relevant features – metal artefacts, grave architecture, funerary rites, and the age and sex of the deceased – and also takes into account different contexts in which these shapes and decorations appear. A computer analysis of the grave assemblages supports his view that pot style is an integral part of the collective representations of early Athenian society. It is a lens through which we can focus on the changing social circumstances of Dark Age Greece.

Dr Whitley's approach to the study of style challenges many of the assumptions which have underpinned more traditional studies of early Greek art.

Dr Whitley is Tutorial Fellow in Archaeology, University of Wales, College of Cardiff.

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Style and society in Dark Age Greece

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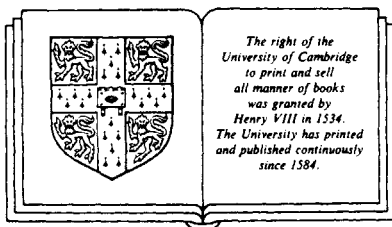
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JAMES WHITLEY

Style and society in Dark Age Greece

The changing face of a pre-literate society 1100–700 BC



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For Rachel

One idea is enough to organize a life and project it
Into unusual but viable forms, but many ideas merely
Lead one thither into a morass of their own good intentions.
Think how many the average person has during the course of a day, or night,
So that they become a luminous backdrop of ever-repeated
Gestures, having no life of their own, but only echoing
The suspicions of their possessor.

John Ashbery, *A Wave*, lines 53–59

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is a study of the connexions between style, burial and society in Athens during the so-called Dark Ages (1100–700 BC). It is based on my doctoral dissertation, undertaken between 1981 and 1986, entitled ‘Style, burial and society in Dark Age Greece: social, stylistic and mortuary change in the two communities of Athens and Knossos between 1100–700 BC’. This work began as an attempt to apply the kinds of ‘new archaeological’ analyses of mortuary variability that have been undertaken in the prehistory of Northern Europe to the cemeteries of the Greek Dark Age. It would now perhaps be best described as an attempt to reach an understanding of Protogeometric and Geometric art by archaeological means, while at the same time trying to address the kinds of historical questions that have long preoccupied both classicists and archaeologists. In revising this work for publication, I have been obliged to exclude most of the analysis of Knossos in the Dark Ages. My work on Knossos has the disadvantage of almost instantaneous obsolescence, since not only its conclusions but its database would have to be extensively revised in the light of the forthcoming excavation report from the North Cemetery, publication of which I understand is imminent. Nonetheless, in many respects the omission of Knossos is unfortunate, since the work loses most of its comparative force. Moreover, in recasting the work as a purely Athenian study, the overlap between my work and Ian Morris’ *Burial and Ancient Society* (Morris 1987) becomes so glaring as to be embarrassing to both of us. The sceptical reader may ask whether the society of Dark Age Athens merits the attention of two major archaeological studies. There are several good reasons for answering in the affirmative.

The first reason is one of general historical interest. We understand so little about the kind of society that existed in the Dark Ages, the kind of society from which the *polis* emerged, that any attempt to elucidate social change must be welcomed. This is particularly true of that most important of Greek *poleis* and Dark Age sites, Athens. It is a mistake to believe that Dark Age society can be reconstructed from literary sources, particularly the Homeric poems, since these project an idealised, ahistorical ‘heroic’ past, a poetic amalgam of the Bronze and Iron Ages. Any attempt to understand social change must rely primarily on archaeological evidence, and must have theories and methods equal to the task.

The second reason is one of archaeological approach. Although the subject matter of both works overlaps, their interests and their focus do not. Ian Morris’ work concentrates on questions of demography, on the *longue durée*, and on patterns of exclusion and inclusion in ‘visible’ burial. His picture of social development resembles

a 'long-wave' model favoured by some economic historians. My approach is founded on quite different propositions.

My main proposition is that art historical and historical research, particularly in the absence of written sources, must go hand in hand. In archaeological investigation, the particular form that material culture takes cannot be studied independently of a consideration of the society that generated that material culture. The same is true of other forms of material collective representations, such as cemeteries and burials. In attending to the specificity of cultural forms, my reconstructions are much more detailed than Ian Morris', and the character of the argument is in general much more art historical. Not only are my theoretical concerns distinct from Morris', but my methods of analysis have to be much more sensitive to small degrees of difference between the individual units of analysis (in this case grave assemblages).

In claiming that style, burial and society need to be studied together, I am not asserting that there are always necessary and easily deducible relationships between the three. Indeed, part of my argument is that the degree to which 'style' is embedded in social practices and social form changes quite markedly through time. My point is simply that such relationships, whether necessary or contingent, can be elucidated by archaeological means, and that the social form that generated them can be characterised by these relationships. To give some indication of how I arrive at these conclusions, a chapter by chapter summary is in order.

Chapter 1 is a general introduction to the book. It serves both as a general historical introduction to the subject (how the Dark Ages became an object of study) and as an introduction to the book's main concerns. It describes why Athens has been chosen as the focus of study, and why painted pottery and burials have been taken as the most significant class of material.

Chapter 2 is devoted to theoretical concerns, and is divided into five parts. In the first part I am concerned with assessing the relative merits of traditional approaches in classical archaeology and art history as against those recently current in the New Archaeology towards gaining an understanding of style, and I try to define an approach to style that is appropriate in this case. In the second part I discuss recent developments in the archaeological approaches towards understanding prehistoric societies through an analysis of their cemeteries. In the third, I outline some of the inescapable difficulties inherent in using textual sources to reconstruct pre- and proto-historic societies. In the fourth section, I try to weigh the merits of the kind of particularist historiography traditionally favoured by ancient historians against those of a comparative state-formation approach in addressing the question of the origins of the *polis*. In the fifth, I devote myself to the particular, art-historical question of the origins of figural representations in the predominantly abstract Geometric style of ninth- and eighth-century Athens.

