

Independent Project

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To What Extent did the Nazi Party Use and Exploit Archaeological Evidence in Order to Advance their Political Power.

Introduction

The Nazi party was founded by Adolf Hitler in 1920 and was controversial from their beginning. This then capitalised in 1941 with the execution of the 'Final Solution', which will be discussed later on in the independent project. Further research into this topic has helped me to realise that the Nazi party both used and exploited various archaeological records and evidence in order to rise to the political success that they reached. However, it is clear that this was not done ethically, and little consideration was given towards such archaeology- the extent of this will be explored and assessed. From my research I have discovered that there is an archaeological theory that can be applied well to the case of Nazi-archaeology, again which will be discussed throughout this project.

Presenting my Theory

The archaeological theory that I will be discussing during this project is the theory of Memory and Identity, and how we can use this theory in order to gain an understanding of how ancient cultures used various forms of togetherness and collective memory in order to advance themselves in a cultural way. I will not only be describing this theory, but I will also be applying this to my case study later on. On a whole, it is clear that there are many different subsections to this theory, with most sections being backed up by the interpretation work of archaeologists and anthropologists. The first of these sections is the 'Cultural Historical Approach'. In short, this represents that common styles that can be seen across assemblages could be used to identify similarities cultures, or could link all assemblages to the same culture. Another key point on the Cultural Historical Approach that could become more prevalent later on in this project is the idea that assemblages that are repeated within a discrete geographical area are known as 'culture areas' (Steel, 2019). Another key aspect of the memory and identity theory is the ethnicity side of the theory. The word 'ethnicity' in this context is used to describe a feeling of togetherness, and to represent a 'common descent' within a group of people. An example of this is the feeling of togetherness that people feel while attending a sporting event. However, it has been argued as

to whether this idea is relevant in an archaeological standpoint, as this is an example of intangible evidence, meaning there are no physical archaeological records of this feeling togetherness. The next prominent aspect of the memory and identity theory is the 'style' of the culture. This has been split into three main types of style: Emblemic Style, Assertive Style and Isochrestic Variation (Wiessner, 1983). In short, the term emblemic style is used when a clear message is transmitted to a defined target population, regarding a conscious group affiliation and identity (Wiessner, 1983). This can be seen where a form of symbol can be recognised as belonging to or representing a group, such as a flag or company logo. On the contrary, assertive style is used to describe when an object carries personal information which supports or proclaims individual identity (Steel, 2019). Another aspect to the memory and identity theory is the idea of performativity and identity. This idea suggests that, although there are many ways in which a person could represent or portray themselves as an individual, ancient forms of this still made sure they were 'in line' with the rules of their culture. This form of identity or individuality can be portrayed in many forms, including difference in jewellery, clothing or- in some cases- figurines. Such an example of this individuality across figurines can be seen when looking at Ancient Egypt. This is because different Egyptian households would feature figurines and shrines to different gods, yet these gods would still have been acknowledged under Ancient Egyptian culture as a whole. Another minor side of the memory and identity theory can be seen in the idea of personhood. This again suggests that, although some people may identify as individuals in some aspects of their life, the idea or theory that there would be individuals in an ancient culture that were completely unique, or that didn't follow the rules of the culture to an extent is 'a rather peculiar idea within the context of world cultures' (Geertz 1984). The final side of the memory and identity theory that I will discuss is the idea and various interpretations of 'memory'. Collective memory is used to describe how many people in a particular culture base their social constructs off of a memory that they either share, or were all told about that had happened previously. This shows how the interaction of individuals towards the social environment can lead to a group memory and identity to be formed (Halbwachs, 1950). A very good example of this is the adornment of a poppy in order to remember fallen soldiers on Remembrance Sunday from a young age, despite the fact that most of the people who do wear these were not alive during the wars and therefore would not have a 'memory' of their own from this time. This would in turn lead to the development of a 'group identity'. Another key aspect of collective memory is the idea of 'tradition'. This is used to describe a set of symbolic practices, rules, rituals which through repetition imply continuity with the past (Steel, 2019).

