A discussion on the nature and direction of your chosen discipline and their relationship within the wider range of humanities

How did archaeology come to be? And what is its place within the wider range of humanities? These are the questions that will be discussed in this essay. To understand archaeology's place within the humanities, a knowledge of what the humanities are and how it differs to the sciences is essential.

What are the humanities? The humanities are a group of academic disciplines who's aim of study is to seek understanding of human culture and the human experience. These disciplines include history, religion, literature, philosophy, language and the arts. The use of cultural artefacts, historical documents and artistic expression are all used to seek deeper knowledge of human life. So, what are the sciences? The sciences are the academic disciplines that study the natural world. These include biology, chemistry and physics. Although the humanities and the sciences both seek knowledge and understanding, the ways in which they do so are different. The sciences study the natural world through empirical observation and experimentation (Drew, Q. 2024). Scientific method is the most important aspect of the scientific disciplines and it involves using logic, evidence and reason to support theories. The humanities on the other hand seeks to understand the human experience through interpretation, reflection and critical analysis. Although they approach their respective studies differently, there are often many overlaps. Disciplines such as Psychology, Anthropology and Archaeology draw on both scientific and humanistic studies to understand culture and human behaviour (Drew, Q. 2024).

In the modern world, we see the sciences and the humanities as different subjects but many centuries ago, there was no distinction between the humanities and the sciences. They were a part of the same intellectual world. It's often said that science and learning began in Greece, although this doesn't include the study of language. It is difficult to accurately say when historiography emerged due to it emerging independently in different parts of the world, but also due to historiography's intertwining with myth (Bod, R. 2013). Myths and folklore can often contain historical and social truths but they can not be used as historical records. An example of this would be Hesiod's 'Theogony and Works and Days', where a world of gods, heroes and mortals are described within five ages: The Golden Age, The Silver Age, The Bronze Age, The Heroic Age and The Iron Age. Although the Chinese book of documents from the 6th Century BCE is seen as one of the earliest examples of a historical source book, Herodotus is claimed to be the first historian to systematically collect his material and test its accuracy. As modern humanists, it's a given that sources should be tested for its reliability or accuracy, otherwise all sources would have to be considered true, even if they contradicted each other. Herodotus used critical analysis to test historical sources. He did not trust verbal sources from his immediate environment and decided to travel and to try and get as close as possible to the 'source' relating to the main subject. He would then analyse all sources and selected the one that was most probable. Due to the subjectivity of this method, he was accused by later historians of distorting sources. Although the opinion on Herodotus' method is kinder now as it's universally accepted that objectivity in historiography is an unattainable ideal (Bod, R. 2013).

So where did archaeology come into this? The early roots of archaeology stems from antiquarianism. European antiquaries from the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries were responsible for creating the modern study of the ancient world. The way they did this was by bringing objects and the object world into the domain of scholarship (Drew, Q. 2024). Arnaldo Momigliano described antiquarians as “the type of man who is interested in historical facts, without being interested in history”, which many historians agreed with. By the 19th century, there was a very negative outlook on antiquarians as they were seen as amateurish scholars that were obsessed with dusty relics with no interest in the historical meaning or significance of said objects. They were often passionate about collecting and classifying remains of the past, whether or not the artefacts were of interest to the wider historical community. It was often suggested that they had an unhealthy and pathological obsession with the past, and that they would value items because of the state of decay or age rather than their significance or meaning (Drew, Q. 2024). The collection of what scholars would call ‘humdrum’ items, such as children’s toys, fragments of clothing and medical recipes, were what antiquarians believed taught us about the customs of the past. Tim Murray argues against the negative view of antiquarians in his book ‘From Antiquarian to Archaeologist’. He writes ‘as opposed to the historian whose task was to comment on texts, the antiquary was responsible for the management of material remains of the past- be they objects or monuments’ (Marsden, R. 2020). It seems obvious today that material finds from the past can teach us about the lives of our ancestors. Some would argue it can teach us more than texts due to the unreliability of written material. Today, many scholars recognise that the early interest in the habits of ‘ordinary’ people is one of the foundation stones of social history (Drew, Q. 2024). In 1976, Stuart Piggott concluded an essay on the history of British antiquarianism by writing ‘now, on the eve of Victoria’s reign, we leave antiquarianism as it becomes archaeology’ (Marsden, R. 2020). This is the general view towards the antiquarians in the modern world. That archaeology and antiquarianism were born from the same interests, the same curiosities, the same questions. Historians have been keen to distance themselves from antiquarianism but archaeologists tend to see it as the crucible in which their own discipline was forged.

