

## Imperial Intersections: Archaeologists, War and Violence—Comments

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### ABSTRACT

This is a commentary on a series of papers presented in the *Imperial Intersections: archaeologists, war and violence* session at the 2007 Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology. The session addressed issues surrounding archaeology, war and violence and the ethical responsibilities of archaeological practitioners. The papers in this volume have created more questions than answers, but as with all ethical scenarios, I was inspired to think and to examine critically aspects of archaeology that may have eluded past contemplation. In attempting to find commonalities and themes in the submissions I realized that almost every paper is concerned with the production of knowledge—how much access should there be; who should have access to knowledge; how should knowledge be disseminated; and when and if the knowledge should be reproduced. The central debate of “in whose best interest is this knowledge produced” is also explored in this review?

Résumé: Ce qui suit est un commentaire portant sur plusieurs articles présentés par les recoupements impériaux: la session sur les archéologues, la guerre et la violence tenue en 2007 à l'Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology (rencontre annuelle de la société se consacrée à l'archéologie américaine). La session s'est concentrée sur les problèmes d'archéologie, de guerre et de violence et les responsabilités éthiques des praticiens archéologiques. Les articles de ce volume ont soulevé davantage de questions que de réponses, mais a considéré tous les scénarios éthiques. J'ai été pour ma part amené à penser et à examiner de façon critique des aspects de l'archéologie qui peuvent avoir échappé par le passé. En tentant de trouver des similitudes et des thèmes soumis j'ai réalisé que presque tous les articles se sont focalisés sur la production de la connaissance—quel degré d'accès devait être déployé; comment cette connaissance devrait-elle être disséminée; et à la fois quand et si cette connaissance devait être reproduite. Le débat central de « qui aurait le plus grand intérêt à accéder à cette connaissance » est également explosé dans cette interview.

Resumen: Se trata de un comentario sobre una serie de trabajos presentados en las Intersecciones Imperiales: jornada sobre arqueólogos, guerra y violencia en la junta anual del 2007 de la Sociedad de la Arqueología Americana. En la jornada se abordaban cuestiones relacionadas con la arqueología, la guerra, la violencia y las responsabilidades éticas de los profesionales de la arqueología. Los trabajos de este volumen han suscitado más interrogantes que respuestas, pero al igual que ocurre con todas las cuestiones éticas, se me ocurrió pensar y examinar críticamente los aspectos de la arqueología que podrían haber escapado de la contemplación del pasado. Al intentar encontrar características y temas comunes en las presentaciones, me di cuenta de que casi todos los trabajos trataban sobre la generación del conocimiento: cuánto acceso debería haber, quién debería tener acceso al conocimiento; cómo debería difundirse el conocimiento, y cuando debería reproducirse el conocimiento, si es que debería hacerlo. En este repaso también se analiza la cuestión de debate central, es decir, "en interés de quién se genera este conocimiento".

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**KEY WORDS**

Archaeological ethics, Knowledge production, War, Violence, Looting, Lesser archaeology, Public archaeology

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Several of the issues discussed in this volume are at the core of my own research and I found it immensely helpful to consider these matters through the lenses of archaeology, war and violence. These papers illustrate that war and violence should be understood as a continuum—from small acts of everyday, structural violence to the brutal exercise of genocide as evidenced by the mass graves discussed by Steele, Ballbe and Steadman. Many of the papers promote an ethically responsible archaeology that acknowledges war and bears witness to human tragedies and losses. Should we practice archaeology during times of conflict? Are we ethically compromised if we agree to provide information gathered while undertaking archaeology on behalf of governments and military personnel as Hamilakis (2003) has stated? Do we need to first identify our ethical foundation, as Hamilakis (2001) has previously noted—defining ethics with respect to human rights, rather than a narrow ethics of professionalization with its focus on the 'archaeological record'? Do we need to put humanity before archaeology in order to be ethical archaeologists? Should there be only one set of ethical standards, or are ethics situational, modified to suit the time and place, as succinctly noted by Heinz in her discussion of archaeology in Lebanon? Should we think about the consequences (intended and

unintended) of our research before we even venture into the field? Is an ethical stance possible in times of war, violence and crises? Can we ever be ethical archaeologists?

The papers in this volume have created more questions than answers, but as with all ethical scenarios, the papers inspired me to think and question aspects of archaeology that may have eluded past contemplation. As I looked for common themes (apart from war, violence, and ethics) I came to the realization that for all of the papers the real ethical quagmire was not the physical action of excavation or survey, but the by-product of archaeology—the knowledge produced as a result of archaeological practice. Almost every paper is concerned with the implications of producing knowledge—how much access should there be; who should have access to knowledge; how should knowledge be disseminated; and when and if the knowledge should be reproduced. And perhaps the fundamental point is—in whose interest is this knowledge produced?

