

II. Papers

Soviet Archaeological Expedition as a Research Object

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We're all going on an Expedition with Christopher Robin!
What is it when we're on it?
A sort of boat, I think, said Pooh.

– A. A. Milne. *Winnie-The-Pooh and All, All, All*. Chapter 8

Traditionally, an expedition is perceived as a form of academic research. For archaeologists it takes the form of fieldwork, of studying archaeological sites. However, not all participants of archaeological expeditions are professional archaeologists. In fact, the majority of expedition participants are ordinary people who are not professionally involved with ancient history. Besides, archaeologists themselves are not only professionals but also human beings (Sveshnikova, 2008).

An expedition comprises academic activities as well as everyday life: people eat, sleep, communicate, etc. Having found themselves in unusual living conditions, they create a special 'lifeworld' (Lebenswelt). Sometimes the specifics of it are cultivated and turned into a subculture; customs, attributes, and folklore appear. Often the social space of expeditions becomes determinative in the lives of its participants, thus creating a special milieu. In any case, any archaeological expedition is part of general society. The practices it creates are always historical, as they are created at a certain moment in time, within certain social and cultural conditions.

Soviet archaeological expeditions are the main focus of my research. They provide us with very interesting examples of archaeological expeditions as a part of a society, and not only as a part of science. After the 1960s it was an especially popular leisure practice. Many people who were not professional archaeologists went on expeditions in their leisure time and worked there as diggers or shovelmen (excavators). A Soviet archaeologist described them as people who 'prefer to spend their vacation in archaeological expeditions in various parts of our country instead of seaside resorts. This phenomenon was widely observed among the intelligentsia of Moscow, the original capital, and the capital of the North as well' (Konopatski, 2001: 477).

Even though archaeological fieldwork was leisure practice, it still involved hard physical work in extreme living conditions. Here I have to specify what an archaeological expedition is like, in the Russian tradition, because the system of organizing archaeological excavations in other countries is entirely different.

In Russia an expedition means leaving the usual place of residence. Most expeditions take place in the countryside,



Fig. 1: Expedition arrives at the burial ground. Archive of the Institute of Archaeology, RAS. F.1. # 2268: 84.

often far from inhabited locations. People who conduct the excavation temporarily live together, often in tents, and cook their food over an open fire. The extreme nature of this situation became even more so during Soviet times, when people had to bring enough food provisions to span the entire period of the expedition – because it was impossible to replenish supplies from stores at nearby villages. However, the working day of ordinary expedition participants lasted no longer than eight hours (and they didn't work at all, in case of rain), their food was prepared by a cook, and therefore people had a great deal of free time.

Research Context

As a student, I majored in archaeology, and I received my PhD in the history of archaeology. After finishing my degree, I taught sociology courses at university level, and during the eight years that I taught sociology, I learned to look at the world through the lens of a sociologist. In 2002, after five years of participating in archaeological excavations in the Omsk region in Soviet central Asia, I worked at excavations outside Novgorod, in central Russia. I was astonished at how different the everyday lives of archaeologists participating in expeditions could be. In 2006 I started collecting materials on the experiences of everyday life on archaeological expeditions, and could not stop admiring its variety. Six months ago I came to Germany, where I learned that the system of organizing archaeological research can also be undertaken completely differently.

While the content of the work (excavations) and its meaning (studying ancient monuments) remain uniform

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for all expeditions, the kinds of everyday life on expeditions are often completely different, which I find very interesting. By the term 'everyday life' I mean, according to the German tradition, the inter-subjective world, the meanings and implications of which are taken for granted by those who live them. To be more specific, I am not interested in learning what archaeologists drink and when they wake up: I want to find out what influences their behaviours and what they think about it.

My research did not involve collecting materials according to an elaborate plan. It was just the opposite: it developed from collecting empirical data, and then to creating a research scheme. That is why I will first describe my source base, then my research scheme and, finally, my findings when I combine the two.

Sources

Participant observation is my first source. The key components to understanding the everyday lives of archaeological expeditions are, besides the participation in excavations itself, the involvement of the professional community, and formal and informal communication between colleagues, and with other archaeologists.

