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People, worlds and time

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Introduction

The Classical world is a world in the past. It is a part of global history. Geographically it is easy enough to define broadly where the Classical world was located – it was the parts of Africa, Asia and Europe that surround the Mediterranean Sea. But saying when, in the past, the Classical world may be found is not so simple. The most straightforward way of doing so is by counting time. In years, the ancient world may be placed between about 2,800 and 1,500 years ago. But how is it possible to be so specific about saying when the ancient world happened when it was so long ago? The answer is that Classical Studies, as an academic subject, has chosen boundaries for itself. Anything before 814 BC, the date of the earliest ‘reliable’ historical date in the area around the Mediterranean Sea, is a part of prehistory – the massively long part of the human past that was lived without written historical records. Everything after that date is a part of recorded history (see Essay Two).

If such great significance is to be placed upon a single year it demands some closer examination. The date of 814 BC has been recorded for the foundation of the city of Carthage in the modern state of Tunisia. The date is given by a Greek-speaking writer named Timaeus from the city of Taormina in Sicily in his history of that island that was written over 500 years after the foundation of Carthage. He used earlier lists of kings in Phoenicia (modern Lebanon), which have not survived, to fix the date of the founding of Carthage at 38 years before the first Olympic Games, a set of ancient athletic contests first held in 776 BCE (Lancel, 1997, p.22).

Using written records in this way to divide up time needs some explanation. Why should the presence or absence of written words recording an event play such a powerful role? The clearest answer to this question is that the written word that has survived from the ancient world gives us a voice from the past. We can say that Timaeus *says* that the city of Carthage was founded in 814 BC. His voice gains authority through the fact that he lived closer to the time itself and had sources of evidence not available to us. Other historians living in ancient times relied on his work to write their own histories. In modern times, scholars who have studied the question in great detail have found good reasons to believe that Timaeus was providing a reliable piece of information free from prejudice or wilful misrepresentation, and this reinforces its credibility.

This voice from the past, and the others like it that have survived through to the present by being written down, form the raw materials from which ancient history is written by modern historians. The use of the earliest reliably dated event to mark the very beginning of the ancient world underlines the traditional emphasis placed by historians of the ancient world on the word as the most important source of knowledge about what happened in the ancient world. The date of 814 BC may be considered reliable for historical reasons, but independent corroboration has not yet been found for this: the earliest dated archaeological finds made at Carthage, up to now, date to about 50 years later, in the middle of the eighth century BC (Lancel, 1997, pp.25–34). This lack of supporting evidence does not necessarily prove that the historical date is not believable. All that can be said is that evidence to support the date has not yet been found.

At the other end of Classical Studies the boundary is harder to draw, but in the western Mediterranean the ousting of the last Roman emperor, Romulus Augustulus, in AD 476 is commonly taken as the end of the Roman period. This too is a reliably dated event given to us by an anonymous voice known as the Anonymus Valesii, writing in a fragmentary chronicle of the period (Anonymus Valesii, viii; in König, 1987, p.38). However, in the eastern Mediterranean, emperors continued to reign. Voices from the past, preserved in writing, tell us that later figures in Byzantium, such as the emperor Justinian (lived AD 527–65), who controlled parts of the western empire and was titled ‘Emperor of the Romans’ (Procopius, *History of the Wars* 1.1), continued to consider themselves as maintaining the traditions and civilisation of the ancient world. The end of the ancient world, or the Classical world as it is often termed to differentiate it from ancient periods in other parts of the world such as India or China, is often taken to have happened when Islamic peoples conquered the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean in the seventh century AD, thus marking the beginning of the Middle Ages. Yet if we follow the Classical world through into the Byzantine empire, the end of the ancient world may be placed even later, in 1453, with the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, which in the west of Europe is nearer in date to the end of the Middle Ages.

Wherever precisely markers are placed at the beginning and end of the Classical world, a long period still remains to be studied in between. How can such a long period of time, at least 1,300 years, be divided into manageable, meaningful and useful shorter periods that can be studied and understood? Making such divisions is essential, since once this has been done it becomes possible to investigate processes of change within the ancient world by comparing one period with its predecessor or successor.

The aim of this essay is to investigate methods used for the dividing up of the past and also to ask why the past is divided up into different periods, how it has been done and what effect that has upon our understanding of the ancient world.

The organisation of time

Perhaps the most obvious way to divide up the past is to measure time, as we have already done, using 'years ago'. This may be convenient but it is not very precise. 'Two thousand years ago' said in 2005 is not the same as 'Two thousand years ago' said in the year 2015 – it is different by ten years. Using a system derived from observations of the rotation of the earth around the sun to calculate the length of a year has the advantage of being related to the unchanging rhythm of the natural world. Indeed, it might seem an ideal system: it is very regular and it is independent of human events and cultural changes (provided it is measured accurately).

Furthermore, it is a system that has been in use from before the start of the Classical world, and the calendar adjusted by Julius Caesar in antiquity (in 46 BC) was in use in western Europe until the eighteenth century AD and is still used in Russia. However, even if we can measure the length of a year and count the passing of individual years, it is still necessary to define a year zero, be it the present, from which we can count back (as in years ago), or in the distant past, from which we can count forward. But this is where the problems start.

