The World That Was : An investigation of lost cities, hidden empires, and their role in online pseudoarchaeological communities.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Abstract

In recent years, alongside the rise of innovative social media platforms such as TikTok, fast increasing pseudoarchaeological conspiracies have spread across the western world. The legacy of these conspiracies, their uptake on social media, and their impact on heritage identity has largely been ignored amongst archaeologists and heritage professionals with exceptions being studies of online communities, discussions of how pseudoarchaeology misrepresents the past, and most recently the vast number of blogs written both within and without the archaeological establishment discussing various aspects of pseudoarchaeology.[1] In this dissertation pseudoarchaeology, pseudoheritage and pseudohistory are all to be investigated through how they are spread on social media as well as the role they play in the identity of both individuals and online communities.

While many successful attempts have been made to define pseudoscience, an umbrella term under which pseudoarchaeology can be seen to fall, no one definition has found a consensus among scholars investigating fraudulent archaeology.[2] The intention of this dissertation is to address the definition of pseudoarchaeology through the lens of a modern pseudoarchaeological theory, that of Tartaria, which although recent in its creation, draws on historical precedents set by 19th and 20th century pseudoarchaeological theories. Tartaria is seen by its believers to be a globe spanning civilisation unified by a single language and culture including architecture, technology, and originating from Hyperborea[3]. It is hoped that by analysing the Tartarian theory this dissertation will provide a framework for future researchers on how best to address the problematic nature of pseudoarchaeology and its viral spread on social media platforms.

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[1] For digital communities read;
Richardson, L-J. (2014). Understanding Archaeological Authority in a Digital Context, Internet Archaeology 38. Available online: http://dx.doi.org/10.11141/ia.38.1 [accessed 06/12/2021]; For pseudoarchaeology and how it misrepresents the past see; Fagan, Garrett, G. (2006) Archaeological Fantasies: How Pseudoarchaeology Misrepresents the Past and Misleads the Public. Psychology Press. For blogs the reader is directed to; Bones and Books (Halmhofer, Stephanie), JasonCalovito.com (Colavito, Jason) & https://anthropology.msu.edu/anp364-fs19/ (Hosted by the Anthropology Department at Michigan State University). [Accessed 06/12/2021].

[2] David S Anderson and Jeb Card, 'From Ancient Wisdom to Alien Architects: The Varieties of Pseudoarchaeology', 2020. Pg. 2.

[3] 'Queue | The One World Tartarians: The Greatest Civilization Ever Erased From History 9798678049261', *Ebin.Pub*, 2021 <https://ebin.pub/qdownload/the-one-world-tartarians-the-greatest-civilization-ever-erased-from-history-9798678049261.html> [accessed 20 December 2022]. Pg 1-6.

1.2 Definitions of Pseudoarchaeology, pseudoheritage, and pseudohistory

1.2.1 Aiming for a definition

It is the difficulty in defining pseudoarchaeology which presents scholars with an unenviable position. Without a solid definition it is extremely challenging to present to the public reasons as to why certain theories, programmes, discourse, and social media posts are problematic. It is the aim of this dissertation to not only provide a definition of pseudoarchaeology and its associated terms; pseudoheritage and pseudohistory, but to provide a working framework for the use of archaeologists, students, academics, and museum professionals to better understand the threat pseudoarchaeology presents to the heritage field.

In order to achieve this aim, it is pertinent to provide definitions for these three terms. The following paragraphs seek to define pseudoarchaeology using existing academic work while also putting forward as a contribution to the emerging scholarship, my own definitions of pseudoarchaeology, pseudoheritage, and pseudohistory. The more work which can be put towards defining pseudoarchaeology and the ways in which it presents aspects of the past the stronger the public's perception of difficult alternative ideas will be.

These definitions and ideas will be further explored within this body of work focusing on how they have been reached and the impacts which they present to both cultural heritage and society at large. As well as a focus on traditional definitions of pseudoarchaeology this work will put forward a relatively novel suggestion that pseudoarchaeology should be viewed as a type of conspiracy theory. Treating pseudoarchaeology as a conspiracy will allow archaeologists to build on the body of knowledge presented in the schools of psychology and sociology.

1.2.2 Previous definitions

Firstly, pseudoarchaeology must be defined in order to be able to successfully analyse the theories presented under its umbrella. The majority of scholars which have sought to define pseudoarchaeology have presented a number of characteristics through which pseudoarchaeological topics can be identified. For example, in his work on exploring the dangers of 'Cult Archaeology', W.H Steibing Jr stated that pseudoarchaeology contains three characteristics:

> "Unscientific methods and evidence, a tendency to provide simple compact answers to complex, difficult issues, and a tendency to present itself as being persecuted by the archaeological establishment."[4]

Furthermore, pseudoarchaeology can be defined by the behaviour of its proponents. B Piercy in identifying the dangers of pseudoarchaeology proposes that it can be claimed as a:

> "Counterfeit version of true archaeology whose proponents rely on bias, ignoring accurate scientific methodology and evidence to produce unrealistic ideas about the past."[5]

As well as relying on bias and ignoring scientific methodology Garett G Fagan, argues that the key characteristic of pseudoarchaeological proponents is that they *wilfully* ignore countervailing data, or *deliberately* bypass or leave unexplored contextual deliberations in order to protect their preferred conclusion. It is Fagan's opinion that both of these characteristics must be applied systematically.[6]

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[4] W.H Steibing Jr. 'The Nature and Dangers of Cult Archaeology.' In *Cult Archaeology and Creationism: Understanding Pseudoscientific Beliefs About The Past,* ed. Francis B. Harrold and Raymond A. Eve, University of Iowa Press, Iowa, 1987, pg. 2.

[5] https://pages.vassar.edu/realarchaeology/2017/10/01/the-dangers-of-pseudoarchaeology/. [Accessed 23/10/2022].

[6] Garett G Fagan, 'Diagnosing Pseudoarchaeology', in *Archaeological Fantasies: How Pseudoarchaeology Misrepresents the Past and Misleads the Public* (Routledge, 2006), pp. 28 - 29. quoted in Alecia Bassett, 'Pseudo-Archaeology: The Appropriation and Commercialization of Cultural Heritage', *Spectrum*, 3.1 (2013) 6. pg. 62

Scholarship has mostly focused on identifying the characteristics inherent to pseudoarchaeology and its supporters. It is my intention with this dissertation to define pseudoarchaeology in my own terms. However, in doing so it is important to consider previous definitions which have focused on different areas and examples of what constitutes pseudoarchaeology. Building on preceding definitions by Anderson and Card 2012; Bassett 2013; Fagan 2006; Feder 2020; Hoopes 2019; Moshenska 2017 and Whitesides 2019, Stephanie Halmhofer has defined pseudoarchaeology as:

> "a form of discovery paranormalism that proposes speculative and alternative claims about human history. These claims rely on matter of faith rather than matter of proof by *wilfully* and deliberately downplaying or ignoring contradictory archaeological knowledge under the guise of stigmatized knowledge, placing pseudoarchaeology within the same realm as conspiracy theories."[7]

1.2.3 Conspiratorial Pseudoarchaeology

Building on the definitions provided above and aiming to focus on the methodology behind pseudoarchaeological thought instead of a simple demarcation between science and non-science, I offer the following working definition:

> *Pseudoarchaeology is the false mirror image to archaeology appropriating its methodology, language and aims in order to deliberately create a false narrative about the past, regardless of whether it is the past of an object, a group of people, or a nation. Pseudoarchaeology can be further identified through its proponent's use of language highlighting their apparent persecution at the hands of a group or organisation, either real or imagined.*

I have categorised this definition as *Conspiratorial Pseudoarchaeology*. I aim to discuss the conspiratorial nature of pseudoarchaeology as I believe that conspiracy

[7] Stephanie Halmhofer, *Myth-Taking and Myth-Making: Exploring the Use of Pseudoarchaeology in Lost City Explorers and Arkworld*, 2021.

theory research explored within the schools of psychology and sociology can further our understanding of the harms of pseudoarchaeology.

Pseudoarchaeology can be an outcome in and of itself, for example creating a false narrative around an object, but for the majority of occasions pseudoarchaeology is a tool used by its proponents in order to achieve a certain aim. Usually these aims fall under two further terms, both of which will be defined within this work: pseudohistory and pseudoheritage. It is my view that:

> *Pseudohistory can be defined as a form of history, created using real or fake documents, objects or sources in order to falsify a narrative for either entertainment purposes or a political or ideological agenda.*

> *Pseudoheritage is a false or misinterpreted narrative surrounding a community, group of people, or nation designed to present them in a particular light or provide them with a longevity that is non-existent or exaggerated. It can incorporate both pseudoarchaeology as well as pseudo history.*

All three of these definitions will be further explored throughout this work because, although a definition of pseudoarchaeology, pseudoheritage and pseudohistory are useful for professionals working within the heritage sector they are not fixed in stone. As technology changes the nature and transmission of these ideas will change with them and therefore the definitions used in their study should also adapt alongside them.

1.3 Project Background

This dissertation seeks firstly to explain the history behind claims of lost continents, cities, and civilisations presenting where the theories have arisen from and the often ethnonationalist and racist agenda behind them. Secondly, the dissertation will investigate the phenomenon surrounding Tartaria and Mudflood conspiracies, which will be explored in full in section 5.0, followed by the role of

social media in forming and spreading internet communities and finally, how the heritage sector can best tackle the challenges these claims present.

1.4 Research Problem

Many heritage professionals feel that it is better to ignore pseudoarchaeology and its proponents as tackling the theory head on is seen as both energy intensive and as providing oxygen to alternative narratives, while others believe that pseudoarchaeology should be debunked at all costs.[8]

As an example, following the announcement of a new Netflix show centred on pseudoarchaeological theories there arose a number of interesting discussions amongst archaeologists on Twitter.[9] However, one user wrote:

Figure 1 - Screenshot from Twitter (Now X)[10]

Following a few more tweets between the user and myself, in response to the question of how we as archaeologists should discuss the issues presented by these shows the user responded:

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[8] Cornelius Holtorf, 'Beyond Crusades: How (Not) to Engage with Alternative Archaeologies', *World Archaeology*, 37.4 (2005), 544–51. Pg. 545.
[9] 'Netflix Releases Data About Who Is Watching "Ancient Apocalypse"', *JASON COLAVITO* <http://www.jasoncolavito.com/1/post/2022/11/netflix-releases-data-about-who-is-watching-ancient-apocalypse.html> [accessed 8 January 2023].
[10] Dr. Snarky-ologist [@HKNorton], '@ward_andrewArch I Am so Not Interested in Having This Conversation.', *Twitter*, 2022 <https://twitter.com/HKNorton/status/1583869667247996930> [accessed 3 January 2023].

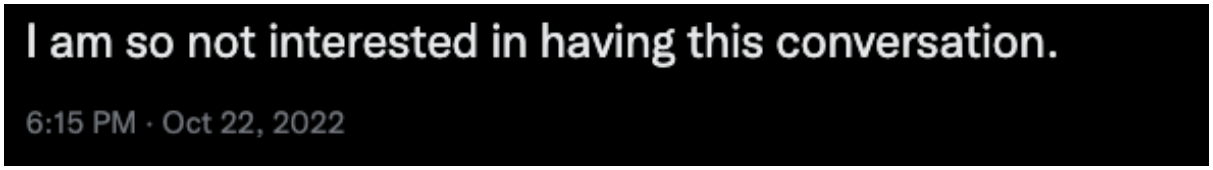

Figure 2 - Screenshot from Twitter (Now X) [11]

It is entirely the prerogative of individual users to question the discourse, especially when it does fuel the publicity of a particular show or book. However, not engaging with the discussion presents its own challenges. If heritage professionals choose to avoid discussing the issues presented by pseudoarchaeology on social media, where it can be seen by the widest possible audience, then it reinforces the ideas that professionals are aloof, but it also allows the supporters of these pseudoarchaeological programmes to fill the gap and boost the show without archaeologists and scholars being able to debunk the claims made.

Other scholars on the other hand have begun to talk about pseudoarchaeology on social media. For example, Dr Holly Walters presented an extremely useful thread on two key ideas found in much of pseudoarchaeological thought: hyperdiffusionism and unilineal evolution.[11] Her post as of 20th February 2020 had over 1000 views suggesting a fairly wide reach. Archaeologist Flint Dibble combined a “thread of threads’ detailing his discussions on the topics of pseudoarchaeology.[12] By providing a series of interconnected tweets in this way, known on Twitter as a thread, science communicators can provide further context on a particular idea or show, linked a number of related ideas together, or update on a

[11] Dr. Holly Walters [@Manigarm], ‘Hyperdiffusionism and Unilineal Evolution, for Those Curious.’, *Twitter*, 2023 <https://twitter.com/Manigarm/status/1623726600289230859> [accessed 20 February 2023].
[12] Flint Dibble 🦴🏺 [@FlintDibble], ‘A Thread of Threads Recording My Research and Critique of #pseudoarchaeology Https://T.Co/LqkB7VSUIP’, *Twitter*, 2022 <https://twitter.com/FlintDibble/status/1600283029020499968> [accessed 20 February 2023].

particular matter.[13] A third, extremely prolific science communicator and archaeologist on social media is Steph Halmhofer, who recently posted on one of the harms of pseudoarchaeology in the ways it supports white supremacist thought and actions.[14] Archaeologists are taking a positive step talking about pseudoarchaeology on social media channels. The best ways to do so will be discussed later in this work in order to provide a useful framework.

It is within the realm of social media where new pseudoarchaeological theories are being developed and shared. While traditional pseudoarchaeological conspiracies such as *Atlantis, Ancient Astronaut Theory (AAT),* and claims around the pyramids have all been thoroughly debunked over recent decades by a small circle of archaeologists and academics; newer claims born on social media regarding Tartaria, and Mud Flood have largely gone unanswered. [15]

The relative novelty of the Tartarian theories has meant that scholarship on this issue is light despite the fact that on its surface it avoids the usual trappings of racist theories found in older pseudoarchaeological thought. However, underneath this exists the same white supremacist, racist, and disparaging ideas that take away from the achievements of indigenous peoples, misinterpret historic evidence, and promote ideas of superiority of one group of people over another.

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[13] 'How to Create a Thread on Twitter and How to View' <https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/create-a-thread> [accessed 20 February 2023].

[14] Steph Halmhofer, Verklempt Archaeologist [@Cult_Archaeo], 'What Should Not Be a Radical Thought Is That If White Suprm'ists Literally Praise Your Work as Being a Good Way to Draw People into White Suprm., Then Instead of Dismissing That as "Not My Problem," or "I Can't Control How My Work Is Used," You Should Maybe Actually Condemn That?', *Twitter*, 2023 <https://twitter.com/Cult_Archaeo/status/1623790979252899840> [accessed 20 February 2023].

[15] The reader is directed to sources by Ken Feder, David S. Anderson, Jeb Card and Gareth Fagan for discussions on the key elements of pseudoarchaeological theories and debunking of Atlantis, AAT and the Pyramids.

1.5 Research Aims, Objectives and Questions

This dissertation aims to approach these pseudoarchaeology from my own archaeological background while addressing the psychological theories addressing why people believe such claims. Drawing on ideas found in sociology and psychology, this dissertation will treat pseudoarchaeological theories along the same lines as conspiracy theories with which they share a number of similar elements. It is hoped that at the completion of this investigation the text will provide heritage professionals, academics, archaeologists, and social media content creators with guidance on how to address pseudoarchaeology and pseudohistory in order to reduce the harm and damage that they can cause often while hiding behind innocent entertainment.

Through the investigation of the Tartaria pseudoarchaeological theory it is hoped to answer four research questions. These questions will:

1. Explore the nature of pseudoarchaeology/pseudoheritage/pseudohistory, its history, role in society, and role in identity formation.
2. Answer how prevalent pseudoarchaeological conspiracies are on TikTok and do these have links with other platforms e.g., YouTube, Twitter, Websites?
3. Discuss how the heritage sector can address pseudoarchaeological conspiracies without giving them the authority they crave
4. Ask whether social media be used as a suitable methodological tool to showcase how interesting archaeology is without the need for conspiracy, fantastical civilisations, or extra-terrestrial intervention.

The overarching aim of this study is to elucidate the phenomenon of pseudoarchaeology and its role within identity formation. In particular, it will highlight

their impact and spread on social media platforms. A secondary aim of this study is to highlight how all pseudoarchaeological theories whether new or old have insidious natures based in ethnonationalism and racism.

The dissertation will have three key objectives:

- Outline the history of specific pseudoarchaeological claims, particularly Atlantis, Mu, Lumeria and their influence on the 'newer' theories of Tartaria and Mudflood.
- Highlight the role played by social media, in particular the video sharing platform TikTok, and how it spreads pseudoarchaeological conspiracies.
- Present methods for how the heritage sector can not only tackle and debunk pseudoarchaeological claims, but also demonstrate to the public how important and fascinating archaeology is on its own merit.

By aiming to achieve these three key objectives it is hoped that the dissertation will provide guidance to heritage professionals on the nature of pseudoarchaeology, its harms, methodologies and how to combat them in both the academic and public spheres.

1.6 Methodology

Due to the novel nature of the investigative subject being focused on in this dissertation it is pertinent to lay out the methodology that is proposed. Firstly, this study plans to investigate historical pseudoarchaeological theories such as those of Atlantis, Lemuria and Mu. In order to do so primary sources will be utilised including works by Plato and Helena Blavatsky. Secondly, this study seeks to examine the social media-based theory of Tartaria, which will involve analysis of social media posts on TikTok, Twitter, Reddit and YouTube. The main focus of the analysis will be

of TikTok as the newest social media platform; an amalgamation of three video apps Musical.ly launched in 2014, Chinese app Douyin launched two years later and finally TikTok owned by Chinese company ByteDance which combined the three apps under the brand TikTok in 2018.[16]

The proposed analysis aims to take the form of content mining of these four social media platforms by both manual searching using key words and automatically mining platforms using API software. The exact methodology used will be explained below. This content mining will also use the idea of systemic content analysis (SMA) following on from work by Gabriel Weimann and Natalie Masri.[17] To gather the key terms to be used in the SMA a popular video on YouTube by Robert Sepher was identified and Microsoft Word's transcription function used to transcribe speech into text.[18] This allowed me to identify key topics such as references to other pseudoarchaeological theories, particular locations, proponents, or other social media platforms.[19]

It is hoped that through this methodology this dissertation can demonstrate how interlinked social media platforms are in regard to pseudoarchaeological theories. It is suggested that TikTok, Twitter and YouTube operate as a circular

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[16] 'TikTok: The Story of a Social Media Giant', *BBC News*, 4 August 2020, section Technology <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-53640724> [accessed 20 February 2023].
[17] Gabriel Weimann and Natalie Masri, 'Research Note: Spreading Hate on TikTok', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2020, 1–14.
[18] *The Great Tartarian Empire*, dir. by Robert Sepher, 2019 <https://youtu.be/y7cwDR0YYek>. [Accessed 04/04/2023].
[19] This methodology was designed following discussions with Stephanie Halmhofer over zoom in August 2022. Stephanie has carried out similar analyses of pseudoarchaeological and conspiratorial videos in her PhD research into Brother XII and pseudoarchaeological thought.

ecosystem directing users to more pseudoarchaeological theories regardless of which platform they first encounter it on.

1.7 Structure – How will the dissertation be laid out?

The structure of the dissertation will follow a systematic approach drawing on my knowledge of writing archaeological reports. Each section will be compiled of sub paragraphs, numbered for easy navigation therefore following the layout of desk-based assessments.[20] The reason behind choosing this layout for the dissertation is so that any reader, whether academic, professional archaeologist, or interested member of the public can easily read the entire body of work or navigate quickly to an appropriate section such as the analysis of conspiracy theories on social media. This, it is hoped, will act as a dedicated guide to the heritage profession in response to the rise of popular pseudoarchaeological theories.

Overall, there will be six key sections to the body of the investigation, each of which will be divided into sub-sections. This will be followed by a further three sections forming a conclusion, the bibliography and appendices where any work that does not neatly fit into the main body will be included.

[20] 'CIfAS&GDBA_2.Pdf' <https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/CIfAS&GDBA_2.pdf> [accessed 20 February 2023].

1.8 Justification – Why is it worth doing?

There are many reasons why this dissertation is felt to be justified in its scope and focus. First of all, the Tartarian pseudoarchaeological theory has a dark underbelly of antisemitism and white supremacy. This presents a danger to both scholarship as well as wider society and therefore, should prove to be an area of study for academics both within archaeology and disinformation studies. Secondly, it is important for heritage professionals to be armed with the correct tools to discuss and study pseudoarchaeology as their novel methodology, spread of information, and obvious rise in popularity presents a serious harm to the field.

Finally, with platforms such as Netflix providing pseudoarchaeology with a vast audience exemplified by the recent production of *Ancient Apocalypse*. Presented by pseudoarchaeological author and journalist Graham Hancock the show reached audience viewing hours of around 24.61 million hours.[21] As well as a large number of hours watched, according to a TV analytics website for the United States demand for the show in the last 30 days (the show first aired on 11th November 2022) rose by 159%.[22] In comparison popular archaeology programme Digging for Britain reached around 2.5 million viewers.[23]

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[21] 'Netflix Releases Data About Who Is Watching "Ancient Apocalypse"'.
[22] 'Ancient Apocalypse (2022) (Netflix): United States Daily TV Audience Insights for Smarter Content Decisions - Parrot Analytics' <https://tv.parrotanalytics.com/US/ancient-apocalypse-2022-netflix> [accessed 8 January 2023].
[23] 'PressReader.Com - Digital Newspaper & Magazine Subscriptions' <https://www.pressreader.com/> [accessed 8 January 2023].

1.9 Limitations – Potential limitations of my approach and project

Unfortunately, there are some limitations to studying a novel pseudoarchaeological conspiracy theory. For example, the online nature of the theory means that the ideas are constantly evolving and progressing which makes it difficult to study as an overall idea. This means that the nature of the Tartaria idea examined in this dissertation should be viewed as a flashpoint in time, representing the pseudoarchaeological thought at the time of writing prior to the submission of this work in September 2023. Furthermore, because of the variation in the theory amongst different social media platforms and proponents' vast amounts of research need to be conducted in order to challenge each element presented.

Challenges are also presented by gathering the information available to heritage professionals, archaeologists, museum staff, and disinformation researchers. Many articles that would have proved beneficial to this study were hidden behind paywalls or if available in a physical format were either extortionately expensive or out of press. This limited the directions that this study could take as despite the eagerness of many scholars to engage in cross-disciplinary discussions, busy schedules, lack of interest in the specific topic, and distance meant that resources were left unexplored.