Gradually my conversations with archaeologists progressed from the recording of archaeological experiences and anecdotes into full-fledged interviews. It is especially interesting to talk to archaeologists from an older generation, who started their expeditionary activities in the 1950s and 1960s. At the same time I also interviewed unskilled expedition participants who are not professional archaeologists. They emphasized certain things that were obvious for me as an archaeologist. An interview is a unique method that allows one to clarify certain data and to double-check the results of research analysis.

I also used the following sources in my research:

- **Memoirs** of participants in archaeological expeditions. Usually they are part of memoirs about archaeologists themselves or autobiographies. The memories of non-professional expedition participants are exceptionally interesting. However, they are rather scarce and usually part of the memories of distinguished people, or about distinguished people.

- **Letters** from expeditions found in archaeologists' personal archives.

- **Field journals and other expeditionary materials**, most of them found in the archive of the Institute of Archaeology, in the Russian Academy of Sciences. Professional archaeologists do not usually consider field documentation worth saving. All the scientific information concerning their research is filed in the form of reports, and the rest of the information is considered unimportant. The diaries of T. N. Nikolskaya that I used were found in a dusty corner of the archive of the Institute of Archaeology. Archive workers were seriously discussing that they should have, long ago, thrown the diaries away, because there were reports on those excavations.

- **Photos**, all excavations are thoroughly photographed. Therefore, every archaeological excavation leaves behind a considerable amount of pictorial data. There is a special



Fig. 2: Novgorodskaya expedition, 1932. Photo Archive of the Institute for the History of Material Culture of the RAS. O2417.23.

archive in Russia for storing such photographs: the Photo Archive of the Institute for the History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Archaeologists usually photograph their own archaeological sites and artefacts.

One can identify two types of archaeological photographs that portray people. The first type comprises pictures where people are photographed by accident. Figure 2 is a typical example from the excavations in Novgorod – only part of the person is in the picture. The second type of photographs comprise those that deliberately photograph people. For instance, in the Soviet era it was rather popular to photograph groups of workers (shovelmen).

For my research, however, personal photo archives of non-professional expedition participants are much more valuable. They contain images of field camps, of celebrations and so on. Often people like to be photographed by the side of unearthed skeletons. Unfortunately it is rather complicated to get access to such personal archives and photograph collections.

All the materials that I mentioned above characterize archaeological expeditions in the USSR and Russian Federation from 1930s to 2000s.

Possible Approaches

There can be a variety of approaches to studying archaeological expeditions. For instance, one can study an expedition as a social organization. In this case, from the viewpoint of the sociology of organizations and the sociology and psychology of labour, one might study such issues as the leader's functions, the correlation between formal and informal structures, the most efficient work schedules. In real life all of these issues are usually resolved by expedition leaders based on their common sense. Some practices for organizing life in field camps prove to be very successful, and they are adopted by other expeditions. One example is the tradition of celebrating Bastille Day on July 14th by the expeditions starting their field season in the end of June or the beginning of July. In the course of celebration, support expedition staff 'hold court' over the expedition leaders. This event, conducted in a humorous manner,

provides relief from potential discontent and brings some diversity into the life of a field camp.

An archaeological expedition can also be viewed as a pedagogical organization. A large number of schoolchildren and undergraduate students take part in expeditions, thus, one can speak of its pedagogic function. Which personal traits and characters do expedition participants develop? Which skills do they gain? Does an expedition have any educational effect? To a certain extent, the schoolchildren themselves tend to answer those questions as they grow up (Lebedev, 2002). Parents often use expeditions as a pedagogic tool:

'For me it was a pedagogic issue. My kid went on expeditions with me. My child's difficult age called for some extraordinary pedagogical means. I decided that an expedition was a totally different environment, a totally different community that would distract him from street life.' (Anonymous interview 10.04.2008)