### Knowledge Production

In her paper Starzmann states that archaeology can never be divorced from the political realm and that as archaeologists we should be mindful of the power relations that are involved in the production of knowledge. In her analysis of the looting of Iraq, Starzmann suggests that the artifact looters are the victims of structural violence when they are denied fair compensation for the material they recover and sell in the market. This disposition of artifacts in the Middle Eastern antiquities marketplace and the inherent inequalities in the system can be considered a direct reflection of the legacy of colonialism. Early responses to increasing foreign interest in archaeology and artifacts from the Middle East prompted the Ottoman Empire to pass early legislation (1874 and 1884) aimed at regulating the movement of antiquities. At first glance these efforts appear to have the best interests of the cultural heritage of the region in mind, but they were in fact motivated by the colonialist overtures of the Empire—a wish to appropriate desirable material from the far reaches of its territories. These laws and the later British Mandate legislation (discussed by Sauders) form the basis for much of current legislation in the region (see Kersel *in press* for further discussion on the legislative legacies of the region).

The transnational movement of illegally looted artifacts throughout the world is usually exacerbated with the onset of war and subsequent lawlessness. Nowhere is this more immediately apparent than in the recent events in Iraq and Afghanistan. Unable to protect its citizenry, cultural heritage protection in Iraq has been relegated to the back burner; the plunder and looting of archaeological sites continues apace, with no end in sight. Local,

national and even international laws, statutes and conventions are only as effective as their enforcement. Given the current situation in both Iraq and in Afghanistan, the protection of archaeological sites and cultural institutions are not the top priority; nor am I suggesting that they should be. Should we not privilege human rights and the protection of the basic fundamentals of existence over the protection of archaeological sites? Cornelius Holtorf (2005) has argued that archaeological sites are in fact renewable resources, so we should not really be concerned with their safeguarding. Whether or not we support the notion of archaeology as a renewable resource, the belief that laws—local, national and international—protect our archaeological heritage is fundamentally flawed, especially during times of conflict.

A number of papers (Sauders, Starzmann, and Steele) cite the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict 1954 as a potential protection mechanism of cultural heritage during times of conflict. Enforcement of the principles of the Convention is based on states having ratified the Convention and then adhering to its ideology during war. Unfortunately, as Starzmann mentions, many of the key players involved in current on-going areas of strife have not ratified the convention (the US, UK and Israel have not ratified the Second Protocol, which specifically addresses the issue of the protection of cultural heritage by an occupying nation), or cannot ratify as in the case of Palestine. Stymied by a lack of mutual cooperation, politics, and a lack of enforcement, international legal remedies are often ineffective, despite outward appearances to the contrary. Furthermore, to reinforce Starzmann's assertion, should these international efforts be viewed as colonialism disguised as good will—more hegemonic legal discourse from the West imposed upon the so-called "third world"? The fifth anniversary of the US-led invasion of Iraq reminds us that the casualties of war can take many forms—academic institutions, libraries, museums and archaeological sites, all of which were victims of the conflict. Can we ever rely on warring factions to "do the right thing" during times of battle?

The use of knowledge is a central question in Steele's examination of mass grave excavation in Iraq. She stresses that the decisions on where to dig and what to dig are made by international agencies and NGOs, not agendas set by archaeologists or physical anthropologists—either local or foreign. Steele and Ballbe and Steadman all lament a lack of set standards for mass grave excavations. In both instances the evidence gathered from the excavations of mass graves is crucial for identifying bodies, explicating past events, and may often be used in testimony incurring an additional level of ethical responsibility—judicial. By providing evidence that might implicate and/or exonerate individuals are we colluding or collaborating? More questions than answers.

An intriguing ethical and moral dilemma encountered is whether or not researchers should be engaged with clients and/or countries whose policies or actions might not conform to professional ethical standards or personal standards of morality and law. Does excavating in a war-torn state implicitly condone particular behaviors? The idea that involvement is better than boycott pervades much of current applied research, but some argue that association is complicity and, as a consequence, recommend that applied researchers avoid a wide variety of ethically ambiguous situations (see Berrerman 1991; Escobar 1991). When incriminating information is received, is it our duty to report it to the respective authorities, potentially compromising any future investigations, or even other related studies? How should research proceed under these circumstances? Should research proceed under these circumstances?

