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Thematic Block:

*Archaeology and the Modern World:
Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives*

Session title:

‘FRINGE’ ARCHAEOLOGIES: ‘THE OTHER’ PAST

Session organisers:

Eleni Stefanou, Dr. Anna Simandiraki

Session abstract:

The relationship between archaeology and the public has become the subject of increasing analysis and debate in recent decades, especially as far as museums, education, heritage ownership and nationalism are concerned. However, there has been only a small amount of systematic research on “alternative” uses of “mainstream” archaeology.

Alternative discourses of archaeology may stereotypically advocate state or worldwide archaeological/ cultural/ religious/ governmental supremacy and conspiracies, even extraterrestrial interference with past material culture. This may overlap with related international discourses, but also and perhaps ironically have particularly local motifs and aspirations. This session will explore some alternative uses of the past by various social actors who raise a different voice towards established archaeological discourses, a voice that is used to fulfil cult/ fringe/ fundamentalist/ extremist ideological tendencies.

However, are there clear-cut limits between what is and is not acceptable as valid and constructive uses of archaeological materiality and ideas? Who are the actors and who are the audience of this interplay? For example, how do these proponents identify themselves through established national symbols that mean different things to different social actors? How do they differentiate themselves from other fellow citizens through a common archaeological past? What are the agendas behind the representation and edification of some pasts and not others? Consequently, how is identity performed through such uses of archaeology that go beyond a simple visit/pilgrimage to reveal more complex embodied experiences and performances?

Session papers will present critical, culturally diverse case studies which illustrate wider issues, debates and concerns about alternative archaeologies, on the part of archaeologists and non-archaeologists alike. These will include, but may not be limited to, representation, disenfranchisement, ownership and political uses of archaeology.

1. ‘Fringe’ Archaeologies: Themes, Challenges and Borders of the ‘Other’ Past

Eleni Stefanou (University of Southampton), Dr. Anna Simandiraki (University of Bath; Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol and Reading)

Overview of the papers to follow, issues and debates associated with the topic.



2. Bad Archaeology: amusing diversion or cultural terrorism?

Dr. Keith J. Fitzpatrick-Matthews (North Hertfordshire Museums)

Popular culture holds that the Egyptian pyramids could not have been built by Copper Age Egyptians, that there once existed a mid-Atlantic continent (Atlantis) that was the source of all civilisation, that Britain is crossed by lines of mysterious energy marked by ancient tracks, stones and churches and that archaeologists are too entrenched in their orthodoxy to look at these radical ideas. But how radical are they? Why do archaeologists ignore them? And what is their deeper cultural significance?

Whilst many might regard these fringe ideas as misguided, eccentric or, at worst, dishonest, I believe that there is a deeper agenda with its roots in the late nineteenth century. The so-called Occult Revival sought to undermine the rationality of Late Victorian intellectualism, to return spirituality and magic to everyday life, even to make it part of the academic mainstream. Although the Revival failed, its legacy continues, sometimes in surprising quarters.

This paper seeks to expose the undercurrents in the explicitly Bad Archaeology perpetrated by fringe authors and to explain why it has such popular appeal.



3. An Insider's View of an Alternative Archeology

Michael Cremona (Bhaktivedanta Institute)

Since 1984, I have been developing an approach to archeology and history of archeology with roots in a perspective on human origins and antiquity derived from the Puranas, the historical writings of ancient India. The Puranas present a picture of extreme human antiquity, incompatible with current mainstream theories. In my project, I have made use of mainstream archeological materiality. In the paper I will explore how and why I have done that. I will also describe the various audiences for my alternative archeological perspective: mainstream archeologists, Christian creationists, intelligent design theories, conspiracy theorists, ancient astronaut theories, New age and spiritual seekers, Hindu nationalists, alternative science researchers, historians of science, educators. I will also explore the various

methods of communication I use to reach these various audiences (papers presented at mainstream science conferences, mainstream science publications, lectures at mainstream science institutions and universities, lectures at alternative science conferences, UFO conferences, New Age conferences, yoga societies, religious organizations, the web, radio interviews, television shows, newspaper and magazine articles, etc. in countries around the world (my books are now in 20 languages). I will also explore my motivations and agenda. My motives are to introduce into archeology, and science generally, a perspective on human origins and antiquity with roots in an ontology that includes nonmaterial substances, intelligence, and agency. The perspective is meant to transcend nationalism, race, gender, etc. I will offer some suggestions as to how alternative perspectives like mine should be accommodated in state supported education systems, state supported research institutions, and state supported museums.