Up to this point in this essay, in discussing how the Classical world was delimited, a year zero has been assumed using a system of identifying years as BC or AD (but it should be noted that in the BC/AD system there is actually no year zero since the measurement of time passes directly from 1 BC to AD 1). This system of referring to years is familiar to some, but is itself controversial. It has been argued that it is inaccurate since it uses the date of the birth of Christ as a fixed point before or after which things can be measured to have happened, yet the historical fact of the date of that reported birth is disputed by many on two different grounds, both the accuracy of the actual date and the historicity of such an event. Others object to the system because it is too culturally specific and the division of world history into years fixed upon the date of birth of a figure key to a particular religious faith is inappropriate for other people with different faiths – who use their own, different, culturally specific systems. Attempts to remove the cultural significance of the system by replacing BC (before Christ) with BCE (before the common era) and AD (*anno Domini*, Latin for 'the year of our Lord') with CE (common era) are hardly more satisfactory in that they still use the same religiously defined date as a year zero. Neither the BC/AD system nor its derivative, the BCE/CE system, were used

in antiquity. The former was invented in the fifth century CE and the latter in the twentieth century CE. However, we will for convenience be using the BCE/CE system throughout the essays in this book from here on.

The ancient Romans had a similar system, which used the traditional date of the founding of the city of Rome, 753 BCE, as a year zero. In this system of reckoning, the year 2006 would be 2759 AUC (*ab urbe condita*, Latin for ‘from the founding of the city’). This system was commonly used in history books written before the early twentieth century CE, but it has now fallen out of fashion. Furthermore, it does not seem that the system was widely used in ancient times and the actual date of founding of the city was debated in antiquity and still is. Another system that used significant events in the past as fixed points was employed in the Ancient Greek world. This divided the passing solar years into groups of four years, the beginning of which were celebrated by the Olympic Games. Thus, CE 2008 would be the start of the 696th Olympiad. Yet another ancient system reckoned time in years after the Trojan War, thought to have ended in 1183–1182 BCE.

So in antiquity, as now, there was a variety of reckoning systems in use but no consensus about a universal system. A more common system was one that was not absolute, in that it did not work from a fixed zero, but instead identified each year by referring to the names of those holding certain offices of state in that year: the two ruling consuls (chief magistrates) in Rome, the archons in Athens or the ruling magistrates in other cities, each of which maintained its own system of identifying years. Thereby, time was defined locally by referring to individuals in authority, and making the marking of time a part of public and political life in each independent city. In this system, in Rome, the year CE 15, for example, was referred to as the year when Drusus Caesar and Gaius Norbanus Flaccus were consuls. It is the surviving lists of consuls that provide the possibility of matching the years in the two systems: that is, the one defined by year zero and the other by named officials (Figure 1.1). Later on, years might also be identified by referring to anniversaries of the accession of a new emperor. For example, CE 122 could be referred to as the fifth year of the emperor Hadrian.

This form of time measurement, being precise about years, provides a means of describing how long ago events happened and the amount of time that elapsed between different events happening. It also makes it possible to put events in the past into a chronological order. This is time used to gauge the past and it is an important basis for constructing history, or cultural development, since once observations of events or situations, judged to be important, have been put into a sequence it becomes possible to investigate change and causes and effects. This chronological time is important for students of the past but there are other uses for time and other ways of dividing the human past.

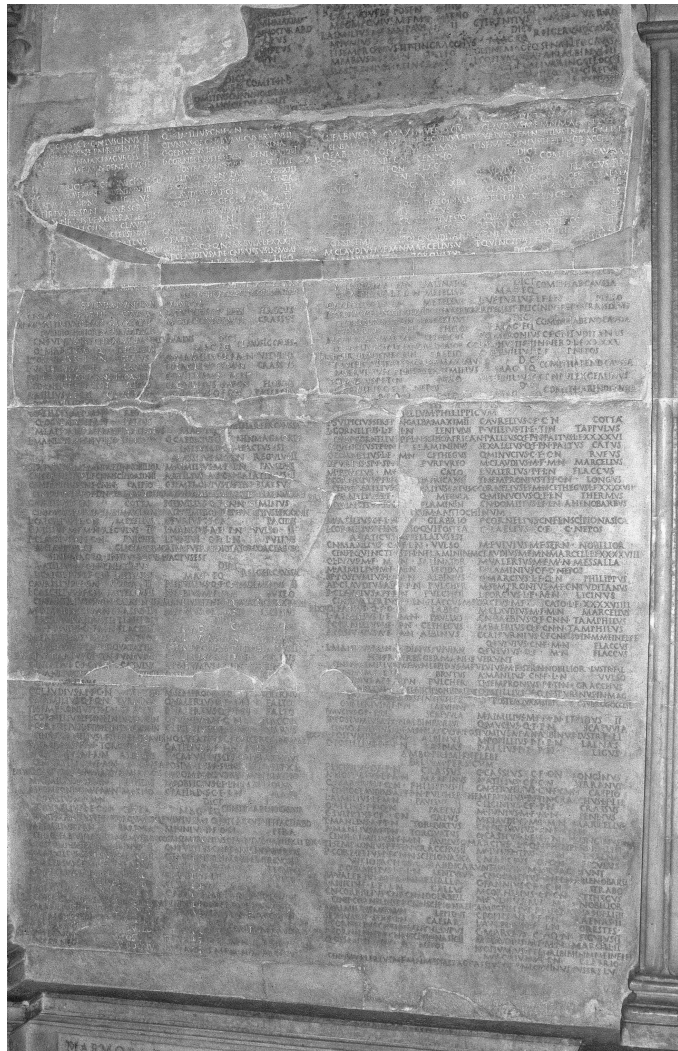


Figure 1.1 Inscription of the Capitoline Annals, with the list of the names of the magistrates of the Republican period; found in the Roman forum. First century BCE. Capitoline Museums, Palazzo dei Conservatori Museum, Rome. Photo: Alinari Archives 1985–1995.

