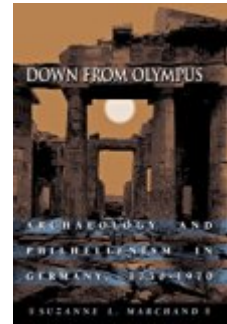


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## The Strange Career of German Philhellenism

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Intellectual historian Susan Marchand has taken a close look at the evolution of Greek studies and the related disciplines of classical, Egyptian, and Near Eastern archaeology in Germany from the mid-eighteenth to the middle of the twentieth century. As might be expected from a non-classicist, her focus is not on the development of Greek philology or archaeology as professional fields, a task that would have required her to pay equal attention to developments in England and France. Rather, she considers “the evolving relationships between humanistic scholarship and the [German] state” (p. xxi), concentrating upon institutions and not the research of individual scholars.

Modern German interest in ancient Greece was sparked by the work of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), a Saxon cobbler’s son who became the greatest contemporary European authority on Greek art.[1] Winckelmann himself never visited Greece, but spent most of his working life in Rome. There he became enthralled with Greek culture, particularly that of the Hellenistic period, although his acquaintance with it was largely limited to the viewing of Roman copies. His enthusiasm was conveyed to many others, including Goethe, Lessing, and Schiller, through *Gedanken ueber die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (1755) and *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764).

Winckelmann and those who followed his lead (the

*Neohumanisten*), shared what Marchand calls a “passionate, and nearly exclusive, obsession with Greek beauty” (p. 5). Although they associated the Greeks with nature, spontaneous genius, and freedom, in contrast to the stultifying social and intellectual life of the towns and princely courts of their own day, these aesthetes had no overtly political aims. Rather, they hoped to reshape German culture and its institutions after the model of the civilization whose putative ideals they had embraced. The neohumanists believed that the ancient Hellenes and their civic life provided excellent exemplars for contemporary individuals and society.

Of course, the glory of Greece could not be absorbed simply by gazing upon statuary, but required the perusal of Greek texts. German intellectuals, like those of the rest of Christian Europe, had traditionally studied Latin literature as an adjunct (*Hilfswissenschaft*) to theological and juridical education. To a much lesser extent, Greek had also been cultivated in the universities, but the Winckelmannian boom led to increased interest in this language. A key figure in this regard was the Halle professor Friedrich August Wolf, whose *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795) applied the meticulous textual criticism recently developed and systematized for biblical scholarship to the works of the Greek poet. Together, the careful establishing of the original, non-corrupted, ancient text (*Urtext*) and close attention to grammatical analysis constitute the basic methodology known as philology. As exemplified by the *Prolegomena*, philology soon assumed the overwhelmingly dominant posi-

tion in German classical scholarship that it has retained to the present day.[2] But collating manuscripts and memorizing uncommon verbal forms require a different mind-set than the aesthetic rapture conveyed in Winckelmann's reveries, and the character of Philhellenism was correspondingly altered. Indeed, Marchand writes of "the post-Winckelmannian dominance of elite, expert, and philosophically unadventurous university philologists over the study of the ancient past" (p. 24).

This development was institutionalized by Wilhelm von Humboldt, founder of the University of Berlin (1810) and briefly the official in charge of education at the Prussian Interior Ministry. A friend of F. A. Wolf, Humboldt so strongly promoted basic, sound philology as the core of his educational philosophy that by the end of his tenure "it would not be too much to say that he had made this variety of neohumanist *Bildung* the cultural philosophy of the Prussian state" (p. 28). Philhellenism thus became the property of the *Bildungsbuergertum*, closely allied to the university establishment and the Prussian royal bureaucracy.[3] Not surprisingly, women and Catholics were now largely shut out of this cultural discourse.[4]

German archaeology abroad began modestly in 1823, with the founding of the *Hyperboreisch-Roemische Gesellschaft* in Rome by Germans resident in the Eternal City. In 1829, this dilettantish group evolved into the *Institut fuer archaeologische Korrespondenz (IfAK)*, under the patronage of the Prussian crown prince. If at first its activities were limited to the documentation of accessible Greek and Roman antiquities and visible architectural remains, the *Institut* was soon able—through royal Prussian patronage—to mount an expedition to Egypt under Richard Lepsius (1842-45). Judged by today's standards, Lepsius' excavations, like those of his British, French, and Italian contemporaries, were little more than treasure hunts, but they did yield a sizable Egyptological collection for the royal museum. The ethos of early German archaeology is manifest in the words of one of its first practitioners, Eduard Gerhard, who referred to his work as "the philology of monuments" (p. 41).

