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## Epilogue: why the history of archaeology matters

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In recent years the history of archaeology has been enjoying something of a vogue in different research traditions, resulting in a wealth of new studies and publications. In the English-speaking world, our store of biographies and national histories has been considerably expanded by the five-volume *Encyclopedia of archaeology* (Murray 1999; 2001). The *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology* has provided a much needed forum for research, and the AREA project — Archives of European Archaeology — has begun to explore a range of resources bearing on the history of archaeology in Europe. At the same time, archaeologists have continued to justify and to advocate the significance of 'novel' approaches to archaeology through partial histories of the discipline (the most recent being those associated with the revival of 'Darwinian archaeologies' such as Lyman *et al.* 1997). Other agendas have been advanced through the production of alternative histories

of national archaeologies (e.g. Patterson 1995), the role of women (e.g. Díaz-Andreu & Sørensen 1998) and amateurs (Kehoe & Emmerichs 1999).

In his comprehensive survey of disciplinary historiography, Trigger (2001) points out that the history of archaeology has become a richly complex field producing knowledge that serves a diverse range of interests. Major synthetic treatments (Trigger 1989; Schnapp 1996) have made firm statements about disciplinary history and identity that have stressed the entanglement of archaeology and society, and the complex and ambiguous roots of the archaeological perspective. A concern with disciplinary identity (particularly for Trigger) has also meant a concern with disciplinary epistemology and metaphysics — in other words, with the nature of archaeological knowledge and of archaeological phenomena. This bridge between disciplinary history and epistemology has also

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focused attention on the need to explore archaeological institutions (university departments, museums and professional associations) as well as those structures (such as heritage legislation) that help shape the intersections between archaeology and society.

Over the last decade or so historians of archaeology have also focused their attention on methodological matters. Van Reybrouck is probably right in arguing here that perspectives from the sociology of science have been slow to filter through into mainstream histories of archaeology, but they have been present (see e.g. Fahenstock 1984; Murray 1989; 1998; Trigger 1985; 2001). Indeed, the kinds of methodological introspection found in two older collections (Christenson 1989; Reyman 1992) have recently been further expanded in the papers assembled by Corbey & Roebroeks (2001), where historians of archaeology (and historians of sciences cognate to archaeology) explicitly debate the role of the history of archaeology both within and outside the discipline.

The papers collected here as *Ancestral Archives* advance our understanding of many of the themes and issues that have been at the heart of recent work in the field — methodology, the purposes of history-writing, issues of disciplinary identity, the socio-politics of archaeology (particularly in nationalist and colonialist contexts) and disciplinary epistemology. I shall now look at these in slightly greater detail.

### How and why the history of archaeology

*Ancestral Archives* contributes to a continuing reflection about the how and the why of the history of archaeology. It does so through explicit methodological discussions (e.g. Van Reybrouck, Kaeser), and through practical demonstrations of the value of archival resources (Alexandri, Lewuillon, Ruiz, Sánchez & Bellón, and Roughley, Sherratt & Shell). In the Introduction, Schlanger steers a course between the various models of practice that have become available, and makes an important distinction between histories of archaeology that are *for* archaeology and those that are *about* archaeology. In Schlanger's view the history of archaeology should play a significant role in developing a coherent philosophy of archaeology, but it should also seek to comprehend archaeology as a social and cultural product in its own right.

This is especially important in discussions about the identity of archaeology. Schnapp's discussion of the 'evolution' of archaeology from natural history and antiquarianism makes the important observation that archaeology — the study of material remains from the past — does not simply belong to archaeologists. Likewise Nordbladh's evocative history of Pehr Tham reinforces the notion that antiquarianism was no 'wrong turning' on the path to archaeology, but rather a coherent activity in itself. Recognizing the interests of others, whether they be practitioners of different cognate disciplines, political opponents (Richard on de Mortillet), members of professional associations (Maischberger on war-time members of the German Archaeological Institute), or politicians with a keen eye to the rhetorical power of archaeological data (Schlanger on Smuts) emphasizes the fact that archaeological perspectives (either past or present) are strikingly ambiguous.

Understanding ambiguity also helps us to avoid the ultimately sterile oppositions of internalist/externalist and presentist/historicist histories that have tended to dog the histories of other sciences. Here the work of Blanckaert (e.g. 2001) in tracing out the complex lineages of archaeological and anthropological concepts and categories has been especially valuable. Lewuillon's detailed discussion of the iconography of archaeological illustration advances our understanding of the evolution of the observational languages of archaeology during the 19th century. This advocacy of sociology of science perspectives by archaeologists has not, however, been matched by much interest in archaeology from historians of cognate disciplines such as anthropology (e.g. George Stocking), let alone historians of science (*cf.* however Van Riper 1993). One hopes that the possibilities demonstrated here will provide sufficient incentive for non-archaeologists to improve this situation.