The cosmos and time

Even before the time of the Greeks and Romans, the length of the solar year was known to be approximately $365\frac{1}{4}$ days, and calendars were devised at different times and places to divide the year into a number of days and months. Some calendars attempted the difficult task of combining the length of the lunar month ($29\frac{1}{2}$ days) with the solar year to form a coherent system. Roman calendars have survived which map the days and

the months against public business and religious festivals and these were used to record and predict the time-dependent aspects of the ancient social world. Within each day the time between sunrise and sunset was divided into twelve equal parts, as were the hours of darkness. This was a geometric and rational organisation of time that was easily measurable with a sundial by dividing the part of the sundial where the shadow is cast into twelve parts, but it led to hours of different lengths at different times of year as the length of time between sunrise and sunset varied with the seasons.

The passing of the months and seasons was also related to the apparent movements of the stars, and in one of the earliest surviving pieces of Greek poetry, *Works and Days* by Hesiod (c.700 BCE), the timing of farm work appropriate to each season is related to the rising of various constellations, for example:

As soon as mighty Orion rises above the horizon
exhort your slaves to thresh Demeter's holy grain
in a windy, well-rounded threshing floor.

(Hesiod, *Works and Days* 597–9; in Athanassakis, 1983, p.82)

The passing and measuring of time was therefore intimately associated with the natural world and the cosmos with its cyclical rhythms (Figure 1.2). In the middle of the fourth century BCE, the same close relationship between time and the cosmos was rationalised and put in theological terms by Plato:

For before the heavens came into being there were no days or nights or months or years, but he [god] devised and brought them into being at the same time that the heavens were put together ... the sun and moon and the five planets as they are called came into being to define and preserve the measures of time.

(Plato, *Timaeus* 38; in Lee, 1977, pp.51–2)

This creation of time and the cosmos clearly parallels the Old Testament account of the creation.

The role of divinities in measuring and regulating time is visualised by the Roman poet Ovid (43 BCE– CE 18) in the second book of his *Metamorphoses*, where he tells the story of Phaethon, the son of Phoebus, god of the sun, who took over driving the chariot of the sun for a day – with disastrous results:

He went at once into his father's presence, but stood some way off: for he could not bear his light too close. The sun, dressed in a purple robe, was sitting on a throne bright with shining emeralds. On his right hand and on his left stood Day, Month, Year, the Generations and the Hours, all ranged at equal intervals. Young Spring was there, his head encircled with a flowery garland, and Summer, lightly clad,



Figure 1.2 Floor mosaic showing Aeon (god of eternal time), or the spirit (*genius*) of the year, surrounded by (from left anti-clockwise) the Sun, Spring, Summer, Moon, Autumn and Winter, each in a roundel set in a circular composition, from El Djem, second half of the third century CE, El Djem Museum, Tunisia. Photo: Akg-images, London/Gilles Mermet.

crowned with a wreath of corn ears; Autumn too, stained purple with treading out of the vintage, and icy Winter, with white and shaggy locks.

(Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 2.22–30; in Innes, 1976, p.50)

The personifications to either side of the sun god are carefully arranged: the *Dies*, *Mensis*, *Annus* (Day, Month, Year), the natural temporal divisions, followed by artificial divisions, the *Saeculi* and *Horae* (Generations and Hours) (Zissos and Gildenhard, 1999, p.33). It has even been suggested by Andrew Zissos and Ingo Gildenhard that the arrangement of the Hours at

equal intervals to either side of the sun reflects the arrangement of a Roman sundial with twelve even intervals to either side of the shadow of the sun at midday.

Ovid used words to create his images, but physical representations of time were also popular. Roman mosaics decorating the floors of the residences of the Roman élite commonly feature themes related to time, particularly personifications of the seasons. Such personifications became standardised, often as female figures, with flowers to represent Spring, ears of corn to represent Summer, grapes for Autumn and olives for Winter (Figure 1.2). The days of the week, each of which was sacred to a god or goddess, also occasionally appeared on mosaics, as did the signs of the zodiac. Time was ordered and unchanging, it had a regular, cyclical



Figure 1.3 Silver statuette of the goddess Tutela (Fortune) by an altar with an offering dish, with busts of Apollo and Diana in a pair of cornucopiae in one arm, Castor and Pollux on her wings and deities of the days of the week, Saturn, Sol, Luna, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter and Venus above. Found at Mâcon, France, c.CE 260, British Museum, London, Silver 33. Photo: © Copyright The Trustees of the British Museum.

structure. This order was often represented in geometric compositions, such as mosaics featuring the seasons arranged in a circular composition.

Thus, time was divided, measured, rationalised, mythologised and visualised in Graeco-Roman thinking, life and art (Figure 1.3).

People and time

Human lifespan was meshed into this ordering of time: it was used as a measure of the passing of time. For example, Herodotus (484–430 BCE) describes the Heraclid dynasty in Lydia as reigning for 22 generations, equating this to a period of 505 years, and so giving an average life of nearly 23 years to each generation (Herodotus, *Histories* 1.7). But an ordered cosmos could also be mapped against the individual's life in order to understand the future through the calculation of horoscopes. The tradition of ancient horoscopes came from the earlier civilisations of Babylon and Egypt, and the influence of these systems can be seen in modern descriptions of stars as constellations and also, indirectly, in contemporary astrology (Figure 1.4).

