

Archaeology as Politics: *The relationship between the nature of archaeology, can archaeology be seen as a political practice?*

Archaeology and its relationship with politics is a crucial part of its DNA and is woven into the framework of every aspect of the study. This encompasses areas such as the methodology of the subject, the interpretation of the data gathered by archaeologists and legislation involved in the practice of archaeology in the field or in publishing findings and the ethical dimension they have to consider. Yet archaeology can also be seen as a form of political practice itself as a result of the areas mentioned and additionally, the subject can and has been used as a political tool for suppressing or promoting political ideologies regardless of how the archaeologists behind the data and findings view their own work as a form of political tool. Therefore it is important for archaeology to outline and self review its own inevitable impact on the political sphere across the globe as the study itself can be seen as a political practice and so it must be treated as such by its community of researchers across the globe.

Methodology of Archaeology

It is too frequent of an occurrence that archaeology and its various methodologies involved in practicing the subject are used as evidence in a political campaign to form bids for legitimacy within regimes and parties across the world. This impacts the nature and methods to which archaeology can be performed between various nations. Archaeology has been done time and time again in isolation by certain nations with the initial intention to prioritise discovering what best serves the national identity in relation to its heritage. This can be particularly seen in the case of western christian archaeologists various excavations of holy lands recorded in the bible. In this case the sole reason for performing the excavations of these holy lands and locales such as Bethlehem on the West bank, Palestine, would have been to serve their own interests and not the local people. So upon creating the methodologies for these excavations they have been drawn up and created with their sole interests and goals of legitimising their belief in a faith as there would clearly have not been an ethical framework of self criticism and review taken into the discoveries. Therefore, archaeological methodology must be carefully moderated as it can more often than not when formed in isolation to the world create a framework for exposing evidence suited to sole political agendas and not the full and wider picture of archaeological data into interpretation within findings. Additionally, the example given of early western archaeologists performing studies based upon their own "biblical" archaeology in areas like the west bank is not fully representative to the notion that even in the present century archaeology is used as a means to argue the legitimacy of nations tied to their biblical significance and other religious beliefs, most evident in the world today in the same area referenced: Palestine. However detrimental political influence on archaeology may seem, in reality it alone is useful when practiced correctly and most importantly of all, practiced across a diverse base of researchers. Political influences and ideologies when creating and establishing methodologies used in archaeology is fundamental to their actual application in the real world as archaeologists are humans and are not excluded from political opinions or ideals and should not be treated as robots when creating methodologies. Our own unique ways of creating methodologies in the field have to be protected no matter how much methods may rely more and more on data and other quantitative methods. The influence different groups of people have on the creation of methodologies alone is useful to the study itself, archaeology cannot be misidentified as being anything other than a social science, people are at the heart of the

archaeology and so neglecting that individuality and diversity within the wider field of archaeological study to fit one political agenda or ideal is critically detrimental to understanding the human story of both ourselves and our ancestors as a result. All influences on a potential excavation must be evaluated and understood when outlining the methodology of research in the subject.

Interpretation of Archaeological evidence

The interpretation of Archaeological research findings has been as crucial as the actual methodology behind them in being utilised for political matters. Archaeological data and findings are constructed to form interpretations about the past and are important to influencing world politics as they provide narratives about the past of many different ancient societies and cultures. They also provide nations with opportunities to understand the influence of their own national culture on the world in the past, this can also be used by political figures and has been used in history to justify political entities own geopolitical actions with encroachment on territories they believe, by using archaeological theories and interpretations to excuse their actions, are theirs to take and control. In reality, these politicians simply use archaeology and its inherent ties to politics as a weapon for justifying their restructuring of territories and invasions. An example of Archaeological theory and interpretation being used politically can be seen by Gustav Kossina's concept of Kulturkreis being used by the nazi party nefariously to justify their invasions that started the second world war. Kossina's theory of Kulturkreis or culture area was that the findings of germanic pottery being discovered in dig sites in poland and czechoslovakia suggested a wider german culture that spreaded out of germany. The Nazis would use his theory as a justification for the staging ground of their invasions, after Kossina had passed away in 1931 no less. This is a clear example of how archaeological interpretations can impact political spheres and how a form of evidence can be used to justify political actions based solely on an interpretation of said evidence and theory. It also shows how closely archaeology can affect political actions and how integral politics are to archaeology and may also suggest archaeology is possibly more than this and can definitely be applicable to being a political practice itself in general. As echoed by the effect politics have on archaeological methodologies in the previous section of this essay, It is far too difficult to separate archaeology from politics and archaeological interpretation of the data provided in methodologies needs to have the same level of transparency in the writing, an acknowledgement with analysis of how our modern politics can impact on our understanding of the past and vice versa. Additionally similar to the methodology, archaeological interpretation needs to be structured around multiple perspectives and there is also a push for archaeology to focus and involve local communities in their own history as opposed to leaving their views and their own interpretation out of archaeological discourse surrounding their own areas of land. This is crucial once again in establishing a united front of discourse into archaeological findings rather than simply using the field as a simple static force of academia which opens itself up for being used nefariously by entities that wish to uproot and or abolish a culture of people for political purposes. People's unique and equally important perspectives must be taken into archaeological interpretations to keep a balance and transparency needed in the field of archaeology.