An archaeological expedition is obviously an important object for those who study archaeologists' professional communities. What norms and values exist in such an academic community? What formal and informal rules determine their behaviour? What variants of the norm can exist, and how are they determined? Most theories on the sociology of science focus on analyzing publications and scientists' behaviour in academic communities. The study of expedition experiences is extremely interesting, because in this case non-professionals become participants of scientific research. The existing norms are not obvious for them, they need to be put into words and explained. For instance, my respondents in two interviews had totally different impressions of the way archaeologists treat artefacts unearthed during excavations: 'Such a shame, I really wanted to put that knife-shaped stone blade in my pocket, to keep it – I felt it was mine' (Anonymous interview 27.02.2008); and just the opposite: 'I was shocked... by the way they threw away all our findings, saying they weren't of any interest' (Anonymous interview 06.03.2008). The first respondent speaks of the desire to keep an artefact and the inability to do so, and the second, to the contrary, speaks of the professional archaeologists' disregard for their finds. Both respondents are women who took part in archaeological expeditions during their student years; neither of them is a professional archaeologist. They both live in Omsk, their age, and the time when they took part in archaeological expeditions is about the same. Their opposite perceptions of a similar situation are explained by the fact that they took part in the excavations of archaeological sites from two different periods. The first expedition excavated a Neolithic archaeological site. Well-preserved artefacts from this period are scarce, and each find has a great scientific value. The second participant observed the excavation of an antique settlement, where fragments of clay pottery constituted a considerable part of the finds. It was a so-called 'mass-material': i.e., they are extremely numerous, the types of ancient ceramics are known to scientists, a large number of undamaged pottery vessels exist, so the fragments are simply counted and not preserved.

Therefore, we are dealing with the professional archaeologists' different attitudes to artefacts, characterized by the perceptions of the expedition's participants.

Expeditions can be viewed as subcultures. For instance, participants of the majority of Soviet archaeological expeditions in 1960s–1970s, celebrated Archaeologists' Day, performing an initiation ceremony for new archaeologists. In the evening they would sit around the campfire singing songs about the Scythians and the Eagle of the Sixth. Expeditions can create their own system of norms and values. For example, it is customary in some expeditions to conduct excavations in clean white shirts and clean-shaven, to demonstrate the ability to remain a 'cultured' person in any circumstances (Klejn, 2010: 64). On the contrary, in other expeditions there is a tendency to pay as little attention to appearances as possible. People who wear the same pair of pants during the whole field season without ever washing them become role models. For some expedition participants it is a way to get away from civilization.

It is only recently that the song folklore of archaeological expeditions has become an object of studies (Beletskiy, 2000). Expeditions comprise special forms of social bindings. All respondents who took part in numerous expeditions noted that 'people are absolutely sincere there. Therefore, you are absolutely sincere as well' (Anonymous interview 19.08.2008). Often students who have studied together for a number of years get to really know each other only on expeditions. Working together, providing for life's necessities, meeting basic needs, reveals everyone's true natures over a short period of time. Obviously, the lower the comfort level, the higher the level of integration level in an expedition there is. Archaeological expeditions conducting their research in difficult living conditions are the most close-knit. On the other hand, having an expedition cook, and other situations when expedition participants have no need to work together to provide for bare necessities, can lead to the formation of isolated groups.

Often relationships that developed at an expedition continue to play an important role in people's lives long after the expedition is over. The determinative role of expedition community has been studied at the example of a school archaeological group (Gladarev, 2001; Yurchak, 2006: 137–139).

While the above list of approaches to studying archaeological expeditions includes the approaches that I find the most interesting, however, it is by no means complete. Expeditions are also, for example, a form of communal activity in field conditions. Although archaeologists usually claim to be completely different from ordinary tourists, in essence, they share the same living conditions. They address the similar issues of finding and preparing food, and lodging arrangements, and so on. Until now there is no research dealing with the history of Russian archaeological expeditions as an institution. It is yet unknown how the forms of organizing expeditions, the ways of engaging non-professional participants, etc. changed over time.

In my research I am trying to study expeditions as part of the society. In order to do that, I created a research scheme at the interface of history and sociology.