The telling of fortunes in ancient times depended upon the positions of the celestial bodies at the moment of birth. For this reason, if no other, it was important to be able to measure time precisely enough to allow the use of astronomical tables, built up through centuries of observation and calculation, to establish the positions of the stars and planets at the moment



Figure 1.4 Egyptian wooden horoscope plaque, showing Luna in the centre, the signs of the zodiac in the inner ring and further out the houses represented by Egyptian divinities, with stars around the edge. From a Roman sanctuary, Grand, Vosges, France, second century CE, Musée départemental d'art ancien et contemporain à Epinal. © Musée départemental d'art ancien et contemporain, Epinal. Photo: Bernard Prudhomme.

of birth. Although astrology does not play a significant role in standard histories of the ancient world, it does seem to have been widely practised, at all levels in society (Figure 1.5):

At Apollonia, Augustus [the future emperor] and Agrippa together visited the house of Theogenes the astrologer, and climbed upstairs to his observatory; they both wished to consult him about their future careers. Agrippa went first and was prophesied such almost incredibly good fortune that Augustus expected a far less encouraging response, and felt ashamed to disclose the time of his birth. Yet when at last, after a deal of hesitation, he grudgingly supplied the information for which both were pressing him, Theogenes rose and flung himself at his feet; and this gave Augustus so implicit a faith in the destiny awaiting him that he even ventured to publish his horoscope, and struck a silver coin stamped with Capricorn, the sign under which he had been born.

(Suetonius, *Augustus* 94; in Graves, 1979, p.93)

The taking of a horoscope is a demonstration of faith in fate and predestination, the moment of birth being vital for defining an individual's future. It is also a demonstration of faith in an astrologer. Time is vital for gauging the future by means of the time of birth and hence the position of the celestial bodies, but the knowledge and skills required to interpret these were those of the astrologer. Astrology provided not only a knowledge of fate, but also the power to manipulate that fate. A second-century CE manual of astrology sums up this power:



Figure 1.5 Silver coin (denarius) of Augustus, showing on the obverse Augustus with a laurel crown and on the reverse his birth sign, Capricorn, holding a globe and rudder symbolising steering of the empire, 27–24 BCE, British Museum, London. Photo: by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

if future happenings to men are not known, or if they are known and the remedies are not applied, they will by all means follow the course of primary nature; but if they are recognized ahead of time and remedies are provided, again quite in accord with nature and fate, they either do not occur at all or are rendered less severe.

(Ptolomy, *Tetrabiblos* 1.3.13; in Robbins, 1980, pp.27–9)

Thus, a knowledge of time and its relationship to nature might yield control over the future.

Periodisation

Time, past or future, can thus be measured in various ways, both absolute and relative, for a variety of purposes. History, the study of past time, traditionally divides time into broad areas, such as modern times, medieval times, ancient times, even prehistoric times, but why do students of the past need to divide up history? At a simple level the answer is that periodisation – dividing things into periods – makes the practice of history easier. It makes it easier to talk about the past, it ‘enables the drawing of lines and to be able to say some common thread unites a block of human lived experience, also that this block is different from the preceding or following ones’ (Morris, 1997, p.96). For example, if something or someone can be identified as belonging to the Archaic period, that on its own enables us to situate it or them in history with respect to other periods, such as the preceding Orientalising period or the following Classical or Hellenistic periods (see Table 1.1). It is also often possible to identify common features of artefacts or societies that can be characterised as Archaic (for example) and to draw boundaries for a period when such features begin and cease to be found.

Table 1.1 Table of periods

Greece	Iron Age/Dark Age		Archaic period			Classical period		Hellenistic period	
			Orientalising period						
Italy	Bronze Age	Iron Age		Orientalising period	Archaic period	Classical period	Hellenistic period		
Central Europe	Bronze Age			Iron Age					
				Hallstatt D period		La Tene period			
Years BCE	1,000	900	800	700	600	500	400	300	

(Sources: Barker and Rasmussen, 1998, p.6; Champion *et al.*, 1984, p.271; Whitley, 2001, p.62)

There is, however, a need to be careful about precision – that is, how closely we can be sure of a date assigned to something in the past. In some cases ancient historians can be sure of a date, for example the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, known from surviving eyewitness accounts to have started on 24 August CE 79. But in many other cases such certainty is not possible and various techniques are used to express uncertainty. For instance, a historian may write ‘In about BCE’ or ‘Between X BCE and Y BCE’ or commonly the abbreviation *c.* of the Latin word *circa* is used, meaning ‘about’. Another area where dates can be less than precise is when the dates of birth and death of an individual from the past are not known but some information about when the person lived is available. In these cases, the Latin term *floruit* (‘flourished’) is used to indicate that the individual is known to have been alive at a certain date but that any more precision is not possible. There are no hard-and-fast rules to dictate how a particular level of uncertainty should be expressed, and it will often be necessary to dig deeper to find out just how certain of a date historians actually are. So there are problems with precision in dating events, and perhaps even greater problems in dating artefacts from the past where it may be difficult to assign a date in calendar years to an object. In some cases it is necessary to ask how we can be sure that we have placed an object, a text or an event even in the correct period.

Some periods appear to be very precisely defined – for example, the Hellenistic period is usually taken to begin in the year 323 BCE, the year of the death of Alexander the Great. This was no doubt a key event for the history of the Macedonian kingdom that Alexander ruled, yet why that should become the borderline between two historical periods goes beyond the effects of an individual’s death upon his contemporaries. It is the result of generalisations made later by historians who have taken the individual event and used it retrospectively as some kind of marker of change, indicating that something that was ‘typical’ before the event becomes different after the event. The problem with this kind of definition of periods is that the closer one looks the more difficult it is to see differences between periods. With a time perspective of 2,500 years, and a knowledge of what came before and after, it becomes easier to see large-scale differences. Yet these large-scale changes in history which are visible to later historians are most likely to have been much less visible to contemporaries.

