

pca

europaean journal of
postclassicalarchaeologies

volume 9/2019

SAP Società Archeologica s.r.l.

Mantova 2019

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PCA is published once a year in May, starting in 2011. Manuscripts should be submitted to editor@postclassical.it in accordance to the guidelines for contributors in the webpage <http://www.postclassical.it>

Post-Classical Archaeologies's manuscript **review process** is rigorous and is intended to identify the strengths and weaknesses in each submitted manuscript, to determine which manuscripts are suitable for publication, and to work with the authors to improve their manuscript prior to publication.

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How to **quote**: please use "PCA" as abbreviation and "European Journal of Post-Classical Archaeologies" as full title.

Cover image: statue of Mont'e Prama (from F. Pinna with modifications).

"Post-Classical Archaeologies" is indexed in Scopus. It was approved on 2015-05-13 according to ERIH PLUS criteria for inclusion and indexed in Carhus+2018. Classified A by ANVUR (Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione del sistema Universitario e della Ricerca).

DESIGN

Paolo Vedovetto

PUBLISHER

SAP Società Archeologica s.r.l.
Strada Fienili 39/a, 46020 Quingentole, Mantova
www.archeologica.it

Authorised by Mantua court no. 4/2011 of April 8, 2011

For subscription and all other information visit the web site www.postclassical.it

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Archaeology by, for, and about the public

An understanding of the complexity of public engagement with heritage is now a part of the standard toolkit for contemporary archaeology, and it fundamental to every archaeologist's professional responsibility. The papers in this section cover a wide range of approaches to public archaeology and describe the practical issues and legal barriers as well as the ethical and scholarly motives for participatory research. In this concluding comment I elaborate some of the key issues and creative ideas that have inspired the work of these authors, whose commitment to public involvement in first rate science bodes well for the future of our discipline.

Keywords: citizen science, participatory archaeology, heritage management, public archaeology

Una comprensione della complessità del coinvolgimento del pubblico con il patrimonio archeologico è ormai stabilmente parte della "cassetta degli attrezzi" dell'archeologia contemporanea. Gli articoli di questa sezione coprono un ampio spettro di approcci all'archeologia pubblica e descrivono le questioni pratiche e le barriere legali, così come le motivazioni etiche e scientifiche per la ricerca partecipata. In questo commento conclusivo elaboro alcune delle questioni chiave e delle idee creative che hanno ispirato il lavoro di questi autori, il cui impegno verso il coinvolgimento del pubblico in una scienza di prim'ordine fa ben sperare per il futuro della nostra disciplina

Parole chiave: citizen science, archeologia partecipativa, gestione del patrimonio culturale, archeologia pubblica

The use of expertise, whether for radical or conservative political outcomes, may work to deny or marginalize the legitimacy of communities or other interests to have their own say and be listened to by public policy-makers.
(Laurajane Smith 2012, p. 393)

Together the papers in this volume present a cogent summary and discussion of both practical and legal issues entailed in the practice of public archaeology. They represent some of the first truly coherent attempts to evaluate the impact of public programs and to grapple with the legal and administrative complexities that arise from democratic ap-

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proaches to discovery. All of the papers contribute new ideas and concerns, several address familiar problems in novel and useful ways.

A number of important themes run through chapters presented here that tie them together but also reveal a framework of change that is re-orienting archaeological research. Many of the papers take a radical position that counters traditional archaeology that was proudly represented as rigorous science without public accountability. In contrast a few of these authors even view public interest as a source for research questions. The revolution in archaeology that began in the 1980s has come so far that many of the ideas my generation promoted concerning public accountability and Indigenous sovereignty have become an accepted baseline in several of these papers. It is an eerie feeling to have one's own revolutionary ideas become a part of disciplinary canon.

1. Theme I. Experts versus expertise

Several of the papers grapple with the problem of expertise and the role of archaeologists' specialist knowledge in working with the public. Summarising UNESCO's more classical economic view, Olivier discusses the tensions between regulation and participation and between inclusion and exclusion in the management, protection and use of heritage sites. Yet these concepts contain implicit assumptions about expertise and where it lies. The dichotomy he describes assumes that inclusion and exclusion cannot be handled by participants and beneficiaries of heritage or that regulation is not normally enacted from the "bottom up".

