

Wilhelm Dörpfeld: Schliemann's important discovery

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Sir Arthur Evans evidently considered Wilhelm Dörpfeld to be the “greatest discovery” that was made by Heinrich Schliemann (Evans 1931, 19). The “discovery” occurred in 1881, when Schliemann visited Olympia and met Dörpfeld, the young architect who gave him a detailed tour of the excavations. This meeting was at the beginning of a fifty-year career in which Dörpfeld made a number of important contributions, first to Schliemann's success, and ultimately to the history of architecture, through the field of archaeology.

This paper places the architectural contributions by Dörpfeld into the broader scope of archaeology during the past century. To properly understand the architectural aspects of these contributions, one has to take into account the changes that occurred in architecture between the time that preceded Dörpfeld's career and the present. It must be understood, before the commencement of this paper, that the term architecture does not designate a permanent phenomenon, but rather a notion which depends on the issues and concerns that prevail at the time when it is interpreted and employed.

I. Architecture before Dörpfeld: From origins to progress

The fifteenth through seventeenth centuries

Until the fifteenth century, architecture of the ancient world, as we now know it, was regarded as having mythical origins, and was accompanied by moral and spiritual value. After that time, architects of the Italian Renaissance explored the centres of earlier Roman civilizations, reviving the structural and decorative elements that were found among the remains of former buildings. The architects used the ancient orders, the columns and entablatures as sources of inspiration to make their own structures. A few of these architects were theorists, like Alberti and Palladio, who used drawings of the ancient buildings

to illustrate their personal interpretations of the writings by Vitruvius. These theorists thus made connections between the buildings and the minds of the former civilizations. Following the ancient engineer, the theorists perceived architecture as a single, uniform precept in which the logic of the ancient orders determined both the style, or appearance, and the construction of a building. This notion of architecture prevailed throughout most of the eighteenth century.

The late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, contention and turmoil fostered revolutions on a number of fronts that, in turn, affected the prevailing notion of architecture. The discovery of Herculaneum in a search for precious objects led to the formation of scholarly organizations and the systematic publication of architectural remains. While documenting the ancient Greek quest for excellence, Winckelmann, the renown historian of ancient art, interpreted architectural history as a four-phased progression: the birth, growth, suspension, and decline of artistic style. Drawings such as those by Stuart and Revett, increased the scholarly thirst for knowledge about the architecture of ancient Greece, known mainly from interpretations by Vitruvius. The drawings were complemented by other architectural treatises, such as *Palais, maisons, et autres édifices modernes* (by Charles Percier, architect for the Napoleonic court) and *Recueil et parallèle des édifices en tout genre, anciens et modernes* (by J.N.L. Durand, professor of architecture at the Ecole Polytechnique). A surge of information about ancient architecture motivated designers like Schinkel to apply details from buildings of ancient Athens onto the structural forms of renaissance Rome, in order to create a neo-classical environment in Berlin. By the time Dörpfeld began to prepare for his career, a schism between the designing architects and the building engineers prompted a revision in the prevailing notion of architecture, increasing the emphasis that was placed on historical