This aspect of collaboration, compromise or contribution was emphasized in Emberling's paper discussing his work training members of the US military on the history and culture of Iraq. In an interesting twist on working with local populations, Emberling and his colleagues have had to "adapt to the needs" of the military in order to make any impact. Are these efforts to "educate" the military working? What demonstrates a successful program? If we had more military education programs for other parts of the world where cultural heritage is at risk, would an army helicopter pilot be arrested for smuggling Egyptian antiquities into the US as was recently reported (Associated Press 2008)? It will be a while before we know whether or not future smuggling attempts are thwarted, but there was, and continues to be, a need for cultural heritage awareness on the part of military personnel deployed to the Middle East. Individuals from the US should be made aware of the importance of our collective past (and by collective I mean the global community) and it is our ethical responsibility to impart this knowledge. Or rather, should Iraqi archaeologists be training US military on the importance of their cultural heritage? Would Boas, who was censured by the AAA for his criticism of anthropological spies, accuse us of damaging the credibility of the discipline? Should we heed Emberling's warning in his discussion of the HTS that the various Departments of Defense and military units will use anthropological approaches in their intelligence gathering missions, whether or not professional anthropologists are deployed in these actions? This brings us back to the question of involvement vs. prohibitions in our archaeological practice. Again, more questions than answers.

In their examination of ethical challenges to a postcolonial archaeology, Nicholas and Hollowell (2007:62–63) suggest that though there has long been recognition that we have an ethical responsibility to avoid providing information that could be harmful to others, the obligation to find ways that knowledge production is beneficial to local communities is less

established in academic archaeological discourse. Steele, Emberling, and Ballbe and Steadman provide examples of how archaeological knowledge gathered through the excavation of mass graves or the enlightenment of military personnel might be beneficial to local communities involved with prosecuting war crimes and those charged with the protection of cultural heritage. Yet these instances are fraught with doubts concerning the possession of knowledge. Heinz's paper illustrates that those communities are not uniform in their position on the use of archaeological knowledge. This disposition and dissemination of knowledge pervades our very existence as archaeologists, as the imperative to publish is (or should be) one of the basic tenets of our profession. But herein lies the rub—one that Heinz, Steele, and Ballbe and Steadman emphasize in their examination of excavating mass graves and sites in war-torn Lebanon—how do (or even should) we decide how the information we have uncovered is best used? Are we perpetuating colonialism by refusing to give information, which we foreign archaeologists have gathered? And if we do not publish in the local language(s) in an accessible form, does it even count?

Who actually owns the knowledge? Can knowledge be possessed? Or is it that, as Linda Smith (1999) suggests, the only valid knowledge of a people is produced by that same people? Can foreign and local archaeologists share the production of knowledge? Nicholas and Hollowell (2007:59) state that “the very idea of sharing power is threatening to many archaeologists—they contend that it means a radical re-visioning of ethical responsibilities and research agendas, all of which results in an examination of long-ingrained notions of scholarly privilege, ownership of intellectual property and knowledge production.” Is an alternative to sharing the handing over any and all information gathered as a result of our research to the local populations, without thinking about the consequences of our actions? And when we consider the on-the-ground implications of such actions, what exactly would a local population do with field notes, digital photos, etc., much of it rendered in a foreign language? This point is clearly emphasized in Bernbeck's discussion of archaeology students who receive training in foreign “Western” countries. Are we perpetuating the colonial ideal, where the best education is a “West” education? Currently in Jordan there are no PhD programs in archaeology. If Jordanians want to earn a PhD, they must leave the country in order to enter doctoral programs elsewhere. As foreign archaeologists who habitually arrive for a six to eight week field season and then leave, does it not behoove us to share our administrative and organizational knowledge in order to help establish a PhD program in Jordan? Or would Bernbeck view this as a perpetuation of Western principles in a foreign setting?

In his paper on preserving cultural heritage in a conflict zone in Palestine, Yahya suggests that we do not always think about the unintended

consequences of the production of archaeological knowledge. Yahya suggests that archaeologists (local and/or foreign) are often training a cadre of future looters when they employ locals as field workers, a point which has been corroborated in various parts of the world (Kersel 2007; Migliore 1991; Smith 2005). Sauders in his paper on the indistinct state of Palestine and the problem of protecting cultural heritage suggests that political ambiguity is among the biggest threats to the cultural heritage of Palestine—which is the cultural heritage of mankind in the assessments of Yahya and Sauders. The question here is, what are our ethical responsibilities in this instance? Should we be lobbying the UN or the US for Palestinian statehood? Is there a potential danger of co-opting the voices of the subaltern groups we seek to support? Or is this too much engagement? Is there such a thing as too much engagement when it comes to protecting global cultural heritage? Can the political be separated from the archaeological? Yet more questions rather than answers.