Elinor Ostrom's (1990, Gould 2018) work addressed the "tragedy of the commons" so long feared to be the outcome of resource pooling among self-regulating community members. Ostrom showed that communities can sustainably pool their common resources and countered the prevailing idea among economists that no such strategy could succeed. Economists were more surprised by her findings than anthropologists since we mostly study small scale economies, which is where successful resource pooling is more common. But Ostrom's enormous database goes beyond a theoretical contribution – it suggests that if organized properly many communities can benefit from pooling their resources, and her generalizations about the characteristics of successful governance structures suggest policy applications and a practical guide for strategy.

In communities around the world, sustainable use of resources, including heritage resources, has been achieved through grass roots organizational expertise. Not all communities have developed such sys-

tems, but they are common enough and so widely used across cultures that it behooves archaeologists to pay attention to the tenets of community resource sustainability that Ostrom described. The question is how (and whether) to introduce and stimulate the growth of this sort of bottom up management strategy in new places (Burtenshaw 2017).

Möller elaborates on the Faro document's support for participation that allows the public to influence research decisions and critiques the German legal restriction on public engagement. As with many of these authors she sees the class boundary between amateurs and professionals as more influential than actual differences in knowledge or skill.

Broggiolo and Chavarría elaborate this issue in their chapter in which they advocate for local communities to choose the subjects for archaeological research to enhance the "positive effects on community wellbeing, including outcomes on social relationships, sense of belonging, pride of place, ownership and collective empowerment". They contrast their approach with the more typical emphasis on mining local expertise for academic research purposes and aiding the extractive missions of multinationals. I agree, and I would further argue that archaeologists are only one type of expert; the boundary between the scientists and the community was constructed by the scientists and that "the community" is defined as such because it is actually an alternative group of experts whose expertise is not usually recognized as having peer status.

2. Theme II. Agents versus agency

The difference between the introduction of new ideas and strategies to encourage grass roots problem solving and hegemonic top-down manipulation of subject populations to harness them to solve a problem introduced by outsiders is deeply problematic, as expressed in the opening quote by Laurajane Smith. However, rather than seeing ourselves as experts in sustainable development or the ultimate authorities on the meaning of preservation, archaeologists can usefully style themselves as expert agents in negotiation with bureaucracy and in the consequences of particular choices for the *longue durée*. The value of this expertise is not for making decisions for the public, but for elucidating the issues so that the public (however defined) can have the agency to make informed decisions (Smith 1999).

This is not a panacea, not a recipe for ethical behaviour, since how information is shaped and edited will affect how it is received. Nevertheless, approaching public engagement as information sharing rather than

“educating” is more likely to elicit questions and critique that will enhance reflexivity of all concerned. As Tully points out, “participatory archaeology therefore has the potential to lead to multiple outcomes”, but acknowledging this and relinquishing control of some crucial aspects of decision making do not absolve the archaeologist of responsibility much less guarantee an ethical outcome. It is essential that heritage professionals recognize that they are what development specialists call “change agents” and that they make their own motives clear both to themselves and to their collaborators. Sustainable development, community engagement, public education – these are all laudable, but they are vacant concepts that will inevitably be realized through political agendas and disciplinary values.

My point here is simply that archaeologists and other heritage professionals are stakeholders in the programs and projects we support (Castillo, Strecker 2017). Wilkins echoes this in his discussion of Nesta’s requirement that funding organizations, whether extractive industry or research entities clearly articulate their social mission. It is certainly reasonable that those of us whose careers have been dedicated to heritage in one way or another should have an investment in our work. But it is crucial that we make a good faith effort to make these motives clear to the local and descendant communities as well as to the developers, miners and even children whose stake in the past and in heritage we want to nurture or mitigate (Meskell 2005).

