NOTES

1. *The Roman Middle Republic.* Politics, Religion, and Historiography *c.*400–133 B.C. Papers from a Conference at the Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, Sept. 11–12, 1998. Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae Vol. 23. Edited by Christer Bruun. Rome, 2000. Pp. ix + 310, with figures. Limp. Price not stated.

2. *Marcus Aurelius, a Biography*. By Anthony R. Birley. Routledge, London and New York, reprinted 2000. Pp. 320, with 38 plates and 3 maps. Paper £15.99.

3. *Hadrian, the Restless Emperor*. By Anthony R. Birley. Routledge, London and New York, paperback 2000. Pp. xviii + 399, with frontispiece, 37 plates, and 8 maps. £14.99.

4. Alan Cameron, *CR* 17 (1967), 347–50.

5. *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire*. By Mary T. Boatwright. Princeton U.P., 2000. Pp. xviii + 243, with endpapers, 18 illustrations, and 2 tables. £31.00.

6. *The Empire of the Tetrarchs*. Imperial Pronouncements and Government AD 284–324. Oxford Classical Monographs. By Simon Corcoran. Oxford U.P., revised paperback edition 2000. Pp. xvii + 421, with 7 plates and 1 map. £18.99.

Archaeology and Art

The most glorious book among those under consideration here is Richard Brilliant's **My Laocoön*.[1] It is brief, and written in easy, relaxed prose: but every page is telling. And what is told? The message might be Socratically distilled to the firm knowledge that we have no knowledge; or an acceptance of Nietzsche's dictum that 'there are no facts, only interpretations'. As the status-group of Laocoon and his sons was excavated in Rome, learned witnesses were immediately sure of its identity: it must be the piece esteemed by Pliny as 'a work to be preferred to all other works of art'. That was in 1506: and the recognition that the sculpture we now see in the Vatican is what Pliny was talking about remains just about the only true *datum* for 'our' Laocoon. Quite apart from the question of whether it has been reassembled as it once was, the following key aspects of the Laocoon as an *objet d'art* remain obscure: place of production; date of production; identity of artist(s); occasion of commission; original meaning. A statue so apparently 'well-known' since the Renaissance therefore remains suspended in a great limbo of incertitude; it is effectively anyone's guess as to how to rescue Laocoon from that void. Brilliant's droll assessment of the situation includes, as one might expect, a summary of Laocoon-literature down the ages, and a shrugging survey of some (by no means all) of the ingenious and quite incompatible academic attempts to explain the piece; but he also extends the problem, in a manner rare to classical archaeology, so that we are asked to consider the fragility of comprehension built into other 'masterpieces' of western art. (Who, for example, can deliver the most engaging account for that royal group portrait in the Prado known as 'Las Meninas', by Diego Velázquez?) Brilliant has exposed a truth which most archaeologists and art historians would probably not wish to admit: the truth that it is not finding 'the truth' that concerns us so much as coming up with a good story. In this respect, it probably does not matter that Brilliant's meditation has coincided with studies gathered within *Laocoonte: Fama e stile* by Salvatore Settis (Rome, 1999); for Settis there commits himself to a story (Laocoon an early Augustan original) which like any other hinges upon a sequence of conditionals. Brilliant's circumspect views have made me, for one, feel a little happier about devising my own tenuous tale for the Laocoon (see *Apollo*, July 1988, and the second chapter of *Enduring*

