

## SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

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When lecturing on Etruscan archaeology or on the excavations at Poggio Colla, I am often asked about my methodological approach and whether I subscribe to “post-modern” methodologies. While these new approaches have much to offer, I believe that archaeology will always be a process of reconstruction that demands structuralist and positivist approaches. We cannot “deconstruct” when our mission is to reconstruct. Walter Burkert, the great Swiss scholar of Greek religion, put it best in his *Creation of the Sacred, Tracks of Biology in Early Religions* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1996, p. xii):

“Historical studies presupposes some optimism as to the existence of facts and the possibility of correct accounts. This may sound naïve vis-à-vis modern or post-modern tendencies to dissolve every object of study into interpretations, to be analyzed in turn to detect their tacit preconceptions and tendentious distortions. Those who cling to a hard core of reality may still claim company with science, which in its most abstract constructs remains tied to empirical data. Biology is exploring the “reality” of living organisms with growing success, from self-replicating molecules to human consciousness. Even in the humanities, interpretations are not just constructs but hypotheses about reality which does not cease to make itself felt. If, for example, the language and symbolism of sacrifice in a specific cultural context prompt a variety of interpretations, real bones remain at the site to prove that real killing took place there. Religion is life-and-death realistic—which keeps it close to nature.”

My own opinion is that as archaeologists and historians we construct narratives from the evidence, the “real bones” of Burkert’s reality, and that our work must be based on the assumption that there is such a reality. On the other hand, a good dose of “post-modern” self-consciousness might also be salutary. We have to be aware that the process of construction is fraught with difficulties,

and we should be humble enough in the face of these difficulties, to realize that we will need to revise our narrative in light of new evidence. Archaeology is a process.

One final quote about the construction of narrative, from Janet Malcolm, **The Crime of Sheila McGough** (Vintage, New York 1999, p. 3), a book about the construction of narrative in the legal process and the resulting reality that we call “justice:”

“The law is the guardian of the ideal of unmediated truth, truth stripped bare of the ornament of narration; the judge, its representative, adjudicates between each lawyer’s attempt to use the rules of evidence to dismantle the story of the other, while preserving the integrity of its own. The story that can best withstand the rules of evidence is the story that wins.”

In archaeology, what matters is not the story that “wins;” our goal is to fashion one that best explains the evidence.