So who defines boundaries between periods and how is it done? Are they ancient or modern? Are they relevant to ancient people or just to modern students? Did ancient people conceive of themselves as belonging to a particular time and were they aware of the fact that they belonged to part of a broader sequence of cultural development and historical change? A first question is, did ancient people think that they were part of a process

of change, be it progress or decline? The answer, for once, is relatively straightforward: yes they did. Provided that is, and there is almost always a proviso in the study of the ancient past, the ‘ancient people’ we are asking questions of are those who were aware of their own contemporary elite culture, since theirs is the only point of view that has survived.

Hindsight and periods

In *Works and Days*, Hesiod tells the story of a myth of human development through five races of men. Each race described is characterised: the first is the race of Gold, the next Silver, then Bronze, Heroes and Iron, with Hesiod’s contemporaries being of the race of Iron (*Works and Days* 106–201). This myth was used by Hesiod to symbolise moral and material decline rather than to explain humankind’s technological, social and cultural development (Dodds, 1973, pp.1–5), and the myth recurs in later Roman poetry and philosophy – for example, in Lucretius’ (lived 98–55 BCE) work *The Nature of the Universe*. However, it re-emerges in the early nineteenth century CE, when it influenced the development of the ‘Three Age’ system that archaeologists still use to divide prehistory into Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age (Trigger, 1989, pp.60–1, 75–6). Perhaps surprisingly, the modern division of early Greek history places the boundary between the end of the Iron Age (the Geometric period) and the Orientalising period at precisely the same time, and so, in modern terminology, Hesiod unwittingly lived at the end of the Iron Age, which he himself mythologised as the time of the race of Iron. This immediately raises again an important question, which must be addressed before progressing: how precisely are boundaries between periods drawn? In Hesiod’s work, the sequence of stages is driven by the gods of Olympus, who replace one race with the next, each characterised poetically by its moral character, predilection to violence or carefree life. In modern archaeology it is identification of the materials that were used for tool technology that divides the periods, although one does not necessarily entirely replace its predecessor, so, for example, bronze tools were still used in the Iron Age. These two forms of periodisation divide the past of human kind into different periods using different criteria to define the periods (the moral and the technological).

Making periods

In other areas of human culture, scholarship has developed criteria for assigning artefacts to different periods, for example in the study of Greek sculpture. Figures 1.6 and 1.7 show two sculptures of a nude male. The first is from the Archaic period (c.800–c.480 BCE) and the second is from the Classical period (c.480–323 BCE). (The Classical period is a shorter period within the whole period that Classical Studies covers.) The Archaic characteristics of the so-called ‘Apollo of Tenea’ include the upright, rigid

pose, with apparently taught muscles; one leg in advance of the other but with the weight shared between them; the straight arms; the anatomy and musculature not being quite natural; the patterned, stylised hair; the pointed nose and chin; the almond-shaped eyes; and the fixed grin. This type of statue is specifically called a *kouros* and is similar to earlier statues from Pharaonic Egypt.

Compared to this the Classical characteristics of the *Doryphoros* ('spear-bearer', who would originally have had a spear in his left hand and resting on his shoulder, but this is now missing) include the more relaxed pose, with the muscles of the left leg and right arm relaxed and the weight on the right leg; the torso curving and the head turned; overall the axis of the body sinuous rather than upright; the anatomy apparently more natural (e.g. the ribs), even if the musculature is exaggerated; the hair and the more naturalistic facial features. These differences are the clearest indication of the Archaic qualities of the one and the Classical qualities of the other. These formal characteristics may be used to assign the sculptures to the Archaic and Classical periods, and so, incidentally, to date them approximately.

These and other defining characteristics have been developed and refined by scholars through the comparison of many statues and other representations of the human form – for example on painted pottery where, very generally, Attic Black-figure and earlier Red-figure painting is Archaic and later Red-figure Classical. The combination of recognisable characteristics comes to define a style of visual culture for each period, thus the Apollo of Tenea can be said to be in the Archaic style and the *Doryphoros* in the Classical style.

This characterisation and structuring of ancient sculpture is not entirely a creation of modern scholars inventing and imposing a system onto ancient art. Polyclitus (c. 460–410 BCE) is known to have written a book titled 'The Canon' (from the Greek word *kanon* meaning 'rule' or 'standard'). Only a few short passages have survived, but it outlined a system of ideal proportions for the human body expressed in mathematical ratios between the fingers and toes and other parts of the body. The 'Canon' also discusses the nuances that are part of the creative expression of the artist, as well as the more technical aspects of representation. It is generally believed that Polyclitus embodied the ideas in the book in a statue, which is thought to be the *Doryphoros*, and that the statue subsequently became the stereotyped model of the perfect male form in Greek and Roman art. It has even been suggested that the statue represents the perfect Greek warrior, Achilles, and so another range of idealisations could be brought to the statue. There is, however, no sure identification of the figure in the statue. The original bronze statue has not survived but



Figure 1.6 'Apollo of Tenea', from Attiki near Corinth, *c.*560 BCE, Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptotek, Munich.

over 50 whole or part stone copies are known, including the one shown in Figure 1.7.

Scholarship during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries CE has largely unified the periodisation of different sub-disciplines of Classical Studies so that it is possible now to characterise literature, political systems, history and society, to list a few examples, as being Archaic or Classical.