4. “The Bible in Stone”: Pyramids, Prophecies and Lost Tribes

Gabriel Moshenska (UCL Institute of Archaeology)

The Great Pyramid of Giza has been the focus of various alternative archaeological theories over several centuries, including the pseudo-science of pyramidology which claims to derive significant numbers, dates and prophecies from the internal and external dimensions of the structure. This paper examines the role of the religious-nationalist ‘British Israelite’ movement in the development of pyramidology in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as the central importance of the Great Pyramid in British Israelite theology.

The British Israelites claim that the Anglo Saxon race are the literal descendents of the ten lost tribes of Israel, and that the British are therefore God’s chosen people. The British Israelite beliefs were reinforced by questionable scriptural, linguistic and archaeological evidence, including pyramidology.

In the course of this paper I will trace the origins and growth of British Israelite pyramidology from the 1860s, focusing on the key personalities, their use and abuse of the Great Pyramid, their responses to major historical events such as the two world wars, and some of the more bizarre conclusions they came to. Overall, I will attempt to place this particular alternative archaeology within its historical, social and political context of an increasingly insecure imperial nation.



5. The ‘otherness’ of early education and scientific constructs in identity formation processes

Dr. Anna Izabella Zalewska (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Poland)

The role of early education in identity formation is this paper's broader context which seeks to demonstrate how school textbooks and direct contacts with archaeological and historical sites and monuments actively sustain national pride and social memory. After analyzing the ways Biskupin – the oldest prehistoric site in Poland with the results of organized research on a vast scale – was and continues to be presented to the youngest group of general public over the past 70 years, it is clear that various social actors use(d) and abuse(d) archaeological discourses to achieve their own goals.

I begin by arguing that the problem of 'ethnic myths' (seen here from the micro-scale) should be treated as one of the most intriguing problems that fields of science face – appealing to both the imagination and emotions – and needs to be discussed more systematically. The case study analyzed and presented here gives not only a huge potential for observing the long term results of exercising "factual gaps" in knowledge about the past, but also exposes the legibility and illegibility of scientific versus popular constructs in history and archaeology.



6. All shades of gray: the case of "Vinča script"

Dr. Aleksandar Palavestra (Belgrade University)

The problematic term *the Vinča script* denotes a number of incised ornaments and signs on the surface of the pottery of the Vinča culture – one of the most important "cultures" of the South Eastern European Neolithic. The modes of use and abuse of this phenomenon and the very term *the Vinča script* have changed through time, eloquently testifying about the paradigm shifts in European archaeology, at the same time indicating dangerous contaminations of archaeology by pseudo-archaeological ideas. During the 19th and first half of the 20th century, the idea of a script in the Neolithic cultures of South Eastern Europe surfaced occasionally as an argument for the short "historical" chronology and Near Eastern influences. This interpretive paradigm has been completely refuted by the new C 14 chronology. During the 1980s, the idea of *the Vinča script* emerges again in Serbia, this time from the pseudo-scholar circles, and is massively supported by the media. *The Vinča script* becomes the central motif of a much larger pseudo-scholar movement: the invention of script is linked to the prehistory of South Eastern Europe, allegedly from Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Lepenski Vir, over the Etruscan, Lydian and other scripts, down to Cyrillic and Latin letters. Naturally, the so-called *Vinča script*, during the turbulent times of the destabilized ethnic identities and political turmoil in the Balkans, develops into a flagrant example of abuse of the past for the current political purposes. Unfortunately, over the last few years the term *the Vinča script* – falsely represented by the media as a new and equally valid interpretive paradigm – seeps into the general public discourse, and even into archaeology itself.