My Research Scheme

It is known that any research scheme has its limitations and is an instrument rather than a descriptor of reality (the 'ideal type' according to Weber). In my research I consciously narrowed down my object of study to an example of a common situation of archaeological research. I know that there are other situations, but they are not included in my field of attention.

Thus, I proceeded with the fact that the primary scientific purpose of an archaeological expedition is excavation, i.e. digging through soil, and the focus on newly found remains of material culture. An expedition always means leaving the usual place of residence; the people who conduct the excavation temporarily live together. Taking part in such an expedition for non-archaeologists is voluntary, that is, any needs satisfied by the expedition can be satisfied elsewhere, and this kind of pastime is the person's own choice (of course there are contradictory cases, but they are exceptions to the general rule).

With the uniform content of work, the relationships and practices that are formed in expeditions are quite different. Expedition participants build up their everyday lives depending on their own needs and opportunities. Within this scheme, I view reality as the point of intersection between needs and opportunities. These needs and opportunities are social ones, that is, their reasons are found within the society. As Karl Marx put it, man is a social animal.

My research scheme contains three levels of analysis:

1. Lower level – the everyday life of the expedition itself. At this level I am trying to perceive what life in the field is like. Who takes part in the expedition? How are expedition participants selected? How is the life in a field camp organized? How are holidays in the 'archeological calendar' acknowledged, i.e. the Day of Archeologists, the Archaeological New Year, etc.?

2. Second level – individual meanings – how expedition participants explain their actions: why they choose to take part in an expedition, how they structure and develop individual and communal expedition life, what they consider important or unimportant in their temporary communities and so on. This level is not as straight forward for the researcher as it might initially seem. Expedition participants are naturally and unconsciously making decisions about how to live their lives during a dig, and thus cannot always easily articulate their thought processes. The meaning and consequences of such decisions often go unnoticed by those who make them. As a researcher, I make analyses, and then look to expedition participants for their subsequent confirmation or rejection of my interpretations. It is understood that as a researcher I face a constant risk of mistaking my own analysis for fact.

3. The third level is social function. Here I am trying to answer certain questions. What are the consequences of the decisions of the individual on this temporary dig society as a whole? What do these personal decisions say about the social needs and responsibilities of the individual? What are the social functions of archeological expedition? All social functions can be divided into apparent and latent. Apparent – means fulfilling the need that

the society is aware of, and offers other ways of fulfilling it. They work to support the existing social order. Latent (hidden) might seem to be a sort of by-product but, in fact, also fulfill a certain need that is not generally recognized. They are what we usually call 'informal practices'. Here I also try to understand other potential means for fulfilling apparent and latent needs, specifically to investigate intersection points between needs and opportunities to fulfill those needs. In essence, it is a separate (fourth) level of research, however, at present it plays an auxiliary role.

It is obvious that in reality all these levels are closely intertwined. I believe it is extremely important not to derive social functions directly out of practices. The same actions can have different meanings within the same society. Despite the difficulties in revealing less apparent meanings, it is important to take them into account.

Scheme Implementation

Now let me try to show how this research scheme reconstructs reality by the example of the Soviet Union in 1960s–1970s. During that period archaeological expeditions were at their peak of popularity.

Figure 3 is a page from a field journal. It is a record of working times of expedition participants. From memoirs and interviews we know that there was a practice of employing people as expedition staff. They were employed for the period of excavations (that is level one – reality).

Level two is meanings. One and the same reality can have quite a lot of meanings. That is why together with the meanings I will describe their social functions.

The first group of meanings is the ones created by professional archaeologists, expedition leaders. Employment is the basis for paying salaries. For the majority of professional archaeologists this meaning is obvious, they only say it out loud in the context of the correlation between financial paperwork and real economic activities. The money accounted for on paper is one thing, and the money spent in reality is quite another. One way of finding real money for real needs is employing fictitious personnel. Unskilled expedition participants very rarely describe the fact of employment (and I will speak about these cases later). What is much more important for them is the romance of an unusual environment: 'life used to be a boring routine. And here you get to spend some time in an unusual environment with your peers' (Anonymous interview 22.03.2008).

