



Eduard Gerhard: Founder of Classical Archaeology?¹


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It is difficult for us to imagine that archaeology is a relatively recent discipline, whose establishment dates to the middle of the nineteenth century. Its development has been so rapid and the interest elicited by its discoveries so strong that it seems to be a science as ancient as it is canonical. We should not be misled, however: if the taste for the past, the passion for collection, the observation of the earth, are practices as ancient as the earliest humans, archaeology in the modern sense of the term was only constituted as an autonomous and recognized discipline at the moment it was able to emancipate itself from bric-a-brac, from the impossibility of dating objects and monuments with certainty, from the barrier that separated the history of man from the history of nature. The moment of that rupture, which transformed the old antiquarian quest into actual archaeology, coincides with the middle of the nineteenth century and the advent of the positive sciences. It consists in an upheaval of the first order affecting the humanist domain as well as the natural sciences, anthropology as well as geology or paleontology. It is interesting to examine the conditions under which research in Antiquity, traditionally dependent on philology, was able to elaborate its own model of development by freeing itself from the primacy of text over monument, from the cult of the work of art in favor of the history of material culture, from the centrality of universal history in favor of the diversity of regional and local histories.

This work, begun in Germany with Johann Winckelmann, in France with the Comte de Caylus, in England with the “Society of Dilettanti,” took shape in a private international society founded in Rome in 1829. The “Istituto di Corrispondenza

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170 Archeologica,” created by Christian von Bunsen, the Prussian ambassador to Rome, and supported by a host of scholars and aristocrats including the crown prince of Prussia (the future Friedrich Wilhelm IV), Count Metternich, the Duc de Blacas, and a young German scholar, Eduard Gerhard, is the ancestor of all our modern archaeological institutions. It embodies a universal model of knowledge that owes its style to Alexander von Humboldt and its tradition to Gerhard.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, passion for Antiquity was expressed by collection, imitation of ancient works of art, and study of literary sources: the collector, the artist, and the philologist were the three symbolic figures of antiquarian curiosity. Gerhard, born in 1795, knew this milieu well, having frequented it first while studying in Breslau and Berlin, and then especially during his numerous stays in Italy. A student of Friedrich August Wolf and August Boeck, he displayed impeccable philological erudition (in April 1815 he was the first doctor “*rite promotus*” of the brand new University of Berlin). Above all this admirer of Goethe and close friend of Alois Hirt and Ernst Toelken at the Prussian Academy of Fine Arts exhibited an obvious sensitivity for art. In this city which openly claimed its royal destiny, the fine arts were one of the elements of urban and political development. The Hohenzollern family was moreover heavily involved in the development of museums and the support of the study of Antiquity. The patronage of the crown prince and the close friendships that Gerhard had formed with the milieu of Roman connoisseurs naturally played a decisive role in this context.

Gerhard was at once a dedicated scholar, a museum curator, and a university professor. His professional career lived out the different stages of the institutionalization of the discipline: he was first a secondary school instructor, then a simple Prussian grant holder in Rome, before becoming the secretary of the Institute he had founded, returning to Germany in 1833 as “archaeologist” of the Berlin museum, and finally being named professor at the prestigious university in 1844. But his uninterrupted activity did not exhaust the man’s ardor: a member of the Berlin Academy, he promoted great learned enterprises like the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* and the inventory of Etruscan mirrors. The founder of several scholarly journals, he directed for years the *Archäologische Zeitung* he had created. He was no stranger either—which seems surprising today—to the ancient art trade, from which he was able to make a profit. However, if we add that he donated all his collections of books and antiquities to the University of Berlin and that he willed a large sum to the Academy for the creation of a research grant, we see that the man in his diverse facets incarnated a type of scholar very different from the aristocrats or the abbés of the eighteenth century.

Published in 1850, thus three years after the first volume of Boucher de Perthes’s *Antiquités celtiques et antédiluviennes* and nine years before Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*, the *Archaeological Theses* can be considered the emancipation program for classical archaeology and the establishment of its new course. At this time Gerhard was fortified by the experience acquired in the creation of the Instituto, whose three types of publications, *Bolletino*, *Annali*, and *Monumenti*, were intended to provide the scholarly public with a complete panoply of editorial tools. The *Bolletino* was dedi-

cated to current information, to following the news; the *Annali* were to receive scholarly communications from the corresponding members; and the *Monumenti* (which took up an old idea of Winckelmann's) were designed to offer detailed publication of the monuments and great series of objects of Antiquity. Around these three tools, an international community of scholars and patrons worked to provide the Istituto with an effective editorial and documentary structure.

It was a project at once universalist (even if limited to the Mediterranean world) and functionalist: only systematic publication of antiquities would allow for their understanding and their protection. Gerhard and his colleagues—of course, he was not alone—saw in the Istituto an instrument for the dissemination of knowledge with the goal of saving the archaeological patrimony of Antiquity in the way Renaissance scholars had made accessible, and oftentimes rediscovered, textual sources. When Gerhard invented the term *monumental philology* to characterize his project in opposition to traditional philology, he positioned himself as the inventor of a new approach to antiquity, just as Alde Manuce and Guillaume Budé had revolutionized the history of the classical tradition. Emancipated from a weighty indenture, archaeology participates by other means in the same goal as philology. Faced with the activity of artists and collectors, archaeologists seek to acquire a concrete knowledge of objects and monuments. Antiquity should not remain a model to imitate, but should become a source of innovation. The archaeologist's task will be to observe the great ancient corpus with positive methods of description and analysis.

Gerhard's *Archaeological Theses* are the product of a positivist overturning of the curiosity for the past, seeking not only to establish rules of description, but to give archaeologists indices, tools, techniques, in short the entire arsenal of an independent discipline. To that end, archaeology must have the right means. At the University of Berlin Gerhard created, against the advice of the philologists, a *Lehrapparat*: a collection of books, iconographic volumes, ancient objects, and casts designed for pedagogy. It is at the University that future archaeologists would henceforth learn the rules of their profession, before objects that they would be allowed to touch, to see, and to see again.

Gerhard insisted on this material and technical side of archaeological education: "*Monumentorum artis quis unum vidit, nullum vidit, quis millia vidit, unum vidit.*" (He who sees one art monument sees none; he who sees thousands, sees one.) He was not the founding father of a new discipline, for others before him, and after him, brought their contribution to the establishment of archaeology, but at a century's distance from his illustrious predecessor the Comte de Caylus, he was able to express in a concise and effective formulation the intangible rules of the profession.

Translated from the French by Matthew Tiews

Note

1. There is an abundant bibliography on Eduard Gerhard. The reader will find it presented with a series of very interesting studies in the collective volume published by Henning Wrede, *Dem Archäologen Eduard Gerhard 1795–1867 zu seinem 200. Geburtstag* (Berlin: Willmuth Arenhövel, 1997).