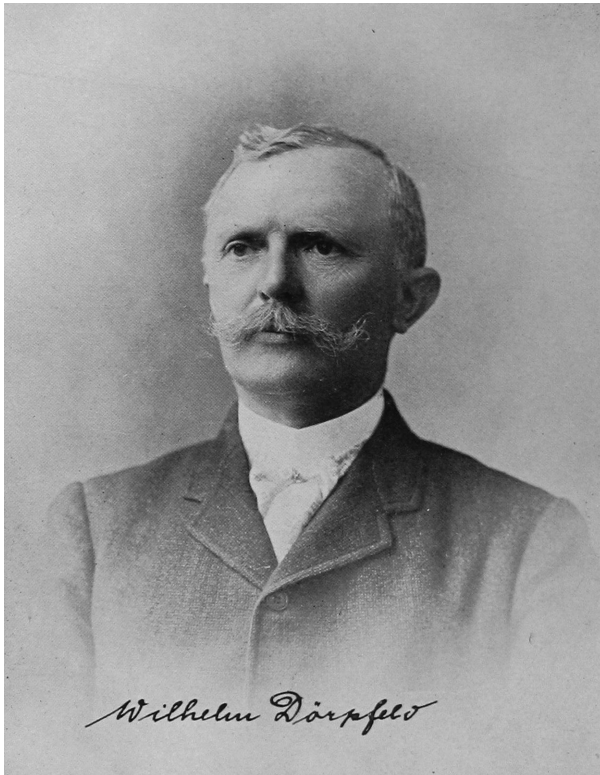


Fig. 1. Wilhelm Dörpfeld in 1911, after *The Builder* (June 30, 1911).

studies. The revised notion of architecture included the idea that excellence in design was attained by emulating the classical builders.

II. Dörpfeld's career preparation

The late nineteenth century in neo-classical Berlin

Eight years before Schliemann visited Olympia, Dörpfeld went to Berlin and enrolled in a program to study building construction at the Bauakademie. By that time, Berlin had become both the capital of Prussia, and an important cultural and architectural center, due in part to the neoclassical designs by Karl Friedrich Schinkel, the state architect. The buildings by Schinkel included the Royal Theater, the Altes Museum, and the Berliner Bauakademie. The Altes Museum, located near the Bauakademie, was one of the first structures in Western Europe to be designed specifically to house public collections of artistic and historical works. The museum, and the collections it contained, afforded Dörpfeld a large body of ancient objects, and it served as an arena for exercises in identifying, interpreting, and classifying them.

Studies at the Bauakademie

The program of study at the Bauakademie was based on treatises like those by Alberti, Palladio, Stuart and Revett, Percier, and Durand. Although all of these treatises deal with historical material, their general approach is typological. They focus on such topics as materials, methods of construction, or spatial organization. Although the treatises are not concerned with the actual process of design, Dörpfeld would have used them as references in his planning of contemporary buildings. He thus could have produced a building like Schinkel's Royal Theater, the Altes Museum, or the Bauakademie.

Dörpfeld studied architectural history under Professor Friedrich Adler (1827-1908), the Hauptdozent der Baugeschichte at the Bauakademie. Adler was probably the individual most responsible for developing Dörpfeld's understanding of the epochs and styles of architecture. Dörpfeld would have been introduced to such readings as Stuart and Revett's documentation of the monuments at Athens, and Winkelmann's *Anmerkungen über die Baukunst der Alten*. Through the readings and Adler's instruction, Dörpfeld came to regard the forms of ancient monuments as expressions of organic stylistic development.

The instruction of design at the Bauakademie had two facets: one was concerned with a technical analysis of the classical orders; the other was devoted to the compositional planning of buildings. In analyzing the orders, Dörpfeld studied their elements and proportions, their mouldings, and their organization in the plans and on the facades of buildings. Sources for this analysis likely included works by Italian Renaissance theorists, such as Alberti and Palladio. In his studies of planning, Dörpfeld would have been required to prepare several designs of a single official building, like a law court. Each design was to be in a different style, using illustrations in treatises like those by Percier and Durand. By the end of his analysis and planning exercises, Dörpfeld mastered the different styles, their vocabulary of architectural elements, and the rules for their composition.

III. Dörpfeld's contribution to the progression of progress

At Olympia with Adler and Curtius

The Berliner Bauakademie fostered Dörpfeld's amazing ability to combine an understanding of

ancient building traditions, with techniques of abstract thinking in three-dimensional space. As a self-professed *Altertumsforscher*, Dörpfeld offered a solution to the incomplete Propylea on the Athenian Acropolis for one of his final examinations. In this solution, he was able to discern the intent of the architect Mnesicles, and to describe the main lines of his design. Professor Adler was impressed by this solution and decided to hire the young researcher after he completed his examinations.

