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New Historiographical Approaches to Archaeological Research

Gisela Eberhardt

Fabian Link

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CONFERENCE REPORTS

New Historiographical Approaches to Archaeological Research

September 9-11, 2010, Free University of Berlin.

Gisela Eberhardt, Free University of Berlin, and Fabian Link, University of Basel

Recent developments in the historiography of the sciences have led to a call for a revised history of archaeology and a move away from rational reconstructions of scientific progress. Historians of archaeology are beginning to use state-of-the-art historiographical concepts and tools to trace how archaeological knowledge has been produced and to reflect on the socio-historical conditions and spaces in which this knowledge has been generated. This workshop, funded by the Excellence Cluster TOPOI in Berlin, assembled scholars to discuss innovative approaches and new methods for writing histories of archaeology

Marianne Sommer (Zürich) opened the workshop with a keynote lecture on controversies surrounding scientific evidence of the so-called eoliths in 19th and 20th-century archaeology. Eoliths were thought to be the earliest stone-artifacts created by prehistoric men. Sommer's lecture demonstrated that debates about the eoliths mirrored the social structure of a time when archaeology was not yet established at universities. Utilizing frameworks from Fleck and Latour, Sommer exposed the transmission of knowledge concerning those alleged artifacts. She stressed the impact of popularized scientific knowledge, which could not be seen as a top-down phenomenon. However, classifying eoliths in series helped to incorporate these objects into the paradigm of progression.

The first section of the workshop dealt with research processes and social dynamics. Amara Thornton (London) presented an approach combining biography, prosopography, and network analysis, emphasizing the importance of the contexts of network production and the role of "fringe" players in this process. The case study of a network of British archaeologists working in Transjordan and Palestine in the early 20th century helped her to emphasize the importance of archival material for such a historical approach.

Pamela Jane Smith (Cambridge) examined a specific space of such research networks. According to Smith, the tearoom at the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology was crucial as a place of knowledge generation for the archaeological agenda from the 1920s and the 1940s. In addition, the tearoom was a social platform for scientific exchange and a practical solution to social problems in archaeology, such as that of trust between researchers. Through the years the participants as well as the localities changed, yet the tearoom remained an essential institution.

Traditionally, the formation of a discipline or sub-discipline has often been presented as inevitable process. Taking the case of French numismatists, a social group that defined itself by specific research objects, namely medals and coins, Felicity Bodenstein (Paris) described how heterogeneous the scientific milieu within antiquarianism actually was, focusing on the principal promoter of Numismatics in France, Ernest Babelon. Bodenstein deconstructed Babelon's biography, which had long been presented as a mere success story, and showed how the *illusion biographique* underlined by Pierre Bourdieu opens important questions on the role of biographical narratives in the historiography of archaeology.

The second session was dedicated to archaeological space in the making, assuming that places of archaeological research are not predetermined scientific environments, but outcomes of specific projects that researchers pursue. Marieke Bloembergen (Leiden) and Martijn Eickhoff (Amsterdam) focused on the emergence of archaeological space under colonial and postcolonial conditions, asking what role colonialism played and still plays in defining Indonesian heritage. They stressed the importance for such archaeo-historical research beyond eurocentric thought. Incorporating post-colonial theory, they underlined the meaning of local perspectives on or appropriations of specific sites and asked for the influence of such perspectives on the national and global appropriations of these types of sites in Indonesia.

Irina Podgorny (Berlin) compared how knowledge was generated of two very different issues in Mexico and Argentina in the 19th century by following the traces of the documents that made them famous: the circulation of manuscripts on the ancient ruins of Palenque and of manuscripts of the viceroyalty of La Plata. Podgorny showed that the handling of the manuscripts dominated knowledge production and led to a similar structure of knowledge within quite different categories of objects.

Felix Wiedemann (Berlin) spoke about the interrelation of geographical space, archaeological objects, and anthropological scientific methods and interpretation. Referring to late 19th century Near Eastern archaeology, he discussed the emergence of physical anthropology. This new and "exact" method revised the older hermeneutical methods of philology and created ethnic knowledge, which led to race theories. Whereas European prehistoric archaeologists focused on ancient peoples "without history," racial theory was applied to Near Eastern "high cultures" that possessed a large number of historical sources. Connecting this application with racial theories created ideas such as the "Aryan" origin of Near Eastern cultures.

Fabian Link then focused on the connections between archaeology and political culture. Link discussed the epistemic changes in the scientific constructions of Gotthard

Neumann, a German archaeologist working in Thuringia from the late 1920s to the 1960s. He used semantic and conceptual history in the tradition of Reinhart Koselleck to study Neumann's publications. Focusing on the impact of *völkisch* thoughts in Neumann's publications and language, Link argued that the importance of these ideas in prehistory was strongly linked with the social interactions Neumann had with Nazi politics and the success he experienced in academia. The more Neumann profited from the Nazis, the more he used *völkisch* terms and concepts for the analysis of ancient cultures.