In her introduction to this set of papers Pollock uses the term ‘scientific exceptionalism’—the idea that archaeology (and archaeologists) is divorced from politics. The concept is fundamental to many of the case studies in this volume as the political pervades the archaeological at almost every instance in almost every country. In a recent statement regarding his excavations in the City of David (Jerusalem), archaeologist Ronni Reich (Friedman 2008) asserts, “I can divide the political from the archaeological,” but can we? Reich is adopting what Rafi Greenberg has referred to as ‘lesser archaeology.’ A term first coined by historian Yaacov Shavit (1997); ‘lesser archaeology’ is a professional, dispassionate, detached archaeology, which allows archaeologists to maintain a sense of neutrality and impartiality in their work (Greenberg 2007). In order to mitigate the effects of ‘lesser archaeology’ and the effects of those who practice with blinders on, Greenberg (2007) invites us to reflect on our individual responsibility each time we approach an archaeological project (anywhere in the world) by asking ourselves a series of questions: “Who are our clients, in the broadest sense? What kind of impact are we making on the place in which we excavate? Have local people been involved in the decisions that will affect their environment? What is being done to mitigate negative effects of our work? What is being done to enhance the positive effects of our work? What is our legacy to the site and its surroundings, after we have left it?” If we follow this practice can we be considered ethical archaeologists?

Most papers in this session suggest that war, violence and their aftermath cannot solely be understood in terms of physicality, but that violence profoundly affects personhood, a sense of self-worth, and a sense of justice. The ripple effects in archaeology and archaeological education are acute, as Bernbeck, Heinz, and Starzmann point out in their papers. Some local communities do not want to support an archaeology that will investigate a

difficult, troublesome or pesky past. Most want the clean, sanitized versions that support notions of strength, power, and longevity. An interesting US example is the only recently enacted US law (December of 2006), H.R. 1492 which recognizes the need for the preservation of Japanese-American internment camps, demonstrating an increasing emphasis on preserving all aspects of this particular conflict, even the darker sides of US participation in WWII. Heinz relates the difficulties encountered when excavations were first proposed in downtown, post-civil war Beirut. The competing claims of economic development over archaeological investigation, coupled with opposition from locals who did not want to “revisit” a painful past, were overcome by promoting a glorious Phoenician past on which residents of war-ravaged Beirut could rebuild their identity. Beirut residents are sharing in the process of archaeological knowledge production to construct their own identities and narratives. Simultaneously, under better conditions, Lebanese residents may benefit from knowledge that comes from the research carried out in their communities and ultimately they may even economically profit from the commodification of that knowledge. Yet Heinz’s paper was filled with questions on how archaeology should proceed—should priority be afforded to the political intentions of the local authorities or should “we” (read foreign archaeologists) attempt to convince the locals of the value of cultural diversity and/or open access to knowledge? Or if we do not act on the part of our profession, are we simply bowing to developers, and the few who will profit from swift development? What are the ethically correct actions? Who controls the past? And the fundamental premise of these papers: what is at stake in the production of archaeological knowledge?

I often remind the students in my ethics and archaeology class: there are usually more questions than answers when discussing ethics. This is not negative, because questions encourage us to think about the issues and reflect on our own roles in the production and dissemination of knowledge. As a discipline we need to recognize that the knowledge we produce is historically and politically situated and that just because we excavated a particular site does not make us the sole purveyor of the knowledge that results from that work. I found Bernbeck’s paper intriguing. I wonder if it is possible to grant a Jordanian or Palestinian colleague permission to excavate at a historical site in Canada or the US. I also wonder how the knowledge they produce about the North American past would be disseminated and used.

As archaeologists we all have ethical responsibilities, and as a group of archaeologists who conduct research in the context of war and violence those ethical responsibilities are manifold. At the forefront is accountability to the local communities in which we work. The *Ethical Guidelines for*



*Practitioners of the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (NAPA)* state:

Our primary responsibility is to respect and consider the welfare and human rights of all categories of people affected by decisions, programs or research in which we take part. It is our ethical responsibility, to the extent feasible, to bring to bear on decision making, our own or that of others, information concerning the actual or potential impacts of such activities on all whom they might affect. It is also our responsibility to assure, to the extent possible, that the views of groups so affected are made clear and given full and serious consideration by decision makers and planners, in order to preserve options and choices for affected groups. (National Association for the Practice of Anthropology, 1988)

While no code of ethics or set of guidelines can anticipate the unique circumstances which arise in each individual field research project, it is on these guiding principles that I base my own research, following the general tenet of ‘do no harm.’ In the production of knowledge, a key theme of this issue, can we avoid doing harm, while remaining true to the ethical standards of our discipline and our selves? Should we avoid working in conflict zones? What role—active or passive—should archaeologists play in the “defense” of archaeological sites? Are there a set standard of ethical guidelines which we can follow or should we make ethical determinations on a case-by-case basis as Heinz advocates? How are decisions about access to archaeological knowledge made? Can we or should we control the use of our research results? I leave you with more questions than answers, which is also a common theme in many of these papers.

### Acknowledgments

I would to thank Reinhard Bernbeck, Susan Pollock and Maria Theresia Starzmann for inviting me to respond to such an interesting set of papers. Reading the collection encouraged me to reexamine my own ethical practices.

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