Archaeology as its own subject started with an interest in the Romans and the Greeks in 18th Century Italy when excavations of Herculaneum and Pompeii took place. Though its earliest origins can be traced back to the 15th century when renaissance humanists were looking back at the glories of Greece and Rome. Excavations were initially sponsored by Cardinals, Popes and noblemen in the 16th Century to expand their collection of antiquities, although they would probably be called art collectors today (Daniel, G. E. 2024). The development of scientific archaeology in the 19th Century instead of antiquarianism and the collection of artefacts in the last three centuries was mainly down to three things: Geological revolution, antiquarian revolution and the propagation of the doctrine of evolution. The revolution of Geology emerged with the discovery of the principles of uniformitarian stratigraphy, which determines the age of fossil remains by the stratum they occupy below the earth (Daniel, G.E. 2024). This was spearheaded by scholars such as Georges Cuvier, William Smith and Charles Lyell. In Lyell’s book ‘Principles of Geology’, he managed to popularise this new system which paved the way for the acceptance of the great antiquity of man. Charles Darwin even regarded the book as one of the germinal works in the formation of his theory of evolution. Darwin’s ‘Origin of Species’ suggested that man had a long past, longer than religious texts implied. This nurtured a climate of thought in which archaeology flourished and it created advances for the discovery of man’s past (Daniel, G.E. 2024). Here is a prime example of how humanistic and scientific disciplines are used in conjunction with each other to gather information about the human experience. Archaeologists, geologists and anthropologists

all working together and using each other's knowledge to gain understanding of man's past.

One of the main, and most famous subject areas within archaeology is Egypt. The discovery of Egyptian artefacts by European archaeologists, or collectors, paved the way for modern scholars and archaeologists. When Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798, he brought along scholars to record archaeological remains of the country, which was the birth of Egyptian archaeology. The results of their work was published in the 'Description de l'Egypte' and Jean-Francois Champollion was able to use this to decipher ancient Egyptian writing for the first time in 1822 (Daniel, G. E. 2024). The large demand for Egyptian antiquities during this time meant that more people were organising tomb robberies, such as Giovanni Battista Belzoni. While working in Egypt, Belzoni applied for funds from Sir Henry Salt to investigate moving 'The Young Memnon' to England. Although Napoleon attempted to shift the 9ft head during his invasion, he was unable to do so and Belzoni managed to ship it to the United Kingdom. Tomb robbers such as Giovanni often came up against people vying on the same antiquities as there was a big interest in Egyptian artefacts at this time (No author. No date. The Great Belzoni). The method of acquiring artefacts changed in 1880 when British archaeologist Flinders Petrie developed a systematic method of excavation while working in Egypt. He defined the methodology and goals of his profession in his book 'Methods and Aims in Archaeology' in 1904. Petrie put emphasis on recording the physical dispersal of artefacts found in a site as well as suggesting the use of cameras in the field (Poole, G.J. no date). These are methods that are still used today in modern archaeology.

The history of archaeology branches back many centuries. It stemmed from the years of antiquarianism, where there was a new found interest in historical items. Antiquarianism was born from the idea that material items were key to fully understanding textual sources. That is what archaeology is. The discovery and use of historical finds, with the intent of using it to strengthen written texts and to broaden our knowledge of man's past. The key to this is the collaboration between subjects, between the humanities and the sciences. Without mathematics and geology, it would not be possible to excavate and record data efficiently. For example, the use of spacial statistics to analyse the distribution of artefacts within an area of excavation, the use of mathematical principles of radioactive decay for chronological dating and the use of statistical analysis to make sense of collected data (Carneiro, A. R. P. 2023). Without history and anthropology, it would not be possible to gain a contextual understanding of artefacts found and often find possible archaeological sites. For example, the use of historic books and maps to find possible excavation sites and the use of virtual anthropology to digitise, reconstruct specimens and expose hidden structures at excavation sites. Darwin used textual sources on geology to form his own theories on the evolution of man. These theories were then supported by archaeological finds. It is not possible to get a rounded and clear vision on human culture and history using just one subject. It is in fact our responsibility to ensure we continue to learn from all specialisms to drive a holistic approach to understanding our history.

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