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Histories of Archaeology: Archives, Ancestors, Practices

A major international conference on the history of archaeology was held in Göteborg, Sweden, on June 17–19, 2004. The conference was organised by the AREA network – Archives of European Archaeology – with the support of the Culture 2000 programme of the European Commission, as well as Göteborg University, the Municipality of Göteborg and other generous benefactors. It was held at the particularly well-equipped and welcoming Department of Archaeology, Göteborg University, on Olof Wijksgatan 6.

The conference was designed to be both a culminating event marking the end of AREA’s current phase of activities (AREA III, 2001–2004), and, it was hoped, a valuable opportunity to further consolidate the institutional interest and research perspectives generated by the network. AREA partners were implicated in the conception of the conference, but on the day they only presented posters as part of an extensive poster session in a dedicated hall.

Given the ‘human’ scale of the conference – over twenty papers, a pleasant auditorium, and an attendance of some 90 participants – it has been possible to hold a single session during the two and a half days of the meeting. This proved very useful for consolidating social links, and also for promoting the integration of the field, which cannot afford to be fragmented and dispersed. As well, while the conference was organised into thematic blocks (listed below), it was clear from the onset – and confirmed throughout the meeting – that these themes would effectively overlap and dovetail with each other.

Here is then the list of papers (title, author, institution):

Sources and Methods for the History of Archaeology

Biography as Microhistory. The Relevance and Teaching of Private Archives in the Writing of the History of Archaeology / Marc-Antoine Kaeser, Swiss National Museum.

Unearthing the Past – A Case Study in European Archival Archaeology / Ruurd B. Halbertsma, National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden.

The Hemenway Southwestern Archaeological Expedition, 1886–1889: A Model of Inquiry for the History of Archaeology / Curtis M. Hinsley, Northern Arizona University; David R. Wilcox, Museum of Northern Arizona.

Administrative Archives of the Archaeological Service as a Source for the History of Archaeological Research in Thessaly, Greece / A. Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou, Archaeological Institute for Thessalian Studies.

The Phenomenon of Pre-Soviet Archaeology. Archival Studies of the History of Archaeology in Russia – Methods and Results / Nadezhda I. Platonova, Institute for the History of Material Culture, St Petersburg.

Prehistoric Archaeology in the ‘Parliament of Science’, 1845–1900 / Tim Murray, La Trobe University, Australia.

Archaeological Practice

Wilamowitz and Stratigraphy at Capua: Telling the Story of an Unlikely Pair in the History of Archaeology / Giovanna Ceserani, Department of Classics, Stanford University.

Methodological Reflections on the History of Excavation Techniques / Gisela Eberhardt,

Humboldt-Universität, Berlin.

'More than a Village' – On the Development of the Archaeological Study of the Medieval Countryside / Emma Bentz, Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Lund University.

Visualising Archaeology

Frozen in Time: Photography and Archaeology in The Netherlands / Leo Verhart, National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden.

The Sorting Table – The Performance of Antiquarianism / Christopher Evans, Department of Archaeology, Cambridge.

Towards a More 'Scientific' Archaeological Tool: The Accurate Drawing of Greek Vases Between the End of the 19th and the First Half of the 20th Centuries / Christine Walter, Musée du Louvre.

Weaving Images. Juan Cabré and Spanish Archaeology in the First Half of the 20th Century / Susana González Reyero, Prehistory and Archaeology, Autonoma University, Madrid.

The Impossible Museum: Exhibitions of Archaeology as Reflections of Contemporary Ideologies / Marcello Barbanera, Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza".

European Images of the Ancient Near East at the Beginnings of the 20th Century / Maria Gabriella Micale, Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza".

Questions of Identity

Archaeology, Politics and Identity. The Case of the Canary Islands in the 19th Century / José Farrujia de la Rosa & Carmen del Arco Aguilar, University of La Laguna, Tenerife, Canary Islands.

Language, Nationalism, and the Identity of Archaeologists – the Case of Juhani Rinne's Professorship in the 1920s / Visa Immonen & Jussi-Pekka Taavitsainen, Department of Archaeology, University of Turku, Finland.

Prehistory at the Portuguese Association of Archaeologists: A Question of National Identity? / Ana Cristina Martins, Portuguese Association of Archaeologists.

Town and Gown, Amateur and Academic – Archaeological Encounters in Oxford 1850–1900 / Megan Price, Wolfson College, Oxford.

On the History of Danish Archaeology in the Last 150 Years / Stine Wiell, Denmark.

Virchow and Kossinna. From the Science-Based Anthropology of Humankind to the Culture-Historical Archaeology of Peoples / Sebastian Brather, Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe-Universität Seminar für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Frankfurt/Main.

Dutch Archaeology and National Socialism / Martijn Eickhoff, RAAP Archeologisch Adviesbureau.

Ransacking the Archaeological Memory of the Vallhagar Excavations, 1946–1948 / Marie Svedin, Department of Archaeology, Göteborg University.

A written commentary, based on the extended abstracts of the speakers, was provided by Leo Klejn (St. Petersburg), who unfortunately could not attend. These extended abstracts and additional information can be found on the conference website, at www.historiesofarchaeology.org

The concluding discussion, on the afternoon of Saturday the 19th June, generated lively debates and exchanges of information.

To begin with, we returned to and expanded several of the themes and ideas previously addressed. This was notably the case with issues and techniques of visualisation, and also with the question of who should be doing the history of archaeology (if such a prescription was at all possible or desirable).

This led to a general concluding debate on future prospects and opportunities for the histories of archaeology. One issue that was only touched upon, and clearly deserves further reflection and exchanges, was that of public outreach and heritage management: how to get the general public (e.g. museum goers) interested in the ways archaeological knowledge is produced and displayed – how both beautiful objects and scientific certitudes come about.

We dedicated much more attention to the teaching of the history of archaeology. Experiences in various university systems and countries were shared (Russia, Romania, Britain, France, Germany, Australia). Two points followed. First, we considered the opportunity of incorporating historical and historiographical considerations across the whole range of archaeological teaching (i.e. in core courses in method and theory, in regional or chronological modules etc., at both undergraduate and more advanced levels). Next, in this didactic context, we began to reconsider the question ‘why do the history of archaeology’, and why should it be of interest to future and current practitioners.

The last and possibly most effective way of promoting the histories of archaeology we discussed at the conference is of course through scientific publications. Publishing guidelines for the proceedings of this conference were indicated, and the speakers were invited to submit the final version of their papers.

More importantly, this was also the opportunity to announce the launching of a major new series ‘Histories of Archaeology’, to be published with Berghahn books, and also to call for manuscripts and expressions of interest (see separate announcement). We all agreed that the interest and momentum generated by the conference should be maintained and expanded in the future.

From James E. Snead, George Mason University.

History of Archaeology at the Montreal SAAs

The 69th annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in Montreal was also the setting for the biennial Gordon Willey Symposium on the History of Archaeology, organized by the SAA’s History of Archaeology Interest Group. This year’s session, organized by Steven E. Nash and James E. Snead, was entitled ‘Unconventional Scholars: Making Archaeology Work’. Preliminary discussions are underway to arrange for publication of this symposium. Attendance was excellent, a clear demonstration of the growing appeal of the history of archaeology in professional circles. This is further supported by the fact that the session was assembled via an open call for papers.

Session Abstract

The production of archaeological knowledge, method, and theory is situated in a complex web of social relationships. Faculty members and curators typically gain recognition through grants and publications that are the standard currency of archaeological careers. Their efforts sometimes stand on the shoulders of patrons, technicians, amateurs, informants, spouses, and