The final limitation of this study, although not explicitly a negative is the wordcount available paired with the vast scope which could be covered by this topic. The history of pseudoarchaeological thought, conspiracy theories and the role of social media in their spread is too vast a topic to cover in this 15,000-word dissertation, however it is hoped that this work will stand as a framework for future research whether by myself or other scholars.

2. Demarcation

2.1 An Approach to Demarcation

In order to answer two of the key research questions set out in this dissertation's introduction (R1 and R2),[24] it is important to investigate previous definitions of what constitutes a pseudoarchaeological idea and how these ideas have been divided from those of "mainstream" archaeology.[25] While previous attempts at defining pseudoarchaeology have been laid out in the introduction, including my own definition, this section will set out the history of demarcation – setting a boundary or limit of something[26] – which has typically been assessed as dividing pseudoscience from science. As archaeology can be considered a soft science focusing as it does on human behaviour, institutions and society, it is not unexpected that throughout its history it has been demarcated from its opposite pseudoarchaeology.[27] However, this dissertation will argue that focusing on archaeology and pseudoarchaeology as a dividing line between science and pseudoscience is not a helpful methodology for heritage professionals, students, archaeologists, and the general public to use. The reason for this hesitation will be explored throughout this chapter with reference to the history of demarcation,

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[24] R1 – Explore the nature of pseudoarchaeology/pseudoheritage/pseudohistory, its history, role in society, and its role in identify formation & R2 – How prevalent are pseudoarchaeological conspiracies on TikTok, and do these have links with other platforms e.g., YouTube, Twitter, Websites?

[25] "Mainstream" has been put in quotation marks as it is a much-loved term used by pseudoarchaeological authors such as Graham Hancock, Erik Von Daniken, Andrew Collins etc., as a way to present their research as being in direct opposition to professional and academic archaeologists. This is despite the fact that there is no one central authority of archaeologists. For an explanation of this idea see Garrett G. Fagan *Diagnosing pseudoarchaeology* in Archaeological Fantasies: How pseudoarchaeology misrepresents the past and misleads the public (Routledge, 2006), pg. 31.

[26] 'Definition of DEMARCATION' <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/demarcation> [accessed 2 February 2023].

[27] 'Soft Science Definition & Meaning', *Dictionary.Com*, 2023 <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/soft-science> [accessed 12 August 2023].

modern attempts at demarcating and defining pseudoarchaeology, and the approach of psychology and sociology scholars in defining conspiracy theories. It is this latter element which I feel will be central to producing a new framework for approaching the popularity of pseudoarchaeology, pseudohistory and pseudoheritage.

2.2 The historiography of demarcation

The demarcation of science has a long history in the philosophy of science beginning in earnest with Karl Popper's *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* produced in his native German in 1934 and produced in English by 1959.[28] Within this work Popper proposed that Science, unlike its counterparts in pseudoscience produced falsifiable results; results which can be tested in future and found either wrong or correct.[29] Popper's central argument was that a single piece of evidence could be used to refute a theory rather than simply being used for verification of our ideas.[30] However, since the publication of Popper's work other methods of demarcation have been produced and argued over. For example, the idea of a gradualist demarcation, one in which science and pseudoscience can be viewed on a spectrum with the strongest science at one end travelling through soft, proto, and bad science before ending at the clearest cases of pseudoscience at the other has been heavily discussed and debated.[31]

Other demarcation criterion have been produced suggesting that both science and pseudoscience have a number of criterion through which they can be

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[28] Lee McIntyre, *The Scientific Attitude: Defending Science from Denial, Fraud, and Pseudoscience* (MIT Press, 2019). Pg 3.
[29] McIntyre. (2019), Pg. 3.
[30] McIntyre. (2019), pg. 15.
[31] Angelo Fasce, 'Are Pseudosciences like Seagulls? A Discriminant Metacriterion Facilitates the Solution of the Demarcation Problem', *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, 32.3–4 (2019), 155–75. Pg. 156.

identified.[32] Gruenberger (1962) suggested that a checklist defining the key characteristics expected of science and 'crackpots' could be used to differentiate between the two fields.[33] The idea of a checklist that can be worked through by readers in order to identify whether a paper, book, TV programme or presenter is proposing a pseudoscientific idea has been suggested within the field of archaeology as well by authors such as Garrett G. Fagan which will be further explored in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Other philosophers have argued that it is not helpful to treat pseudoscience as an observable phenomenon rather they see it as being a tool to pour disapproval on an idea or person.[34] Larry Laudan argues that demarcation criteria are used by scientists as *machines de guerre*, weapons in an ongoing battle between rival camps.[35] While it is perhaps understandable why philosophers would argue that specific attempts at demarcation are unnecessary or serve a different agenda, I feel that demarcation can serve a useful purpose. It does not serve this purpose through providing a specific and set in stone definition of what constitutes science and pseudoscience, but instead it works as a framework through which scientists, educators, and archaeologists can, to borrow Laudan's expression, arm the public with the knowledge to identify unsubstantiated claims.

It is important when designing a framework to understand the prior history of attempts at demarcating between science and those ideas which are held to be on

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[32] Fasce. (2019), pg. 156.
[33] Gruenberger, F. [1962] [1964] "A Measure for Crackpots." Science 25: 1413–1415 in Fasce. (2019), pg. 156.
[34] Stefaan Blancke and Maarten Boudry, 'Pseudoscience as a Negative Outcome of Scientific Dialogue: A Pragmatic-Naturalistic Approach to the Demarcation Problem', *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, 34.3 (2021), 183–98. Pg. 184
[35] Larry Laudan, 'The Demise of the Demarcation Problem', in *PHYSICS, PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOANALYSISEssays in Honor of Adolf Grilnbaum*, ed. by R.S.Cohen and L. Laudan (DORDRECHT I BOSTON I LANCASTER: D. REIDEL PUBLISHING COMPANY, 1983), pp. 111–27. Pg 119

the fringe. Firstly, many ideas which are now considered a bedrock of science were initially derided as 'crackpot' ideas.[36] Therefore, providing a checklist of characteristics that can be used by the public and other scholars to identify work which could be considered pseudoscientific is a useful task. Gruenberger for example provides thirteen criteria for his checklist: *public verifiability, predictability, controlled experimentation, Occam's razor, fruitfulness, authority, ability to communicate, humility, open-mindedness, Fulton non Sequitur, paranoia, dollar complex,* and *statistics compulsion*.[37] Under Gruenberger's checklist each of the headings is assigned a numerical value with Controlled Experimentation having the highest at 13 and the lowest score, 5 being assigned to seven of the thirteen criteria.[38]

2.3 Utilising demarcation in archaeology

While the checklist described above is useful, not all of the criteria can be used within the field of archaeology. For example, archaeology is a destructive process, it's very act resulting in the removal of material from the field and therefore it would score low on controlled experimentation (if scientific archaeology, such as lab work is not considered). However, the remaining criterion can be used in demarcating between archaeology and pseudoarchaeology. Taking paranoia and the Fulton non Sequitur as an example, both of these criteria can be used to define pseudoarchaeological ideas. Paranoia in this checklist suggests that the 'crackpot' feels he is being suppressed and is hated by wider society while the Fulton non

[36] Fred J. Gruenberger, 'A Measure for Crackpots', *Science*, 145.3639 (1964), 1413–15. Pg. 1414.
[37] Gruenberger. (1964), pg. 1414.
[38] Gruenberger. (1964), *Ibid.*

Sequitur suggests that ‘crackpots’ will equate having their ideas being laughed as evidence that they are correct.[39] The idea of this logical fallacy is most often described in pseudoarchaeological work by invoking Copernicus or Galileo, stating that as their ideas were ridiculed or persecuted by the Church during their day and that the modern pseudoarchaeologist is being ‘persecuted’ by ‘big archaeology’ then it means that their ideas are just as valid and correct as Copernicus and Galileo’s were found to be.[40]

Alongside claiming persecution at the hands of the dogmatic “mainstream” pseudoarchaeologists also seek the support of the scientific establishment. Essentially proponents of pseudoarchaeology and pseudoscience in general seek to wrap themselves in the trappings of science.[41] The inherent idea that science contains a voice of “authority” permeates the ideas of pseudoarchaeologists. They argue against this authority while at the same time seeking to present themselves as a trustworthy alternative source of authority.[42] Proponents of pseudoarchaeology often push their academic qualifications, even when in fields not relevant to the theory they are pushing, they may include outdated or meaningless mathematical formulas, use terminology difficult to decipher by the lay-person, and publish works with extensive footnotes and references to take on an academic façade.[43] For example, in Graham Hancock’s publication Underworld he has a total of 38 pages of

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[39] Gruenberger. (1964), pg. 1415.
[40] ‘They All Laughed - Everything2.Com’ <https://everything2.com/title/They+All+Laughed> [accessed 27 November 2022].
[41] Susanna Hornig, ‘Telivision’s NOVA and the Construction of Scientific Truth’, *Critical Studies in Mediea Communication*, 7.1 (1990), 11–23 <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039009360160>.Pg 18
[42] Paul R. Brewer, ‘The Trappings of Science: Mediea Messages, Scientific Authority, and Beliefs About Paranormal Investigators’, *Science Communication*, 35.3 (2021), 311–33 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547012455499>.
[43] Blancke and Boudry. Pg 195

notes and references.[44] Furthermore, Hancock focuses heavily on the academic qualifications of those he interviews in his books. In underworld, he refers to Dr Robert Schoch, Professor at Boston University.[45] Interestingly, according to Schoch's on faculty page he is an associate professor and not a full professor as inferred by Hancock's nomenclature.[46] While this may be accidental on Hancock's part, with associate professors being a junior position in American academia, it could also be argued that he is trying to increase the academic authority of those who support his ideas.[47]

Nearly all of the characteristics mentioned above by Gruenberger, and others have been included, in one way or another in previous attempts at defining and demarcating pseudoarchaeology. Garret G Fagan provides a number of criterion split across two overarching themes; attitude and procedure. This criterion is elucidated in full within Fagan's work but their titles are as follows: for characteristics of attitude; *dogged adherence to outdated theoretical models; disparaging academia; appeal to academic authority,* and for characteristics of procedure*; huge claims; selective and/or distorted presentation; the "kitchen-sink" mode of argument; vague definitions; superficiality sloppiness, and grossness of comparison; an obsession with esoterica; a farrago of failings; and an expectation of a reward at quest's end*.[48] These criterion need to be made clear to the public when we, as educators argue why a particular idea is pseudoscientific or pseudoarchaeological.

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[44] Graham Hancock, *Underworld: Flooded Kingdoms of the Ice Age* (London: Penguin Books, 2002).Pg 679 - 717
[45] Graham Hancock. Pg 598
[46] 'Robert Schoch | General Studies' <https://www.bu.edu/cgs/profile/robert-schoch/> [accessed 12 August 2023].
[47] 'Associate Professor Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary', 2023 <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/associate-professor> [accessed 12 August 2023].
[48] Garrett G. Fagan, *Archaeological Fantasies: How Pseudoarchaeology Misrepresents the Past and Misleads the Public* (Psychology Press, 2006). Pg. 30-42.

Key characteristics defining pseudoarchaeology given by both Gruenberger and Fagan focus on the attitude of the pseudoscientist/pseudoarchaeologist when either presenting their ideas or being criticised by academics[49]. Paranoia or the idea that the work of the pseudoarchaeologist is being suppressed by the state/academics/shadowy groups, an appeal to academic authority either through their own credentials or those of their supporters, humility (or lack thereof) equating to huge claims and the extensive use of logical fallacies such as the Fulton Non Sequitur. These characteristics are important to consider as whenever archaeologists attempt to debunk the theories of pseudoarchaeologists either in print or online, they will often be faced with a mounting wall of ad hominem attacks and referrals to their role in the suppression of knowledge. This can result in many scholars giving up in the discussion due to the extensive energy output required to deal with circular arguments where the evidence presented by scholars is often ignored by proponents and their supporters.

Dr Robert Park, a physics professor at the University of Maryland has produced seven characteristics of pseudoscience or 'bogus' science which, while aimed at scientific claims being used in court cases, can also be applied to archaeological claims.[50] The below screengrab was circulated on social media channels in December 2022 and gained a large circulation, with my own post gaining 111 impressions on Twitter alone.[51]

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[49] Garett G Fagan, 'Diagnosing Pseudoarchaeology', in *Archaeological Fantasies: How Pseudoarchaeology Misrepresents the Past and Misleads the Public* (Routledge, 2006), pp. 31

[50] Robert L. Park, 'The Seven Warning Signs of Bogus Science', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 49.21 (2003), B20.

[51] '(2) Media Tweets by Andy Ward, BA, PCIfA #dig4arch (@ward_andrewArch) / Twitter', *Twitter*, 2022 <https://twitter.com/ward_andrewArch> [accessed 2 February 2023].

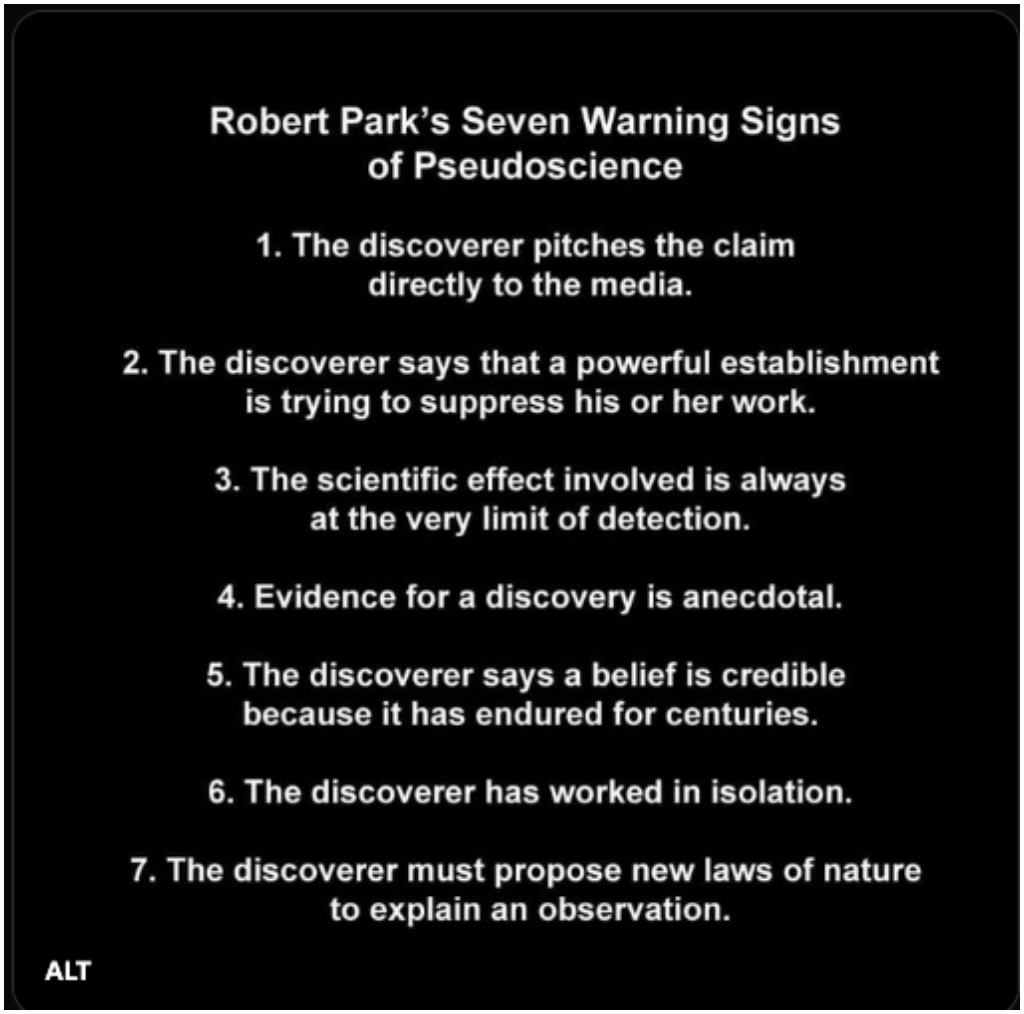

Figure 3 - A screengrab showing Robert Park's Seven Signs of Pseudoscience, originally published in The Chronicle of Higher Education, January 31st, 2003.

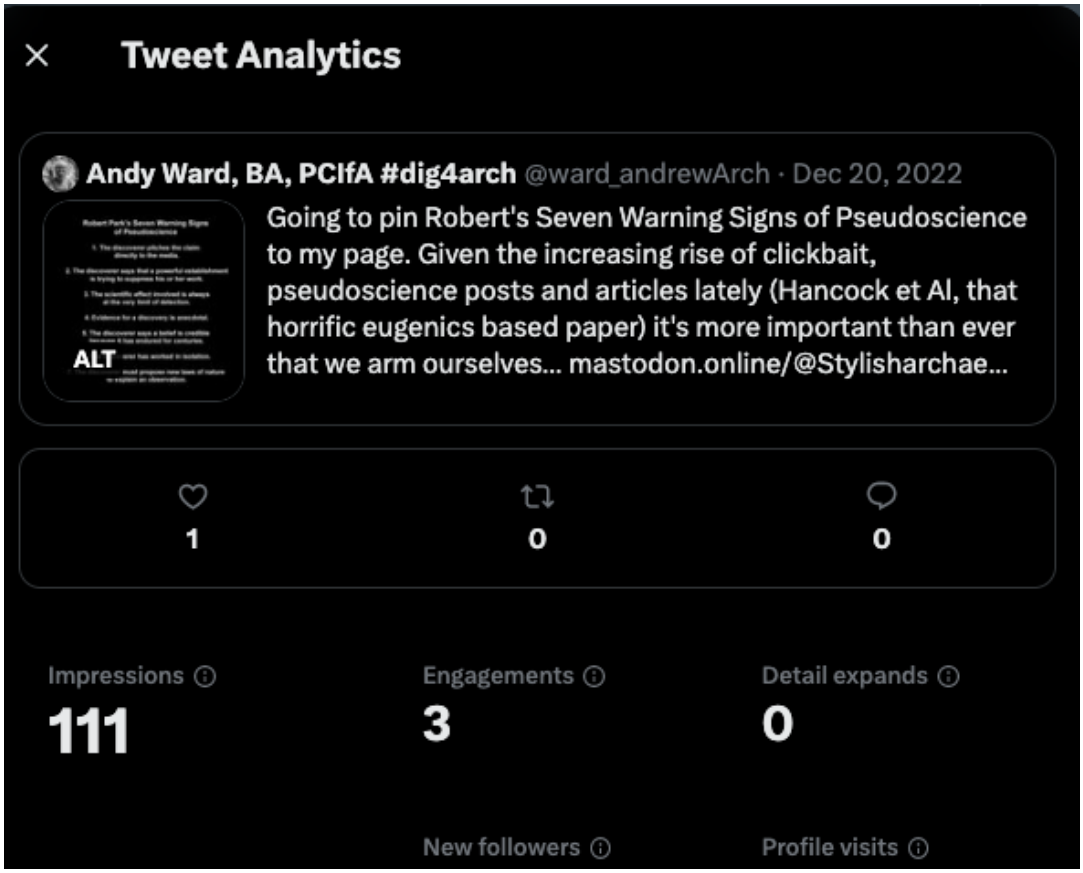

Figure 4 - Twitter Analytics for pinned Seven Signs of Pseudoscience post 20/12/2022.

The above demonstrates that defining and demarcating pseudoscience has had multiple attempts carried out in order to combat the rise of pseudoscientific though, however, the popularity of these ideas continues to grow, and it is this that I hope to explore deeper into this work.

2.4 Definitions of Pseudoarchaeology

It is the aim of this dissertation to not only provide a definition of pseudoarchaeology and its associated terms; pseudoheritage and pseudohistory, but to provide a working framework for the use of archaeologists, students, academics, and museum professionals to better understand the threat pseudoarchaeology presents to the heritage field.

As has been laid out in the introduction above there have been many previous definitions of pseudoarchaeology which I will not repeat here. On the other hand, this section will address some of the ideas behind the definitions of pseudoarchaeology. In the introduction to this dissertation, I devised my own definitions of pseudoarchaeology, pseudoheritage and pseudohistory having built on previous definitions and scholarly work. The following section will explore how I reached my definitions utilising scholarly work which addresses the idea of stigmatised knowledge and the recurring themes found in pseudoarchaeological thought.