Presenting my Case Study

Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party was founded in Munich in 1920 and, although not originally mentioned by members of the party, their main goal was to be as much of a global superpower as

they could be, and to project their own race- the Aryan race- as the most dominant race. This hunger for power came following the declaration of the Treaty of Versailles following the end of the First World War, leaving the once powerful Germany weak and reliant on the ally forces. Hitler's party were planning on doing whatever they could in order to gain back this power, and one way in which they did this was through the use of archaeology. It is clear that Hitler exploited archaeology to its full extent on his mission to take Germany to the top, and this archaeological exploitation carried on throughout the Second World War as he emphasised the viewpoint shared by himself and his party members that the Aryan race was more powerful than any other. Due to this exploitation, the term 'nazi-archaeology' was created to describe this plan. Although Hitler himself was not the key figure in this scheme, he agreed to fund any costs needed for this plan to work, and he even appointed various influential figures to carry out this devious exploitation, including Heinrich Himmler and Gustav Kossina. However, it is clear that this was not the only form of archaeology that was used by the Nazis in order to extend their control and influence. This is because they also used pseudoarchaeology as another form of propaganda to get the German population on their side (Arnold, 1992). Pseudoarchaeology is the term designated to people who believe or have their own ideas of the past, and therefore negate the evidence provided by scientific evidence, investigations and discoveries (Holtorf, 2005). The fact that pseudoarchaeology was used by the Nazi Party also clearly suggests that the scheme did not care much for the archaeology and evidence they were using, rather they were doing whatever they could in order to boost their power. The main aspect of this Nazi archaeology scheme that was used by the party was the 'Kulturkreis' regime. This translates to 'Culture Circles' and was theorised by Gustav Kossina. The basis of this plan, implied that those who owned the material culture found at areas of archaeological interest then had 'evidence' to lay claim to the land where they found it. Another key aspect of the nazi-archaeology plan that was brought in to give them more power and sovereignty is the introduction of the Ahnenerbe. It is quite clear that this organisation had 3 main goals that it aimed to carry out for the Nazi party. These goals included to study the day to day life and culture of the Indo-Germanic people, to bring these findings forward to show to the modern day German people, and finally to ensure that the German population backed and got onboard with the organisation. The Ahnenerbe targeted the Indo-Germanic people in particular, as these were the cultures who lived on German land in ancient times, well before the Nazi party came into fruition. Another major organisation that was introduced to the Nazi-archaeology regime was that of the 'Amt Rosenberg'. In short, this plan was based off of Alfred Rosenberg's interpretation of the world being shaped by a battle between two different civilisations- the 'Nordic Atlantic' and the 'Semites', who were Jewish people (Augustyn et al, 2020). This plan was part of the reason as to why the Nazi party ended up carrying out 'The Final Solution'- the genocide of the Jewish religion and all of its followers. It is also worth noting how, prior to the election of Adolf Hitler and the introduction of the Ahnenerbe, there was little funding being provided for German archaeology. It is no coincidence that this funding issue changed following the introduction of the Ahnenerbe, as Hitler saw the

possibilities that would come following the relation being made between his people and the Indo-Germanic tribes, the main possibility being the chance to extend his power and control further than any German leader had been able to prior to him. This would in turn mark Adolf Hitler down as being Germany's most prolific leader in terms of power and control, despite the fact that this was based off of archaeological exploitation and lies.

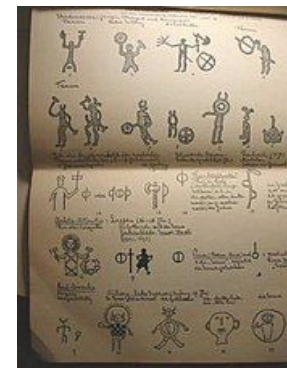
Application of Theory to Case

After carrying out my research for this independent project, it became clear to me that there are many ways in which the above archaeological theory regarding memory and identity could be seen during the nazio-archaeology scheme. There are many examples of this theory being applied to the growing power of the Nazi party. For example, the main area of this archaeological theory that is clearly apparent when looking at nazi-archaeology at a deeper level is the Cultural Historical Approach. As previously mentioned above, this aspect of the theory focuses heavily on how common styles visible across assemblages could be used to identify similarities both within one culture and across many different cultures. The main evidence of this theory in relation to the Nazi-archaeology regime is the adoption and exploitation of ancient swastika symbols carried out by the Nazi party. The Nazi party adopted this emblem as a symbol for their party in 1920 (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2017), and an image of