Early in 1877, Dörpfeld began to work as an apprentice in Adler's private practice in Berlin. There he was expected to solve architectural puzzles with reference to the ancient monuments on which his education was based. Several months later, he was invited to join the archaeological staff, working as Adler's assistant at Olympia. At the excavations, Dörpfeld learned the theory of stratigraphy, particularly as it could be used to discern the relationships between three-dimensional space, time, and cultural evolution.

While Dörpfeld was at Olympia, he worked with Ernst Curtius, a pragmatic follower of Winckelmann. Through Curtius, Dörpfeld developed a personal interpretation of the Winckelmann theories, and he applied them to formulate his personal notion of architecture. Dörpfeld's experience with the Hera temple at Olympia was the first opportunity to apply this notion in the field, where he discerned a progression in ancient construction materials and technology.

At Athens with the Deutschen Archäologischen Institut (DAI)

Dörpfeld's notion of architecture was concerned with the logic of its evolution. He traced the progression in masonry technology, from sun-dried mudbrick and timber, through fieldstone, to ashlar. His interest was extended also to metrology, i.e., the study of the foot as a unit of measure, and to the evolution of temple form and roof terracottas.

Beginning in spring 1881, Dörpfeld was in Athens where he resumed the studies of the monuments that he began as a student. He continued to be active in this area until after the First World War, contributing an architect's understanding of the Greek monuments. He disclosed what he regarded to be the Ur-Parthenon (which eventually became known as the "Dörpfeld-temple"), and he interpreted the plan of

the Erectheum as being the completed part of a larger design.

Also in spring 1881, Dörpfeld made a study tour to Sicily and southern Italy to finalize his ability to detect differences in construction between one stratum and another at the same site, and to formulate sequences that correlated the architecture of one time or place with that of another. Dörpfeld's notion of architecture thus came to include the idea that a change of materials or form could indicate a change in circumstance or time.

At Troy and Tiryns with Schliemann

When Schliemann met Dörpfeld at Olympia, he invited the young architect to join him at Troy. Dörpfeld finally accepted the invitation a year later, and used the opportunity to field-test his understanding of relationships between three-dimensional space, time, and culture. In general, he managed to coordinate the many horizontally and vertically separated walls and other architectural features that were excavated in Schliemann's previous campaigns. Specifically, he articulated the sequence of major strata and, most important, he disentangled the second settlement levels.

From Troy, Dörpfeld went on with Schliemann to Tiryns. There, he was given virtually complete responsibility to elucidate the building history of the palace, both in the field and in the final publication. Again, following his notion of architecture as organic evolution, he related the buildings at Tiryns to the broader history of architecture, including the structures at Troy and the Hera temple at Olympia.

IV. Dörpfeld's contribution to archaeology and architecture

The early twentieth century: Modern anti-history

Between the time of Schliemann's death in 1890 and the First World War, Dörpfeld commenced on his *Hauptwerk*, *Das griechische Theater*. Before Dörpfeld was born, Strack and Wieseler initiated their studies of the form and evolution of this architectural type, and stimulated much controversy, particularly in regard to the stage and the scene. While in Athens during 1881, Dörpfeld excavated the Theater of Dionysus, and then went on to complete eight publications on various theater topics between 1896 and 1915.

He culminated this work with a study of formal evolution, namely, *Zur baugeschichtlichen Entwicklung des antiken Theatergebäudes*.

Dörpfeld's publications were complemented with similar works by Allen, Bethe, and Frickenhaus. Excavation of the Dionysus theater by Dörpfeld probably did much to spark a virtual explosion of new theater excavation and publication in the period between the two wars. Many of the publications were reports and analyses, as in Fiechter's series of Leipzig studies, *Antike griechische Theaterbauten*.