7. Visual collision: a non-stereotypical approach to the interpretation of rock art

Fay Stevens (Institute of Archaeology and The Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching, University College London)

The aim of this paper is to present an ‘alternative’ view to the possible reasons and motivations behind the production of rock-art images. Fusing together a palimpsest of rock art imagery from a volcanic site in Armenia (currently a contested landscape that emerges out of its political and cultural history, centered around theories of national identity formation and nationalism e.g. Panossian 2006), and the production of so-called anarchist art (e.g. the work of the graffiti artist Banksy 2006), notions such as the possible rationale behind the production of these images and how they reflect the textures of social relationships (as defined for example by Gell 1988) will be considered. I will explore, through the varying presentations of these ‘other’ images, how the material production of imagery presents an ontological interplay between the possible flux or stability (depending on ones perspective) of the world people live/d in. Pels *et al* (2002, 13) for example have noted how people perform objects, but that these objects also perform people by constraining their movements and by suggesting particular encounters between them and others. This perspective allows a route into the consideration of the creation of place, ideas of the construction of self (at both a collective and individual level), boundary making (and contesting) and visual materiality expressed (perhaps) as an interest in making sense of the world through the production of imagery. As such, what defines a boundary? (e.g. who sets the parameters?) are images representative of anarchy, supremacy, cooperation or propaganda? and is it possible to extrapolate an acceptance, or not, of these social structures will be explored.

Bibliography

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8. Lake Stories

Dr. Anastasia Chourmouziadi (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki)

Since 1992 a Neolithic lake-side settlement is being excavated at Dispilio, a village in Northern Greece. From the very beginning, the archaeological team was determined to keep the laboratory’s doors open and was willing to disseminate the *scientific* results in every affordable way. Having ensured the local authorities support, a small exhibition with original finds next to the excavation site was possible as early as in 1996 and three years later the President of the Hellenic Republic inaugurated an open-air reproduction of the Neolithic village which is attracting a great number of visitors.

As the number of visitors was increasing, every year, and as the locals were getting used to the presence of the archaeological team in their neighborhood, for a moment, we had the illusion that the communication network was functioning and that all three –archaeologists, locals and visitors- we were sharing a charming adventure pursuing the past. Soon, we realized that nothing was less true. The oral comments of the visitors, their impressions “officially” written down in the Visitors Book, the many discussions with the villagers showed us that our modest exhibition and the more impressive model of the Neolithic village are actually triggering jingoistic interpretations that have nothing to do with our archaeological conclusions or our own general ideological viewpoint.

This paper will discuss the local and foreign visitors’ perceptions, largely based on their written comments, and the archaeologists’ contribution to the making of the communication gap.



9. “Too inaccurate or acceptable?” Representations of the past in the mass media

Diane Scherzler (Suedwestrundfunk)

Discussing (un)acceptable representations of the past in the mass media means talking about twilight areas and varying opinions: how archaeology is portrayed in a news article, in a radio documentary, or in a film may satisfy the journalist. The archaeologist, however, regularly notices omissions, mistakes, exaggeration, stereotypes, and distortions. For the journalist, the narrative style of a text contributes to its quality and should make it easier to grasp; for the scientist, it often means nothing other than fantasy and commercialising the past.

The archaeologists' complaints about the media's inaccuracy and sensationalism characterize much of the profession's attitude towards communicating with journalists. Archaeologists often see the power of the media in influencing the masses as a threat to their authority of interpreting the past. The journalist, they think, is the translator of their message to the general audience. How the past is represented should therefore depend on the archaeologist, be it the short article in a newspaper or a blockbuster like Mel Gibson's "Apocalypto".

On the other hand, a scientist's attention to detail and his or her prosaic way of narrating is an unacceptable representation of the past for many journalists. Their first priority is to be understood by the reader, the listener or the viewer. Editorial departments are using their own criteria for selecting topics, and these criteria follow different rules to those of science. Most journalists do not consider it as their task to portray archaeology and its view of the past in an exact manner and insist on creating their own reality.

The paper examines the facets of a strained controversy that lasts for decades. It attempts to find a basis for a more constructive interaction of archaeology and the mass media.