their flag can be seen to the left. Although the general census of modern times is to relate the swastika symbol to the Nazi party, as their flag is so easily recognisable, and in turn relate the swastika to a greed for racial purity through wicked means, it is clear that this was not the original meaning for the iconic symbol. It is actually an ancient symbol used by Eurasian civilisations as far back as 7,000 years ago, and it originally was used to represent "good fortune" or "well-being" (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2017). This original meaning for the symbol was the reason as to why it was chosen to represent the Nazi party, which in turn led to the symbol representing racism and a horrendous group in history. It is very clear that this adoption and exploitation is a good example of the Cultural Historical Approach aspect of the archaeological theory, as it is commonly understood that the Nazis chose to adopt the swastika as their symbol in order to relate themselves to ancient cultures. The reason that the Nazi party would have intended to relate themselves to such cultures would have been done in order for them to be able to claim any land where this swastika was found as their own. This is clearly shown following the introduction of the Kulturkreis scheme of the nazi-archaeological regime. In simpler words, this meant that the Nazi party felt that- if an artefact featuring a swastika was found at a site- they had a moral reason to claim the land as their own, and invade. It is also apparent that in some

extreme cases, the Nazi party would even carve their own swastikas into artefacts that they found from other countries, in order to give them an excuse to claim the land as their own. This would therefore give them an increased political presence, and even shows the extent that they were willing to go to in order to increase their global dominance. However, it was not only the Kulturkreis that allowed the Nazi party to claim ancient Germanic artefacts as their own, rather it is quite clear that the Ahnenerbe group previously mentioned was founded solely to act on this idea. There are many examples from the Ahnenerbe that clearly act on the Cultural Historical Approach theory. Firstly, it is clear that the Ahnenerbe were funded to carry out various expeditions across didn't countries in Europe. The main purpose of these expeditions would have been in order to find evidence of occupation for Indo-Germanic and Nordic tribes, whom the Nazi party felt the German people originated from. These tribes were home to the Aryan race which, as previously mentioned, the Nazi party felt were their ancient ancestors and the superior global race. These expeditions meant that, if any evidence was found in these particular countries, then the Nazi military would move in and attempt to claim the land as their own. It is clear that one form of evidence that the Ahnenerbe was looking for rather than swastikas was evidence for 'petroglyph rock carvings' (Pringle, 2006), which the Nazis believed to be one of the earliest forms of writing. Expeditions to Karelia in Finland and Bohuslän in Sweden were made in order to find these inscriptions, and writings from Herman Wirth's notebooks- as seen on the right- suggest that these were found.



However, what is interesting regarding this notebook is how it was titled 'Was Heisst Deutsch?', which translates to 'What does German Mean?'.

This point is interesting as, again, it is showing evidence of the Nazi party trying to claim ancient inscriptions as their own, which in turn is an example of the Cultural Historical Approach theory. However, it is clear that these were not the only expeditions that the Ahnenerbe encountered during the Nazi party's rise to power. For example, one expedition of Italy carried out by German archaeologist Franz Altheim and his wife Erika Trautmann led to the 'discovery' that the Nordic cultures had built Ancient Rome (Rennie, 2019). These findings were made after looking at Prehistoric rock inscriptions in Rome, which supposedly depicted Nordic rune symbols. In turn, this led the Nazi archaeologists to believe that the ancestors of the German people founded Rome, and therefore led to the possibility of them invading Rome, if they had not been stopped in Stalingrad by the Russian forces across 1942 and 1943. Again this depicts how the Nazi party were using the Cultural Historical Approach theory in order to advance and extend on their conquests, by attempting to relate themselves to "various occultists God-like beings". Another expedition of the Ahnenerbe that seemed very significant regarding the advancement of the Nazi party was the expedition of Iceland by Otto Rahn in 1936. Iceland was targeted as a good location to seek Nordic related evidence as it is seen as the epicentre for ancient Aryan activity, as it was quintessential to both Viking and Nordic history (Rennie, 2019). The reason as to why the Nazi party were so

