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DOCUMENT A

Digging

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; as snug as a gun.

Under my window a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down

5

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

10

By God, the old man could handle a spade,
Just like his old man.

15

My grandfather could cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, digging down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

20

The cold smell of potato mold, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

25

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

30

Seamus HEANEY, in *Death of a Naturalist* (1966)

DOCUMENT B

The stones, and especially the ruined stones, illustrate the new ways in which archaeologists discuss the past. They avoid the word 'authentic' when they are talking about objects. They parry it by asking: 'Authentic to whom, and when?' This thing may be a stone tool or a timber post which was 'provably' manufactured five millennia ago. But the 'authenticity' is not in the thing itself, like some trace element with a diminishing half-life. It is in the beliefs about the thing which have been held by human beings through all those years – changing beliefs, sometimes credulous, sometimes inexplicable. The polished stone axe may have been made to be treasured rather than used, something to be gifted and amassed but never intended to cut down a tree or butcher a dead stag. Much later, until a few hundred years ago, its finders thought it was a 'thunderstone' cast down from the sky. Later still, early archaeologists assumed that it was a practical implement, bound it into a haft and timed the minutes required to cut through an oak log with it. All these beliefs about use or origin are authentic. That cairn at Kivik in Sweden is largely reconstruction or even innovation, but it left the Crown Prince who 'opened' it with an authentic sense of pride and achievement. The last word about the authenticity of anything from a bronze rapier to a new nation remains a proverb: 'This is my grandfather's axe. My father gave it a new handle, and I gave it a new head.'

Instead of authenticity, stones have biographies. Some of the biography is incised or chipped or rubbed into them. Some of it – the different uses, mythical or practical, to which they were put by humans – can be read in a written document or inferred from other material evidence (like the cremated bone in the socket at Ballymeanoch). Much of it remains unreadable. But a surprising amount of an object's biography is simply lying around, waiting to be noticed. It has remained unstudied because historians and archaeologists have been so exclusively obsessed with an artefact's birth – and have almost ignored its life.

Nobody made this point more sharply than Francis Haskell, apostle of the study of taste in art history.

Art historians generally concern themselves with the processes of creation. Who painted such and such a picture? When was it painted? What does it represent? What does its style tell about the influences on the artist? Sometimes they venture into wider fields. How important for the painter were the political, the social or the religious circumstances of the time? What about the patron who commissioned the picture? ... But once the picture is completed, the historian usually loses interest. What it may have meant to the man who ordered and paid for it, or to the artist's contemporaries and successors, to the critics and historians of the time or later – all this tends to be neglected...