The last section of the workshop dealt with material dimensions of archaeological practice. Stefanie Klamm (Berlin) analyzed the role of media in the creation of knowledge in classical archaeology during the nineteenth century. Excavation sites, the most important places of knowledge production in archaeology, were (and still are) confronted with the problem of the transformation and representation of these three-dimensional places into two-dimensional images. Instruments such as the camera became means both for contesting a new scientific view of archaeological excavation and for creating representations of scientific objectivity.

The process of production of scientific objects in archaeological research was the topic of Ulrich Veit's (Tübingen) contribution. Using the approach developed by Hans-Jörg Rheinberger on experimental systems, Veit focused on the case of Iron Age princely seats in Germany and showed how this epistemic object was constructed by several steps of knowledge transformation.

Géraldine Delley (Neuchâtel) analyzed the establishment of new scientific dating methods in archaeology during the second half of the twentieth century. She focused on the radiocarbon method, which has been said to have revolutionized archaeological research. She explored research practices of Swiss lake-dwelling archaeology between 1950 and 1985 through the lens of actor-network theory. Delley demonstrated that the profound changes new scientific methods provoked in Swiss archaeological research in the 1960s were rooted not in general "modernization" but in the activities of agents such as Hans-Georg Bandi, who attracted financial resources from politicians by applying specific rhetorical strategies.

Gisela Eberhardt (Berlin) focused on the question of whether and how the history of excavation practices could be examined through historiographical approaches to material practices in sciences such as biology. Eberhardt came to the conclusion that a better understanding of the history of excavation practices is achieved by analyzing exactly how manual labor and ideas are interwoven in specific contexts. She showed that, since the processes are intrinsically tied to the particularities of field research, concepts of the field available from the history of biology are an important resource for the described purposes.

In the closing speech of the conference, Serge Reubi (Neuchâtel) stated the opinion that the fields of history of science on the one hand and history of the human sciences on the other were too different to create general standards in methodological approaches and theories. Reubi briefly summarized important items of the workshop contributions, pointing toward possibilities for future research. In quoting Ulrich Veit, he

finished the workshop reminding the participants that independent of the discipline at stake we all had one goal: “We want to understand scientific processes.”

Scientific Instructions for Travelers

October 8 and 9, 2010, National University of Ireland, Galway.

Daniel Carey, National University of Ireland, Galway

The purpose of this conference was to discuss the development of inquiries, questionnaires, and directions for scientific travelers, which began to proliferate in the early modern period, ranging from the work of chorographers in the sixteenth century, surveying particular places in Europe, to the Ramist organisation of knowledge, and the remarkably thorough surveys proposed in Spanish *interrogatorios*. The Royal Society’s queries for destinations around the world are among the best known in the seventeenth century. The growth in this practice in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and into the era of professional anthropology is remarkable. The subject has not been studied systematically in English, though there are valuable edited collections in Italian, French, and Spanish.¹⁵

Papers on British sources in the seventeenth century included a discussion of William Petty’s demographic questions by Ted McCormick (Concordia), an account of the widespread use of questionnaires by chorographers and antiquarians in the seventeenth century by Adam Fox (Edinburgh), Edward Lhuyd’s parochial enquiries distributed in Wales by Nancy Edwards (Bangor), and Locke’s unpublished questionnaire concerning religion, by Daniel Carey (NUI Galway). The German tradition was discussed by Matthew McLean (St. Andrews) with a paper on the network of map-making correspondents created by Sebastian Münster in the sixteenth century and Gudrun Bucher’s analysis of Gerhard Friedrich Müller’s elaborate instructions for the second Kamchatka Expedition (1733-43). The French tradition was considered by Frédéric Tinguely (Geneva) with a paper on the advice received by François Bernier for his journey in Mughal India in the seventeenth century, and Efram Sera Schriar (Leeds) discussed De Gérando’s ‘Methods to Follow’ and the Baudin Expedition of 1799-1803. The emergence of geology as a field of study, with accompanying observational instructions for travelers, was described by Ezio Vaccari (Insubria), and two papers addressed the protocols established for collecting the natural world, by Dominik Collet (Göttingen) on German and English practices, and Marcelo Figueroa (National University of Tucumán) on Spanish directions for travelers to the New World. The conference featured two wide-ranging contributions on questions of method – Charles Withers (Edinburgh) on the Royal Geographical Society in the nineteenth century, and Henrika Kuklick (Pennsylvania) on anthropology and the disciplinary method of fieldwork.

¹⁵ Maurizio Bossi and Claudio Greppi, eds., *Viaggi e scienza: le istruzioni scientifiche per i viaggiatori nei secoli XVII-XIX* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2005); Claude Blankckaert, ed., *Le terrain des sciences humaines: instructions et enquêtes (XVIIIe-XXe siècle)* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996); Francisco de Solano, ed., *Cuestionarios para la formación de la Relaciones Geograficas de Indias siglos XVI/XIX* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1988).