Tully’s chapter also addresses the loss of community agency due to historical constructions that sever contemporary cultures of North Africa and Western Asia from their past. The colonial motives of the agents promoting this ideology were submerged beneath their claims to expert status. Instead, by deploying her expertise to reveal these motives, Tully models the difference between manipulation and engagement.

The outstanding success of DigVentures in terms of participant numbers and crowdfunding certainly makes this type of public approach appealing and many of the advantages of peer to peer collaboration and citizen science are clearly detailed in Wilkins’ chapter. In the UK, archaeology is practiced with a standardized methodology of recovery and documentation without the use of a scientific research design, as evidenced on the television program *Time Team*. It is assumed that discovery can be achieved by trained labour and that scholarly analysis can be applied at a later stage.

Because I am trained in the US I see difficulties with this approach, since the success of research done without a specific motive (hypothesis) is difficult to evaluate and unless there is an attempt to test a

proposition the research is unlikely to discover anything new. So, for example, excavation of a structure that began as a private mansion, became a nunnery, then a school and finally a refugee camp during Second World War presents many possibilities for discovery, but not all these phases can be uncovered and equally preserved and investigated. The decision about which building to recover should be informed by public interest, but the archaeologists surely have some responsibility for informing public interest and research questions developed from expert knowledge should also play a part in programs of recovery and preservation. After all, archaeology is not about discovering a button, but about reconstructing the context that determines whether it is a button or a spindle whorl, a toy, an exotic import, evidence of a military campaign or proof of alien contact. To make this determination requires advance decisions about where and how to dig.

3. Theme III. Discovery versus interpretation

Generally speaking, the inclusion of the public in most of these papers is in the production of “normal science” – research that simply supports pre-existing perspectives, despite the emphasis on the interests of local and descendant groups that may contrast with scholarly concerns. Nevertheless, normal science is not a pejorative term – it is a crucial part of intellectual work as it develops confidence in the interpretations of previous work. Rizner’s contribution is in this vein and focuses on an educational approach, which is clearly essential for working with very young students. Her work brings up the important point that types of public engagement and heritage sovereignty are closely linked to the history of particular nation states. Nevertheless, the public at all stages of intellectual growth needs to understand that archaeology is motivated by research questions and not just the desire to find things. Children easily misunderstand this as in our efforts to simplify and enchant we often leave out the creative and knowledge-based motives of our research. This not only enhances the already indelible association between archaeology and treasure hunting but mystifies science and distances the public from knowledge production. In my opinion public engagement should focus less on how to dig and more on why we dig with an emphasis on enhancing the public’s interest in evaluating types of mitigation and ranking multiple justifications. After all, how we dig is ultimately determined by why we have chosen to research (or avoid) and protect (or ignore) a particular time and place. “We were paid to do it” is not a research design.

4. Theme IV. Democracy versus sovereignty

Several chapters argue for citizen science and for the democratization of knowledge, particularly those that are concerned with legal frameworks for preservation. Olivier explores heritage protection as an aspect of human rights that promotes democratic ideals. Möller makes a similar case with her emphasis on the democratizing tenets of the Faro Convention. Conversely, Karl discusses the elite bias inherent in top-down ideas about site significance and Benetti and Santacroce point out that professional's research motives and preservation priorities may exclude important aspects of the material past. Together these papers make a convincing argument for the negotiation of research design and preservation schemes among stakeholders both within and without the academy, and implicitly broach the issue of the sovereignty of descendant communities.

Another side of this argument is raised in contributions from Thomas and Wilkins, who consider along with Delgado Anés, and Martín Civantos aspects of heritage value that contrast with the more global and international scales of value that Olivier describes. But the complex issues that these papers grapple with ultimately lead us back to global concerns, not those inspired by glorious expressions of common humanity, but those values triggered by a reaction to heritage of inhumanity.

Thomas discusses programs aimed at the "difficult" Second World War conflict heritage of the German military presence in Finland, where the successive forces created complex and often painful relationships with local residents, and a PoW camp in Scotland for German "black" prisoners who were deemed to be particularly hard core Nazis. She successfully counters the claims that community archaeology undermines archaeological training and expertise by offering a balanced perspective that respects multiple types of expertise and the competing claims of stakeholders, fully aware that the amount of conflict over heritage is directly proportional the amount of community engagement. Her honest portrayal of the mixed and varied results of the two programs she describes is enlightening and invaluable for achieving a realistic understanding of community engaged efforts.