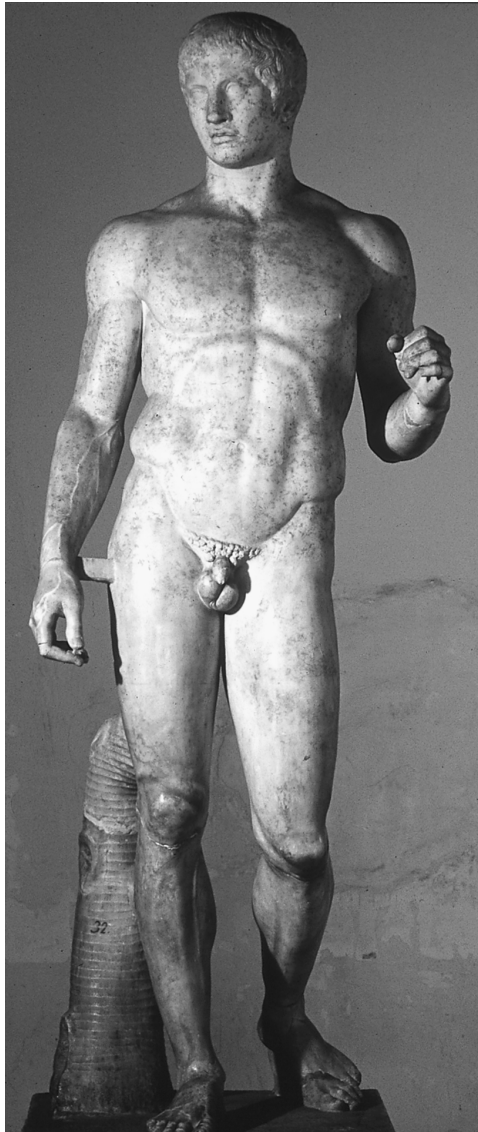


Figure 1.7 Roman copy of the *Doryphoros* (spear-bearer) of Polyclitus, original c.440 BCE, copy from Herculaneum, National Archaeological Museum, Naples. Note that the tree supporting the right leg is a feature of the copy that would not have been part of the original statue.

This is not to say that the same formal characteristics define both statuary and politics alike. Rather, the statuary defined as Classical can be said to date from a period with boundaries set (c.480–323 BCE) and the known political system from that same period – democracy – can also be seen to

have a set of characteristics – liberty, citizenship, freedom of speech, for example – that can be said to define the Classical period. The Archaic period, on the other hand, is characterised by a different political system – tyranny – typified by monarchy and personal monopoly of political power. This possibility of characterising elements of a period is the unifying ‘common thread’ specified by Morris, quoted above (Morris, 1997, p.96).

Of course, the boundaries between the Archaic and Classical periods (or any others) are not sharply discernible. The *Doryphorus* may be canonical in that he can be taken as emblematic, or even quintessentially Classical, but other statues may not share so many Classical features and may even have both Classical and Archaic features. This can be seen in Figure 1.8, where the rigid pose is more Archaic yet the naturalistic tendencies in the face and the musculature are more Classical. Furthermore, changes in statuary are not systematically matched by changes in politics. The dating of the transition from one period to the next cannot be precisely confined to a single year, yet historically recorded events, held to be significant, are often used as markers of the transition from one period to the next. So 480 BCE – the date of the sack of Athens by the Persians, a well-recorded and traumatic episode in the city’s history – marks the boundary between the Archaic and the Classical periods. This event itself caused the destruction of old Archaic buildings on the Athenian Acropolis that were subsequently replaced with new buildings constructed in the Classical style, which helps to reinforce the distinction between the periods. However, stylistic changes in different genres and media were not tightly synchronised, the historical marker date does not precisely match the transition in all areas of culture. Statuary and pottery, for example, had developed towards Classical styles before this time. The boundaries between periods are therefore somewhat fuzzy, and it is not possible to be overprecise or always certain about the date of a transition or the assignation of an artefact to a period. The degree of uncertainty will vary from case to case but that is not an insurmountable problem: it is a feature of working with imperfect evidence from the ancient world. After all, Classical Studies is not a precise science.

The characterisation of periods has often taken on something of a moral tone, in that the ideal, perfect form of the *Doryphorus*, or the happy state of living in a well-regulated democracy and other idealised aspects of human culture have often been intellectually combined in order to set up the Classical period as an ideal of perfection, a time when everything in human history was at its best. The preceding period, the Archaic, has been characterised as primitive, partially formed and imperfect, and so the name Archaic – a modern term meaning old, out-of-date and primitive – has been applied to the period. Transition into the Classical period is a bettering of everything. Following the perfection of the Classical period, the

Hellenistic period is decadent, impure and over-embellished. This characterisation is deeply rooted in western culture. For example, in contemporary English referring to something as a 'Classical example of ...' is drawing upon the same cultural stereotyping. Such definition of the Classical period is not simply a modern phenomenon. Romans idealised Classical Greek art: Cicero (106–43 BCE) calls the work of Polyclitus 'completely perfect' compared to earlier works that were 'too rigid' (Cicero, *Brutus* 18.70), and in the time of the emperor Augustus, Classical, Attic, artistic style was much in vogue. In later centuries up to modern times, the ancient world was not always very finely divided into discrete periods and