It is undeniable that pseudoarchaeological topics have a popular appeal, especially in the modern world of streaming services and social media. Human nature consists of an innate need to communicate, with storytelling and the sharing of new or privileged information playing a central role in communities.[52] In order to tell stories, people need – often manifold – communities around them in which to share them. These communities are often formed between people who share similar beliefs, presenting themselves as both individuals and as part of the group.[53]

Furthermore, social communities allow group dialogues and reasoning to take place, allowing arguments and justifications to spread about ideas both to and from us.[54]

Conspiracy theories, including conspiratorial pseudoarchaeological ideas, can help to make a person feel unique as the information they contain strays from the academic norms presented by “mainstream” science and archaeology. Uniqueness

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[52] Estrella Gualda and José Rúas, ‘Conspiracy Theories, Credibility and Trust in Information’, 2019. Pg. 180
[53] Anni Sternisko, Aleksandra Cichocka, and Jay J Van Bavel, ‘The Dark Side of Social Movements: Social Identity, Non-Conformity, and the Lure of Conspiracy Theories’, *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 35 (2020), 1–6. Pg 8
[54] Blancke and Boudry. Pg 187

has been shown as a strong characteristic amongst those who hold conspiratorial beliefs and the stronger the uniqueness of the conspiracy the more people may be drawn to it.[55] Tartaria, being a novel pseudoarchaeological theory has a strong level of uniqueness ingrained within it therefore it suggests that there is a high likelihood of people becoming drawn to it. Uniqueness allows the proponents of pseudoarchaeology and conspiracy theories more generally to feel a sense of being a trailblazer, out beyond the pack and on the path to genius.[56] Combine this feeling with that of a supportive echo-chamber and it is easy to see how some may be swept up in believing in "alternative" ideas. When faced with disconfirming evidence many conspiracy theorists will reaffirm those beliefs in an attempt to secure their self-identification amongst their fellow believers.[57]

Many scholars have tried to demonstrate why pseudoarchaeological topics are problematic which proponents often counter with the claim that new paradigms are often challenged by "the establishment". This is known as the Galileo Gambit, a logical fallacy often touted by pseudoarchaeologists and pseudoscientists. The gambit posits that as Galileo was laughed at by the academy of his day and pseudoscientists are disproved by academics of today it must mean the pseudoscientists are right, as Galileo was proven right.[58] However, the reason critics

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[55] Sternisko, Cichocka, and Van Bavel. (2020) Pg. 9-10.
[56] Donovan Schaefer, 'Buying into Conspiracy Theories Can Be Exciting – That's What Makes Them Dangerous', *PsyPost*, 2023 <https://www.psypost.org/2023/02/buying-into-conspiracy-theories-can-be-exciting-thats-what-makes-them-dangerous-67607> [accessed 12 August 2023].
[57] Christine Abdalla Mikhaeil and Richard L. Baskerville, 'Explaining Online Conspiracy Theory Radicalization: A Second-Order Affordance for Identity-Driven Escalation', *Information Systems Journal*, n/a.n/a <https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12427>.
[58] 'The Galileo Gambit and Appealing to Ignorance | Psychology Today United Kingdom' <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/logical-take/202006/the-galileo-gambit-and-appealing-ignorance> [accessed 25 February 2023].

are confident in their rebuttals of pseudoscientific ideas is not due to their novelty or strictly their implausible claims, but rather because they are often championed without sufficient evidence to support them.[59] This dissertation aims to demonstrate that pseudoarchaeological theories share many elements with conspiracy theories, a link which is only recently being explored.[60]

Evidence plays a key role in discussing pseudoarchaeological thought. It forms a key tenant both of legitimate archaeological thought as well as illegitimate pseudoarchaeological topics. Peter Kosso in explaining the role of evidence in archaeology states how "all claims about the past and even about the evidence are, to varying degrees, revisable."[61] While this idea applies to both 'mainstream' archaeology and pseudoarchaeology it is important to consider how much impact a piece of evidence and its interpretation has on the wider coherence of the theory.[62] For example, the existence of a sub-basement window to a buildings archaeologist will tell them about the construction of the building, it's possible date, and its uses whereas that same sub-basement window will be interpreted by a proponent of Tartaria as evidence of a global mud flood. However, while it is valid that both interpretations should be entertained at first, it is vital that the interpretation is supported by the wider theory of 19th and 20th century architecture.[63]

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[59] McIntyre.(2019), Pg. 154.
[60] Stephanie Halmhofer, 'Knowledge Feature: Pseudoarchaeology', *Bones, Stones, and Books*, 2018 <https://bonesstonesandbooks.com/2018/01/08/knowledge-feature-pseudoarchaeology/> [accessed 24 June 2022].
[61] Peter Kosso, 'Introduction', in *Archaeological Fantasies: How Pseuodoarchaeology Misrepresents the Past and Misleads the Public* (Routledge, 2006), pp. 3–23. Pg. 12
[62] Peter Kosso. (2006), Pg. 13
[63] *Ibid*, Pg. 15

2.5 Why is it dangerous?

Pseudoscience may be viewed by some as being harmless, but much like conspiracy theories they can carry real and harmful impacts. They are often irrational, flying in the face of accepted knowledge and lead to real-world harms such as reduced uptake in vaccines.[64]

Pseudoarchaeology presents a number of dangers to society which this dissertation hopes to evaluate. While healthy scepticism can be a benefit allowing society to evaluate new information critically, it is the threat of overly suspicious mindsets which can be seen through the lens of pseudoarchaeology.[65] Amongst scientists there is a growing dismay seen by the denial of scientific findings, the dismissal of evidenced-based conclusions, and the rise of 'alternative facts.'[66] Pseudoarchaeology, pseudoheritage and pseudohistorical ideas all present theories which seek to misrepresent physical evidence, historical evidence, and scholarly work in order to support political and supremacist agendas.

In a pragmatic-naturalistic examination of pseudoscience Blankce and Boudry present three strategies utilised by proponents of pseudoscience [and thus pseudoarchaeologists] to bring their arguments onto a level ground with science.[67] These three strategies include presenting the scientific community as 'blinkered', blind in its dogma and therefore restricting the pseudoscientific theory from being discussed; outright denying that the outcome of their debate has been finalised exploiting the idea that science is filled with unanswered questions; finally moving

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[64] Blancke and Boudry. Pg 184
[65] Robert Brotherton and Silan Eser, 'Bored to Fears: Boredom Proneness, Paranoia, and Conspiracy Theories', *Personality and Individual Differences*, 80 (2015), 1–5. Pg. 4.
[66] Robert T. Pennock, *An Instinct for Truth: Curiosity and the Moral Character of Science* (MIT Press, 2019). Pg xii.
[67] Blancke and Boudry. Pg 184

the debate to a different field entirely one with society rather than scientists at its core.[68] With the rise of social media the increased opportunities for pseudoarchaeologists as pseudoscientists to engage with the public and presenting their ideas as on an academic par with accepted theories are vast.

2.6 A new approach; pseudoarchaeology as a conspiracy theory?

Conspiracy theories were chosen as a comparative school of thought because it was clear to me that not only did pseudoarchaeology share a number of foundational elements with conspiracy theories, but they also shared similar impacts on society. It is for this reason that I have labelled my definition of pseudoarchaeology detailed in the introduction to this work, *conspiratorial pseudoarchaeology*. The theory of Tartaria was chosen as a lens through which to investigate this topic because it most overtly shares conspiratorial thinking, an idea which will be explored below.

Conspiracy theories put down the ultimate cause of significant events and circumstances as the secret actions of malevolent groups, who undertake a coverup to suit their own interests.[69] Building on this core definition Robert Brotherton defines conspiracy theories in seven ways paraphrased here as: containing unverified claims at odds with the mainstream consensus, which grow and thrive *because* of this opposition; they are sensationalistic - often surrounding disasters, pandemics, terrorism, celebrity & political deaths, crashes, and aliens; they assume everything is intentional and nothing is coincidental with the world being dualistic – divided between good and evil; proponents have low standards of evidence for their

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[68] Blancke and Boudry. Pg 194 - 195

[69] Daniel Jolley, Silvia Mari, and Karen M Douglas, ‘Consequences of Conspiracy Theories’, 2020. Pg. 3.

theories; they are primarily built on negative evidence, often perceived rather than proven; epistemically self-insulating against “questioning or correction”; finally, the most successful conspiracy theories adapt in order to retain relevance amongst their adherents.[70]

It is my belief that these characteristics can also be found in pseudoarchaeological theories as these are inherently at odds with academic scholarship and many thrive on this apparent antagonism; they are most often focused on the most famous or widely known sites such as the Giza pyramids, Mayan civilisation etc. They assume connections between numerous unconnected societies and monuments while claiming that shadowy groups or academia are hiding the truth. Often pseudoarchaeological theories have low standards of evidence, misinterpreting known evidence or concocting their own; they imply that scholars are involved in the conspiracy therefore any evidence presented to counter their claim is dismissed as just another piece of the conspiracy. Lastly, pseudoarchaeological conspiracies will morph and evolve to stay relevant which partly explains how theories such as Atlantis or Ancient Aliens have lasted for decades in the face of robust criticism.

Lee McIntyre postulates a matrix between scepticism and gullibility which attempts to explain characteristics of science, denialism, conspiracy theory and pseudoscience. In his matrix proponents being open to new ideas but sceptical without evidence are characteristics of science; being closed to new ideas and sceptical are those of denialism; being open to new ideas but gullible, willing to believe any idea without evidence reflects pseudoscience and being closed to new

[70] Stephanie Beene and Katie Greer, ‘A Call to Action for Librarians: Countering Conspiracy Theories in the Age of QAnon’, *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 47.1 (2021), 102292. Pg. 1-2. [Emphasis in original source.]

ideas and gullible represents conspiracy theories.[71] Using this matrix we must ask whether pseudoarchaeology falls within pseudoscience or within conspiracy theories or instead does it occupy a middle ground?

It is my argument that they straddle the divide between both: they are open to new ideas, but only if those ideas support their preconceived notions (e.g., precursor race, Aliens, Atlantis). They are also closed to and sceptical of new ideas, especially where these originate from within academia or science. These are immediately dismissed as being part of a wider conspiracy or entirely false. Pseudoarchaeologists are often sceptical of new evidence and counterarguments, but at the same time are gullible and easily swayed by clearly fraudulent or misidentified information. In other words, proponents of pseudoscientific ideas appeal to conspiracies to support their pet theory, while conspiracists will appeal to the trapping and their understandings of science, which are often erroneous or incomplete in order to support their beliefs.[72]

This reciprocal circle makes 'debunking' pseudoarchaeological ideas difficult as any claims made to counter them will be treated as part of the conspiracy, especially if they arise from a person within academic circles. Furthermore, adherents to one conspiracy theory e.g., Atlantis will often be psychologically ready to accept any conspiracy theory presented to them. This tendency towards monological thinking was first described by Goertzel in 1994.[73] It may explain why conspiratorial pseudoarchaeology ideas such as the Tartarian mythos accumulates

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[71] McIntyre. (2019), Pg. 154
[72] Emilio Lobato and others, 'Examining the Relationship between Conspiracy Theories, Paranormal Beliefs, and Pseudoscience Acceptance among a University Population', *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 28.5 (2014), 617–25. Pg. 617.
[73] Lobato and others. (2014). Pg. 618.

elements of other ideas as proponents draw on other conspiracy theories they come across, especially those found online.

This issue raises a challenge for those studying pseudoarchaeological thought. In order to better understand the thought process behind these ideas we must understand scholarship behind conspiracy theories and behind the popularity of pseudoscience in other disciplines while also keeping abreast of new archaeological ideas in order to understand whether they can be misinterpreted by proponents. Understanding all of these elements makes the archaeologists' job even harder.

Research into conspiracy theories (CT) have typically focused on two avenues of understanding. These have been what drives individual belief in CTs (Douglas & Sutton, 2011; Brotherton, French & Pickering, 2013; Drochon, 2018) and what psychological needs motivate beliefs in conspiracy theories (Adam-Troian et al, 2021; Van Prooijen, Douglas & De Inocencio, 2017; Van Prooijen & Proostman, 2013). These two research avenues are known as the *Individual* and *Motivational* frameworks.[74] Among the individual traits identified as influencing CT belief are a negative correlation with 'agreeableness', positive correlation with schitozypy and paranoid ideation as well as correlating well with other belief systems such as social dominance, right-wing authoritarianism and political cynicism. Furthermore, research has found that individuals with higher levels of analytical reasoning and moral orientation towards epistemic rationality are less likely to believe in CTs.[75] On the other hand, the motivation framework identifies CTs as being driven by three psychological needs: to reduce uncertainty, restore a meaningful view over

[74] Jais Adam-Troian and others, 'Investigating the Links between Cultural Values and Belief in Conspiracy Theories: The Key Roles of Collectivism and Masculinity', *Political Psychology*, 42.4 (2021), 597–618. Pg. 599
[75] Adam-Troian and others. (2021) Pg, 599

ambiguous situations, and to regain control over unexpected or threatening events.[76] These two frameworks can, in my opinion also be applied to the belief in pseudoarchaeological thought because the individual and motivational factors indicating a likelihood to believe in CTs also exist in individuals who subscribed to pseudoarchaeological theories such as Tartaria or Atlantis.

As well as focusing on the individual and motivational factors behind belief in conspiracy theories research has also covered two approaches in treating the conspiracy theories themselves. *Generalism*, the argument that conspiracy theories should be viewed with suspicion purely for being conspiracy theories and *particularism.* This second train of thought has gained more popularity within philosophical research holding that each theory should be addressed on the nature of the evidence for or against them, rather than dismissing out of hand.[77]

The driving argument behind my idea of *conspiratorial pseudoarchaeology* is that through their discussions of alternative history or pseudohistorical or pseudoheritage ideas, individuals on Social Media form communities built around the central tenant of their theory i.e., Tartaria. A central belief held by this community is that an outgroup such as archaeologists, academia or a shadowy group are deliberately hiding “the truth” from the wider world. The notion of a conspiracy implies an [outside] group that threatens the very existence of the society [or in-group] in which it exists.[78] By subscribing to a conspiratorial belief within the realm of

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[76] Adam-Troian and others.
[77] M RX Dentith, ‘Debunking Conspiracy Theories’, *Synthese*, 198.10 (2021), 9897–9911. Pg 9901
[78] Véronique Campion-Vincent, ‘From Evil Others to Evil Elites: A Dominant Pattern in Conspiracy Theories Today’, in *Rumor Mills* (Routledge, 2017), pp. 103–22. Pg 203

pseudoarchaeology, that for example archaeologists have hidden evidence of a global Mudflood, it serves to enhance the community identity among Tartaria proponents. This idea, that conspiratorial narratives strengthen communal identity against enemies has been identified in sociological research.[79]

The above suggests that by sharing “evidence” amongst other members of the Tartaria community online, members present a us vs them narrative, with the “enlightened” re-searchers on one side and archaeologists, either alone or working for a shadowy elite on the other. This idea is further supported by looking at research into QAnon and how believers in this ideology, known as anons, comb the internet for clues and supporting evidence all while being encouraged and supported by fellow anons.[80]

As well as strengthening community identity amongst its adherents a pseudoarchaeological conspiracy theory can also lead to supporters doubting scientific explanations for phenomena or discoveries. This is because there is a general tendency for humans to embrace arguments that support pre-existing beliefs at the casting out or ignoring of any evidence casting doubt on their beliefs.[81] Long-standing findings in sociological research show that a confirmation or my-side bias exists where one selects or interprets data in a way which strengthens their own argument or beliefs.[82]

This further exacerbates the problems faced by scholars combating conspiratorial pseudoarchaeology. Any evidence they present to believers will be

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[79] Campion-Vincent. (2017). Pg., 103
[80] Abdalla Mikhaeil and Baskerville. Pg. 4
[81] Katrin Weigmann, ‘The Genesis of a Conspiracy Theory: Why Do People Believe in Scientific Conspiracy Theories and How Do They Spread?’, *EMBO Reports*, 19.4 (2018), e45935. Pg 2
[82] Blancke and Boudry. Pg 187.

cast out or ignore if it does not support their pre-existing notions of how the world works.

2.7 Pseudoarchaeology as Stigmatized Knowledge

In order to reach my definition of *Conspiratorial pseudoarchaeology* I searched for earlier investigations into pseudoscience and conspiracy theories which have sought to define the nature of the knowledge held by adherents. A key investigation that has proven most useful in defining conspiratorial pseudoarchaeology has been Michael Barkun's "A culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America."[83] Barkun built on the earlier works of James Webb and Colin Campbell to devise a notion he defined as *Stigmatised knowledge*.[84] Rejected knowledge devised by Webb focuses on the relationship between certain claims and the so-called 'Establishment', whereas the work of Campbell on the *Cultic Milieu* focused on identifying the sources from which the New Age Movement drew its inspiration.[85] Barkun's work extended this concept in order to introduce five aspects of *Stigmatised Knowledge* including: forgotten, superseded, ignored, rejected, and suppressed each of which constitutes the appeal of conspiracy theories.[86] It is the idea of *Stigmatised Knowledge* which I feel forms a driving basis through which the Tartarian pseudoarchaeology theory can be explain. For Barkun, *Stigmatised Knowledge* represents claims to truth regarded as true by

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[83] Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Univ of California Press, 2003), xv. This work is recommended reading not only for its exploration of the notion of *stigmatised knowledge*, but also for an overview of numerous conspiracies ranging from Millennialism to the New World Order to UFOs to Hidden civilisations beneath the earth. Each of these have had an impact on pseudoarchaeology either directly or indirectly.
[84] Barkun, xv. (2003)., Pg 23.
[85] Barkun, xv. (2003)., pg. 23
[86] Charlotte Ward and David Voas, 'The Emergence of Conspirituality', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 26.1 (2011), 103–21. Pg. 116.

their proponents despite the marginalisation of those claims by traditional, knowledge-forming institutions such as academia and scientific research communities.[87] Stigmatised knowledge is further supported by the ideas found within conspiracy theory research showing that a core tenant within conspiracy theories is that they must be in conflict with an “official” explanation of the same historical event.[88]

Within the umbrella term of *Stigmatised Knowledge* Barkun describes five types of knowledge: Forgotten, Superseded, Ignored, Rejected and Suppressed.[89] While all five knowledge branches are important when considering the importance of conspiracy theories, in regard to *conspiratorial pseudoarchaeology* the three which I felt informed this concept the strongest are forgotten, rejected, and suppressed knowledge.

Forgotten Knowledge according to Barkun’s idea refers to knowledge once known but lost either through faulty memory, cataclysm, or some other interrupting factor; rejected knowledge refers to those explicitly rejected as false from the outset; while suppressed knowledge refers to those claims which adherents state are known to be true by authoritative institutions but are suppressed because they fear the consequences of widespread public knowledge or for another more malicious reason.[90]

All three of these knowledge forms can be found within Tartarian theories as well as other pseudoarchaeological themes. For example, the existence of what is known as *antiquetech*, advanced technology used within the Tartarian empire to

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[87] Barkun, xv. (2003)., Pg. 26
[88] Steve Clarke, ‘Conspiracy Theories and the Internet: Controlled Demolition and Arrested Development’, *Episteme*, 4.2 (2007), 167–80. Pg 171.
[89] *Ibid*, pg. 27.
[90] Barkun, xv. (2003) pg., 27

harness free energy or ether, visible on buildings as large antenna.[91] The concept of antiquetech clearly meets all three forms of knowledge. It is a form of forgotten knowledge as it has been forgotten as a technology available to humanity following the proposed 'mudflood', it is rejected as outrightly false by historians and archaeologists who have investigated the idea[92], and as its existence is reportedly hidden by 'elites' including academics it must therefore, according to Tartarian researchers, be seen as valid and therefore fit within the definition of suppressed knowledge.

3. Those who came before

3.1 Exploring pseudoarchaeology

The nature of the human past means that people and events are unobservable synchronously, but the physical and textual remains they leave behind can tell us their stories.[93] However, because this evidence requires interpretation it is at risk of being subjected to modern values.[94] Furthermore, evidence can, in essence, be found to support any claim e.g., sub-basements being evidence for a global mud-flood. The important aspect is how much strain its interpretation places on the coherence of our wider beliefs.[95] It is this strain on wider beliefs which is clearly represented in pseudoarchaeological, pseudohistorical and pseudoheritage ideas.

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[91] 'Antique-Tech : Tartaria' <https://www.reddit.com/r/Tartaria/comments/111rau4/could_this_be_an_old_world_atmospheric_energy/> [accessed 18 February 2023].
[92] 'The Lost Empire of Tartaria', *Historical Blindness* <https://www.historicalblindness.com/blogandpodcast//the-lost-empire-of-tartaria> [accessed 12 December 2022].
[93] Peter Kosso. Pg., 6.
[94] Peter Kosso. (2006). Pg., 6-7.
[95] *Ibid*.

Pseudoarchaeological ideas have a long history, and while the focus of this dissertation is on the modern pseudoarchaeological theory of Tartaria and how it spreads on Social Media, it is also vital to explore the precursors to this idea; their influence on modern ideas, and the harmful ideas imbedded within them that continue to rear themselves in the modern day.

Scholarship has identified a number of themes within pseudoarchaeological ideas. These ideas can be found across the spectrum of pseudoarchaeological and pseudohistorical theories. While a deeper investigation of pseudoarchaeological themes can be found in Chapter 2, it is important to focus here on our overarching themes that can be identified: Origins, Ancient Knowledge, Religious Truth, and Aliens. According to Moshenska, pseudoarchaeological theories will focus on the origin of national, linguistic, or ethnic communities or the birthplace of a specific practice such as pyramid building.[96] Ancient Knowledge is the second of Moshenska's themes demonstrating the idea that people or civilisations in the past possessed spiritual, technological or ecological knowledge that far surpasses modern thought in complexity or purity. This sort of romantic nostalgia for a lost, more perfect world is part of many New Age alternative archaeologies as well as ideas of Atlantis, Mu and other lost continents. The third and fourth overarching themes include that of Religious Truth. Here, vast sums of money being spent to prove the truth of religious evidence as well as the idea that extra- terrestrial beings have visited earth in the past and guided human development.[97]

These themes discussed here and elsewhere within this dissertation can be seen throughout the history of pseudoarchaeology, each theory, from Atlantis to

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[96] Gabriel Moshenska, 'Alternative Archaeologies', *Key Concepts in Public Archaeology*, 2017, 122–37. Pg, 123-124.
[97] Moshenska. (2017), pg. 126-127.

Tartary collects elements from both its predecessors and competitors gaining new traditions, theoretical elements, and evidence as they gather supporters. Each supporter of these theories bring their own knowledge, preconceptions, and agendas to the theory drawing on their own lived experienced to answer their own questions on one of these four themes.

3.2 Atlantis, Mu, and Lemuria – The precursors of Pseudoarchaeology

"Our records tell how your city checked a great power which arrogantly advanced from its base in the Atlantic ocean to attack the cities of Europe and Asia."[98]

These lines form part of Critias' introduction to the great city of Atlantis, an ocean spanning ancient power that once fought Athens over 11,600 years ago being 9000 years after the time of Solon.[99] This city is what springs to mind in the public's understanding of lost ancient civilisations.

Much has been said on Atlantis in other scholarship and it is not within the scope of this work to re-tread that ground.[100] However, it is important to understand how modern theories of pseudoarchaeology have picked up antiquarian ideas.

The most famous of pseudoarchaeological works regarding Atlantis is *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* which was published in 1882 by Ignatius Donnelly. Donnelly was born in 1831 and died in 1901. His work comprised five sections detailing Donnelly's theory that not only did Atlantis exist, but it formed the central founding civilisation for the entire Ancient World from Egypt to America.[101] This is a key tenant of hyperdiffusionism; the idea that a "mother-culture" were the originators of

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[98] *Plato: Timaeus and Critias*, ed. by H. D. P. Lee (Penguin Books, 1971). Pg., 37
[99] H. D. P. Lee. (1971). Pg., 36.
[100] For scholarship on Atlantis read; https://www.jasoncolavito.com/apps/search?q=Atlantis;
[101] Ignatius Donnelly, *Atlantis The Antediluvian World, The Classic Illustrated Edition of 1882* (Gramery Publishing Company, 1990).

technology and ideas helping to spread them across the globe.[102] Atlantis has often played the role of this central culture. Furthermore, The story of Atlantis reflects the political, religious, moral and intellectual changes found in modern society hence its thematic popularity in science-fiction and fantasy literature, tv & film, video games, and pseudoarchaeological literature.[103] Atlantis allows pseudoarchaeologists to present their ideas about the past whether that's focusing on the catastrophic ending, the fantastic technological achievement of the Atlanteans, or the idea of a glorious homeworld.