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Creation [2001]). Is it important whether the three sculptors named by Pliny as the makers of the Laocoon – Hagesandros, Polydoros, and Athenodoros – were historical individuals to whom a specific style can be assigned? Would we have to invent them, if Pliny had never given us the names? The Laocoon seems doubly defiant of scholars if *its* date ranges over centuries, while a lowly Athenian vase can be neatly ascribed to such-and-such a decade – thanks to the science of attribution practised by J. D. Beazley and others. The Italian scholar Bianchi Bandinelli branded this sort of connoisseurship in classical art as 'un gioco di società', a trivial pursuit of salon lizards; and the demise of the reputation of Bernard Berenson, who sold his scholarly credentials (if not his soul) in order to profit from the market value of providing names for Italian Renaissance paintings, has generally sullied the practice of 'attributionist' methods in art history. Yet it remains the case that, in front of any work of art, we want to know 'whodunnit'. Unattributed pieces seem to throw down a challenge to our powers of detection; 'victims of anonymity', their makers seem all the more frustratingly elusive when we can see, close-up, each stroke of the brush – as is often the case with Roman wall-paintings. From all Pompeii we have only one signature, *Lucius pinxit* – and that by no means clearly attached to a picture in the House of Loreius Tiburtinus. So perhaps inevitably, then, we must accept the slim volume that is L. Richardson, jr.'s [B]★★*A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters of Ancient Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabiae*.[2] Richardson has had this project bubbling since 1948, and his method (as deployed about the Casa dei Dioscuri) has already appeared in print. Here, a cohort of divers artists working in the Second, Third, and Fourth Styles is presented, each by way of an invented name, a verbal description of salient 'giveaway' artistic mannerisms, and a quality assessment. This latter judgement rather tends to faint praise or outright castigation ('never more than a marginally competent journeyman'; 'a painter of no exceptional talent', etc.), which would seem to negate the connoisseur's usual reward of joy in the revelation of creative personality. We may doubt that Lucius, 'The Infancy of Bacchus Painter' or any others conceived by Richardson are going to enter the handbooks of Roman art as great *maestri* of their craft. But although it is entirely without illustrations, Richardson's book performs the service of forcing us to scrutinize the Campanian wall-paintings with fresh diligence. Academic analysis of this art has lately been dominated by attention to patterns of patronage, genre, decorum, and iconographic 'programmes'; previous attempts at isolating individual painters or 'hands' have been piecemeal or careless. The dogmatic assurance in tracing artistic 'personality' (however mediocre the artist) that Richardson brings to bear in this situation is pleasantly different; and if his detective work gains consensus, then it should lead to some interesting explorations within the obscurities of apprenticeships, career paths, and output among Roman muralists. Now if both the Laocoon and Roman wall-paintings are examples of ancient art without documentation, then what is to be made of the case where detailed documentation of an art-object survives – but the work itself is gone? In the second century A.D. Pausanias visited Olympia and gazed upon a carved wooden chest or *larnax*, inlaid with ivory and gold. It was displayed in the sanctuary of Hera, and was probably made in the late seventh century B.C., carrying in relief its own thesauros of myth and saga. The 'Chest of Cypselos' described painstakingly by Pausanias (see J. G. Frazer's commentary on Pausanias Vol. III, 600 ff.), but since gone to oblivion, has tempted a process of revisualization since the formal beginnings of classical archaeology (Winckelmann,

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Quatremère de Quincy, and others). This in itself is a historiography which concerns Rüdiger Splitter in his absorbing monograph B★★*Die "Kypseloslade" in Olympia*.[3] But Splitter also adds his own reconstruction of the piece, more or less following the method tried by Wilhelm von Massow in 1916 – which was to trawl through the imagery of archaic Corinthian pottery in search of parallels and proximities to what was related in the pages of Pausanias, and build a composite 'replica' from such supposedly schematic forms. 'Supposedly schematic' is a necessary phrase here, since it would be rash to assume visual formulae operating, even locally at Corinth, in the seventh century B.C. Basic questions about the structure of the chest (was it rectangular or cylindrical?), and the layout of its decoration (in registers or not?) likewise elude absolute answers. If we cannot decide quite how a major monument of antiquity – the Mausoleum, for instance – once looked, there is little hope for a minor 'Wonder' such as the Chest of Cypselos. All the same, Pausanias was earnest enough to devote more pages to this artefact than any other at Olympia – including the Temple of Zeus and its cult statue. And it is clear, from the absorption shown by Pausanias in trying to follow the forwards-and-backwards (*boustrophedon*) antique script running alongside the images on the chest, that this was a pioneer contribution to the alliance of 'art' and 'text' in archaic Greek storytelling. So we feel obliged to seek its virtual recovery; we cannot accept its loss.

I conclude with some brief notices. ★*Roman Housing*[4] by Simon Ellis, though meanly illustrated and scattered with some erratic spellings, contains much sensible discussion of domestic lifestyles – as one might expect from an author whose technical qualifications include not only excavation (principally, at Carthage) but modern town-planning. Ellis runs into some trouble defining an 'elite'; his categorical phrase for aristocratic homes is 'houses of pretension', but it is left unclear who indeed *is* of elite status and who, by contrast, is just pretending.

Some fixed markers seem to be needed here: such as, perhaps, those published in the catalogue of mosaics by Irmgard Kirseleit in ★*Antike Mosaiken*.[5] These are mosaics from the Altes Museum and Pergamonmuseum in Berlin: they include a number of pieces that surely can be counted as unpretentiously excellent, such as a fragment of the Nilotic mosaic in Palestrina, and several significant (one magnificent) samples of the decoration of Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli.