Therefore, from the meanings created by professional archaeologists we can derive two social functions; one of them apparent and the other one – latent. The apparent social function was keeping track of the employment of population. It existed as a social institute, there were certain rules (laws, guidelines and so on), reporting forms, etc. The latent function was receiving unaccounted financial means. It was the need that almost any leader in the USSR had but no one was allowed to talk about. So everyone solved that problem differently, to the best of their abilities.

There was another specific function typical for the USSR in 1960s–1970s. I interviewed one of the participants of

tions. Especially before the results were published or, using Bourdieu's term, scientific capital was received. The reason being that in archaeology the most obvious way to become famous is to discover an important archaeological site. Discovery means not only achieving the result, but also being the one to publish it. In Soviet (and Russian) archaeology there is a monopoly on excavation results. According to the 'Statute on conducting field archaeological works', the exclusive rights of studying and publishing the materials belong to the leader of the expedition (the person holding the official permission to study the archaeological site). What it means in real life is that one cannot get access to the excavation materials without permission from that person. He or she is the exclusive rightholder. The only place where any information leak can happen is at the excavation itself.

The meaning created by professional archaeologists becomes determinative. The function of receiving social capital and thus preserving the academic community is much more important than the popularization function.

Another reason preventing the popularization of archaeological knowledge is people's proprietary attitude to ancient monuments and sites. In accordance with the current legislation, 'the objects of archaeological heritage are considered state property' (Federal law 'On the Objects of cultural heritage (historical and cultural monuments) of the peoples of Russian federation', No. 73 of June 25, 2002 article 49 paragraph 3). However, the public legal consciousness, and the informal norms, at work during the Soviet period presupposed acting according to the principle 'that which belongs to no one, belongs to everyone. That which belongs to everyone, belongs to me'. Objects that have no definite proprietor are considered having no proprietor at all. This attitude holds true for archaeological sites as well. The state is not considered as a definite proprietor, therefore, the principle 'if I found it, then it is mine' is active.

The majority of artefacts unearthed during excavations have little, if any, artistic or material value. It is known that ceramic fragments or, in case of a Stone Age archaeological site, stone tool flakes, are mass material. On their own they present little if any interest until they obtain symbolic value. For ordinary people this is the direct result of popularization. A piece of stone or clay becomes a document of ancient epochs, thus gaining great value.

It so happens that public lectures and talks on the significance of archaeological sites being excavated lead to the increase in unauthorized excavations, and to the decrease in the number of finds: 'I have a glass full of arrowheads from this expedition. Once I even gave my friend a birthday present: Here, this pottery fragment is four thousand years old' (Anonymous interview 02.02.2011).

The popularization of archaeological knowledge among students – the participants of archaeological expeditions – has its own dangers:

The first tomb raiders I had were my own students. One of them, Vanya Esin, was a true virtuoso. He was always active, did a lot of exploring, then became a teacher. Anyway, I heard rumours that he was digging burial

mounds. I sent Vitya Zakh to talk to him. 'Vitya, go visit him, and over a bottle of liquor he might tell you everything – where he digs, what he digs and how he digs'. So Vitya Zakh went to see him, made him drunk, and the tomb-raider told him how to raid burial mounds. He already knew how to dig by then, and that's what he told me. 'First you have to dig it round. Then roll the turf (makes a rolling gesture). Then you dig in the center of it. When you are finished, cover it with soil, unroll the turf, and no one will notice you've been digging there'. That's the virtuoso I've had. That's how he rolled and unrolled it.' (Interview with Dr. T. N. Troitskaya 25.10.2006)

That is why it is a lot safer when the professional archaeologist remains the only one to possess the knowledge of the scientific value of the excavation materials.

Conclusion

Archaeological expeditions are an extremely interesting research area. At present, the problem has just been set up. I would like to believe that further research will allow us to take a different view at the role of archaeological expeditions in the process of knowledge production as well as in the life of the society in general.

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