Donnelly's work represents the pinnacle of 19th century thought on Atlantis, however there were plenty of works published before his which paved the way. The 19th century is vitally important to the story of Atlantology, at which point the story set out by Plato gathered pace and split into two distinct fields; the scientific focusing on the veracity of the myth, while literature exploited the gaps in the mythological story, its symbology and storyline.[104]

3.3 Theosophy and the search for precursor civilisations

The late 19th century advancement in the sciences with the like of George Lyell and Charles Darwin did not lead to the end of the fascination with Atlantis. Other lost civilisations were erected, even in the study of evolution; Godwana or Lemuria for example, while yet more scientists of the time saw in the advances of archaeology, palaeontology, and anthropology the likelihood that once lost civilisations might again reappear.[105] These lost civilisations formed the basis for a

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[102] 'About: Hyperdiffusionism' <https://dbpedia.org/page/Hyperdiffusionism> [accessed 21 April 2023].
[103] Chantal Foucrier, 'The Myth of Atlantis in the 19th Century: Sciene and Imagination', *Leidschrift*, 32.januari: Verzonken en verheven. Plato's Atlantis van klassieke mythe tot nazi-utopie (2017), 43–61. Pg 43.
[104] Foucrier. (2017). Pg., 43.
[105] Foucrier. (2017). Pg., 46-47.

number of 19th century new religious movements, the central movement being that of Theosophy. During the 19th century those who were discontented with the rapid social, political, and religious upheavals that followed in the wake of revolutions and the industrialization of society, found a useful resource for opposition in the rejected knowledge of ancient works, combining them into new religious and philosophical movements.[106]

Theosophy was co-founded by a Ukrainian-born Victorian esotericist in 1875 with the name Helena Petrovna Blavatsky .[107] Her work, principally *Isis Unveiled* which was published two years after the society was founded and *The Secret Doctrine*, published in 1888 both transmitted the metaphysical teaching of the 'masters' including ideas surrounding Atlantis.[108] Theosophy continues today, blending metaphysical ideas with those of archaeology.[109]

Within Theosophy, the idea of lost continents forms a tenant of their beliefs.[110] Blavatsky named five continents in the second volume of her work *The Secret Doctrine:* The imperishable Sacred Land, The Hyperborean, Lemuria, Atlantis, and Europe.[111] Of these, only one, Europe represents a true continent with Lemuria and Atlantis both representing sunken continents, Hyperborea representing the mythological land to the North, and the sacred land representing an ideal continent

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[106] Egil Asprem and Asbjørn Dyrendal, 'Close Companions? Esotericism and Conspiracy Theories'. Pg 5.
[107] J Hoopes, 'The Mysterious Origins of Fringe', *The SAA Archaeological Record*, 19.5 (2019), 21–25. Pg. 22.
[108] Carole M Cusack, 'New Religions and the Science of Archaeology: Mormons, the Goddess, and Atlantis', *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science*, 2010, 763–96. Pg.,
[109] Hoopes. (2019)., pg. 22.
[110] John R. Cole, 'Cult Archaeology and Unscientific Method and Theory', *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory*, 3 (1980), 1–33. Pg 2.
[111] Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, 'The Secret Doctrine, Vol. 2 of 4' (Project Gutenberg, 2017) <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/54488/54488-h/54488-h.html> [accessed 3 May 2023].

“whose destiny it is to last from the beginning to the end of the Manvantara throughout each Round.”[112]

Theosophy has a role to play in the building of the Tartarian mythology, even if many of its adherents are unaware of it. Blavatsky promoted the idea that there were a number of root races preceding our own representing evolutionary stages of humanity.[113] Theosophy ascribed seven root races to humanity which Blavatsky attempted to place in parallel to scientific thought at the time.[114] Our current species is, according to Theosophy the fifth root race, also known as the Aryan race.[115]

Blavatsky attempted to use the archaeological discoveries of her time to justify her ideas of root races. In volume II of her work, she argues that crude, Palaeolithic tools prove that alongside their makers lived highly advanced civilisations. She justifies this example by comparing the existence of ‘primitive’ Aboriginal people in Australia living alongside ‘modern’ societies.[116] This concept is reversed in Tartarian mythology. Many videos and publications on Tartaria address the idea that “horse and buggy people” were incapable of building the large skyscrapers seen in cities such as New York and Boston.[117]

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[112] Blavatsky.
[113] Julian Strube, ‘Theosophy, Race, and the Study of Esotericism’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 89.4 (2021), 1180–89 <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfab109>.
[114] Blavatsky.
[115] Strube.
[116] Blavatsky.
[117] ‘Queue | The One World Tartarians’.

4. Social Media

4.1 A window into online communities

Social Media has dramatically affected the way in which information is shared amongst unconnected people. Social media is now utilised in networking, socialising, and reflecting on everyday life.[118] These networks allow users to share stories, and due to the public nature of this information, gives researchers a window into what information is being shared, why its popular, and how it spreads.[119] Our world is increasingly one in which visual, digital elements play a central role in how we, as humans, navigate meaning: social media platforms, search engines, interfaces, icons, memes, and smartphones all play an ever growing role.[120] It is for this reason that I decided to focus my research on the Tartarian pseudoarchaeological conspiracy theory, a phenomenon born and spread on social media channels.

The following section of this dissertation will focus on the role that social media plays in a number of areas related to pseudoarchaeology. It will address how social media spreads misinformation whether that is pseudoarchaeological, pseudohistorical, or pseudo-heritage narratives, how social media forms communities both helpful and harmful, harms that the Tartarian narrative has within the online world, and how social media can be used by heritage professionals to improve the understanding of our work and digital literacy thereby reducing the harm caused by conspiratorial pseudoarchaeology.

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[118] Leanne Townsend and Claire Wallace, 'Social Media Research: A Guide to Ethics', *University of Aberdeen*, 1.16 (2016). Pg., 3.
[119] Kim Mortimer, 'Understanding Conspiracy Online: Social Media and the Spread of Suspicious Thinking', *Dalhousie Journal of Interdisciplinary Management*, 13.1 (2017). Pg 6
[120] Matthew N Hannah, 'A Conspiracy of Data: QAnon, Social Media, and Information Visualization', *Social Media+ Society*, 7.3 (2021), 20563051211036064. Pg. 1.

The methodology I adhered to in my data gathering for this section followed two strands; an academic approach using data and network analytics tools and a public approach searching through social media platforms as an “ordinary” person would. My reasonings behind these two strands are explained in detail within the methodology section of this dissertation, but in short, I wanted to approach the world of Tartarian theorists as people would be exposed to them through the algorithms utilised by platforms such as TikTok in order to understand how someone might be drawn to this ideas even if unwilling.

4.2 Ethical Approach

Social media can contain numerous examples of harmful content and while the information is “public” this does not automatically entitle researchers to using personal information from users. For this reason, I sought to engage with social media ethically. An ethics proposal was produced ahead of this stage of work. The types of data collection undertaken in research social media phenomenon requires a careful ethical approach, however, the novel nature of social media has meant there is as yet no concise ethical framework for researchers.[121] For this reason, a number of social media ethics documents from a variety of institutions were used in designing this dissertation.[122] Most usefully Dr Leanne Townsend and Professor Claire Wallace of the University of Aberdeen have produced an ethics framework which was extremely useful in approaching this work.[123]

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[121] Townsend and Wallace. (2016). Pg., 4
[122] Su Golder and others, ‘Attitudes toward the Ethics of Research Using Social Media: A Systematic Review’, *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 19.6 (2017), e195; Megan A Moreno and others, ‘Ethics of Social Media Research: Common Concerns and Practical Considerations’, *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 16.9 (2013), 708–13.
[123] Townsend and Wallace. Pg., 8.

In order to maintain the anonymity of social media users I have sought to remove user names from any screenshots used and where I have quoted from content, I have anonymised users by reference to the platform from which the content was scraped e.g., Twitter User 1. This method of protecting the user's anonymity is derived from other pieces of work analysing pseudoarchaeology and disinformation on digital platforms.[124]

4.3 TikTok: Pseudoscience, pseudoarchaeology, and entertainment

TikTok is a novel social media platform owned by ByteDance, a Chinese company. TikTok also known as Douyin, was first launched in 2016 to the Chinese consumer market before being launched to international IOS and Android users in 2017. In 2018 the platform merged with another Chinese owned platform, Musical.ly before launching in the form it is seen in today August of the same year.[125] This platform has gained an impressive number of users since its launch, amassing nearly 2 billion downloads and 696 million users in January 2021.[126] For this reason I chose TikTok as the focus of my dissertation as it presents a challenge for those studying pseudoarchaeology due to being a novel platform with such a wide reach. However, this could also present a positive avenue for heritage professionals to engage with the public on archaeology.

The appeal of TikTok primarily derives from the fact that any user can become a content creator, producing their own videos.[127] This means that any user who

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[124] Angelina Nugroho, 'Twitter Analysis of Pseudoarchaeology and Conspiracy Theories in Archaeology', *Cornell Undergraduate Research Journal*, 1.2 (2022).
[125] Shawn Graham, Damien Huffer, and Jaime Simons, 'When TikTok Discovered the Human Remains Trade: A Case Study', *Open Archaeology*, 8.1 (2022), 196–219. Pg., 4.
[126] Shaheen Kanthawala and others, 'It's the Methodology For Me: A Systematic Review of Early Approaches to Studying TikTok.', 2022, pp. 1–17. Pg., 3105.
[127] Weimann and Masri. Pg., 4.

wishes to spread pseudoarchaeological content can do so with limited challenges. During the CoVID-19 pandemic the popularity of TikTok increased by an impressive 38%, higher than any other social media platforms.[128] Unfortunately, TikTok has represented a major digital channel for the dissemination of CoVID-19 misinformation.[129]

Given its novel nature, scholarly interest in TikTok is only in its early stages.[130] It is hoped that this dissertation will help to address a gap in the literature with its focus on pseudoarchaeology and, more specifically the Tartarian conspiracy theory. Social media networks allow their users to share relevant stories and provide researchers with a window through which they can observe this sharing.[131] This is an important aspect of studying social media phenomenon because humans navigate much of the meaning in the world through a visual world. [132]

The very nature of social media presents researchers with challenges when using its content for research purposes. The data held by social media companies can be extremely difficult to access. In addition, the platforms evolve quickly, making them unstable as research subjects.[133] This is a challenge which has presented itself during this dissertation which is why I took the decision to freeze the data analysis of TikTok videos to a set period of time.

A search of Tartaria on TikTok brings up a number of videos with some numbering views in the millions. However, because a large content analysis of all the

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[128] Katie Elson Anderson, 'Getting Acquainted with Social Networks and Apps: Talking about TikTok', *Library Hi Tech News*, 2021. Pg., 2.
[129] Nadia Alonso López, Pavel Sidorenko Bautista, and Fábio Giacomelli, 'Beyond Challenges and Viral Dance Moves: TikTok as a Vehicle for Disinformation and Fact-Checking in Spain, Portugal, Brazil, and the USA.', 2021. Pg., 67
[130] Kanthawala and others. (2022)., Pg., 3105
[131] Mortimer. (2017)., Pg. 6.
[132] Hannah. (2021)., Pg. 1.
[133] Kanthawala and others. (2022)., Pg., 3106.

videos is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I decided to select the first video presented to a user. The reason I chose this method is because I wanted to approach the videos as a normal user would to see where the algorithm would direct me. The first video visible to my account was produced by a user known as onefoulwow. This user follows 440 other accounts, has amassed a following of 981.1 thousand accounts and has over 19.3million likes. The vast majority of his videos centre on conspiracy theory content including pseudoarchaeology.[134]

The Tartarian video produced by onefoulwow was produced on the 28th October 2022 and has 694,000 views on the app. The video features the content creator in front of a green screen generated image of a city in Turkmenistan captioned as "Modern Day Tartaria." He addresses his audience as "all those people wondering what happened to Tartaria…we might have just found it."[135] His use of 'we' suggests to his audience that they are on an exploratory journey together, potentially building a bond between content creator and audience through their shared interest in Tartaria.

[134] 'The Bully Slayer (@onefoulwow)', *TikTok* <https://www.tiktok.com/@onefoulwow> [accessed 26 March 2023].
[135] 'The Bully Slayer (@onefoulwow)', *TikTok* <https://www.tiktok.com/search/video?q=Tartaria&t=1679845738226> [accessed 26 March 2023].

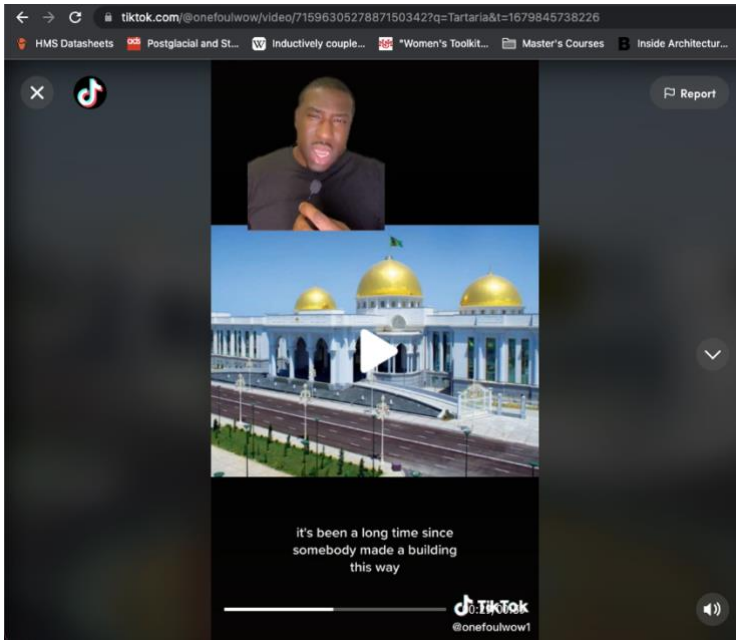

Figure 5 - Screenshot of a Tartarian conspiracy theory video on TikTok

Thirty seconds into his video, the content creator suggests that golden domes visible on a Turkmenistan building are “natural energy conductors.” He provides no further explanation as to why this is the case. He then shows a few more buildings comparing them to spaceships, pyramids, and more natural energy conductors. He ends the video stating that “we don’t make them like that anymore.”

Do you put them in a database/spreadsheet – could you quote number from there? – otherwise how to reference, any ideas?

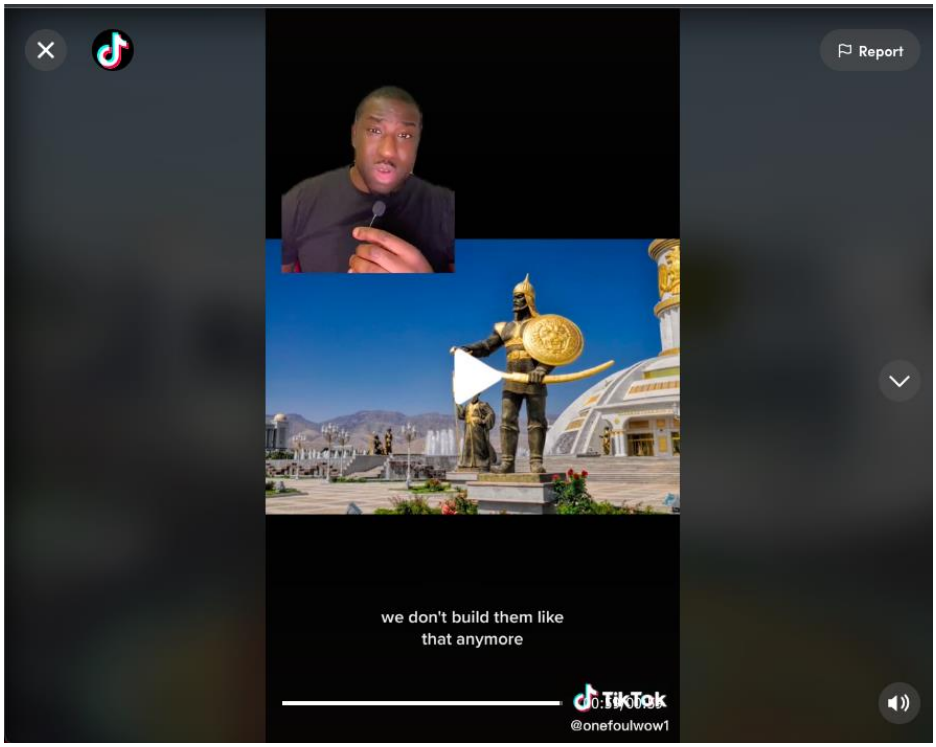

Figure 6 - Screenshot of a TikTok video showing a statue in Turkmenistan.

His video has 744 comments addressing the ideas he presented in the minute long video. While most of those comments are praising the creator for his video a number of comments are adding to his ideas directing the creator and his viewers to other elements of the Tartarian mythos. This is an example of online communities developing a form of *pseudoknowledge*. Pseudoknowledge, which includes pseudohistory, pseudoarchaeology, and pseudoheritage, is defined as knowledge that is seen to be as acceptable as 'conventional' knowledge, but which has been created through unconventional epistemic strategies.[136] One technique used by pseudoarchaeological creators is drawing on legitimate, conventional sources of knowledge in order to substantiate their ideas and increase their credibility.[137] In this video, the creator does this by using Google to highlight Turkmenistan for his audience.[138] However, he deliberately misrepresents the buildings presented in his

[136] Joshua Introne and others, 'How People Weave Online Information into Pseudoknowledge', *Social Media+ Society*, 4.3 (2018), 2056305118785639. Pg., 1-2
[137] Introne and others. (2018). Pg., 11
[138] 'The Bully Slayer (@onefoulwow)'. (2022)

videos as being remnants of or inspired by Tartarian architecture whereas a simple Google search of Turkmenistan presents many of the same buildings and gives them the much needed context surrounding their construction. Searching Turkmenistan Architecture via the search engine provides a number of links on the topic as well as showing a number of images used in the TikTok video.[139] These buildings were constructed as part of a regeneration project led by the then president Saparmurat Niyazov (d. 2006), being awarded a Guinness World Record for the number of white marble buildings in 2013.[140] In total 543 new buildings were constructed, line with white marble and covering 4.5 million square metres.[141]

The content creator on TikTok deliberately avoids these easy to find facts because it does not suit his aims of pushing the pseudoarchaeology myth of Tartaria. Furthermore, by presenting the city as an architectural wonder he downplays the suffering present within Turkmenistan, a dictatorial former socialist republic where those who maintain the White City make no more than $150 a month.[142] This highlights just one of the many harms online pseudoarchaeology can produce.

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[139] 'Turkmenistan Architecture - Google Search' <https://www.google.com/search?q=Turkmenistan+architecture&sxsrf=APwXEdf2PS_4v02EjanVhIUD6t6oIPmFIA%3A1679850435587&source=hp&ei=w3sgZMGNIoWEhbIPu7CwgAU&iflsig=AOEireoAAAAAZCCJ0ywS1sdSi9db9ur0NV-Pwv0ESvDV&ved=0ahUKEwiB-_LDivr9AhUFQkEAHTsYDFAQ4dUDCAo&uact=5&oq=Turkmenistan+architecture&gs_lcp=Cgdnd3Mtd2l6EAMyBQgAEIAEMgYIABAWEB4yCAgAEIoFEIYDMggIABCKBRCGAzIICAAQigUQhgMyCAgAEIoFEIYDMggIABCKBRCGAzoECCMQJzoLCAAQgAQQsQMQgwE6EQguEIAEELEDEIMBEMcBENEDOg4IABCKBRCxAxCDARCRAjoOCC4QigUQxwEQ0QMQkQI6CAgAEIAEELEDOggILhCABBCxAzoICC4QgAQQ1AI6CwguEIMBELEDEIoFOggIABCABBDJAzoICAAQigUQkgM6CwgAEIoFELEDEIMBOgsILhCABBCxAxCDATOICC4QsQMQgAQ6EQguEIMBEMcBELEDENEDEIAEOgUILhCABDoICAAQFhAeEA9QAFiXLWCRLmgAcAB4AIABXogB_Q2SAQIyNZgBAKABAQ&sclient=gws-wiz#imgrc=O_sRDO5nseB0cM> [accessed 26 March 2023].

[140] 'Ashgabat', *Wikipedia*, 2023 <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ashgabat&oldid=1145255701> [accessed 26 March 2023].

[141] Alan Taylor, 'The City of White Marble: Ashgabat, Turkmenistan - The Atlantic' <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2013/06/the-city-of-white-marble-ashgabat-turkmenistan/100528/> [accessed 26 March 2023].

[142] Taylor (2013).

Another aspect that is important when studying pseudoarchaeology online is paying close attention to the Hashtags associated with the video.

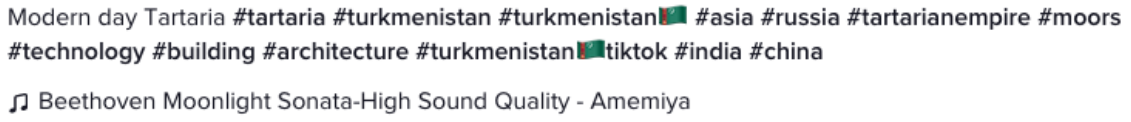

Figure 7 - Screenshot of hashtags associated with a Pseudoarchaeology video.

4.4 A circular ecosystem? TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube

It is the argument of this dissertation that many social media platforms form a circular ecosystem driving pseudoarchaeological ideas from one platform to another. The three key platforms forming this ecosystem are TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube. Content creators on these three platforms can share content from one to another, thereby further spreading their reach. This has an impact on the spread of pseudohistorical ideas because users on TikTok may be directed towards YouTube channels that present longer form video content while users on Twitter may be directed towards TikTok, building on text-based content.

The rise of interest in Tartaria can be seen in tandem with the increase in social media use. For example, a Google Trend search of the term Tartaria shows a gradual increase in the use of the search term on Google, rising steadily until peaking around the end of 2021.[143] The increasing interest in the term Tartaria appears to mirror the increased use of short-form video applications such as TikTok. For example, the hashtag #Tartaria has 450.6 million views.

[143] 'Google Trends', *Google Trends* <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%205-y&q=Tartarian%20Empire,Tartaria,Mud%20Flood> [accessed 12 December 2022].

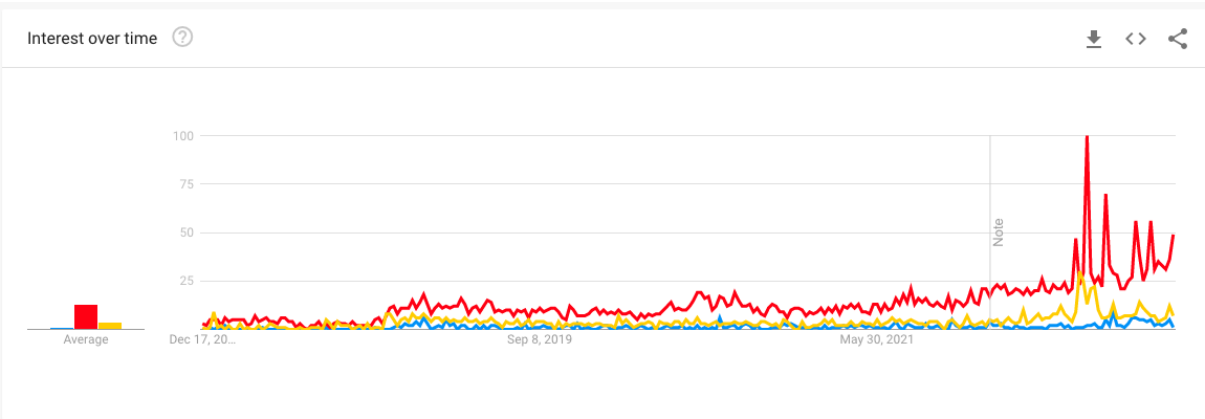

Figure 8 - A Google Trends graph showing the gradual increase in interest over time for the search term "Tartaria".