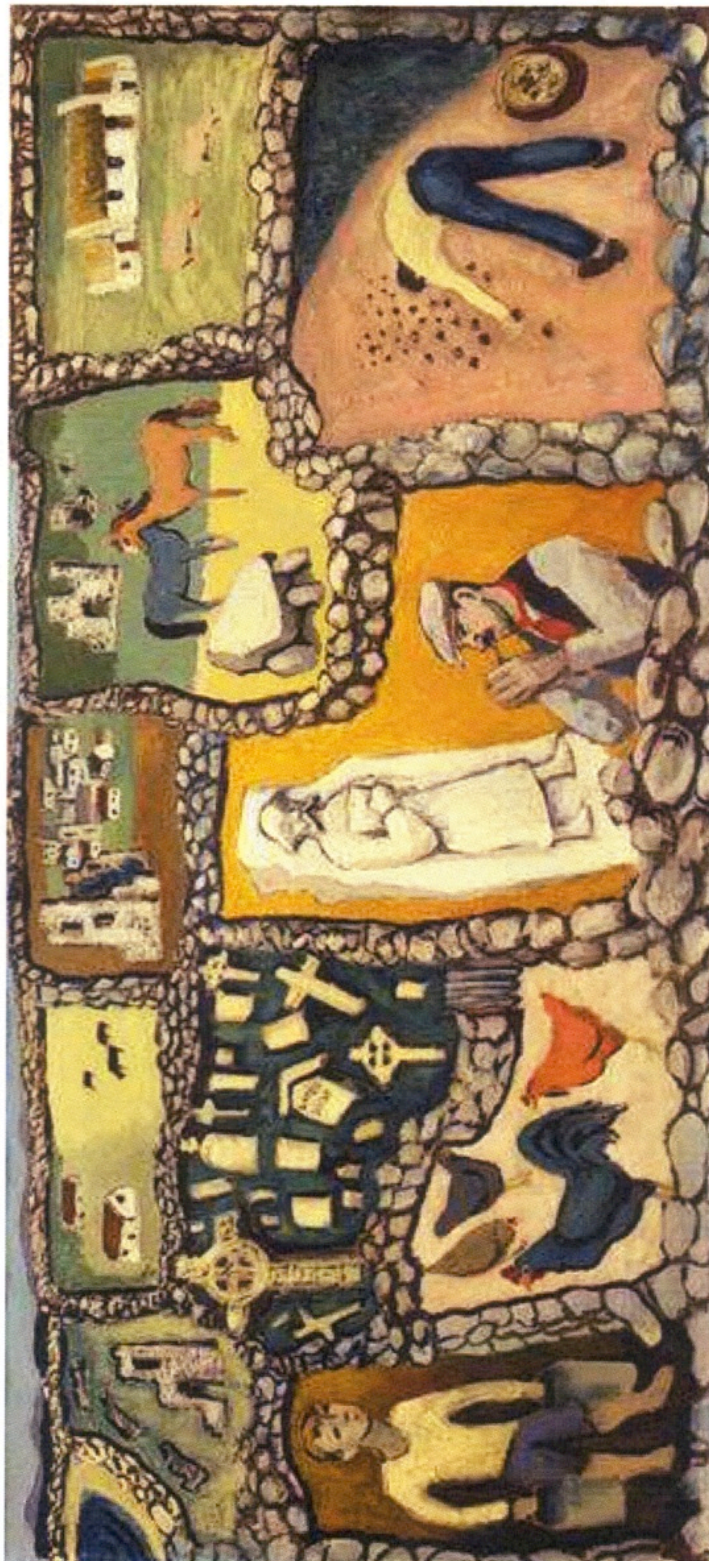
What is true about the study of paintings is also true about the study of material culture. Only now, in our own time, are archaeologists forcing themselves to look beyond the 'processes of creation' to the long life of

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45 successive meanings which followed creation. Some monuments are so prominent and have such an accretion of semiotic biography that it is impossible to ignore it. Stonehenge is the best example; English antiquaries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries conjectured that it was an 'Ancient British Druids' Temple; New Age enthusiasts in our own time have understood it as a vast stellar observatory or as the landing place of visitors from another galaxy; 50 the archaeologist David Clarke has interpreted its many rebuildings and rearrangements in prehistory as evidence of power struggles between competing elites. Maes Howe in Orkney is an enormous funerary mound built five thousand years ago, but the runic graffiti inside its chamber show that to Norse settlers and 'Jerusalem-farer' Crusaders it signified a treasure mine, a weather shelter or 55 a private place for illicit sex ('Ingibjörg the fair widow: many a woman lowered herself to come in here').

And nations? They are artefacts too, but they have two sorts of biography. One is the narrative 'story' of the territorial community which, in this case, goes under the title of Scotland: the battles and famines and kings and coal mines. 60 But the other biography is that of an abstraction, of a supposedly changeless artefact named Scotland, and that biography in turn becomes a rumination about origins and processes of creation.

**Neal ASCHERSON, *Stone Voices, The Search for Scotland*,
London, Granta Books, 2002**



DOCUMENT C

Gerard Dillon (1916-1971), *The Little Green Fields*, ca. 1945
oil on canvas, 40.5 x 89 cm