Political Legislation and Archaeology

Legislation and Archaeology are inextricably entwined with each other and may be the most obvious form of archaeology as a political practice as here archaeology actually directly impacts upon law and is also responsible for how the field itself is controlled and regulated from country to country. Archaeology's impact upon legislation at first stems from its own interests with preservation of various cultural heritages and the habitats in which they belong to. This focus surrounding preservation of cultural heritage whether it's on land or under the sea has become a primary focus of how archaeology as a field of work has influenced how legislation is drawn up and applied to these topics and concerns surrounding preservation of cultures. Archaeology and the growing cultural interest in the past and general antiquities in the 1900s influenced the creation of a few key legislatures across the world such as in America in 1906 when the creation of "An Act for the Preservation of American Antiquities" was first established. This key piece of legislature was created due to a growing trend of private persons collecting and selling on pieces of antiquities found in their own haphazard digs at the same time as archaeologists and federal institutions began to perform actual scientific excavations of these areas of cultural heritage in America. These archaeologists and the federal government soon realised that with these third parties digging up, mishandling and destroying pieces of culture and history they ran the risk of losing important artefacts and pieces of cultural history forever. This was then when the act was drawn up and issued in 1906. The Antiquities Act of 1906 in America is a notable piece of legislation put forward during this time of growing concern for heritage and culture and the same new fascination with archaeology led to changes such as that act across the globe. This identifies the ability archaeology has to influence legislature creation and drive change to happen on a political level to aid in the advancement of the study by showing these areas need protecting from people who wish to take the past for themselves for monetary gain. This need for heritage management has been what has propelled archaeology as a form of political practice in courts and congressional halls across the world. It has pinpointed the ability archaeology has to directly influence how the practice is regulated and protected and in turn how the past is protected from nefarious groups who wish to simply steal or grave-rob. Overall Archaeology has a defined role in altering and establishing legislatures that can shape national policy and additionally define the responsibilities of the world in preserving our shared human heritage. Undoubtedly, with its effect upon legislature evident, Archaeology must be considered a political practice for being involved in getting these crucial bills passed across the globe.

To Conclude...

Can Archaeology be considered a political practice? To conclude, the relationship between archaeology and politics is definitely strong but even further than that, archaeology is political, in everything that makes up its framework, from the methodology to the interpretations drawn from the findings. Archaeology is a political practice. It is a method by which people further political beliefs and standings, it informs countries about their national heritage and it defines the way people see themselves through their shared past. With that also comes both negative and positive utilisations of the subject. The positive is quite obvious when used for political methods such as the creation of legislature protecting cultures and native heritages from private collectors like the previously mentioned 1906 antiquities act; or utilising multiple perspectives into interpretations in the modern day to protect cultures from being uprooted and abolished by nefarious political operators.

However, in that same breath the negative is also quite easily seen in archaeology's usage as device for political motives such as when it is used as an excuse to justify nations moving borders and encroaching on sovereign nations. It has been seen in the past with the previous example of Nazi Germany on its neighbours in Poland and Czechoslovakia, justifying their invasions with various theories but one being of archaeological origin in Kulturkreis and the discovery of Germanic pottery in those countries. There is also the example of interpretations of archaeology being used to terrible effect to justify Israel's apartheid on Palestine with Israeli Political operators using "biblical archaeology" to justify their actions and existence on that area of land in the world by looting artefacts and pushing their settler colonial avenue into Palestinian territories. Despite both the bad and good elements of archaeology being used as a political practice on the world stage, it is undoubtable that, good influences or not, archaeology must be treated as a political practice and not as a lone neutral force for just academia. Archaeology is much more complex than just an academic force with no say on how it is used in the world or interpreted in it also. Politics will always have an impact that has to be understood and weighed into all archaeological discourse to avoid the subject becoming vulnerable to being abused by more nefarious political entities by not accepting its responsibility and position as a subject deeply intertwined with politics as a political practice itself.

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