Chapter 3 discusses, in general terms, the archaeological and literary evidence for our understanding of Dark Age Athens and Attica, providing the essential background for the later analysis. Particular difficulties with the evidence, such as those arising from the use of old physical-anthropological data, or relating to comparative material from contexts other than burials or to the character of settlement of Dark Age Athens,

are also dealt with. I also attempt to elucidate the assumptions that have guided previous work in this area, particularly those of German scholars, and examine the reasons why it is the ceramic sequence from Athens that has stood as the paradigm for the Geometric.

Chapter 4 is concerned with methods and chronology. I outline my approach, and describe appropriate methods of analysis, in particular providing reasons for the use of computers. I define the optimal conditions for such an analysis, namely the existence of clearly defined individual grave assemblages and independent osteological determinations of the age and sex of the deceased. I then discuss chronology, and outline a five-phase scheme for the development of Dark Age Athens.

In chapter 5 I examine the sequence of burials and pot styles, and undertake a computer analysis of the dataset from each phase and an archaeological characterisation of each period. For each period the pot style can be shown to be structurally related to the general character of a social order manifested in the pattern of mortuary assemblages. The disorderly system of Submycenaean times gives way to one in Protogeometric where age and sex are clearly the factors which determine which artefacts and what manner of burial are to be accorded any individual, but one in which pot design appears to be irrelevant. This in turn is replaced by a system in which exotic luxuries, specific pot and metal types, and particular stylistic features are used to define an emerging hierarchy in the ninth century. This new ninth-century social order was defined and legitimised on the principle of the social rationing of emblems of rank ('style') and exotic luxuries. It was an order characterised by the selective use of artefacts and motifs and by their selective destruction, rather than by the profligacy in display found in other contemporary emerging hierarchies. The early eighth century witnesses the elaboration of this system (at least as regards the form and decoration of painted pottery), and the late eighth century its collapse in the processes of state formation.

Chapter 6 summarises the Athenian sequence and draws some comparisons with other parts of the Greek world, in particular with Argos and Knossos. The notion of 'Homeric society' is again discussed, and it is proposed that the institutions and social practices found in the Homeric poems are compatible with at least two distinct social forms prevalent at different times and places in the Dark Ages. One of these social forms appears to fit the situation in ninth-century Athens remarkably well, while the other is characteristic of an earlier period within the Dark Ages, and better fits the picture from sites like Lefkandi. The sequences and social development of Argos, Athens and Knossos appear to be more divergent than convergent, which has important implications for our understanding of the formation of the *polis*.

Chapter 7 draws out the theoretical implications of this work both for the archaeological study of mortuary practices and for our understanding of early Greek art. The historical conclusions reached in chapters 4, 5 and 6 are also summarised.

In the composition of this work I have been greatly helped by numerous individuals. I have many to thank: my supervisors, first Colin Renfrew and Anthony Snodgrass, for their patience, criticism and (unpaid) support; my fellow students in Cambridge and Athens, particularly my colleagues in Dark Age studies, Ian Morris, Alexandra

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ABBREVIATIONS

Bibliographic abbreviations

- AA* *Archäologischer Anzeiger* (supplement to *JdI*)
AAA *Athens Annals of Archaeology* (*Arkhaiologika Analekta ex Athenon*)
AD *Arkhaiologikon Deltion*
AD A *Arkhaiologikon Deltion*, part A, Meleti
AD B *Arkhaiologikon Deltion*, part B, Khronika
AE *Arkhaiologiki Ephemeris*
AJA *American Journal of Archaeology*
AM *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung*
Annuario *Annuario della Scuola Italiana di Atene e della Missioni Italiane in Oriente*
AR *Archaeological Reports* (supplement to *JHS*)
BCH *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique*
BCH Chr *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique, Chronique des Fouilles en Grèce*
BSA *Annual of the British School at Athens*
BSA suppl. British School at Athens, supplementary volume
CVA *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* (Union académique internationale)
Ergon *To Ergon tis en Athenais Arkhaiologikis Etairias*
JdI *Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts*
JHS *Journal of Hellenic Studies*
PAE *Praktika tis en Athenais Arkhaiologikis Etairias*

Non-bibliographic abbreviations

- AG* Agora excavations, artefact number
ASCS Athens American School of Classical Studies at Athens
BA Bronze Age
bha Belly-handled amphora
DA Dark Age
DAI Athens Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Athen
EG Early Geometric (I and II)
EH Early Helladic

Abbreviations

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EIA	Early Iron Age
EO	Early Orientalising
EPG	Early Protogeometric
Fort.	Number given to an artefact from the Fortetsa cemetery by Brock (1957)
G	Geometric
gr.	grave
int.	interment
Ker.	Number given to an artefact from the Kerameikos excavations (Kraiker and Kübler 1939; Kübler 1943; 1954).
LBA	Late Bronze Age
LG	Late Geometric (I and II)
LH	Late Helladic (see Mountjoy 1986)
LHIIIC	Late Helladic III C (see Mountjoy 1986)
LPG	Late Protogeometric
MG	Middle Geometric (I and II)
MH	Middle Helladic
MPG	Middle Protogeometric
nha	Neck-handled amphora
NM (Athens)	Number given to artefact in the National Museum in Athens
O	Orientalising
PG	Protogeometric
PGB	Protogeometric 'B' (in Knossos)
sha	Shoulder-handled amphora
SM	Submycenaean
Smin	Subminoan