After the founding of the *Reich* in 1871, archaeology became a national enterprise. The *IfAK* was taken over by the state, and eventually formed the basis of today's *Deutsches-Archaeologisches Institut*. Rivalry with France and Britain extended to the scholarly realm, and resulted in governmental support for large-scale excavations by Ernst Robert Curtius at Olympia (1875-81), Carl Humann at Pergamon (1878-86), and eventually Robert

Koldewey at Babylon (1898-1914) and Walter Andrae at Assur (1903-1914) in Ottoman Mesopotamia.[5] Wilhelm II was a particularly enthusiastic promoter of archaeology (pp. 192-199), and even conducted his own amateurish dig on Corfu, where professionals salted his site with fragments of statues and architectural remains to make certain that His Highness would make satisfying discoveries.[6]

Archaeology abroad grew ever more dependent on the diplomatic[7] and financial support of the *Reich* for massive long-term projects—what Theodore Mommsen in 1890 labeled *Grosswissenschaft* (p. 75). At the same time, most university students learning classical languages did so in preparation for service in the Prussian bureaucracy. Consequently, over the course of the nineteenth century German Philhellenism became increasingly nationalistic, jettisoning any earlier individualistic or universalistic tendencies. For instance, while Winckelmann had admired the Greeks for themselves, many later writers celebrated Greek culture more as a forerunner of Germanic Christianity (p. 43). By 1900 Philhellenism in Germany was a thoroughly conservative discourse; the symbiosis of *Kultur* and state had been securely established (p. 229). During the Great War German classicists proved especially strident in their patriotism and support of annexationist aims (pp. 238f.).

Meanwhile, challenges had arisen to the primacy of classical studies: educational reformers and *voelkish* philosophers like Paul de Lagarde questioned the emphasis placed on classical languages in the *Gymnasien* (pp. 133ff.). In the name of relevance, the new *Realschulen* substituted French and English for Greek and Latin. In archaeology, the devotion to Homer that led the cosmopolitan Heinrich Schliemann to conduct his excavations at Troy beginning in 1870 (pp. 118ff.) paradoxically contributed to a shift of focus away from the classical world. Since what Schliemann actually recovered was not the city of the *Iliad*, but a settlement of the preliterate Early Bronze Age (Level II, 2500-2200 B.C.), the enthusiastic reception of his work signaled the end of the hegemony of philology over ancient studies (p. 124). The way was open for an upsurge of interest in the archaeology of other non-literate peoples, particularly that of the early Germans.

As promoted chiefly by Gustav Kossinna (pp. 180ff.),[8] *Vorgeschichte* (prehistory) concentrated on delineating the settlement area of the early Germanic tribes, not least in order to legitimize contemporary German rule over Slavs in Central Europe. Holding as they did

the now-discredited view that the *Urheimat* of the Indo-Europeans[9] had been situated in northern Europe, German prehistorians of the early-twentieth century also maintained that their countrymen represented the purest modern descendants of the ancient Aryans. Thus they contributed to the witches' brew that would make up Nazi racist ideology. Even among those scholars excavating within the *Reich* itself, the growing parochialism of German archaeology was reflected in the ascendancy of researchers digging at sites beyond the *limes* (*Germania libera*) over those concerned with provincial Roman remains (p. 178).

Given its close ties with the Prussian crown and bureaucracy, it is hardly surprising that in the years following World War I, classical philology "became a hot bed of monarchist nostalgia and apoplectic reaction" (p. 258). Nor did the Weimar authorities endear themselves to the Philhellenes through their efforts to demote the Greeks from their special place in the educational curriculum (p. 265). Archaeologists smarted under the lessened compliance of antiquities authorities abroad to their wishes, as well as under the greatly reduced levels of funding necessitated by reparations and hyperinflation.

Indifferent or hostile to the *Republik*, classical philologists and archaeologists as a group nonetheless did not particularly welcome Hitler's national revolution. After all, the Nazis had little interest in *Bildung* of any kind, and could be relied upon to promote German prehistory[10] to the detriment of excavation in Italy and Greece.[11] A few philologists, such as the Platonist Werner Jaeger, emigrated. A small number, such as Helmut Berve[12] and Fritz Schachermeyer[13], enthusiastically embraced Nazi ideas. Some archaeologists availed themselves of the opportunities that opened up for Germans after the alliance with Italy and the conquest of Greece (pp. 344ff.).