While Dörpfeld was pursuing his interest in the Greek theater, he completed further publications on architectural problems at various Homeric sites: Troy and Ilion, Alt-Ithaka, Korfu, and Crete. As usual, publications by Dörpfeld stirred the interests of other scholars. In the years around the First World War, scholars like Blegen, Dinsmoor, Durm, Müller, Pfuhl, Ridder, E.B. Smith, and Åkerström each sought his own interpretation of, for example, the development of the Greek house, or the roof of the megaron.

Of all the scholars who were active at the beginning of the twentieth century, William Dinsmoor stands out as an architect who clearly followed in Dörpfeld's footsteps. Dinsmoor began his career before the First World War by re-examining the Athenian monuments that were studied by Dörpfeld. In the time between the two world wars, Dinsmoor tended to apply a detailed and broad-based examination to many of Dörpfeld's strictly architectural puzzles. It is from Dinsmoor, for example, that we learn in detail about the planning, construction, decoration, repairs, and evolution of the buildings that were first disclosed or examined by Dörpfeld. It is also from Dinsmoor that we learn about connections between archaeology and astronomy, seismology, and history. Together, Dörpfeld and Dinsmoor set the stage for architects who had a broader scope: Holland, who documented the remains and evolution of palace architecture at Mycenae; Stephens, who examined the planning logic of the Athenian Acropolis; and Travlos, the architect at the Athenian Agora.

In contrast with the diachronic work by Dörpfeld, and to some extent by Dinsmoor, the publications by other early twentieth century scholars viewed architectural monuments in synchronic frameworks. This occurred at the same time that masters of the modern movement in architecture were expressly anti-traditional. Furthermore, art historians were neglecting or rejecting Winckelmann's notion of stylistic evolution.

In the notion of architecture that prevailed during the early twentieth century, the past was a function of the then-current interpretation of reality.

Late twentieth century: Post-modern history

By the end of the twentieth century, the revolts of the modernists against tradition were replaced by efforts of post-modernists to create a dialogue between history and design. In the revised turn toward history, the logic and rationale of past events are used to understand, explain, and even contest phenomena in the contemporary field.

Just like Dörpfeld, serious students of architecture still interpret archaeological evidence in terms of their own notions of architecture. They continue to perceive problems with the scholars who interpret architectural data according to traditional models of understanding. They believe that the non-architecturally trained scholars do not see the meanings that were accorded to the structures by their builders.

A century after the meeting between Schliemann and Dörpfeld, the architecturally trained historians continue to acknowledge qualities of architecture that were not previously conceived. Architectural form currently is seen to be influenced by functional needs, aesthetic preferences, and symbolic aspirations of the builders and users. Visual architectural form is integrally linked with latent cultural content. The topics of recent publications are wide-ranging and highly theoretical. They include Minoan modular planning by Walter Graham; symbolism of the dome by E.B. Smith; social history by Hauser; builder's intent by Scully; environmental behavior by Donald Sanders; ideology by Bernard Knapp; and the dynamics of change in building tradition by Schaar. All of these contributions, except for the last, are generally synchronic. Future architectural historians are likely to link them into a diachronic network of interacting influences. Whether synchronic or diachronic, architecturally-based studies of ancient structures and environments are providing reliable touchstones for resolving the significantly more complicated problems of contemporary design.

V. Conclusion: Schliemann, Dörpfeld and the history of progress

Heinrich Schliemann's "discovery" of Wilhelm Dörpfeld more than a century ago was at the begin-

ning of a career in which Dörpfeld established a means and a standard of scholarship for architects to contribute to the field of archaeology. Dörpfeld, and the architects who followed him, were all part of a continuum. At the same time, their notions of architecture are products of their separate generations. The contributions that these architects make to the

history of architecture, therefore, depend on where archaeology is in its evolution at the time, as well as on the prevailing issues and concerns of architectural theory and practice. Wilhelm Dörpfeld, Heinrich Schliemann, and perhaps even Sir Arthur Evans, also may have realized this.

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