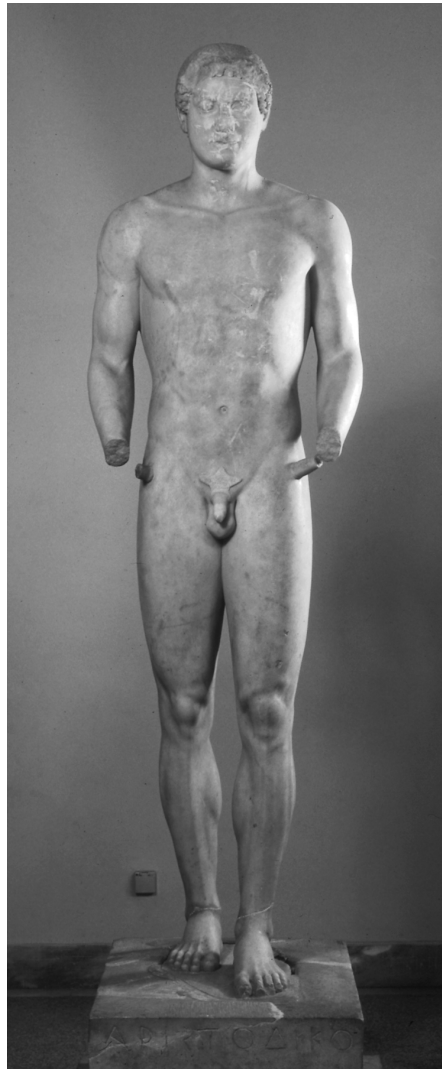


Figure 1.8 *Kouros* of Aristodikos, c.510–500 BCE, Athens National Museum.

the term 'Classical' was often extended to cover the whole of Graeco-Roman antiquity, hence the term 'Classical Studies'.

Although assigning an artefact or other cultural product to a period may carry the risk of weighing it down with unwanted baggage, it is a key stage in developing a context for that item. Context, in its broadest meaning, is identifying the other things that belong together with an item, including both the physical circumstances of its finding or preservation and the cultural circumstances of its creation. So, for an artefact found on an archaeological excavation, that means the location where it was found, the soil it was found in and all the other artefacts that were found in the same soil. It also means the broader cultural context of the society that produced the artefact (and here artefact is being used in its broadest possible meaning of anything produced by humans using skills, so it includes literature and art as well as objects). For a Latin poem the context is both the manuscript upon which it was written, with the means by which it was transmitted, by copying to the present; the cultural world within which it was written; the social, educational and economic background of its author; and all of the other cultural factors that shaped the creativity of the author. A further aspect of context is the historical context: that is, both the events and circumstances contemporary with the production of the artefact and the times preceding and following its production that may have influenced, or been influenced by, its production.

A context can thus be considered as all of the many and various elements that belong in the same period as an artefact. A period is therefore a descriptor that can be used to identify and to some extent characterise a context. Once boundaries have been defined for a period – and, as has been discussed, boundaries are fluid, negotiable and debated – it becomes possible to place an artefact with respect to some other artefacts from a preceding or subsequent period. Once things are placed in a historical sequence it is then possible to consider two different forms of enquiry. The first is a central plank of any historical enquiry and that is the study of change through time – identifying and explaining how and why things change or develop from one period to the next. This form of study is often termed 'diachronic', as for example in the short investigation into Greek statuary above (although there was no attempt there to explain why it changed). The second form of enquiry is how and why things are different in separate places at the same point in time, often called 'synchronic'. The first can be considered as a 'vertical' study in that it examines the same place through time and the second can be considered as a 'horizontal' study in that it examines the same time across different places. Thinking this way it becomes possible to study change and difference in the Classical world in an interesting variety of ways. Change

can be studied in the same place from period to period, for example change between the Archaic and Classical period in Athens. Alternatively, the Classical period in Athens can be compared with the Classical period in Sparta, that is, the same period but in different places. Another possibility is to study a particular point in time, noting that one place, say Athens, can be identified as Classical, while at the same time another place, say Rome, can be identified as Archaic. This discussion is getting rather abstract and so a short case study will both anchor these points to evidence from the ancient world and return to the central focus of this chapter – people and periods.

A person in periods

In midwinter CE 1953, in the Modern period, the French archaeologists M. Moisson and R. Joffroy opened a tomb beneath a mound near the village of Vix in Burgundy, central France (Joffroy, 1954). Nobody had seen the contents of that tomb for nearly 2,500 years since the Hallstatt D period (c.625–475 BCE) in the Iron Age. The tomb contained the body of a female aged about 35 years with bad teeth. She was buried on a chariot-like wagon, with three necklaces of gold, bronze and amber with semi-precious stones, brooches, bracelets and an anklet, as well as an Archaic-period Greek bronze *crater* (wine-mixing bowl) 1.64 metres high, weighing 209 kilograms, with a capacity of 1,100 litres, made in Corinth or its colony Taranto (Figures 1.9 and 1.10), and two Archaic ceramic vases made in Athens, one decorated with Black-figure scenes of battle between Greek male warriors and female Amazon warriors. Along with these were various other metal vessels, some made in Etruria, Italy. The wheels of the wagon had been removed and placed against the side of the burial chamber. All in all this was a particularly rich burial containing some exceptional items that can be used to date the deposition to c.500 BCE (Mohen, 1997, pp.119–21). The nature of this burial and the finds made raise a host of lines of interest to research and analyse, but here the focus will be kept upon periods. (A plan of the burial is reproduced in Champion *et al.*, 1984, p.284 and in Hornblower and Spawforth, 1998, p.298.)

First of all, the discovery was made in the Modern period, an unfortunate title to choose for a period, since the middle of the twentieth century CE no longer seems very modern. It is important to consider the historical context of the discovery: the 1950s were early days for scientific archaeology and the bones in the deposition were not well preserved, but if such a discovery were to be made now a whole range of new techniques, such as analysis of DNA, might be applied to the human remains. At the time, the best available techniques were used, and the study of the skull revealed dental abscesses on the right side of the jaws and indications of an infected wound on the back of the head. From measurements of the skull, it

was suggested that the female was a Nordic individual. This finding reflects the emphasis placed upon establishing race and nationality through skeletal remains that was current in the middle of the twentieth century CE.