Furthermore, this interest in Tartaria can be seen all across the world although it is still largely a western phenomenon.[144] Mirroring the prevalence of social media, far more common in western nations, Tartaria has much of its audience in areas such as Russia, Europe and the United States. Its associated terms of Mudflood and Tartarian Empire appear infrequently in comparison, with Tartarian Empire not appearing on the Trends map when initially search. The term Mudflood while associated with the cause of the supposed Tartarian Empire's collapse within the conspiracy theory may also be explained by social media coverage of landslides, especially given its use in areas of Africa and the Indian Sub-Continent.

[144] 'Google Trends'.

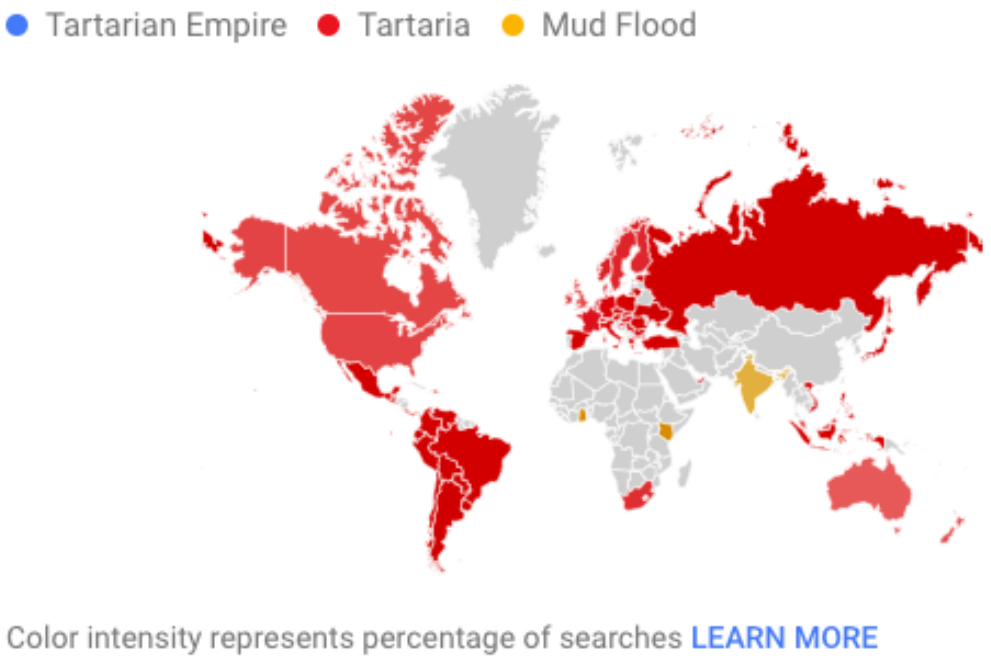

Figure 9 - World map showing the prevalence of Google Searches for "Tartarian Empire", "Tartaria" and "Mudflood".

4.5 A new methodology for dissemination?

Historically, pseudoarchaeological ideas were spread through either word-of-mouth or printed publications such as those of Ignatius Donnelly discussed earlier in this work. However, the rise of social media has given the phenomenon of pseudoarchaeology a substantial boost increasing the numbers of those who now believe, for example, in Atlantis number 50% of those surveyed by Chapman University in 2021 and 43% of those surveyed believing that ancient aliens have visited earth in the past.[145] While there has been a decrease in those who believe in

[145] 'Government Corruption, Fear for Loved Ones, Civil Unrest Top Fears in America - A Majority of Americans Believe Places Can Be Haunted by Spirits', *The Voice of Wilkinson* <https://blogs.chapman.edu/wilkinson/2021/10/14/government-corruption-fear-for-loved-ones-civil-unrest-top/> [accessed 18 March 2023].

Atlantis since the last survey of paranormal fears was undertaken in 2018, those who believe in Ancient Aliens has increased.[146]

Social media, especially platforms like TikTok have played a significant role in expanding the reach of pseudoarchaeological content. One element of TikTok that helps to push harmful content is known as 'dark pattern'. This feature of social media focuses on causing users to pour more and more time into a platform. Mechanisms such as 'likes' and the For You Page – the tailored landing page greeting every TikTok user, draws more and more of a users' focus.[147]

While this aspect of social media can be viewed negatively, it can also assist heritage professionals in reaching more people and better educating the public as to the harmful nature of pseudoknowledge.

The reach of particular search terms used in Hashtags can be viewed through Social Network Analysis. Networks in regard to social media are comprised of two components; a list of actors involved in the network, and a list of the interactions between them.[148] Visualisation of these networks has been used in many successful projects and open-source software such as Gephi can allow researchers to visualise, explore and manipulate network graphs.[149] Given the increasingly visual world in

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[146] 'Paranormal America 2018 - Chapman University Survey of American Fears', *The Voice of Wilkinson* <https://blogs.chapman.edu/wilkinson/2018/10/16/paranormal-america-2018/> [accessed 5 November 2022].
[147] Rebeca Kivijärvi Busto, 'TikTok and Misinformation: Which Factors Contribute to Spreading Misinformation?', 2022. Pg., 15.
[148] Martin Grandjean, 'Gephi: Introduction to Network Analysis and Visualisation', 2015. Pg., 1.
[149] Mathieu Bastian, Sebastien Heymann, and Mathieu Jacomy, 'Gephi: An Open Source Software for Exploring and Manipulating Networks', *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*, 3.1 (2009), 361–62 <https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v3i1.13937>. Pg., 361

which we live Network visualisation has become increasingly important for how we view data.[150]

As part of this dissertation, I sought to explore how interconnected particular words found in Tartarian videos are. I selected a video on YouTube by notorious pseudo anthropologist Robert Sepher discussing Tartaria, a video I had been recommend on an earlier TikTok video.[151]

In order to create a Network Analysis Graph two elements must be included in a dataset; Nodes representing each unique entity in the data and edges, the connections between these entities.[152] In order to create these elements I watched the 12-minute-long video on YouTube and created a list of Comma-separated Values (CSV) file by using Microsoft Word's speech-to-text function to transcribe the video's contents.

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[150] Ken Cherven, *Network Graph Analysis and Visualization with Gephi* (Packt Publishing Ltd, 2013). Pg., 5
[151] *The Great Tartarian Empire*. [Accessed 21st December 2022].
[152] Cherven. (2013)., Pg., 43.

Tartaria Youtube Word Analysis

Word	Occurance
Tartaria	5
Hide	2
Empire	1
Worldwide Influence	1
Aryan	10
Aryan Nobility	1
Genghis Khan	7
Red Hair	5
Blue Eyes	1
Green Eyes	1
Blonde Hair	2
True Origins	1
Swastika	5
Tartars	11
Tartary	3
Great tartary	1
Turkic	1
Age of Aries	1
Atlantis	1
Cataclysm	1
Atlanteans	1
Attarians	1
Victors write the history books	1
CIA	1
International Financial Cartel	1
Eleminate from the history books	1

Figure 10 - CSV file of word analysis related to Tartaria. Copyright of Andrew Ward (2023)

This CSV file can then be easily loaded into Gephi in order to create a network analysis graph. The words picked out of the video represent the nodes of the network while the number of occurrences form the edges. As can be seen from the graph below, nearly every word pulled out of the transcript of the YouTube video is interlinked in one or more ways. For example, the word *Tartaria* has five occurrences during the video which it also shares with *red hair* and more worryingly, *Swastika.* It is the prevalence of outright white-supremacist words and ideas including *international financial cartel*, a right-wing euphemism for Jewish people and *Swastika* being linked with *Great Tartary*, *Genghis Khan*, and *Tartars* that suggests the trend for Tartarian conspiracy videos to lead users to white-supremacist content. It is this trend which can cause the most harm.

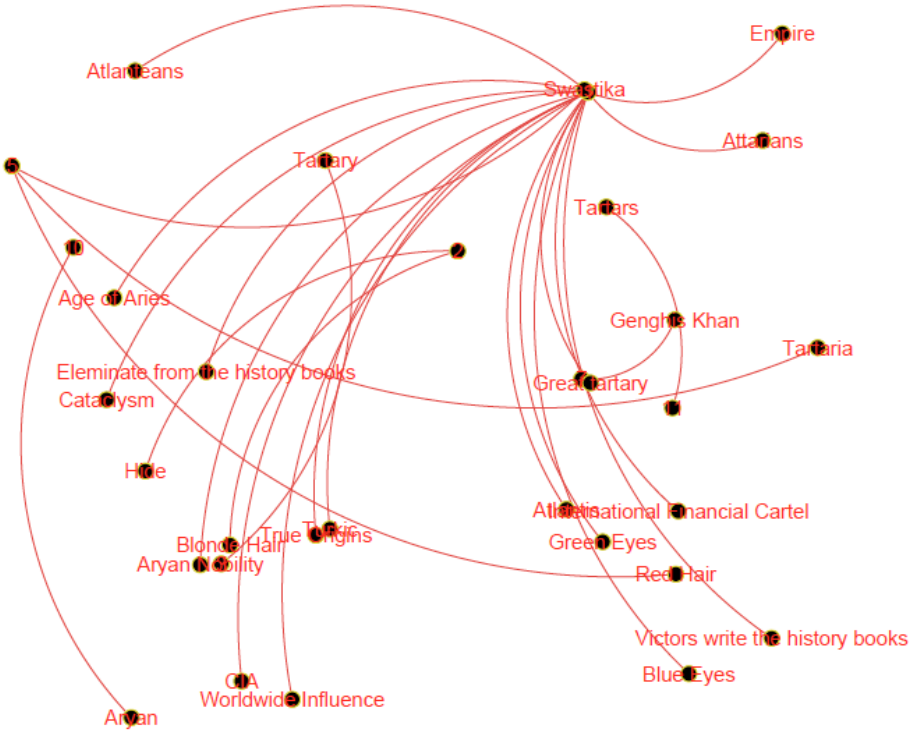

Figure 11 - Network Analysis Graph, copyright of Andrew Ward (2023).

5. Tartaria – Rise of a new conspiracy?

5.1 The World That Was – A history of Tartary

Ideas surrounding lost empires and civilisations are nothing new as has been explored earlier in this dissertation. However, with the increase in social media use it was only a matter of time before these ideas spread into the digital sphere. The most recent of these focuses on a supposed globe-spanning, technologically advanced civilisation occupied by giants which lasted until the mid-19th century, prior to its destruction by some form of mud-based "flood."[153] Following this global cataclysm the adherents of the Tartarian conspiracy theory posit that a secret and shadowy group erased any evidence of its existence from the history books.[154] The effort which would be involved in the cover up of this grand empire is not explained by this theories' adherents, nor do they explain how only the giant denizens of Tartaria were destroyed but the remaining populace remained. This oversight is only the beginning of the flaws in this idea and this section will set out what evidence is provided for Tartaria's existence, the problems inherit in them, the elements of this theory which have been borrowed from earlier ideas and how the hunt for this lost civilisation has exploded into a growing community on social media.

According to multiple online videos and websites this advanced civilisation was responsible for grand buildings that are still visible today in the form of Classical,

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[153] Colin Dickey, *Land of Delusion: Deep inside the World of Crackpots, Conspiracy Theorists, and Radical Ideas That Are Becoming Dangerously Mainstream* (Scribd Originals, 2022) <https://www.scribd.com/book/606395569/Land-of-Delusion-Deep-inside-the-world-of-crackpots-conspiracy-theorists-and-radical-ideas-that-are-becoming-dangerously-mainstream>. Pg. 13.

[154] *The Mud Flood Hypothesis: The History of the Conspiracy Theory about the Global Empire of Tartaria* (Charles Rivers Editors, 2022). Pg. 4

Beaux-Arts, and Second Empire architecture as well as former wonders of the world such as The Great Wall of China and the Pyramids of Giza.[155] As well as grand architecture the citizens of Tartaria apparently had access to advanced technology including suits that allowed flight and steam powered helicopters.[156] Furthermore, Tartarians were no ordinary humans according to some adherents of this view of alternate history, with the belief being that the lost citizens were ten-foot tall giants.[157] The end of this globe spanning empire reputedly took place around one-hundred years ago at the hands of a worldwide mud flood caused either naturally or as the result of destructive energy weapons after which any trace of the empire erased from the history books.[158]

The Tartarian Empire theory and its associated Mud-Flood hypothesis appears to have developed only in the last few years arising sometime between 2016 and 2017.[159] However, using Google Trends, an application provided by Google that highlights the popularity of search terms, it can be demonstrated that there is a distinct rise in searches for Tartaria, Tartarian Empire, and Mud Flood from June 2022 onwards.[160] It is difficult to discern whether this rise correlates with the prior CoVID-19 pandemic.

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[155] 'Inside the "Tartarian Empire," the QAnon of Architecture', *Bloomberg.Com*, 27 April 2021 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2021-04-27/inside-architecture-s-wildest-conspiracy-theory> [accessed 12 December 2022].
[156] 'Tartaria: An Empire Hidden by History, or Revealed by Ignorance? - Lossi 36' <https://lossi36.com/2020/08/26/tartaria-an-empire-hidden-by-history-or-revealed-by-ignorance/> [accessed 12 December 2022].
[157] Colin Dickey. (2022), pg. 13.
[158] *The Mud Flood Hypothesis: The History of the Conspiracy Theory about the Global Empire of Tartaria*. Pg. 2.
[159] 'Inside the "Tartarian Empire," the QAnon of Architecture'.
[160] 'FAQ about Google Trends Data - Trends Help' <https://support.google.com/trends/answer/4365533?hl=en> [accessed 9 February 2023].

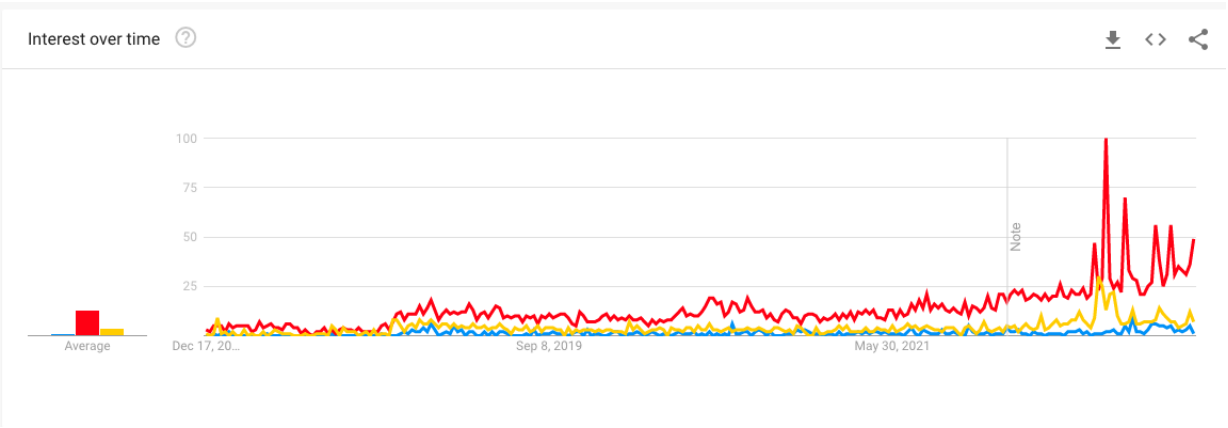

Figure 12 - Google trend graph showing interest over time for three distinct search terms[161]

As is demonstrated above, the discussion of Tartaria is relatively new however even within this short timeframe numerous branches have developed incorporating a wide number of different conspiracy theories.[162] It is important therefore within the study of this pseudoarchaeological and pseudohistorical conspiracy theory to identify the elements borrowed from other conspiracy theories as well the historiography of the ideas prevalent amongst Tartarian theorists.

Tartaria as an online conspiracy theory has believers across the globe, although the vast majority of the content produced on YouTube, TikTok, Twitter and Reddit focus on structures in North America and Russia. A breakdown of search terms across the globe shows that the highest percentage of searches for Tartaria focuses on Russia & Europe with North America following closely behind.

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[161] 'Google Trends'.
[162] *The Mud Flood Hypothesis: The History of the Conspiracy Theory about the Global Empire of Tartaria*. Pg 4.

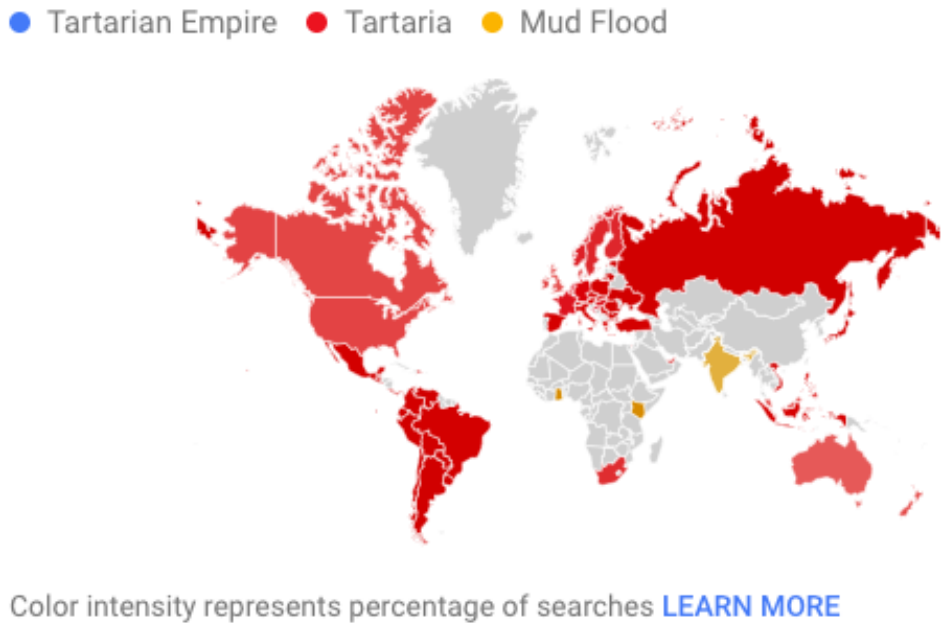

Figure 13 - Percentage of search terms by country[163]

Interestingly for a conspiracy theory with adherents in North America the Tartaria conspiracy is strongly Russian in character, with the technologically advanced empire originating in the area now occupied by Russia prior to its colonisation of the rest of the world.[164] Previous research into the Tartarian conspiracy has identified two main strands of the idea; one based on a Russian ethnonationalist focus with a second representing the English-speaking world's interpretation of the theory.[165] The Russian-centred origin of the Tartarian theory, places at its heart the idea that the founders of this global spanning empire originated in Hyperborea and therefore were white, and technologically superior when compared to other civilisations.[166] While this idea has carried into English

[163] 'Google Trends'.
[164] Colin Dickey. (2022), Pg. 13.
[165] Dylan G. Allen, *Tartaria - The Wish of Ozymandias* (University of Kansas, 19 May 2022). Pg 1.
[166] Dylan G. Allen. (2022), Pg. 2

speaking threads on the topic, the focus on the Russian origin has diminished, instead the focus is on architecture, free-energy, and the Mudflood.[167]

A vast number of proponents of both strands of this theory now exist, sharing and communicating ideas and 'evidence' through online forums such as Reddit and via video sharing platforms like TikTok.[168] By forming communities on social media platforms, proponents are not only able to rapidly learn of new ideas and theories for their chosen interest, but furthermore, scholars and academics struggle to keep pace with each new element. This can mean ideas can run rampant on platforms that traditional scholarship has failed to investigate. Only in the last few years have platforms such as TikTok gathered an academic research interest.[169]

While Tartaria has risen to prominence as a social media conspiracy theory with numerous online communities discussing its varied elements it has a historiographical development centring around Russian historical revisionism, misunderstandings of cartography, and beliefs in pre-flood antediluvian civilisations. Some have described the Tartarian theory as being on par with QAnon due to its tendency to accumulate varying strands of different ideas.[170] This reflects a growing trend in conspiracy theory research that demonstrates how amongst fringe thinkers the internet has allowed groups to spread, developing from smaller, niche communities to wider, global movements.[171] A demonstration of this can be seen in

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[167] Dylan G. Allen. (2022), Pg. 3
[168] Colin Dickey. (2022), Pg. 7.
[169] Library Services team-City West, 'Guides: Social Media for Researchers: More Platforms' <https://guides.library.unisa.edu.au/Social-Media/MorePlatforms> [accessed 9 February 2023].
[170] 'The Lost Empire of Tartaria'.
[171] Brotherton and Eser. Pg. 3.

the rise of print books with one self-published book on Tartaria claiming to have sold over 5,000 copies via Amazon.[172]

5.2 Tartaria – A melting pot of conspiracies

In the discussion above, the focus has been on the nature of the Tartarian pseudoarchaeological conspiracy theory addressing the key tenets of its proponents. However, in order to understand this novel theory, it must be explained how this theory has developed, not through its specific claims, but through what can be described as the theory's historiography. Historiography traces how those in the past have reflected on their past and what it tells them about this past, present and future.[173] For this work I will seek to uncover the variety of other conspiracy theories, pseudoarchaeology and pseudohistorical theories from which the Tartarian conspiracy has evolved. This historiographic approach will cover elements of anti-government conspiracies, ideas of a new world order, antisemitism, Atlantis, Cataclysm, biblical literalism, and theosophy. The nature of the Tartarian conspiracy theory based on an online community spread predominantly on novel social media platforms such as TikTok, Twitter and Reddit allows each re-searcher to add their own thoughts, 'evidence' or angle to the overall picture.[174] By gathering new elements to the central theory it allows it to develop even if archaeologists wished to debunk it.

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[172] Colin Dickey. (2022). Pg 15-16.
[173] Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*, Third (The University of Chicago Press, 2007).Pg. 3
[174] Re-searcher has been used here as a term popular amongst Tartarian conspiracy theorists. The reason for the hyphenation is that in the view of proponents' history has been 'hidden' and thus they are rediscovering that which has been hidden from the public rather than carrying out research into a new topic as an academic would. This use of re-searcher is also paired with the use of His-story to emphasis the false nature of 'mainstream' history.

