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Archival Historiographies: The Impact of Twentieth-Century Legacy Data on Archaeological Investigations. Olympia Bobou, Amy C. Miranda, and Rubina Raja, eds. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2022. xii, 180 pp. 9782503600185

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As a discipline concerned with the ancient past, archaeology is in the rare league of endeavours that require destruction to facilitate reconstruction: a site must be excavated – read, variously destroyed – in order for us to understand its formation and occupation history. As such, there is only one opportunity to undertake an excavation; once the components are removed, they cannot be re-excavated. This also goes for recording a site. In the moment of excavation, archaeologists are tasked with making as much sense as possible of the details in front of them – details that may change or be open to alternative interpretations as years go by. As such, archaeology is also a discipline in which detailed recording of each step, each context, each day’s work is of paramount importance. Yet such data are rarely utilized after their initial collection and realization through site-excavation publication. It is on this juncture that Olympia Bobou, Amy C. Miranda, and Rubina Raja focus as editors of this volume and key proponents in the advancement of the emerging subfield of archival archaeology.

The present volume develops the archival archaeological discourse that originated with the 2021 conference session *Archive Archaeology and Cultural Heritage: Documentation in Conflict Zones*, at the Archaeological Institute of America annual meeting. It is the grey literature of daily notebooks, voluminous amounts of archival photographs, and documentation as part of routine site excavations that lie at the core of the present volume. The “archival turn” of seeing archives as zones of further engagement and not simply neutral curation facilities has been late in arriving to archaeology, but as this volume demonstrates, the field is rife with potential for further interrogation among legacy

archival materials. So often within archaeology, if physical excavations are not to be undertaken, research funding is limited. *Archival Historiographies*, the third instalment in the Archive Archaeology series,¹ implicitly seeks to challenge this tacit norm by demonstrating that archival research is also a valid form of archaeological research.

Contributions to this volume focus on the Mediterranean and Near East, particularly the Syrian sites of Palmyra (chapters 6–9) and Dura-Europos (chapters 3–4 and 11), as well as Knossos in Greece (chapter 2), Gerasa in Jordan (chapter 5), and contexts in Turkey (chapter 10); these appear along with theorization around data curation and digitization (chapter 4) and a rhetorical consideration of archives as sites of curation and contestation (chapter 11). While the scope of coverage is narrow, the intention of this volume is not encyclopedic; instead, contributions engage with specific contexts to demonstrate what archival archaeological approaches can contribute and how these methods can be further developed. Such discourse development meaningfully addresses grey literature engagement; methodological approaches to documentation of sites in zones of conflict; and avenues for integrating analog source materials into digitally accessible media, namely through open-access and interoperable formats such as .csv. Beyond best practices, the *sotto voce* push for further digital integration is also a focus on global accessibility, recognizing that it is often challenging and expensive for global researchers to access physical archives.

One area of engagement evident throughout this volume revolves around interrogations of “what was interesting” – which is to say, “What, of all the countless aspects of any given archaeological excavation, did archaeologists choose to focus their attention on?” Palmyrene funerary portraiture and the synagogue scene from Dura-Europos serve as excellent examples within this volume. The examination of “areas of priority” allows for historiographically oriented reconstructions of broader cultural views on the past and deeper insights into the legacy of archaeological knowledge. The blurring of boundaries between excavators’ interests and the data we have from excavations demonstrates that the researcher cannot be cleanly separated from the research: choices were made about what was examined, and the legacy of archaeology as a field reflects those choices, which serve as the interpretational foundations of the field – whether

1 See Brepols Publishers NV/SA, “Book Series: Archive Archaeology,” Brepols, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://www.brepols.net/series/ARC>.

good or questionable. One must keep in mind that the vast majority of archaeological sites are never fully excavated; the archival archaeology approach espoused in this volume introduces opportunities within archival documentation, particularly through the assessment of archival materials such as diaries and correspondences, to look at the intentionality behind what was excavated and why. To this end, chapter 11, by J.A. Baird, is particularly impactful in its consideration of questions around rhetoric, ethics, and the nature of assessment of archival sources in regard to archaeological contexts.