10. Fringes of the Mexican cultural policies: Divest of the other's culture by the Mexican archaeology

Lilia Lizama (University of Yucatan; EMCSA), Israel Herrera (University of Amsterdam; EMCSA)

Public archaeology is part of a global and diverse system, actual discussions of which have not yet reached or been applied to Mexico.

In general, Mexican cultural policies are based on depriving of cultural heritage. The other or the others –the citizen, the indigenous- is that person who doesn't have enough formal knowledge or education to preserve their heritage, their patrimony, to transmit it or to update it. The others, who do not belong to the system, are excluded and despised from the tasks of conservation and protection of their own heritage. Mexican archaeology seems to be disassociated from who produces an artifact, a relic, a piece of art, and who locks it into a museum, in a national exposition or sends it outside the country.

The conventional Mexican archaeology shows us a narrative where exists a fringe that restricts the participation of private organizations, professional and general public in the activities of conservation and protection.

This proposal explores aspects of current Mexican archaeology in relation to the “others” (the citizen, the indigenous), and the proposal of private organizations and the creation of more flexible and alternative systems, which consider “the others” as a part of the alternative way for the protection and conservation of their heritage.



11. Collision of Cultures. Religion, politics, and identity in the contemporary US seen through the lens of the Kennewick Man / Ancient One

Dr. Liv Nilsson Stutz (Lund University; Emory University)

The relationship between professional archaeologists and other stakeholders with an interest and investment in the past is changing all over the world today. Where archaeologists and anthropologists could previously maintain a monopoly of the interpretation of the past, the playing field is now levelled as other stakeholders are becoming active parties in the process of negotiation. This is especially clear in the increasing number of repatriation cases, where the actual ownership of the cultural heritage is transferred to groups who, in one way or another, can prove their affiliation to the material remains of the past (artifacts, places and human remains). While many archaeologists today recognize that repatriation is part of a positive and democratic development in a post-colonial world, many also feel that it presents some significant challenges. In the negotiations, archaeologists have to be willing and able to engage with a discourse based on religious faith. We also face the processes of how the

material remains of the past are used in active identity processes, potentially reaching from revitalization movements to ethno-nationalism.

In this paper I will engage with all these levels of the problem by looking closely at one of the most publicized cases of a repatriation dispute, the Kennewick case. Through an analysis of the debate on behalf of all the stakeholders, the local Native American Tribes, the scientists and the Astru Folk Assembly, this paper discusses the role of cultural heritage in an ongoing debate about religion, science, identity and race in contemporary United States. The paper also raises questions about the responsibility and role of archaeology and archaeologists in this unfolding relationship.



12. Playing the Right Notes but Missing the Music? Problems with Programmes for Expert-Public Dialogues in Lake District ‘Living Heritage’

Lorna Singleton (University of Manchester), Dr. Stephanie Koerner (University of Manchester)

The humanities and social sciences may be at crossroads in their roles in the dynamics of local, national, and trans-national pedagogical institutions and public affairs. Today, fields dealing with risk (nuclear, chemical, and biological hazard), as well as cultural resources management, have highly institutionalised roles as cultural policy authorities. Global media images of nature-culture, moderns – pre-moderns, experts – publics, tangible – intangible heritage clash with social geographies of ecological hazard, unsustainable development, and political strife. ‘Risk-governance’ functions as *lingua franca* across interstices of academic fields of science, technology and society and cultural heritage, operating in what some call ‘global realms’ of contemporary human affairs.

It is a mainstream international commitment to promote expert-public dialogue - a commitment often treated as strategy to address supposed problems of ‘deficits of public trust and/or understanding’. The session organisers rightly note the centrality of relationships between archaeology and the public. This contribution illustrates problems new ‘deficit’ models pose for ‘hearing’ anyone with materials on problematic expert - public relationships in the ecological, biological, and cultural heritage of England’s Lake District. The correct notes may be played, but the music fails to appear (Wynne 2001, 2006). Conclusions centre on replacing ‘managing cultural property risks’ by concerns with the plurality of ‘lived heritage’ is highlighted.



13. Discussion and closing remarks

Ms. Eleni Stefanou (University of Southampton), Dr. Anna Simandiraki (University of Bath; Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol and Reading) and session participants