The context of the deposition is labelled as Hallstatt D, which is a smaller division of the Iron Age that started in *c.*725 BCE in central Europe. Hallstatt is the name of a large cemetery site in Austria, the finds from which were used to first differentiate the Bronze Age from the Iron Age in central Europe. In contrast, the items in the tomb that were made in Greece and Italy were produced in the Archaic period in those areas. Thus, as well as being transported from the Mediterranean to central Europe, they were also transposed from one period to another, and from one context to another. Now, of course, the items reside in yet another context – a modern museum in France. This case study illustrates how, from an intellectual perspective, artefacts may simultaneously belong to different periods without difficulty. If the perspective is shifted to that of the ancient individuals, a further range of interpretative possibilities arises.

The name of the female buried at Vix with such exceptional artefacts is unknown, yet something of her context can be discovered by considering



Figure 1.9 Vix crater, from Chatillon-sur-Seine, France, *c.*500 BCE.
Photo: MSM-France.



Figure 1.10 Vix *crater*, detail showing Gorgon handle and procession of hoplites and chariots, from Chatillon-sur-Seine, France, c.500 BCE. Photo: MSM-France.

what she was buried with, and the finds made at other nearby sites dating to the same period. Modern Vix is a village that lies close to Mont Lassois, the site of a large, defended Iron Age settlement (an *oppidum* or hill-fort). Evidence from here and elsewhere, which it is not necessary to discuss in detail in this essay, indicates that society at this time was very hierarchical, with a small élite controlling power and resources. The exceptional nature of the burial at Vix suggests that the female buried there was a member of that élite. Her status is represented by the artefacts buried with her (it is not important for this discussion whether the artefacts actually belonged to her in her lifetime, or were buried with her by others to signify the importance of her burial). Part of representing her status was the burial of artefacts with origins alien to her own context – from Greece and Italy. Presumably they acquired a value in excess of their intrinsic worth through their exotic origin. In this way Archaic Mediterranean vessels play a role in the Hallstatt D period of the Iron Age of central Europe. From a distance of

2,500 years we cannot be sure precisely how the artefacts represented that status. It could be their alien nature; their sheer size (for the *crater*); the value of the metals; their decoration, evoking aristocratic values with warriors, chariots and battle; their mythological content – Gorgons and Amazons; or their function as vessels all used for the ritual and social consumption of wine (in the Greek world at least). The relative importance of these factors to Iron Age individuals is a matter for intellectual debate, and it may be that several or all of the factors played some role in establishing and legitimising the female's status. In order to facilitate such debate, terms such as 'Archaic', 'Iron Age' or 'Hallstatt D' are used flexibly to signify chronological periods and cultural contexts as well as characterising the artefacts themselves.

Periods and the Classical world

Periods are thus useful in both analysing and discussing the past. Periods are not, however, simply blocks of time that can be pinned down with a starting date and an end date, using whichever means of measuring time – ancient or modern – is appropriate. Periods can be related to calendar years, enabling them to be placed in time with respect to one another and their duration to be gauged, but they also have geographical and cultural aspects. Once established they powerfully shape how the past is conceptualised: one period happens before or after another, something changes from one to the next, one period may influence another, as we have seen.

Where the lines are drawn between periods is a complex and debatable process, both when dealing with details, for example between the Archaic and Classical periods in Greece, or on the larger scale with the beginning and end of the Classical world. Different criteria may also be used to explore the boundaries of periods: changes in visual representation; social development; political change; the death of a great man; the invasion of a foreign power; or a combination of some of these may be used as criteria to define the boundaries of periods. These choices about how to define the boundaries themselves influence the nature of the periods. A periodisation of history using solely political criteria may not be especially effective in the analysis of art, while a history arranged by poetry may not facilitate the study of ancient warfare. Ideally, the boundaries are drawn in a flexible manner that facilitates analysis and discussion using a suitable combination of criteria. The drawing of lines is not only influenced by empirical evidence and scholarly debate, but also by the interplay of the divisions in intellectual, educational and cultural life. Classical Studies sets its own boundaries that differentiate the periods it studies from those studied by Prehistoric Archaeology at one end and History at the other, and these disciplines in turn set their own boundaries.

Further reading

Rather surprisingly, ancient historians and archaeologists do not frequently discuss time, although Kristen Lippincott, *The Story of Time* (1999) provides a broad world perspective. Periodisation is rarely introduced as a facet of methodology, but Ian Morris, 'Periodisation and the heroes: inventing a Dark Age' (1997) gives an insight into periods and the practice of ancient history. Archaeology is more forthcoming on chronology and dating: see James Whitley, *The Archaeology of Ancient Greece* (2001) for a chapter on the topic, or Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn, *Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practice* (2000, Chapter 4) for a textbook discussion of dating. The concept of progress in antiquity is not often discussed in anything other than technological terms, but Ludwig Edelstein, *The Idea of Progress in Classical Antiquity* (1967) is an exception (although now out of print).

We are in more familiar territory in the study of Greek art. John Boardman, *The Oxford History of Classical Art* (1993) provides a thorough and well-illustrated account, while John Boardman, *Greek Art* (1973) and Robert Cook, *Greek Art: Its Development, Character and Influence* (1972) both give reliable and non-controversial introductions to the development of Greek art.

For a broad discussion of the archaeology of Europe in prehistoric times, which overlaps with much of the period covered by Classical Studies, Timothy Champion *et al.*, *Prehistoric Europe* (1984) gives a well-organised and wide-ranging synthesis.

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