Anne Hunnell Chen (chapter 4) pivots the focus to the technical side, discussing the need to further integrate linked open data within archaeology through the employment of findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable (FAIR) principles. Hunnell Chen advocates in particular for the use of uniform resource identifiers (URIs) to facilitate clearer data connections and act as a tool for disambiguating sites – for instance, the numerous ancient locales named Alexandria. The Pleiades project,² a digital gazetteer of the ancient world, is presented as an example for how such linked data can be developed. The use of URIs also provides opportunities to concatenate data from numerous institutions – the reality being that archaeological projects on the same site are often undertaken by multiple institutions, which then have their own archival repositories. To this end, Hunnell Chen discusses the ongoing International (Digital) Dura-Europos Archive (IDEA) project³ as an example of such a data-integration platform.

Archival archaeology can also play a role in documenting sites at risk of destruction through conflict, encroachment of settlements, and natural impacts to the landscape and act as a mechanism for substantiating provenance details of artefacts entering the antiquities marketplace. Patrick M. Michel (chapter 9) discusses this avenue in regard to the Collart-Palmyre project,⁴ which focuses on the archive of Swiss archaeologist Paul Collart and the integration of visual materials into the Tiresias database.⁵ An ancillary component of this project, accessible on request, focuses on providing documentary data from Palmyra to law enforcement and antiquities documentation agencies, particularly in light of

2 See Pleiades (website), accessed June 2, 2024, <https://pleiades.stoa.org>.

3 See IDEA: International (Digital) Dura-Europos Archive (website), accessed June 2, 2024, <https://duraeuroposarchive.org/>.

4 See Projet Collart-Palmyre (website), accessed June 2, 2024, <https://wp.unil.ch/collart-palmyre/>.

5 See Tiresias (website), accessed June 2, 2024, <https://tiresias.unil.ch/home>.

purposeful destruction of the site undertaken by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in 2015–2016. This data is available through the Collart-Palmyre Object Database via the CATalogue d'IMAgEs (CATIMA) platform, which uses object ID registration protocols⁶ to aid in addressing cultural heritage despoilation and trade in illegally acquired antiquities.

J.A. Baird (chapter 11) provides a counterpoint commentary. While conceding that greater digital access is a boon for archaeology broadly, Baird notes that numerous such endeavours bear hallmarks of a past colonialist salvation mentality. Baird elaborates, noting that it is widely agreed today that, over the past century or more, numerous institutions spirited away countless cultural heritage objects through methods now seen as questionable if not outright unethical. The recognition of this fact has been a key point of attempts at reconciliation within archaeology, of which digitized collections, 3D reconstructions in place of removal, local community engagement, and greater access have been construed as evidence of post-colonial growth and deeper awareness. Yet many digitized archival materials continue to be utilizable only by researchers with institutional credentials or for a fee. Baird questions how such assertions of dominion over archaeological documentary materials are any different than previous physical removals of objects: is the digital archive simply a novel avenue of continued inequity? This question remains open.

Nascent developments within the emerging subfield of archival archaeology have significant promise for future integration into broader archaeological discourses and for methodological expansion to other global contexts, and there are abundant opportunities for examining not only the legacy data of excavations but also cultural dynamics among excavators and local communities. This volume will be of great interest to archaeologists interested in archival data, community engagement, and the historiography of archaeology as well as researchers in the digital humanities and gallery, library, archives, and museums (GLAM) fields. Though potentially of interest to a broader readership, this volume is directed primarily at a research audience and will be a welcome addition to university and research libraries alike.

6 See University of Lausanne, *The Collart-Palmyre Object Database on CATIMA from the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, in collaboration with the International Council of Museums (ICOM)*, NETcher, accessed June, 2, 2024, https://netcher.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/13_Collart-Palmyre.pdf.