As has been mentioned above the Tartarian conspiracy is one with a heavy Russian focus. However, Tartarian conspiracies are not the first Russian focused pseudohistorical idea to have been developed. One narrative presenting an alternative view of history is known as *Fomenko Parallelism*.[175] According to one Tartarian re-searcher his journey into the conspiracy began through looking into Anatoly Fomenko's New Chronology.[176] This idea created by Russian mathematician Anatoly Timofeevich Fomenko, a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (among other accolades) posits that that through statistical correlation, matching events and chronologies can be identified as being incorrect interpretations of the same events.[177] He argues that written history is the result of centuries of copying, altering and repeating a small number of historical events occurring since 800 AD, with their prime taking place between 1000-1100AD. In other words, all history earlier than the 9th century did not take place and is in fact the misinterpretation of Medieval events.[178] The key players in Fomenko's alternative version of history are the Russian-horde, led by Genghis Khan; known to Fomenko as Georgiy Danilovichi. While conquering the known world the Russian-Horde also built the Giza Pyramids and inspired the historical fiction of the Roman Empire. Genghis Khan (b. 1162 – d. 1227), who in 'official' history was the founder and ruler of the Mongol empire between 1206 and his death in 1227, plays a key role in many Tartarian conspiracy theories.[179] Fomenko for his part, believes that rather than being of Mongolian origin,

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[175] 'A Russian Mathematician Rewrote World History — and It Is Bonkers', *Big Think* <https://bigthink.com/the-past/anatoly-fomenko-history/> [accessed 20 December 2022].
[176] Colin Dickey. (2022). Pg. 17.
[177] 'About Anatoly', 2012 <https://www.anatoly-fomenko.com> [accessed 3 January 2023].
[178] 'A Russian Mathematician Rewrote World History — and It Is Bonkers'.
[179] 'Genghis Khan | Biography, Conquests, Achievements, & Facts | Britannica' <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Genghis-Khan> [accessed 3 January 2023].

Genghis Khan and his descendants were instead Russian.[180] In reference to Tartaria Genghis Khan or Temujin is described as the founding "father" of the Tartarian Empire.[181] This idea appears to have developed from confusion abounding from a lack of knowledge of the Mongolian Empire, the life of Genghis Khan and the historical presentation of Genghis Khan as 'white' in historical pictures.[182]

It is my view that, the reason as to why Genghis Khan is seen as a central figure in the Tartarian conspiracy is not only because many misconceptions abound regarding his life and empire especially in the West but secondly, for pseudohistorians such as Fomenko, by recasting the conquering Genghis Khan as of Russian origin it lessens the "shame" of having been conquered in the historical past. The desire on the part of proponents to lessen a perceived "shame" or weakening of position plays an important role in *conspiratorial pseudoarchaeology*.

5.3 The Tartarian Conspiracy

Earlier in this dissertation the construction and development of conspiracy theories was investigated. The following section will demonstrate the conspiratorial elements within the Tartarian theory in order to demonstrate to heritage professionals why this relatively new pseudoarchaeological idea presents such harm to our

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[180] 'Anatoly Timofeevich Fomenko Historical Revisionism', 2012 <https://www.anatoly-fomenko.com/anatoly-timofeevich-fomenko-historical-revisionism.html> [accessed 3 January 2023].
[181] Slexia, 'So It Looks like Genghis Khan Is the OG Tartar...', *R/Tartaria*, 2020 <www.reddit.com/r/Tartaria/comments/hj4s04/so_it_looks_like_genghis_khan_is_the_og_tartar/> [accessed 3 January 2023].
[182] Jon Henley, 'Why Genghis Khan Was Good for the Planet', *The Guardian*, 26 January 2011, section Environment <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2011/jan/26/genghis-khan-eco-warrior> [accessed 3 January 2023]. The image used in this Guardian article depicts a European version of Genghis rather than his traditional Mongolian or Chinese depiction.

profession as well as the general public's understanding of archaeology, heritage, and history.

As has been discussed, Conspiracy Theories put forward that world events are the result of the malevolent actions of a shadowy group.[183] In the Tartarian mythos the shadowy group behind world events is known as the New World Order or NWO. The NWO gained notoriety in the 1990s as representing ideas of a global government, viewed with fear and suspicion by those on both the political Right and Left.[184] The United Nations is often included within conspiracy theories as being the face of the NWO. For example, in the UN logo they see "peace and safety through totalitarian rule."[185] In Tartarian conspiracies the NWO represents those who manufactured the destruction of, and erasure of Tartaria.[186]

Using Robert Brotherton's definition of conspiracy theories,[187] it can be clearly demonstrated that the Tartarian mythos falls within his parameters. Regardless of the source Tartarian adherents make unverified claims at odds with mainstream history and archaeology. For example, James W. Lee in his book *One World Tartarians* claims that griffins were real animals.[188] The main point of contention within Tartarian ideas is that this advanced civilisation was destroyed in a global catastrophe, a key tenant of conspiracy theories. The focus of many Tartarian theories is that a shadowy, maleficent group is covering up Tartaria's existence to serve a malign purpose, with re-searchers representing the 'good' side bringing the truth to light. Furthermore, Tartarian theories have low standards of evidence for proof of their

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[183] Jolley, Mari, and Douglas. (2020)., Pg 3.
[184] Alasdair Spark, 'Conjuring Order: The New World Order and Conspiracy Theories of Globalization', *The Sociological Review*, suppl, 48.2 (2000), 46–62.
[185] Noel Joshua Hadley, 'The Hidden Wilderness', 2022. Pg 54.
[186] 'Queue | The One World Tartarians'.
[187] See section 2.6 for an explanation of Brotherton's definition.
[188] 'Queue | The One World Tartarians'.

ideas. They heavily rely on perceived truths such as claiming that blueprints for large construction projects do not exist or were destroyed by fire.[189] This allows adherents to Tartarian theories to not only avoid questions regarding their ideas, but also to adapt their ideas to remain relevant in a growing social media environment.

[189] ‘Queue | The One World Tartarians’.

6. A new direction – Discussions for heritage professionals and archaeologists

6.1 Why do we need to tackle pseudoarchaeology?

This dissertation has set out the nature of pseudoknowledge and the role it plays within pseudoarchaeology focusing especially on the Tartarian conspiratorial pseudoarchaeology theory. The work has covered the demarcation of pseudoarchaeology, the construction of conspiracy theories, how pseudoarchaeology and conspiracy theories overlap, social media, the Tartarian theory, and the role of earlier 19th century theories on its creation.

Pseudoarchaeology presents a number of challenges to the field of archaeology, and it is important to consider how professionals in the fields of archaeology, museums, and heritage can discuss the problems with pseudoarchaeology without fuelling their ideas and providing further ammunition to their conspiratorial ideas that the "academy" are restricting them.

Firstly, pseudoarchaeology damages the public perception of archaeology.[190] It does so by undermining the idea that archaeological information is built on facts and scientific analysis, instead framing it as an opinion equally as valid as those of its opponents.[191] While this parity of ideas may be seen as harmful to the academic profession it may also have a role in reducing the public's engagement with the field. If the general population view archaeologists as being deceitful then they are less likely to engage with schemes such as The Portable Antiquities scheme whereby metal detected objects are recorded.[192] If the public perceive archaeologists as

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[190] John Hoopes, Flint Dibble, and Carl Feagans, 'Apocalypse Not: Archaeologists Respond to Pseudoarchaeology', 23 (2023), Pg. 28.
[191] John Hoopes, Flint Dibble, and Carl Feagans, (2023), pg 28..
[192] The British Museum, Great Russell Street, and London WC1B 3DG T: +4420 73238618, 'Welcome to the Portable Antiquities Scheme Website', *The Portable Antiquities Scheme*

hiding the truth, then they are less likely to be willing to report objects they find which will have a negative impact on the historical record.

Secondly, the impact of pseudoarchaeology can be seen in how it spreads racist ideals.[193] By propagating the idea that particular cultures required outside help whether that be through aliens or precursor civilisations, in order to build their monuments or that entire cultures were wiped out and hidden from the masses, pseudoarchaeology allows harmful elements of society to justify unscrupulous acts.[194]

6.2 Better communication, better digital literacy?

Communication is vitally important in spreading the knowledge gained through the study of archaeology. Conspiratorial thinking, the bedrock of pseudoarchaeology, is part of the daily struggle in making sense of a rapidly changing world.[195] Therefore, in order for heritage professionals to combat the harms of pseudoarchaeology it is important that communication is utilised better as a tool. For example, it is not helpful to think of all those who hold conspiratorial pseudoarchaeological beliefs as “cranks” or “loons”.[196] By disparaging those who believe in pseudoarchaeology we, as professionals’ risk further alienating our potential audiences. Alienation and feelings of powerlessness can, according to Richard Hofstadter, increase susceptibility to conspiratorial beliefs.[197]

(The Portable Antiquities Scheme/ British Museum) <https://finds.org.uk/> [accessed 31 July 2023].

[193] Harrison Pates, ‘The Dangers of Pseudohistorical Conspiracy Theories’, *GNET*, 2023 <https://gnet-research.org/2023/02/15/the-dangers-of-pseudohistorical-conspiracy-theories/> [accessed 31 July 2023].

[194] Pates.

[195] Campion-Vincent. Pg., 103.

[196] Weigmann. Pg., 2.

[197] Jovan Byford, ‘Beyond Belief: The Social Psychology of Conspiracy Theories and the Study of Ideology’, in *Rhetoric, Ideology and Social Psychology* (Routledge, 2014), pp. 97–107. Pg., 100.

Archaeology has seen a dramatic shift from a primarily science-based discipline to one that encapsulated both quantitative and qualitative research.[198] However, this shift has not been totally reflected in the public's perception of the sector. The results of a survey conducted across a number of European countries found that only 26% of those surveyed view the field as a profession.[199] Such a low number perhaps represents one reason why pseudoarchaeology is so prevalent on social media. If those coming across archaeological material online do not view it as arising from the work of a profession, then they may assume that everyone has the right to decide what constitutes archaeology.

Pseudoarchaeology is not an isolated phenomenon. It sits within a wider landscape of pseudoscience and anti-rationalism.[200] Therefore, in order for the heritage profession to challenge it we must understand the wider environment in which pseudoarchaeology resides. This can be done by working alongside our colleagues in other sectors, disinformation scholars, anti-racism activists, sociologists, psychologists, and technology scholars. We are in a post-truth era one where people appear to be unequipped with the necessary skills to differentiate between what is and isn't archaeology.[201] It is up to archaeologist, museum, and heritage professionals to help equip the public, library staff, and educators to arms themselves with the appropriate tools to increase media literacy.

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[198] Christie Fender, 'Addressing the Alien in the Room: Why Public Perception Is Imperative to the Field of Archaeology', *Pathways*, 3.1 (2022), 29–42. Pg., 34
[199] Fender. (2022)., Pg., 36.
[200] N Levitt, 'The Colonization of the Past and the Pedagogy of the Future In: Fagan, GG Ed. Archaeological Fantasies: How Pseudoarchaeology Misrepresents the Past and Misleads the Public', 2006. Pg.,
[201] Bob Muckle, 'Equipping Archaeology for the Post-truth, Fake News Era', *Anthropology News*, 58.1 (2017), e164–67. Pg 164.

6.3 Methods of communication

Tartaria, the focus of this dissertation is predominantly an online phenomenon. Its ideas are spread rapidly through social media especially on TikTok. While this presents its challenges it also presents potential opportunities for communication between the public and heritage professionals. A study of how the human remains trade is discussed on TikTok found that the platform contains engaged audiences, people who want to know how and why archaeologists do what they do. [202] The researchers suggested six methods for composing videos combatting false or harmful pseudoarchaeological claims including keeping a calm and collected tone highlighting the issues in the video, providing hooks in the comments countering the narrative, using peer-to-peer learning strategies to discuss the material without providing further oxygen, where illegal acts (such as looting) are being discussed drawing attention to laws in the local jurisdiction, publish open-access research and direct TikTok users to it, and finally support fellow colleagues and students engaging on the platform in order to share knowledge.[203]

These ideas are useful to consider when producing heritage-centred content especially combating pseudoarchaeological content. While social media has been used extensively by academics in peer-to-peer networking and dissemination, it has been utilised less in public engagement.[204] However, with the rise of TikTok this has gradually begun to shift with popular public engagement profiles now doing well on the platform including Archaeodeath, Archaeowolf, and Professor Paul Maxwell.

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[202] Graham, Huffer, and Simons. Pg., 32.
[203] Graham, Huffer, and Simons. (2022). Pg., 32
[204] West. Pg 4.

Currently much more research needs to be carried out into how the public view ‘good’ and ‘bad’ archaeology in the media.[205] The majority of scholarship focused on ‘Public’ archaeology addresses community fieldwork or engagement within museums however the digital sphere has received increasing attention in publications by Dr Lorna Richardson, Timothy Clack and Marcus Britainn and Professor Howard Williams.[206] These works provide an excellent grounding for scholars looking to understand how best to engage with the public in our increasingly digital world.

It is important to consider that digital media, often seen as enabling better communication through digital, interactive, and networked forms, composes a large part of everyday life.[207] At the start of the CoVID-19 pandemic in 2021 over 40 million people in the UK owned a smart-phone, 21.6 million owned a tablet, and 30.4 million owned a desktop computer.[208] This provides the heritage sector with a large repository of potential community members if we can secure their attention in the face of increasing misinformation.

One way in which heritage professionals can tap into this resource is to understand the way in which its circular ecosystem works. Each platform available at the touch of a button should be considered as a living organism, one which interacts with both newer and older organisms alongside them.[209] For example, many of the

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[205] Tim Schadla-Hall, ‘Public Archaeology’, *European Journal of Archaeology*, 2.2 (1999), 147–58. Pg., 155.
[206] Lorna-Jane Richardson, ‘Public Archaeology in a Digital Age’, 2014.; Lorna-Jane Richardson, ‘Understanding Archaeological Authority in a Digital Context’, *Internet Archaeology*, 38, 2014.; Timothy Clack, *Archaeology and the Media* (Left Coast Press, 2007).; Howard Williams, ‘From Archaeo-Engage to Arts of Engagement: Conference to Publication’, *Public Archaeology: Arts of Engagement*, 2019, 14–35.
[207] Chiara Bonacchi and Gabriel Moshenska, ‘Critical Reflections on Digital Public Archaeology’, *Internet Archaeology*, 40, 2015. Pg., 5
[208] ‘UK Mobile Phone Statistics 2023 - Mobiles Facts and Stats Report’, *Uswitch* <https://www.uswitch.com/mobiles/studies/mobile-statistics/> [accessed 25 May 2023].
[209] Bonacchi and Moshenska. (2015)., Pg., 7.

TikTok videos on Tartaria which I came across during this dissertation directed viewers towards other platforms such as Telegram, a messaging application or Reddit, a content aggregation blogging site, where longer form discussions of their ideas could be shared.[210] As heritage professionals we need to be engaging audiences on these platforms as well as through short-form communication such as TikTok in order to highlight the education stories we can tell.

The aim of this dissertation is to elucidate why people believe in conspiracy theories and more importantly *conspiratorial pseudoarchaeology*. This is an important aspect of the work because in order to explain to the public why these ideas are damaging, we must understand why they are believable.[211] Once we understand why certain ideas are popular despite the prevailing evidence against them, we can begin to shape how we converse with the public. We can then help the public feel confident in identifying pseudoarchaeology when it presents itself.[212]

There have been numerous suggestions of how best we can arm the public with the tools they need. In Andre Costopoulos' guide he lays out a number of ideas for archaeologists to consider which I will summarise here:

Firstly, we should ask questions rather than present counterclaims when faced with pseudoarchaeological statements. This should be done in such a way that it avoids antagonising the interested parties, especially when asked by a well-meaning member of the public [Holly's man on the plane[213]]. Secondly, we should

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[210] 'Telegram FAQ', *Telegram* <https://telegram.org/faq#q-what-is-telegram-what-do-i-do-here> [accessed 25 May 2023]. And 'Faq - Reddit.Com', *Reddit* <https://www.reddit.com/wiki/faq/> [accessed 25 May 2023].
[211] Andre Costopoulos, 'Finally Getting to the Practical Part of the Practical Guide to Addressing Pseudoarchaeology', *ArcheoThoughts*, 2020 <https://archeothoughts.wordpress.com/2020/09/30/finally-getting-to-the-practical-part-of-the-practical-guide-to-addressing-pseudoarchaeology/> [accessed 12 August 2023].
[212] *Ibid*
[213] Donald H Holly, 'Talking to the Guy on the Airplane', *American Antiquity*, 80.3 (2015), 615–17.

frame our statements as ones of high or low probability, not black and white concrete explanations and understand, as much as we may lament it, that our perception of archaeology and that of the public may not be well-aligned at all times. Finally, we should focus on the questions the public come to us with especially when they are seeking answers on pseudoarchaeology theories, we should evaluate these claims and explain our workings or how we know what we know. This should be done while being honest as to why we may not have all the answers rather than asserting we are the fonts of all knowledge; the most common accusation levelled at archaeologists by pseudoarchaeologists.[214]

There are a number of questions which both archaeologists and the public should consider when assessing any claim, be that pseudoarchaeological or scientific. Kenneth Feder sets them out as such:

1. Where is the particular claim or discovery present? In a respected journal or institution or on an anonymous website or YouTube
2. Who is the one making the claim? Are they trained in a specific field such as archaeology and is it this field they are commenting on or are they making a claim on particle physics?
3. How do they know what they know? Have they explained how they have reached their conclusions or is it from gut-feeling?
4. Have other experts been involved in the discovery or reviewed its results? This can be through official publications, quotes in press-releases or on social media
5. Are their other, verifiable examples or is the discovery a unique one-off?

[214] Costopoulos.

6. Is there enough information for you, as the reader to make a judgement or are there further questions that need answering?[215]

All of these questions should be considered when discussing pseudoarchaeological claims with members of the public and especially when teaching future archaeologists in classrooms. They are important not only for understanding pseudoarchaeology but also for understanding any claims made in print, on social media, or on TV.

The new battleground of social media presents a number of challenges to archaeologists and science educators as explored earlier in this work, but it also presents a number of potential benefits if it can be utilised successfully. Not only does social media, but especially short form content such as TikTok allow archaeologists to quickly engage with the public on particular topics (e.g., new discoveries) it also allows them to begin plugging the gap in the public's knowledge of our sector. This gap filling is vital if we are to stop pseudoarchaeologists from filling that void with their own ideas. However, it is still not entirely clear where the responsibility for tackling misinformation online sits.[216]

In my opinion, while the social media giants have a definite role in guarding against misinformation and the spread of *conspiratorial pseudoarchaeology*, I do not believe that as archaeologists we should sit on the side-lines and wait for official guidance. We should be filling the social media sphere with good, evidenced based content and where necessary responding directly to pseudoarchaeological content. This will weaken the arguments from prevalent pseudoarchaeologists that the

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[215] Kenneth L. Feder, *Frauds, Myths, and Mysteries: Science and Pseudoscience in Archaeology*, Seventh (McGraw-Hill Education (UK), 2011). Pg xviii.
[216] Lisa Soetekouw and Spyros Angelopoulos, 'Digital Resilience Through Training Protocols: Learning To Identify Fake News On Social Media', *Information Systems Frontiers*, 2022 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-021-10240-7>.

“establishment” is unwilling to engage and hopefully, stop the public from falling into the conspiracy rabbit hole.

7. Conclusion

Pseudoarchaeology has a long and disreputable past. Its impact remains felt today through popular TV shows, publications, and websites. The aim of this dissertation was to answer four key questions: exploring the history of pseudoarchaeology and its role in society and identity, the prevalence of pseudoarchaeology on social media and whether it has a circular ecosystem, how the heritage profession can address the challenges of pseudoarchaeology and ask whether social media can play a role in disseminating archaeological knowledge. At its conclusion this dissertation hopes to have met the following three objectives: (1) outlining the history of specific pseudoarchaeological claims and their influence on newer ideas of Tartaria, (2) highlighting the role of social media in the spread of new pseudoarchaeological thoughts, and most importantly (3) provide a framework for heritage professionals to help combat the harms pseudoarchaeology presents.

In order to investigate the research questions posed by this dissertation I sought to undertake a novel approach to investigating pseudoarchaeology. By interrogating TikTok, a platform home to numerous pseudoarchaeological content creators, I sought to demonstrate the methods utilised in the spread of these ideas. While they present unique challenges to the heritage profession it is also my view that social media platforms particularly those with short-form content can also present unique benefits to heritage professionals if used correctly. Unfortunately, archaeologists and museum professionals cannot talk to every visitor to their dig or museum, but through social media they can engage directly with their target audience whether through imagery, text, or video. Furthermore, due to the nature of social media where content can be shared beyond the sphere of its initial target the reach of these organisations can be extended much wider than is traditional.

The work presented in my dissertation demonstrates how TikTok can be used to spread false information relying on the short-form content and the viewers potential lack of digital literacy. The video shown in my dissertation made claims about a real city tying it to the Tartarian pseudoarchaeological theory. However, as I showed, only a simple five-minute search of Google using Google Len's reverse image functionality allowed me to not only locate the images used in the original video but more importantly find the historical context surrounding their construction. The lack of use of digital analytical tools such as Google Lens to corroborate claims made in pseudoarchaeological videos allows for these claims to slip between the cracks and be spread further amongst the public. A key direction heritage professionals, especially those working in public outreach and education, should take is to strengthen the digital literacy of those they engage with. This can be as simple as showing students how to fact-check claims using readily available tools. This should be taught in tandem to teaching the scientific method.

It is my hope that by focusing on how pseudoarchaeological thought imitates the same characteristics as those found in conspiracy theories it can allow heritage professionals to better understand not only the methodology of how they spread but also how they allow believers to form strong relational bonds between fellow conspiracy theories. Scholars in both sociology and psychology have focused for decades on what allows a person to believe in conspiracy theories. The same reasons found as to why people believe in conspiracy theories such as a need to reduce uncertainty, to restore meaning to an unclear world, and to gain control over unexpected or threatening events can also be found in the reasons people support pseudoarchaeology. It is for this reason that I developed my own term of *Conspiratorial Pseudoarchaeology*. While I hope to have avoided the same issues

with demarcation laid out in this dissertation, I do believe that a definition of the pseudoarchaeological theories that specifically draw on conspiratorial thinking is important. By defining the methods used in conspiratorial pseudoarchaeology it is hoped to provide a framework from which heritage professionals and the public can identify fraudulent and conspiratorial claims.

Finally, I believe that this dissertation should serve as a rallying point for other heritage professionals and students to combat the harm presented by pseudoarchaeology. This work has built on the efforts of earlier scholars both in the 20th century and those who continue to work on, communicate about, and challenge pseudoarchaeological harms.