But throughout the Nazi period the majority of German classical scholars, philologists and archaeologists alike simply devoted themselves to their research under often difficult circumstances. As a result of their relatively low political profile, most sailed through the post-war denazification process in the west and the university purges in the east. Marchand calls attention to a substantial "continuity in the classicist teaching corps between the Nazi era and the late 1960s" (p. 360).

However, by the second half of the twentieth century, the zenith of Philhellenism had passed. In neither the *Bundesrepublik* nor the GDR did classics occupy the dominant educational position it had enjoyed under the second *Reich*. As in that other onetime bastion of clas-

sicism, Great Britain, Greek and Roman studies in Germany became a niche discipline, and acquaintance with the works of the ancients was no longer felt to be necessary for every cultivated person. Indeed, the ability to read Tacitus or Herodotus in the original would be a very unusual facility in a businessman or politician today. In the case of the latter profession, one imagines that every effort would be made to keep knowledge of such a peccadillo from the electorate!

Marchand tells the story of the rise and fall of German Philhellenism with verve and remarkable insight. Her command of the scholarly issues involved[14] raises suspicions that classical studies have played their part in her own educational background. I commend this book to anyone interested in the cultural history of Europe over the last two hundred years.

#### Notes:

[1]. The extraordinary life of this scholar and aesthete is well presented by Wolfgang Leppmann, *Winckelmann* (New York: Knopf, 1970).

[2]. The hold that philology gained over German pedagogy is summed up by Hegel's view that grammar is "elementary philosophy"—quoted by Marchand, p. 31.

[3]. It is interesting to compare the situation in nineteenth-century England, where a radical-liberal strain of Greek studies, personified by George Grote, challenged the Tory mainstream. See Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 83ff.

[4]. Ironically, Winckelmann himself had converted to Catholicism in Rome.

[5]. Finds from these expeditions constitute the core of the holdings of the Pergamon-Museum in Berlin. On the ancient Near Eastern collections, see Beate Salje, "Vorderasiatisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin," in *Vorderasiatische Museen. Gestern, Heute, Morgen. Berlin, Paris, London, New York. Eine Standortbestimmung*, ed. B. Salje (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2001), pp. 7-23.

[6] Lamar Cecil, *Wilhelm II*, vol. 2 (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 51-52.

[7]. German excavations in Asia Minor and Mesopotamia benefited greatly from special privileges granted to them by Sultan Abdulhamid II at the personal request of Wilhelm II, with whom he was on very

good terms. In addition, the Kaiser and his foreign office viewed archaeology in Ottoman lands as part of the German mission to bring *Kultur* to the Turks (p. 191). See Wendy M. K. Shaw, *Possessors and Possessed. Museums, Archaeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), especially pp. 108-39.

[8]. Ulrich Veit, "Gustaf Kossinna and His Concept of a National Archaeology," in *Archaeology, Ideology and Society. The German Experience*, second edition, ed. Heinrich Haerke (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 41-66.

[9]. Tellingly, this almost universally accepted linguistic term corresponds to "Indo-Germanen" in German.

[10]. For the flowering of prehistory under National Socialism, see Henning Hassmann, "Archaeology in the 'Third Reich,'" in *Archaeology, Ideology and Society*, pp. 67-142, especially pp. 88-92.

[11]. Hitler's publicly expressed enthusiasm for Greek art and culture (p. 350) to some extent shielded the Philhellenes from the Germanomanes. See Fred-

eric Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (New York: Overlook Press, 2003), pp. 20-23.

[12]. As evidenced in "Zur Kulturgeschichte des Alten Orients," *Archiv fuer Kulturgeschichte* 25 (1935), pp. 216-30. Cf. W. F. Albright, "How Well Can We Know the Ancient Near East?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 56 (1936), p. 122.

[13]. See his *Indogermanen und Orient. Ihre kulturelle und machtpolitische Auseinandersetzung im Altertum* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1944).

[14]. My only technical criticism is with the slight deformation of several Near Eastern toponyms on p. 195. Read Boghazko+i, Fara, and Qal'at Shirqat.

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