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Bias Within Archaeology and the effect of a Local versus External Team

Introduction

The discipline of archaeology allows for greater cultural connection between locals and their history, which is irreplaceable on an individual level considering the importance of one's own heritage and understanding it fully to assess one's place in the world. However, in order to have this effect, the analysis of the information that presents itself must be unbiased and truthful, and there is debate regarding the achievement of this, particularly the use of an external team of archaeologists to conduct an excavation versus one made up of experts more connected to the history of the site, such as being native to the country. There are various positives and negatives that affect both types of teams such as potential for bias, access to equipment and expertise, funding, and cultural sensitivity that make one better suited to a specific excavation than another. This has sparked debate in recent times, which will be explored in this essay, particularly relating to recent history and the current overwhelming distortion of history to show the domination of the west.

An External Team

The debate regarding the use of an external team of archaeologists versus a team of local experts has many angles, and particularly the use of more disconnected scholars has been the topic of recent debate. For example, according to Tirpan (2022), international collaboration on archaeological projects can be successful in maintaining positive relationships across the globe, and the work maintains a sense of community. As well as this, the introduction of a team of overseas or otherwise non-native experts allows the foreign group a better understanding of intercontinental history, which is beneficial for the education of publics outside of the area where the investigation is taking place, fostering respect, and better understanding between cultures. Arguments for the use of external archaeological teams also include the fact that, particularly for less wealthy or educated countries, the introduction of international experts could quite easily mean the introduction of more progressive equipment, as well as more funding and better educated participants. All of which allow for a more thorough and accurate report of an excavation's findings, in addition to advanced processes of logging and preserving an artifact after its removal from the field. However, debate is reached through the idea that external archaeologists may bring biases related to the framing of the research, as suggested by Glock (1995). For example, Glock suggests that the research agenda in Palestine particularly is framed around biblical scholars, and most investigations center around this narrative, skewing the findings and consequential following information that is taught. Similarly, non-native

archaeologists have frequently removed minorities from their achievements to further their own narrative of supremacy throughout history, and the removal of these groups of people is immeasurably harmful due to the fact that it allows the narrative of supremacy to continue, and disallowing these groups acclaim for their achievements further removes them from already limited resources regarding their history. Tirpan (2022) also recognizes the mistreatment of local history from external scholars, as it can perpetuate stigmas related to cultures and allow feelings of possession and supremacy, furthering a westernized narrative that is already considered correct, despite it not being necessarily so.

A Local Team

Teams of archaeological scholars and practitioners that originate from the country or area where an excavation is taking place also have their strengths and weaknesses, furthering this topic for debate. The consensus from research relating to this topic suggests that exploration conducted by natives allows for a more inspiring outlook on the work being done, as it directly impacts the team and allows a greater understanding of their personal culture and history, which is hugely important in the understanding of oneself. Additionally, an excavation being carried out by a team of local archaeologists is likely to be received better by the community surrounding it, which generates more excitement and inspiration towards the work, as it becomes a more coactive operation. This cooperation and added stimulation has been seen across multiple archaeological investigations, particularly well recorded by Tirpan (2022), who explains the benefits of collaboration and information sharing to communities, seen on the Monasukapanough, Virginia site in 2003. Yet, while this is a convincing argument, the likelihood of generating a team of educated, capable practitioners that all originate from the same community, area, or country is limited. Even if this was to be achieved, many countries do not have access to equipment that is accessible to others, which may leave them unable to conduct a full investigation into their history. As well as this, lack of diversity within a team, particularly one aiming to understand something as complex as history, still has the potential for bias even if it consists of scholars personally related to the information being uncovered. Despite this bias presenting differently than it would in a team of external archaeologists, it still exists within their likely desire to present themselves and their ancestors as greater than other groups of people. This, again, is harmful to cultures outside of the excavation carried out by a local team, showing how multifaceted this debate is.

Conclusion

The team of experts carrying out an excavation can have an immeasurable impact on the findings and subsequent conclusions drawn about various historical events, cultures, and societies. The debate regarding external versus local experts working on such things will continue, as there are many factors that do not allow one suggestion to be regarded as correct. Bias is an intrinsic part of operations such as archaeology, and while it is impossible to eliminate it wholly, this debate brings bias to light and allows it to be managed effectively to ensure the findings and reports following an excavation are as fair and true as possible. This debate shows the importance of

diversity within a team and the effects of narrative framework, and allows conclusions to be made regarding action to eliminate historical injustice and create the most accurate depiction of historical events.

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Reference list:

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