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274. Hugo Drochon, ‘Who Believes in Conspiracy Theories in Great Britain and Europe’, *Conspiracy Theories and the People Who Believe Them*, 2018, 337–46;

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279. Maggie Koerth-Baker, ‘Why Rational People Buy into Conspiracy Theories’, *The New York Times Magazine*, 21 (2013);

280. Michael Shermer, ‘Why Smart People Believe Weird Things’, *Skeptic (Altadena, CA)*, 2003, 62–73.

Appendices

Appendix A – Transcription of a pseudoarchaeological YouTube video.

The Great Tartarian Empire – Youtube video by “Anthropologist” Robert Sepehr
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7cwDR0YYek

There's been a lot of hype about Tartaria lately and what some are claiming is an effort to hide a significant chapter of human history. Up until the late 18th century the great empire of Tartaria was a vast country located in Northern and Central Asia stretching eastward from the Caspian Sea and from the Ural mountains to the Pacific Ocean. It had worldwide influence and once was ruled by an Aryan nobility. Here we see a modern interpretation of Genghis Khan, yet in reality Genghis had red hair and either green or blue eyes, the same way that the tall slender blue-eyed blonde-haired Aryan Buddha have been transformed in modern times into a fat or sometimes rather obese East Asian man. Painted on the walls of ancient Buddhist caves we can see the true origins of the ancient cultures of China, Iran, India, where blonde and red headed monks wear Chinese silk with Persian patterns complete with a dot on their forehead. [Video introduces an out of context interview showing a presenter highlighting these supposed Aryan features on a cave painting] “see the red and red hair it's a shame that these figures have all been defaced by people of other faiths at some time in the past but it's still it's very easy to see what they look like, and we can tell where they were just got the red hair parted in the middle”
These Silk Road Aryans left mummies dating back 4000 years as well as swastikas predating Buddha by millennia [In-screen image of a mummy and a newspaper quote shown] an predating any E Asians in China by at least 1000 years. While some associate the swastika with Hitler I would like to point out that this Russian swastika [1917 banknote] from before Hitler's time, before World War Two shows the swastika in the exact same position. That said this is a United States Boeing aircraft with a swastika painted on the side. It seems to me that the evil connotation was not from Hitler but from the winners of World War Two who seemed to have something to hide. [Another video is jumped to discussing Genghis Khan] “You know that Genghis Khan actually came from the clan of the so-called black tartars let's go back and try to figure out where the people who became the tartars came from. this is the great step around 300 BC for the tartars the step is as much of a civilizational cradle as the Mediterranean Sea is for Europeans but if the Mediterranean Sea makes you think of olives, vineyards, and wooden ships then the great step should provoke visions of horses, pastures and yurts. The Chinese divided the tartars into three types of Tartarars; white Tartars; farmers living immediately beyond the Great Wall of China, black tartars; nomads living in present day Mongolia, and wild tartar; living without Khans in the forests of South Siberia governed by chiefs and shamans. These are the ancestral lands of Genghis Khan. Genghis Khan came from the black tartars he called his dynasty the Mongols or the great moguls they lacked the stereotypical ethnic features that you think of today Genghis Khan himself was tall, red haired and blue eyed, a typical European in 25 years Genghis Khan and 100,000

soldiers conquered more lands and peoples than all the Roman emperors in 400 years.
[Linked to another video] There was a race of people known as tartarians which many historians know little about. Some speculate that they were once a great and sophisticated empire. Old maps clearly identified Tartary or great Tartary as a huge land mass, its people were described as Turkic an ethno-linguistic culture found throughout Asia, North Africa, and parts of Europe. Tartary had its own flag, their own kings, and their own language. Maybe these tartarians were related to the original 3-dimensional Aryans who appeared during the age of Aries, descendants of some of those who survived the cataclysm which wiped out Atlantis. This is interesting because in Herodotus's histories he talks about a people called attarians, could he be referring to that Tartarians, possibly descendants of the Atlanteans?
[Another linked video] Encyclopaedia.com states that after the Bolshevik revolution Tartars were targeted for extermination in the 1920s, most total leaders and intellectuals who wanted independence were eliminated through execution or exile. This policy against the tartars continued to until the early 1950s. It is important to point out as the victors write the history books, they occasionally try to eliminate important aspects which they see as counterproductive to their own importance. In 1999 a CIA document was released into the public domain written in 1957, suggesting that the Soviet government set out to erase certain aspects of Tartar in history from the official record essentially rewriting history to suit their agenda and modern narrative when considering that the Bolshevik revolution was partly financed by the international financial cartel it opens up a whole avenue of historical deceit. After the German national socialists came to power in 1933 a strong relationship developed between themselves and the Iranian Shah. A great deal of trade took place between the two countries with almost 50% of Iran's overall trade being with Germany. The Iranian people were immune to the German racial Nuremberg laws because of their Aryan heritage. in 1935 the shah asked the international community to refer to the country as Iran land of Aryans instead of its western adopted name of Persia. In 1939 Germany gave the Iranians a library of over 7500 books relating to German science and the close relationship between the two Aryan cultures because of these close ties and volume of trade taking place between Iran and Germany the allies put pressure on the shah to scale down his dealings with the axis powers. Trying to keep all sides happy the shah promoted his country as neutral. Unconvinced of this the allies invaded on the 25th of August 1941 in a joint Anglo Soviet attack on Iran three weeks later the Shah and any pro German government officials were asked to resign the shah's son replaced him as head of state allowing the allies control of the country's oil fields. Between the 28th of November and the 1st of December 1943, the Tehran conference took place the first time the big three allied leaders had met together during the war to discuss future strategy concerning a second front against Germany and also the need to recognise Iran as an independent country. Of all the places in the world to hold a conference discussing the defeat of the German Nordic Aryans one can't help but feel that Tehran in the heart of the land of Aryan was not just a random coincidence. Although the United nations debate on the race issue and its origins was settled in 1950 concluding we are all from the same species and as Europe and western sovereign nations undergo the controlled demolition of its individual sovereign nations one can't help but speculate as to who will next be eliminated from the history books.

Appendix B – Core Framework Texts

A number of key texts have been analysed in order to create a framework, through which this dissertation seeks to investigate the role of pseudoarchaeology in the formation of online communities. These keys texts draw on the fields of archaeology, heritage, psychology, and sociology in order to draw together a cross-disciplinary approach.

The core sources utilised within this dissertation have allowed the author to draw together and support his thoughts as to the nature of pseudoarchaeology, pseudoheritage, pseudohistory and the role they play in identify formation, especially in regard to online communities. In doing so, the author has drawn upon scholarly texts focusing on the belief in and formation of conspiracy theories. This approach was decided on due to the similarities which the author felt pseudoarchaeology and conspiracy theories share including their formative processes, their adherents, and the harm to which both the adherents and theories can lead.

Angelo Fasce (2019) Are Pseudosciences Like Seagulls? A Discriminant Metacriterion Facilitates the Solution of the Demarcation Problem, International Studies in the Philosophy of Science, 32:3-4, 155-175, DOI: 10.1080/02698595.2020.1767891:

Author Angelo Frasce aimed to set out a philosophical framework that can help to separate science from pseudoscience. He highlights the traditional issues found by scholars attempting to demarcate pseudoscience.[217] He begins by explaining previous models of demarcation, focusing on two models: Gruenberger (1962) and Pigliucci (2013). This work was chosen as a key text for this dissertation as it is hoped that by building on previous work a framework can be built that avoids prior pitfalls and allows the heritage industry to gain a better

[217] Fasce. Pg 155

understanding of pseudoarchaeology and how to combat it. In his explanation of gradualist demarcation Frasce sets out how an assumption is made that science and pseudoscience lay upon a scale, one in which reliable science occupies one end and unreliable pseudoscience the other.[218]

Gruenberger (1962) is the first framework offered as a comparative lens through which to view the science versus pseudoscience problem. He laid out thirteen criterion by which a reader can differentiate science from pseudoscience; Verifiability, Predictability, Controlled experiments, Occam's Razor, Fruitfulness, Authority, Ability to communicate, Humility, open-mindedness, underrated genius, paranoia, excessive esteem of one's ideas, and statistics compulsion.[219] Each of these values were assigned a score by which the reader could assess a scientific claim against a pseudoscientific one. However, Fasce points out that both the criterion and the numerical values assigned to them are arbitrary at best, a point supported by Gruenberger.[220] This is important to reflect on as creating a framework within this dissertation could also be levelled with similar criticisms; that it is arbitrary and based on the author's own views rather than objective criterion. However, against this potential criticism this author would counter that, if heritage professionals are not able or willing to combat pseudoscience which heavily relay on arbitrary and subjective views, with little qualms about it, then the pseudoarchaeologists are bound to win.

The second framework that Frasce analyses is that of Pigliucci (2013). This demarcation framework builds on the concept of Wittgensteinian *Family Resemblance.*[221] Pigliucci's conception continues to build on the idea of a science to pseudoscience spectrum as did the earlier Gruenberg.[222] Primarily, Pigliucci sets out two criteria by which science and pseudoscience should be judged; theoretical understanding and empirical knowledge.[223]

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[218] Fasce. (2019), pg. 156.
[219] Fasce. (2019), pg. 156.
[220] Fasce. *Ibid.*
[221] Fasce. (2019), pg. 157.
[222] Fasce. (2019), pg. 157.
[223] Fasce. (2019), pg. 158.

According to Frasce this demarcation conception has its own flaws that limit its effectiveness in separating science from pseudoscience.[224] Frasce's paper intends to build from these two conceptual ideas moving towards a more robust demarcation concept for scholars to utilise. He points out that previous attempts at demarcating science from pseudoscience begins at the false assumption that they exist on the same level, subject to qualitative differences.[225] He further argues that science and pseudoscience can be classified as different classes even if one accepts that they lay within a spectrum.[226] It is also important to note that, as Frasce points out, the demarcation of pseudoscience has an important impact on the public perception of science; justifying how it is presented in disinformation policy, social media algorithms, public health, professional ethics, education etc.[227] It is for this reason that this dissertation seeks to create its own framework for the identification of pseudohistory, pseudoarchaeology and pseudoheritage to give heritage professionals, educators and politicians the tools and understanding to face pseudoarchaeological conspiracies.

It is often argued that pseudoarchaeology is nothing more than harmless entertainment, supported by its popularity on the History Channel for example.[228] However, Frasce argues that the public acceptance of pseudoscience could involve harmful social consequences, as was the case of Lysenkoism[229], 'scientific' racism[230] [Description in footnote], and social Darwinism.[231] Threatening key issues within the public sphere, such as food, education health, and justice.

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[224] Fasce. (2019), *Ibid*
[225] Fasce. (2019), pg. 161.
[226] Fasce.(2019), pg. 161.
[227] Fasce.(2019), pg. 164.
[228] According to ParrotAnalytics Ancient Aliens is ranked 98.5% higher than any other 'Reality' TV programme in the United States. https://tv.parrotanalytics.com/US/ancient-aliens-history [Accessed 30/10/2022 @ 09:24].
[229] Lysenkoism was the pseudo-scientific belief that environmental influences were heritable through cells. The concept was applied through the USSR in the 1930s and 1940s with disastrous, real world consequences. 'The Revival of Lysenkoism in Russia and Epigenetics | Elsevier Enhanced Reader' <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2017.07.045>. [Accessed 30/10/2022].
[230] Using science to attempt to falsely explain perceived differences between different groups of people. For an explanation of why this is problematic see: https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/disturbing-resilience-scientific-racism-180972243/. [Accessed 30/10/2022].
[231] This concept attempted to argue, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries, that society was governed by the same Darwinian laws as those which governed natural selection in plants and animals. It was used as justification for racist, colonialist and imperialist policies with the 'successes' of the colonial powers being justified based on the inherent 'weaknesses' found in those they conquered. https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-Darwinism [Accessed 30/10/2022]

Accordingly, being characterised as pseudoscience has dire implications, particularly for researchers.[232] The desire for proponents to avoid the label of pseudoarchaeology draws them to build on the tenants of science, presenting themselves with an air of authority. It is vital therefore that scholars investigating pseudoarchaeology are able to clearly elucidate how science and pseudoscience differs to the public because without a clear framework and communication of the difference, it will be difficult to reduce the harm which these theories can cause.

According to Frasce there is a tacit consensus about what is scientific and what is pseudoscientific, so people with the adequate motivational state can normally differentiate between both.[233] However, it is extremely difficult to argue what constitutes an "adequate motivational state", members of the public coming across pseudoarchaeology theories online and on popular TV shows will often be encountering these with entertainment in mind meaning that they may not be thinking that they need to differentiate between science and pseudoscience. This is an even more prevalent issue when these theories are presented with an air of authority, presented by "experts", and shown on platforms which are deemed to be trustworthy such as the main social media publishers and mainstream TV channels.

Frasce presents a clear demarcated philosophical approach defining pseudoscience. Within his paper he argues that pseudoscience is regarded as:

(1) A sharp, greatly restricted category defined by radical epistemic negligence's.

(2) An independent class that must be defined by its distinctive characteristics.

Consequently, due to (1) and (2), pseudoscience cannot be negatively defined solely as a by-product of the definition of science. Instead, it must be defined by its own distinctive characteristics, recognised by means of the following question: what characteristics does pseudoscience have that science and other types of non-science do not?[234] He draws an important conclusion that pseudoscience cannot be solely compared as "false science" but instead must be treated as a distinctive class within its own right.

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[232] Fasce. (2019), pg. 164.
[233] Fasce. (2019), pg. 165.
[234] Fasce. (2019), pg. 165.

His discriminant metacriterion, drawing on his critical analysis of the gradualist approach and aiming to avoid the usual shortcomings of demarcating projects regards pseudoscience as an extreme label; characterised by its inherent flaws and mimicry of authoritative science.[235] It is the aim of this investigation to build on the theoretical approach presented in Frasce's text, further supported by other elements found within philosophical, sociological, psychological and heritage disciplines in order to clearly demarcate pseudoarchaeology, pseudoheritage and pseudohistory from their mainstream opposites.

Conspiracy theories in online environments: An interdisciplinary literature review and agenda for future research. Daniela Mahl , Mike S. Schäfer and Jing Zeng University of Zurich, Switzerland.

Mahl et al present an interdisciplinary systematic literature review, carried out over thirteen years, analysing current research on conspiratorial theorising online, in order to bridge disciplinary boundaries, identify foci of analysis and research gaps. The impetus behind their research is the growing research into conspiracy theories in digital media.[236] Their findings show that the majority of studies lack a definition of conspiracy theories and fail to conceptually delineate conspiracy theories from other forms of deceptive content. They also discovered that although the field employs a variety of methodologies, most studies focused on individual, "mainstream"
social media platforms, "Western" countries, English-language communication, and single conspiracy theories. They aimed to use their results to remedy conceptual and empirical shortcomings and provide suggestions for future research.[237]

This text was chosen as it shared a similar desirable outcome to the key outcome sought by this dissertation; that of providing a cross-disciplinary framework through which conspiracy

[235] Fasce. (2019), pg. 169.
[236] Daniela Mahl, Mike S Schäfer, and Jing Zeng, 'Conspiracy Theories in Online Environments: An Interdisciplinary Literature Review and Agenda for Future Research', *New Media & Society*, 2022, 14614448221075760. Pg 1.
[237] Mahl, Schäfer, and Zeng. (2022), pg 1.

theories could be dealt with in online social media environments. While this text focuses specifically on conspiracy theories online, it is the argument within this dissertation that Pseudoarchaeological theories share the same constructive elements as conspiracy theories meaning that a focus on the literature surrounding the conspiracy theory topic was going to prove beneficial to answering the research questions being considered within the text.

Mahl et al define conspiracy theories as:

> "alternative explanations of historical or ongoing events claiming that people or groups with sinister intentions are engaged in conspiratorial plotting."[238]

As well as defining what constitutes a conspiracy theory Mahl et al also set out how far conspiracy theories have permeated modern culture; appearing in online communication (Wood and Douglas, 2015), news media coverage (Waisbord, 2018), popular culture (Bell and Bennion-Nixon, 2000), and political rhetoric (Mede and Sch.fer, 2020), among other fields.[239] This definition as well as how prevalent conspiracy theories are in popular culture exactly mirrors how prevalent pseudoarchaeology has become, especially in the last few decades. This makes this text a core element of the investigation into pseudoarchaeology in online communities.

As part of the investigation into pseudoarchaeological theories, particularly through the lens of the Tartarian and Mudflood phenomenon, it will be important to draw on pre-existing scholarship. However, as these theories and the methods through which they are spread is relatively novel, there is little available research that specifically addresses them. Therefore, drawing on scholarship from other disciplines such as sociology and psychology will be increasingly important and, it is hoped, bring a novel approach to the study of pseudoarchaeology.

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[238] Mahl, Schäfer, and Zeng. (2022), pg. 2.
[239] Mahl, Schäfer, and Zeng. (2022), pg. 2.

Mahl et al argue that the increased use of digital technologies has increased how visible conspiracy theories have become, mainly through the ability of social media platforms to circumvent traditional guardians of knowledge such as academics and the journals they write in.[240] This is clearly also a symptom of pseudoarchaeological theories. Since the publication of Chariot of the Gods in the 1960s the popularity of Ancient Alien Theories has spread rapidly, increasing dramatically with the advent of social media. These theories have also mirrored conspiracy theories in that they have permeated popular culture, news stories, and even the presentations of politicians. Furthermore, Mahl et al point out that the increased visibility of conspiracy theories [and thus pseudoarchaeological theories] has allowed communities to emerge and grow overtime. In turn, the increased visibility of such content encourages more individuals to publicly share their support and to connect with like-minded people.[241] This is a key tenant of this dissertation arguing that the popularity of pseudoarchaeological theories on social media especially when it comes to TikTok has led to an increase in online communities sharing, discussing, and confirming pseudoarchaeological ideas. Both conspiracy theories and pseudoarchaeological theories share elements of discourse and as such can and should be investigated along similar cross-disciplinary lines. Furthermore, the nature of social media means that circular ecosystems of knowledge reinforce and spread these theories beyond their original online communities.

There are two key strands which both Mahl et al and this dissertation focus on in regard to conspiracy theory research: studies analysing why people hold conspiracy beliefs and how digital media affect such beliefs (e.g. Allington et al., 2020; Mancosu and Vegetti, 2020), and on the other hand, studies interrogating how conspiracy theories are communicated online.[242] Beyond this, Mahl et al points out how conspiracy theories transverse a number of disciplines including health, medicine, the environment and cultural events.[243] Archaeology and cultural heritage form a key component of the natural and built environment, and therefore the

[240] Mahl, Schäfer, and Zeng.(2022), pg. 3.
[241] Mahl, Schäfer, and Zeng. (2022), pg. 2.
[242] Mahl, Schäfer, and Zeng.(2022), pg. 3.
[243] Mahl, Schäfer, and Zeng. (2022), *Ibid*.

conspiratorial nature of pseudoarchaeology and pseudoheritage can have damaging impacts on its enjoyment for the public.

Mahl et al also discuss how varied the definitions of what constitutes a conspiracy theory can be, varying from the epistemological definition defining their status as 'stigmatized' or 'deviant' knowledge, to focusing on the internal content of a conspiracy theory, to defining the emerging context surrounding these theories.[244] It is this broad definitional church which conspiracy theories occupy which it shares with pseudoarchaeology, a school of thought with just as broad a definition. It is the aim of this investigation to further define pseudoarchaeology, but rather than add another definition to the already teeming pool of ideas, it is hoped that it will provide a framework through which the varied theories can be analysed systematically.

Mahl et al has also helped to shape the thought process behind how to research the topic under investigation in this definition. For example, for their literature review Mahl et al used the database Scopus, one of the most comprehensive scholarly databases covering a wide range of disciplines. This database avoids the vast inclusivity of Google Scholar which includes non-peer reviewed works such as undergraduate works.[245] (pg 4). Google Scholar had been used extensively in the preparation for this dissertation, however Mahl et al's paper presented an alternative source of information which could be utilised to draw out further papers. Unfortunately, one limitation of Scopus is that it is a subscription service currently unavailable to the author. Placing scholarship behind a paywall is one factor playing a role in the popularity of pseudoscience and pseudoarchaeology as often, these theories are widely and freely available. Alongside their methodological statement, it is the results of their literature review which drew the most interest for this dissertation. They noted that within their study there was a sharp, 180% rise in scholarly interest in online conspiracy theories since 2020.[246] It may be considered worthwhile comparing this result with the study of pseudoarchaeological theories within the same period and whether a similar increase is apparent. Importantly, out of their sample of 148 articles studying

[244] Mahl, Schäfer, and Zeng. (2022), pg. 3.
[245] Mahl, Schäfer, and Zeng.(2022), pg. 4.
[246] Mahl, Schäfer, and Zeng. (2022), pg. 6.

online conspiracies only 12 articles were derived from the arts & humanities sector, with 5 of these studies having been produced in 2020.[247] This relatively low number of articles suggests that conspiracy theories are not an area given much attention within the humanities. A comparative sample looking at pseudoarchaeology would be beneficial to this study, identifying whether this subject area is similarly overlooked within the discipline or not. One of the results of Mahl et al's study is that within the sampled articles over 70% of articles failed to differentiate between conspiracy theories, misinformation, disinformation, rumours, or fake news.[248] It will be important within this study, when addressing the different terms found within pseudoarchaeology, pseudoheritage and pseudohistory to ensure that clear and delineated definitions are presented in order to avoid further blurring the distinction between these three interlinked but epistemologically separate entities.

In regard to the study of social media platforms, Mahl et al demonstrated that 70% of the studies in their sample focused on social media platforms with the major publishers analysed by scholars being Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.[249]

Therefore, this dissertation is taking a more novel approach focusing on the relatively new platform of TikTok while also analysing results from instant messaging platforms such as Telegram and platforms such as Reddit. Both Reddit and instant messaging platforms were found to have been analysed in scholarship by Mahl et al, however they only formed a low percentage of the sample with instant messengers forming only 2.8% and Reddit 6.2%.[250] This suggests that either these platforms are not studied due to academic unfamiliarity with the platforms, or because of the more widespread popularity and long-term existence of platforms such as Facebook or Twitter. In their concluding remarks Mahl et al urge future scholars to move away from the focus on single social media platforms, but instead to focus more on the connectivity and dynamics of the wider platform ecology.[251] It is the aim of this dissertation to

[247] Mahl, Schäfer, and Zeng. (2022), pg. 6, figure 2.
[248] Mahl, Schäfer, and Zeng. (2022), pg. 8.
[249] Mahl, Schäfer, and Zeng. (2022), pg. 11, figure 5.
[250] Mahl, Schäfer, and Zeng. (2022), pg. 11, figure 5.
[251] Mahl, Schäfer, and Zeng. (2022), pg 17.

meet this goal, focusing on how pseudoarchaeological theories are spread on social media platforms, drawing on the results of searches on TikTok, Twitter, Reddit and Telegram while focusing on the methodology behind the communicative process rather than the platforms in isolation.