Thomas shows that the mixed reception of archaeology by these communities is related to the fact that research aimed at "dark heritage" which although interesting to the public is not a heritage that local communities always want to claim. Clearly the identity and agency benefits of heritage research aimed at ancestral magnificence discussed by other authors are not on offer when the heritage is painful and the possibility

of attracting tourists to scrutinize an unhappy past may not be attractive. Of course, archaeologists have been notoriously insensitive to the impact that their interpretations of the past may have on descendant and local groups, characterizing ancestral groups as cannibals, environmental wastrels, savage warriors, and civilizational failures whose cultures collapsed and disappeared. But the impact of dark heritage is harder to ignore when the heritage is closer to the archaeologists' own past.

The question of democracy arises when a majority of the public may wish to eradicate the remains of a history they would rather forget. If archaeologists cede their authority to the public, and sovereignty to descendant communities we may face not only the public's desire to use the past for agendas that run counter to scholarly integrity, but to identities that desire to eradicate an unpleasant record of the past. Of course, both nation states and archaeologists indulge in editing the archaeological past in the service of a point of view, reifying a particular heritage story, or pandering to economic development and extractive industry. These practices vary from inattention to particular features to strategic disinterest in particular types of looting and the selective permitting and funding of certain projects.

Nevertheless, though archaeologists are clearly as fallible as other stakeholders, it is a part of our professional responsibility to work against the forces that would intentionally and unethically shape the past, though we must balance this against the impact of our efforts on the present. Again, despite our desire to treat heritage value as intrinsic (and abjure the responsibility for difficult decisions about representation and preservation) it is clear that this is not the case and that value results from attribution. Returning to my earlier point, it seems to me to be crucial that archaeologists make documented and public decisions about their motives for research and the possible outcomes they foresee from particular agendas of preservation.

Brogiolo and Chavarría make the related point that programs directed by outsiders instantiate values of Eurocentric historiography and globalized power networks into local history. They see confidence, connectivity and life satisfaction as potential benefits of locally originated research agendas. However achieving local empowerment is a complex process that is embedded in local history and politics and not consistent across all interest groups. In my experience the most reliable way to begin collaboration is for researchers to make their own motives and agendas as well as the outcomes they desire as transparent as possible. If these are presented along with alternatives the target group has a better chance of making informed decisions about their own participation.

5. Theme V. Public versus community

Wilkins argues that the public rather than academic concerns should be the foundation of legitimacy for research, development and preservation of heritage, but public interest is neither coherent nor disinterested, and public concerns also need negotiation. Up to this point I have used the terms “public” and “community” without benefit of definition but using these terms without clarification can be manipulative. Multinational corporations, researchers, preservers, developers and government agents who “consult” with “communities” without defining their terms can use the terminology as a screen for unethical practice. As Thomas notes, there needs to be transparency about how representative the community representative is.

The term public is similarly problematic as I have discussed elsewhere (Pyburn 2011). Public archaeology, like teaching, requires ethnographic knowledge of the characteristics of the public. There are many potential publics and failure to define the target audience can result in a failure to inform the crucial stakeholders. The generalized public is an imaginary group whose interests and reactions cannot be evaluated.

Communities on the other hand are complex entities with fluid boundaries and members who belong to multiple communities. The “community” pertinent to a particular archaeological site or heritage past may not have much social or cultural reality in the present but may coalesce around heritage values. It is important that heritage professionals not attempt to define authenticity of a community without engagement and consultation.

6. Theme VI. Education versus collaboration

Most of the papers indicate a preference for archaeologists to approach other stakeholders as peers. Karl makes this point elegantly in the following quote “it is simply not our place, neither as professional archaeologists nor as state heritage managers, to decide, for what we believe to be the benefit of our subjects, what we believe to know is best for them, even if they do not want it”. This stance alleviates some of the colonial weight of assuming an educational role in relation to the public, which without denying that archaeologists and heritage professionals have expertise, allows that it is a limited field of expertise that originates from motives and experience.