'High status' is a term that can likewise be safely used of Croesus, the last king of Lydia: however happy he was with his wealth, we are now in the position to say at least that it was not 'fabled'. During the reign of Croesus (561–547 B.C.), the techniques of separating and refining gold and silver were historically established at Sardis – as revealed by the archaeologists and metallurgists whose work is collected in the British Museum title, B★★*King Croesus' Gold*.[6] This is a substantial act of collaboration, important for much more than buttressing a tale in Herodotos: what the Sardis excavations have provided is the earliest evidence of bimetallic coinage in the world.

Sappho admired the glitter of Lydian riches; Cyrus the Great of Persia felt impelled to seize them. How he did so is recounted briskly in John Boardman's latest production, ★*Persia and the West*.[7] 'Before the conquest of Lydia,' remarked Herodotos (1.71), 'the Persians possessed none of the luxuries or delights of life.' The development of a Persian taste for the luxuries of monumental art and architecture is precisely the theme of this book. How did an essentially nomadic people pass from tents to palaces? In various lectures and other publications we have seen his answer to that question growing more sophisticated. But although Boardman warns that it is no longer tenable to classify Persian as 'no more

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than provincial Greek art', one cannot help feeling – more or less passim – that, aiming to locate 'the genesis of Achaemenid art', an Assyriologist would have written a very different book.

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1. *My Laocoön: Alternative Claims in the Interpretation of Artworks*. The Discovery Series VIII. By Richard Brilliant. University of California Press, 2000. Pp. xvi + 146, with 1 colour and 27 black-and-white illustrations. £28.50.
2. *A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters of Ancient Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabiae*. By L. Richardson, jr. Johns Hopkins U.P., 2000. Pp. xvii + 190. £38.50.
3. *Die "Kypseloslade" in Olympia*. Form, Funktion und Bildschmuck; eine Archäologische Rekonstruktion. By Rüdiger Splitter. Philipp von Zabern, Mainz, 2000. Pp. 173, with 2 colour plates, 46 figures, and a reconstruction. DM.98.
4. *Roman Housing*. By Simon P. Ellis. Duckworth, London, 2000. Pp. vii + 224, with 22 plates, 30 figures, and 1 map. £40.00.
5. *Antike Mosaiken*. By Irmgard Kriseleit. Philipp von Zabern, Mainz, 2000. Pp. 60, with 59 colour and 14 black-and-white illustrations. DM.28.
6. *King Croesus' Gold: Excavations at Sardis and the History of Gold Refining*. By Andrew Ramage and Paul Craddock. British Museum Press, London, 2000. Pp. 272, with 40 colour and 200 black-and-white illustrations. £45.00.
7. *Persia and the West*. An Archaeological Investigation of the Genesis of Achaemenid Art. By John Boardman. Thames & Hudson, London, 2000. Pp. 255, with 295 illustrations. £36.00.

Philosophy

The [B]*Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*[1] is, according to its editor, a 'fresh and wide-ranging' survey of the founding fathers of western philosophy (xi). *Historically* wide-ranging it certainly is, as all books on Presocratic philosophy are – though one notices it all the more here because this collection is published in a series which has up to now treated almost exclusively of individuals. (When can we expect a *Cambridge Companion to Parmenides*, or *to Empedocles* or even *to the Sophists*?) But the 16 well-integrated articles that make up the collection are also wide-ranging in their intellectual scope, and go further than many of their predecessors towards setting their subjects in a plausible narrative of philosophical debate and development: it will take its place with the most useful introductions to the subject, while providing a great deal for established students of Presocratic thought as well. In recent years, some of the most interesting work on early Greek philosophy has tried to set it aglow in the reflected glory of Plato, and two new books attest to the continuing strength of this approach. In [B]*Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato*,[2] Kathryn Morgan revives the somewhat unfashionable distinction between *mythos* and *logos* to argue that, while philosophers from the beginning defined their endeavour through the denigration of mythological discourse, they went on to use myths of their own to reflect on and signal the limits of their philosophy – to circumscribe their account of the world even as that account is developed. (Parmenides' mythical goddess, we are reminded, 'tells of' the road that 'cannot be told of': 83.) It is not clear that Morgan has hit on a principle of early philosophy rather than a more or less helpful generalization: different philosophers, it emerges, conform to her thesis in ways which are sometimes radically different; and

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