interested in carrying out an expedition to Iceland is due to it being home to the Eddas texts. These were important to the Nazi party as they held information regarding “long-forgotten advanced weaponry and sophisticated medicines” (Rennie, 2019), most of which the Nazis felt as though they could use in order to increase their power and influence. Another key expedition that was carried out by the Ahnenerbe that was very influential in the severe change of mind in the Nazi party was the expedition of Tibet, carried out by Ernst Schafer in 1938. This expedition in particular started to show the true sides of the Nazi personnel, as they carried out increased measures to project how superior they were as opposed to other races. During this expedition, Schafer carried out anthropometric studies on the natives of Tibet, in order to try and discover a link to be able to track down the yeti, whom the Nazi’s believed was the ‘missing link’ between apes and humans (Rennie, 2019). These anthropometric studies clearly show how the Nazis felt about other races, as they attempted to discover a link between the native people of Tibet and a mythological ape-like creature. This is clearly an example of the pseudoarchaeology that was carried out by the Nazi party, as they were basing the information to back up these experimental studies off of myth and their own ideas, rather than looking at historical evidence or recorded verification of such a creature. Despite this anthropometric studies, it is clear that politically, secretly and more practically, Tibet was also explored as a possible base for an invasion of neighboring British-controlled India (Rennie, 2019). Although there is not much evidence from these expeditions that could be interpreted using the Memory and Identity archaeological theory, it could be argued that another theory can be discussed here- that being the Social Evolution theory. This archaeological theory is very in depth and complicated. However one main point that can be made when looking at this theory is how different races and cultures adapt and develop differently overtime, eventually leading to a ‘survival of the fittest’ fight coming to fruition and a superior race being formed (Spencer, 1864). There is a clear example of this theory that could be applied to the Nazi party, as Hitler and his fellow Nazi leaders clearly felt that their own race was related to the ‘god-like’ Aryan race, and therefore were superior to other races that didn’t fall under this category, such as the Jewish or Tibetan societies. This can be seen to reach more serious and prejudicial levels during the later years of the 1930s, before reaching a climax in 1941 with the beginning of the devastating Holocaust. It is clear that there are a handful of ways in which the research carried out by the Ahnenerbe were used by the Heinrich Himmler to ‘justify’ the Holocaust (Pringle, 2006). This can be seen where, during a speech in 1937, Himmler himself described how bog bodies were a method of disposing bodies in Nordic tribes, and he stated how this tradition was done deliberately. Himmler then used his own interpretations to assume that the only possible reason for this was to represent the “eradication of homosexuals” (Pringle, 2006). This is clearly similar to the Nazi mindset that led to the plan to carry out the Holocaust. Although it may not be the main reason as to why the Holocaust was put in place, as this was due to Hitler having the idea that the Jewish people were at fault for Germany losing the First World War, there is a possibility that the Nazi attempt to further relate themselves to the Nordic society could be the reason as to why the Holocaust targeted not only

Jewish people, but homosexual people amongst many other social groups. It is clear that the act of claiming Germanic artefacts that were found in other countries was carried out by the Nazi party for many reasons. If the countries were occupied by 'lower races' in the eyes of the Nazis, then they felt it would justify their pursuit, invasion and conquer. However, it is clear that this was not where the line was drawn. Moreover, there is substantial evidence that shows how they felt that it also justified them to carry out various experiments on these 'lower races' within their concentration camps (Rennie, 2019). These experiments were carried out by the Ahnenerbe. In summary, it is clear that the main purpose of the Ahnenerbe was to play a significant role in wiping Christianity from Germany, and then replacing it with its own pagan religion that originated from various pseudoarchaeological ideas that they based off of loose links between modern German and ancient Germanic people. However, the world luckily never had to see the Ahnenerbe's plans in full effect. Another final point that shows the amount of lies and exploitation that was carried out by the Nazi party in regards to the Ahnenerbe is how the recorded documentations of most of these expeditions and experiments were found following the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps. These documents were then used as evidence in the Nuremberg trials, which were carried out after the end of the Second World War across 1945 and 1946. The fact that these documents were used as evidence in such trials clearly shows the severity of these expeditions and experiments that were carried out.

Conclusion

Overall, the extent of which the Nazi party adopted and exploited any archaeological records they could find is staggering. From my research, as well as comparing what they carried out with the Memory and Identity archaeological theory, I can clearly see that the Nazi-archaeology scheme was well thought out, highly exploitative and manipulative and was heavily based around pseudoarchaeology as opposed to historical facts and records. Due to the reasons stated, I personally feel that Nazi-archaeology was highly imperative for the success of the Nazi party, as it allowed them to gain more land dominance across Europe, and also to manipulate and brainwash the German citizens into believing that the prejudice ways and beliefs of the Nazi leaders was ethical and justified.

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