A commitment to transparency may put researchers and preservationists at a disadvantage since other interested parties are not con-

strained by the same scholarly and ethical requirements. Nevertheless, it behooves us to take this responsibility seriously as it is the foundation of the public trust we need to make collaboration and engagement possible.

Tully quite rightly identifies the tendency to see public engagement or community collaboration as something added to a traditional archaeological research program as a problem for many specialists. In fact, I would argue that traditional archaeological research should often be conceived as an add on to a community-based heritage project. Her approach to public education as starting with the education of archaeologists is refreshing and the comparison between two disparate programs used as case studies is useful. Nevertheless it should be noted that the good will and openness recommended are not appropriate in all contexts and the suggested possibilities for collaboration may be unduly optimistic.

7. Theme VII. Legal versus ethical

Olivier, Karl, Möller, Rizner, Benetti and Santacroce, and Delgado Anés and Martín Civantos all recount and analyze legal restrictions and statutes pertaining to heritage resources to consider how the laws affect and inhibit public and community engagement.

The history of resolutions and statutes enacted by international governing bodies recounted by Olivier gives ample evidence of evolving global concern for heritage protection that is increasingly sensitive to heritage values. Despite the best minds and the best intentions these agreements are by definition top-down and motivated by the concerns of those privileged to speak in the circles of power (Coombe, Weiss 2015). In many cases the results of these efforts will underwrite the needs and aspirations of local and descendant groups, but there are some cases that these statutes cannot reach and where national and multinational interests may intervene.

Karl's field research on "Clauses" is pointed and hilarious and his analysis of the Austrian legal restrictions on archaeological research is instructive. In fact, several of the legal contexts described in other chapters are similarly unenforceable and amount to a legal façade. Although contradictory statutes may restrict archaeological research by both amateurs and specialists, they may also serve to protect people who would be restricted by more enforceable measures. Quirky and contradictory laws may either allow looting or encourage citizen science.

In fact, legal sanctions are rarely effective. They usually carry light penalties, are always open to interpretation, and are rarely enforced.

Although there has been an increase in convictions, sanctions still tend to be inconsequential, especially for those at the top of the art market who motivate the worst destruction.

8. Theme VIII. Protection versus appropriation

If heritage value is not intrinsic to material culture but is attributed through cultural and historical perspectives, political motives and economic interests, then deciding whether to protect a resource and considerations about how to protect it are likely to trigger disagreement. Concern for preservation is frequently used as an excuse for states and corporation to seize control of monuments to “protect” them and their revenue stream. This sort of “disaster capitalism” is often an arrow in the quiver of extractive industry claiming to do community service by protecting cultural resources that are endangered by their resource use (Altschul 2015).

Similarly, as Cornelius Holtorf (p.c.) has pointed out, the continuous harping on the destruction of cultural property in wartime has provided a world stage for those who wish to demonstrate the sovereignty of their ideology. On the other hand, government protection of particular resources as National heritage removes them from the control of descendant groups and undermines identity politics, not always for the good of Indigenous groups (Castillo 2017; Strecker 2017).

In conclusion these papers represent a sea change in archaeology in which scientism and colonial intellectual hegemony is being replaced with reflexive and socially responsible efforts for good in the political present. Advancing knowledge and promoting research are still very important to contemporary practitioners, but there is now an awareness of how complex this process really is and how carefully we must work to overcome the elitist heritage of the disciplines of social science, including archaeology. In these chapters there is evidence that archaeologists have gone beyond the finger pointing and hand wringing of my generation to turn the storehouse of knowledge and the authority of the academy into practical tools for gaining a better understanding of the world and of the place of research into the past in that world (Pikirayi 2009). These contributions acknowledge failure and dissent, complexity and confusion, but also new ways to for researchers to define success. In fact, the very messiness of the projects described is cause for hope and confidence in the future of archaeology.

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