Examining the Relationship Between Conspiracy Theories, Paranormal Beliefs, and Pseudoscience Acceptance Among a University Population, Lobato Et Al

In order to investigate the role social media plays within the development of pseudoarchaeological theories it is important to understand why individuals may believe in said theories. While this research has not been undertaken specifically investigating pseudoarchaeological claims, it has been undertaken with a view to understanding why individuals believe in the supernatural, in conspiracy theories and in pseudoscience. Lobato et al seek in their article to offer a rationale for more closely investigating these three areas of belief.[252] Initially the article offers a definition for what Lobato et al call *Epistemically unwarranted* beliefs. Their definition builds on ideas of *Epistemic Warrant* in philosophy of science literature, stating that often conspiracy theories, paranormal beliefs and pseudoscience fail to meet the necessary evidence criteria required.[253] Pseudoarchaeology, pseudoheritage and pseudohistory will often draw on similar epistemic arguments as those found in conspiracy theories such as a shadowy cabal hiding the 'truth' and some pseudoarchaeological theories can also include elements of paranormal belief such as the idea that megalithic stones were moved through the help of giants or

[252] Lobato and others. Pg. 617.
[253] Lobato and others. (2014), pg. 618.

telekinesis. Therefore, Lobato et al's work will prove beneficial in studying pseudoarchaeological theories and forming a framework for heritage professionals to utilise. It is vital that a cross-disciplinary approach is taken when examining pseudoarchaeology due to its tendency to cross disciplinary boundaries.
Lobato et al further argue that all three of the epistemically unwarranted beliefs looked at in their study share similar rhetorical strategies used by supporters to defend their claims.[254]

The study undertaken by Lobato et al consisted of a novel questionnaire with 480 undergraduate students used as participants.[255] Four elements were included within the study in order to understand whether there was a correlation between beliefs in pseudoscience, conspiracy theories and paranormal beliefs; *Need for Cognition*, *Desirability of Control*, *Mini-IPIP*, and *Core Knowledge Confusion*.[256]
The results of the questionnaire suggested that there was a moderate to strong positive correlation between the three epistemically unwarranted beliefs. It was argued that the endorsement of one belief tended to mean the endorsement of the other two.[257] Furthermore, the study suggests that although superficially different paranormal beliefs, conspiracy theories and pseudoscience share an underlying structure.[258] This result is of interest to this dissertation because due to the epistemic similarities shared between conspiracy theories, paranormal beliefs, pseudoscience and those of pseudoarchaeology, pseudoheritage and pseudohistory means that there is a potential for believers in pseudoarchaeology to also believe in the paranormal and conspiracy theories, which can also feed into the

[254] Lobato and others. (2014), Pg. 618
[255] Lobato and others. (2014), Pg. 619.
[256] Lobato and others. (2014), Pg. 619.
[257] Lobato and others. (2014), *Ibid.*
[258] Lobato and others. (2014), Pg. 623.

pseudoarchaeological theories they hold as valid. However, it is important to note that the sample studied in the questionnaire consisted of undergraduate students and therefore, the accuracy of its results across a wider population may not be clear.[259]

Bunkum, Flim-Flam and Quackery: Pseudoscience as a Philosophical Problem by Andrew Lugg

In Andrew Lugg's article he seeks to address Pseudoscience as a philosophical problem as he argues that through the lens of pseudoscience scientists can better understand science, both its successes and its failures.[260] His article focuses on seven main discussion points; *Pseudoscientific Attitudes*, *Pseudoscientific theories*, *Demarcationism and Retrospectivism rejected, Pseudoscientific theory and fallacious arguments, Pseudoscientific hypotheses and therapies,* and finally *Pseudoscientific practices.*

Firstly, Lugg explores the idea of differing attitudes between scientists and pseudoscientists stating that while one is open-minded, the other closed, one can handle criticism objectively, the other takes it as a personal attack.[261] This idea will be explored later in the dissertation, as it is the view of this author having drawn on literature from psychology, archaeology and sociology that a 'simple' science against pseudoscience demarcation is not the most beneficial means of exploring pseudoarchaeological topics. Interestingly, Lugg does point out that while pseudoscientists can be characterised by particular behaviours, those same

[259] Lobato and others. (2014), Pg. 623.
[260] Andrew Lugg, 'Bunkum, Flim-Flam and Quackery: Pseudoscience as a Philosophical Problem', *Dialectica*, 41.3. Pg. 221.
[261] Andrew Lugg. (1987), Pg. 222.

behaviours can also be demonstrated by scientists.[262] It is important that heritage professionals understand how the profession can also fall foul of pseudoarchaeological behaviours.

Lugg's article is important for the study of this dissertation as he seeks to address the history of previous attempts at demarcating science and pseudoscience. Additionally, he draws attention to the fact that previous attempts at demarcation have encountered problems due to the nature of both science and pseudoscience. Aspects demarcating science such as verifiability cannot be universally applied to all of science while pseudoscience does contain some verifiable elements.[263] Moreover, Lugg discusses how where a pseudoscience theory cannot be criticised as structurally unsound, they can instead be criticised based on the mechanisms by which proponents defend them. As an example, Lugg provides the case of believers in UFOs bringing forth new examples when old UFO case studies are proved to be problematic.[264] This is an important consideration to remember when dealing with pseudoarchaeological theories as proponents will employ similar tactics when their evidence or theories are debunked.

Finally, Lugg draws an important conclusion which will be pertinent to this dissertation being that if pseudoscience is viewed as a body of practices rather than doctrine, then it will be less surprising when they are difficult to dislodge from the imaginations of their proponents.[265]

Pseudoarchaeology: The concept and its limitations, Robin Derricourt

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[262] Andrew Lugg. (1987), Pg. 222.
[263] Andrew Lugg. (1987), Pg. 224.
[264] Andrew Lugg. (1987), Pg. 227.
[265]Andrew Lugg. (1987), Pg. 229.

Robin Derricourt proposes in their article in the journal Antiquity a number of dilemmas faced by those discussing pseudoarchaeology and pseudohistory. They argue that the binary demarcation between scholarly science and the falsehood of pseudoarchaeology presents a number of problems.[266] Again, it is pointed out in Derricourts' article that some of the criterion of pseudoarchaeology can be levelled at those within the heritage profession.[267] Derricourt further points out that the appeal of pseudoarchaeology is within its apparent certainty when making claims within the realms of prehistory.[268] It is important to consider why an appeal to certainty is important in the transmission and development of pseudoarchaeology, pseudohistory and pseudoheritage theories because on social media platforms it is easier for simple answers to be provided compared to the often complex and open-ended answers provided by heritage professionals, which require longer forms of discussion. Derricourt also draws attention to an aspect of the popularity of pseudoarchaeology, a phenomenon they have named *pseudo-pseudoarchaeology*, the idea that popular documentaries will draw on the appeal of pseudoarchaeology with titles such as "legend of the Sphinx" in order to draw in viewers.[269]

It is the hope of this dissertation to provide an alternative framework for heritage professionals to use when engaging with pseudoarchaeological topics and proponents. As will be explored further in this work, the common approach to engagement is either to ignore or to react with disbelief, annoyance or frustration. Derricourt points out a problem which is often used as support for not engaging with pseudoarchaeology, that by doing so, archaeologists run the risk of further spreading

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[266] Robin Derricourt, 'Pseudoarchaeology: The Concept and Its Limitations', *Antiquity*, 86.332 (2012), 524–31. Pg. 524.
[267] Derricourt. (2012), Pg. 525.
[268] Derricourt. (2012), Pg. 525.
[269] Derricourt. (2012), *Ibid.*

the pseudoarchaeological idea or fuelling the proponents claims that they are being suppressed by 'the establishment.'[270] As well as discussing how to engage with pseudoarchaeologists, Derricourt also discusses the issues presented new communication methods such as social media.[271] Writing in 2012, Derricourt could not have envisaged the current social media ecosystem with new platforms being created in the last five years alone.

Finally, Derricourt suggests that scholars should consider adopting a new term for pseudoarchaeology, what they call *quasi-archaeology* and *quasi-history*. These terms are appropriate they propose due to the presentation of ideas appropriating the cloak of academic discourse or even seeking to upend it.[272] It is worth discussing whether pseudoarchaeology is an appropriate term to be used by heritage professionals, however, in this authors view *quasi* does not fully describe the nature of pseudoarchaeology.

The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories Karen M. Douglas, Robbie M. Sutton, and Aleksandra Cichocka

The central premise of this dissertation is that pseudoarchaeological theories behave in much the same way as conspiracy theories. Therefore, in researching this topic a number of texts from sociology and psychology have been included. Douglas et al sought to answer two questions in their work; what drives the popularity of conspiracy theories and what are the consequences in people believing them?[273]

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[270] Derricourt.(2012), Pg. 526.
[271] Derricourt. (2012), Pg. 526.
[272] Derricourt. (2012), Pg. 529.
[273] Karen M Douglas, Robbie M Sutton, and Aleksandra Cichocka, 'The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 26.6 (2017), 538–42. Pg. 538

In order to address these two questions, first conspiracy theories had to be defined. Following Goertzel (1994) Douglas et al define conspiracy theories as:

> "Explanations for important events that involve secret plots by powerful and malevolent groups."[274]

This definition clearly covers events such as John F. Kennedy's assassination, the Moon Landings, or global warming being a hoax, however it could just as easily be applied to pseudoarchaeological theories. For example, an important event could be the building of the pyramids at Giza, the secret plot being supressing the knowledge of how they were built or that they are hiding advanced technology and finally, the powerful and malevolent group can be the 'global elite', a 'shadowy cabal', 'aliens' or a particular group of people working from the shadows.

It is important to address why people find conspiracy theories and thus pseudoarchaeological theories appealing and Douglas et al have put together recent research into the psychological factors behind conspiracy theories appeal. According to their article the current research suggests that conspiracy theories are appealing when they satisfy three key psychological motives; epistemic, existential and social.[275]

It is the social function of pseudoarchaeological theories and the role they play in community identity which forms a key focus of this dissertation, and it is hoped that investigating this phenomenon through the lens of psychology will prove beneficial. According to Douglas et al there a numerous social motivations informing causal explanations which include a person's need to belong and maintain a positive

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[274] Douglas, Sutton, and Cichocka. (2017), Pg. 358.

[275] Douglas, Sutton, and Cichocka. (2017) Pg. 358. Epistemic refers to the desire for understanding, accuracy, and subjective certainty; existential refers to the desire for control and security; social relates to the desire to maintain a positive image of the self or group.

self-image and group image.[276] The need to belong to a group and to present a self-image of being in 'the know' certainly plays a key role in a person's belief in and support of pseudoarchaeological theories. As well as this, it is the authors opinion that pseudoheritage's primary purpose is creating a self and community image using misinterpreted or exaggerated historical facts. Furthermore, it is argued that conspiratorial belief is predicted by *collective* narcissism, being a belief in an in-groups' superiority paired with the belief that it is not appreciated by other groups.[277] Belief in one groups superiority over that of another group is a prime ingredient in racist ideology and it will be argued in this dissertation that pseudoarchaeological theories can both contain harmful ideas as well as lead proponents into more dangerous territory such as white supremacy, antisemitism and racism.

Research Note: Spreading Hate on TikTok Gabriel Weimann and Natalie Masri Institute for Counter Terrorism (ICT), Herzliya, Israel

As part of the investigation into pseudoarchaeology, pseudoheritage and pseudohistory being carried out within this dissertation a novel social media platform was chosen as it serves as a prominent vector for the spread of pseudoarchaeological theories. Weimann and Masri have undertaken what appears to be one of the first attempts at identifying Far-Right content on TikTok.[278] TikTok is a new, but highly popular platform with over hundreds of millions of users.[279] It is this popularity and its method of producing content which identified it as a unique and novel focus for this dissertation.

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[276] Douglas, Sutton, and Cichocka. (2017), Pg. 540.
[277] Douglas, Sutton, and Cichocka. (2017), *Ibid.* Italics present in original.
[278] Weimann and Masri. Pg 1.
[279] Weimann and Masri. (2020), pg. 2

Most importantly for the study of this dissertation, Weimann and Masri's methodology in study Far-Right content on TikTok provides a useful framework for approaching pseudoarchaeological topics on the app. They applied a systemic content analysis in order to identify Far-Right users on the app, as well as the use of specific Far-Right hashtags and content.[280] This methodology will be similar to that planned for this dissertation focusing on prominent pseudoarchaeological content producers, hashtags evoking Tartaria and Mudflood theories, and adjacent pseudoarchaeological theories such as giants, Nephilim, and Atlantis.

Anderson. (2021). Getting acquainted with social networks and apps: talking about TikTok. In Library hi tech news (Vol. 38, Issue 6, pp. 1–6). Rutgers University. https://doi.org/10.7282/00000166 Published Version: https://doi.org/10.1108/LHTN-10-2021-0077

TikTok is a novel platform for this dissertation, although it has begun to garner more research as the number of users utilising the app for reporting and research continues to increase.[281] It is for this reason that the app was chosen as a study. According to statistics available online TikTok had 656million downloads worldwide in 2021.[282] As well as primary users of the app, individuals will also be presented with TikTok through external content such as news reports or other platforms.[283] This vast audience base presents both challenges and opportunities for those combating pseudoarchaeological narratives. Andersons article seeks to elucidate recent updates to the community guidelines that TikTok have implemented in order to

[280] Weimann and Masri. (2020), Pg. 5-6.
[281] Anderson. Pg. 3.
[282] L. Ceci (2018) https://www.statista.com/topics/6077/tiktok/#dossierContents__outerWrapper [accessed 05/11/2022 @ 11:22am).
[283] Anderson. (2021), Pg. 3.

combat the spread of misinformation, particularly in regard to the COVID-19 Pandemic.[284] This article is part of a growing body of scholarship investigating TikTok with Anderson reporting that a search on google scholar returned just over 400 results in 2019, over 2500 results in 2020 and 3100 in 2021.[285] A search of google scholar by the author of this dissertation returned 24,000 results in total, with 4,730 results published since 2022.[286]

After discussing the changes made by TikTok since August 2020, Anderson goes on to explore the nature of misinformation on the platform and specifically how libraries can assist in halting its spread. For example, libraries are ideal places to teach digital literacy skills as well as traditional methods of determining authenticity.[287] It is the opinion of this dissertation that a multi-disciplinary approach needs to be undertaken in order to combat pseudoarchaeological narratives and therefore, being able to understand and learn from library and information staff is vital for archaeologists, heritage professionals and museum staff. An interesting suggestion from Anderson is that libraries need not create their own TikTok account while still engaging with trends and offering workshops on tackling misinformation and disinformation.[288] This idea could be taken forward by museum staff, teachers and outreach officers for archaeological units especially as creating and monitoring a social media platform can take up a lot of staff time that is often seen as onerous.

Sternisko, Anni and Cichocka, Aleksandra and van Bavel, Jay J. (2020) The dark side of social movements: Social identity, non-conformity, and the lure of

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[284] Anderson. (2021), Pg. 3-4.
[285] Anderson. (2021), Pg. 3
[286] https://scholar.google.com/scholar?as_ylo=2022&q=TikTok+App&hl=en&as_sdt=0,5 [accessed 05/11/2022 @ 11:46am).
[287] Anderson. (2021), Pg. 9.
[288] Anderson. (2021), *Ibid.*

conspiracy theories. Current Opinion in Psychology . ISSN 2352-250X. (In press)

In order to understand how pseudoarchaeological narratives spread on social media, why people are attracted to believing in them and the potential harms they may fuel it is important to analyse them through the lens of conspiratorial beliefs. The reason for this is that they share multiple similarities and as more research has been carried out into their motivations and appeal than that of pseudoarchaeology, it provides a stronger scholarly basis for this dissertation.

The main focus of Sternisko et al's work is that conspiracy theories – the idea that powerful people are working towards an evil or illegal goal - cause societal harm and that it is both their content and their qualities which appeal to its adherents.[289] Pseudoarchaeological narratives are often seen as light entertainment, however with 57% of Americans believing in advanced ancient civilisations and 41% believing that aliens have visited earth in the past, the risk they can present can be extensive.[290] It is hoped that in the dissertation the author will be able to showcase how these beliefs are harmful and why they are so appealing. In order to understand the appeal of pseudoarchaeological theories Sternisko et al's work into conspiracy theories will be used as part of the research framework. They argue that three main motivators push a person to believe in conspiracy theories; when people want to feel good about themselves and their communities, when they want to make sense of the world around them, and when they want to feel safe and in control.[291] Furthermore, they argue that conspiracy theories should be understood as a genre of belief

[289] Sternisko, Cichocka, and Van Bavel. Pg.4.
[290] 'Paranormal America 2018 - Chapman University Survey of American Fears'.
[291] Sternisko, Cichocka, and Van Bavel. (2020), Pg. 6.

systems defined by certain qualities.[292] This idea will be taken further in the dissertation as pseudoarchaeological theories can also be seen as a genre of beliefs, each of which have their own defining qualities and therefore draw their own unique adherents to them.

According to the research carried out by Sternisko et al conspiracy theories can be analysed through their content and their qualities. Content refers to the narrative make up of each theory such as the nefarious group behind the conspiracy while qualities refer to the structural element of the conspiracy theory such as them aiming to explain world events i.e., epistemic and counter-normative i.e., challenging agreed upon knowledge.[293] Pseudoarchaeological theories in particular often present themselves as being counter-normative, challenging the established archaeological knowledge while pseudoheritage and pseudohistory will present themselves as countering established histories, either attempting to push the known date of a community or society back into the deep past or establish an origin that counters existing knowledge. Therefore, pseudoarchaeological theories fit within the characteristics established in Sternisko et al's work.

One of the research questions which it is hoped this dissertation can answer is whether pseudoarchaeological theories are involved in forming community identities especially within online spaces. Sternisko et al believe that people are more likely to establish social identities in which belonging to a particular group forms part of a person's self-identification. As well as this, they argue that as part of these social identities an individual will hold positive beliefs about the ingroup they belong to and negative views about outgroups and that these beliefs help to attract

[292] Sternisko, Cichocka, and Van Bavel. (2020), Pg. 6.
[293] Sternisko, Cichocka, and Van Bavel. (2020), Pg. 7.

them to conspiracy theories.[294] It is argued that believing in certain conspiracy theories allow a person to enforce and legitimise their pre-existing beliefs and biases.[295] For pseudoarchaeology, pseudohistory and pseudoheritage narratives this suggestion means that if an individual holds views that European culture is superior to non-European i.e. non-white cultures, then they may be more likely to believe in theories which place the start of civilisation in Europe or with a white 'supercivilisation'.

An important factor to many conspiracy theories, as well as pseudoarchaeological theories is the belief that the individual is part of a unique group in possession of secret knowledge, challenging the status quo.[296] Believing that an individual is in possession of secret knowledge or that a proponent is able to offer secret knowledge is key to many pseudoarchaeological theories and it will be investigated within this dissertation as to whether secret knowledge is pertinent to the strength of belief in pseudoarchaeological theories.

Finally, it is important to remember that each of the motives and qualities analysed by Sternisko et al do not work in isolation and it may be that different elements serve different needs at different times.[297] This is an important consideration to consider throughout this dissertation as different pseudoarchaeological theories may cover a number of psychological as well as societal needs, especially when discussed in the light of social media platforms.

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[294] Sternisko, Cichocka, and Van Bavel. (2020), Pg. 8.
[295] Sternisko, Cichocka, and Van Bavel. (2020), Pg. 8.
[296] Sternisko, Cichocka, and Van Bavel. (2020), Pg. 9.
[297] Sternisko, Cichocka, and Van Bavel. (2020), Pg. 11.

Why smart people believe weird things, Michael Shermer, *Skeptic,* Vol 10, No. 2 (2003), pg. 62-73.

The final text chosen as part of the core body of literature informing this dissertation is Why smart people believe weird things by the editor of Skeptic magazine, Michael Shermer. The reason this text was chosen as part of the research for this dissertation is that understanding why highly qualified individuals are often the most vocal in support of pseudoarchaeological theories is an important part of being able to challenge these claims. Are these individuals espousing pseudoarchaeological ideas because they truly believe them or are they espousing these beliefs for monetary gain. Shermer defines "weird" as having three characteristics; a claim found to be unacceptable by most experts in that field, one which is logically impossible or with a high degree of unlikeliness, and a claim based mostly on anecdotal or uncorroborated evidence.[298] All three of these characteristics can be demonstrated within pseudoarchaeological, pseudohistorical and pseudoheritage theories. Furthermore, in his article Shermer goes on to define 'smart people', something which can be objectively measured, even if not universally agreed; those who have reached the highest levels of education such as PhD graduates, university lecturers, and peer reviewed publication can all be classed as 'smart'.[299]

The field of pseudoarchaeology is filled with highly qualified people moving in from other fields and bringing pet theories to the study of the human past. Shermer provides the example of Barry Fell, author of America B.C., and a marine biologist who recycled previously debunked ideas surrounding the discovery of America

[298] Michael Shermer, 'Why Smart People Believe Weird Things', *Skeptic (Altadena, CA)*, 2003, 62–73. Pg. 62
[299] Michael Shermer. (2003), pg. 62.

before Columbus.[300] Often, those who are qualified in one field are wholly unprepared to engage in the research, literature and historiography of another.

Shermer highlights that there are many reasons why smart people believe 'weird' things including age, gender, education, locus of control, influence and personality.[301] Each of these ideas will help to further strengthen the arguments within this dissertation, however, they will also help to temper discussions that are often levelled at pseudoarchaeological ideas that only the foolish or poorly educated could fall for them. As well as the above-mentioned characteristics which all play a role in the belief in pseudoarchaeological ideas an important psychological behaviour to consider is that of *confirmation bias*. This bias involves seeking out or interpreting evidence that supports pre-existing beliefs while ignoring or reinterpreting evidence that disproves that belief.[302] It is important for those seeking to combat pseudoarchaeological ideas that they are aware of not only their own confirmation biases, but also those of proponents of pseudo ideas as they will seek to reinterpret, ignore or avoid evidence provided if it disproves their personal beliefs.

Conclusion

The ten core texts described above have been used to form a framework of research for this dissertation. Each piece of literature spanning archaeology, psychology, and sociology provides a cornerstone for the research to be carried out in order to answer the four key research questions within this dissertation. It is hoped that by drawing on the knowledge of a number of sectors as well as the author's own knowledge and experience, this dissertation will be able to provide a novel and

[300] Michael Shermer. (2003), Pg, 65.
[301] Michael Shermer. (2003), pg. 65-69
[302] Michael Shermer. (2003), Pg. 70

useable framework for combating pseudoarchaeology, pseudohistory and pseudoheritage.