The contribution of the history of archaeology to contemporary debates about disciplinary theory and epistemology is particularly apparent in discussions about the impact of colonialism and nationalism on archaeological reasoning. Boast's analysis of Wheeler's research at Arikamedu, and Schlanger's account of Smuts' use of archaeology to justify the social order in South Africa, make significant contributions to the exploration of colonial science. This is

of course an on-going issue, and histories of archaeology have already begun to play their part in the development of postcolonial approaches, both internal and external, to our discipline. Significantly, one of the best examples of this genre (Griffiths 1996) has been written by a historian, not an archaeologist. Nonetheless, an exploration of links between archaeology and colonialism will uncover much hidden social history in Europe, particularly with regard to the subjugation of ethnic minorities within European nations (see e.g. Jones 1997; Murray 1989; 1998).

After the flood of research in the 1990s on the links between archaeology and nationalism, the detailed historical examples presented in *Ancestral Archives* (particularly those by Richard, Alexandri, and Ruiz, Sánchez & Bellón) can be more easily appreciated by practitioners. Certainly these studies give us an opportunity to explore the ways in which archaeologists have sought support from science and society, and the conditions under which that support has been given. Alexandri's use of archival resources to chart the ways in which archaeological knowledge actually contributed to the formation of community identity in newly independent Greece stands as a major contribution to the field.

Other aspects of disciplinary history can also help us explore the identity of archaeology through an analysis of disciplinary epistemology and metaphysics. Schnapp eloquently argues for the value of a critical historiography in this role, and the contributions by Van Reybrouck and particularly Kaeser focus on the use of perspectives drawn from the sociology of science to make this explicit. Certainly Kaeser's analysis of the internationalization of archaeology, during the very same period where it was such a powerful force in the creation of national identities, highlights the rhetorical value of a positivist generalizing science based on explicit observational languages and strict logical rules — many of which were more honoured in the breach than the observance.

One of the consequences of the turn towards critical self-reflection in archaeology has been that we now understand more about the power of tradition. Tradition guides the socialization of practitioners (especially in matters related to the goals of archaeology, problem selection, methodology and assessments of the plausibility of knowledge claims). Tradition also structures the terms in which practitioners of disciplines cognate to archaeology establish the meaning or plausibility of archaeological knowledge claims. In this sense tradition oversees both the production and the legitimation of archaeological knowledge (Murray 1987).

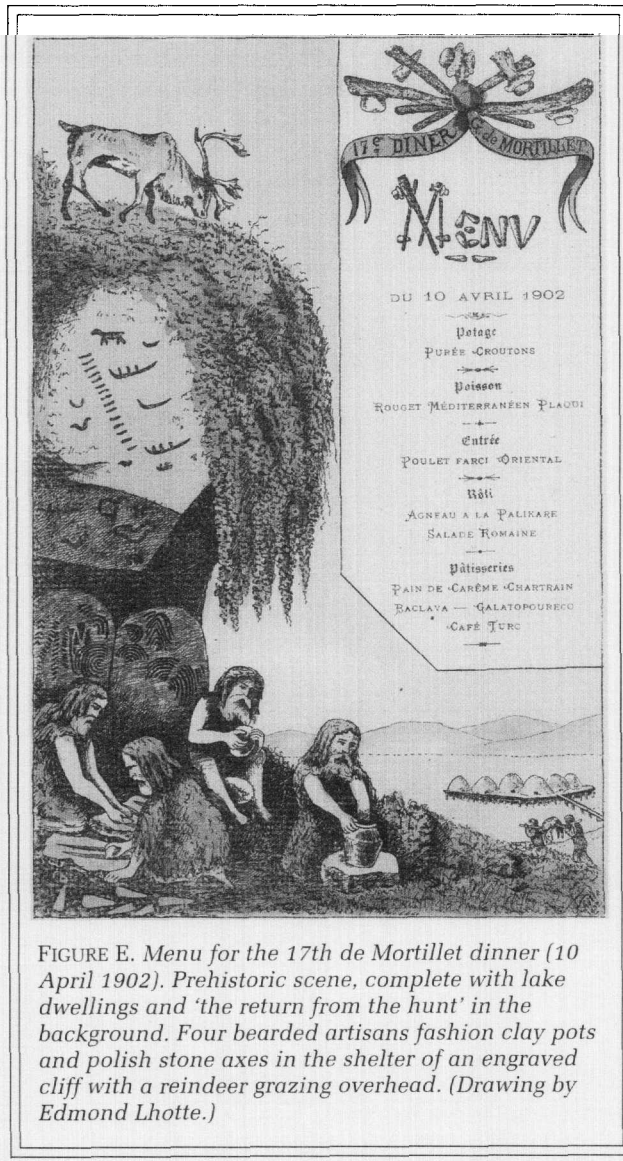


FIGURE E. Menu for the 17th de Mortillet dinner (10 April 1902). Prehistoric scene, complete with lake dwellings and 'the return from the hunt' in the background. Four bearded artisans fashion clay pots and polish stone axes in the shelter of an engraved cliff with a reindeer grazing overhead. (Drawing by Edmond Lhotte.)

Understanding the reasons why interpretations and explanations are found to be plausible or implausible has proved to be a more challenging problem. Work in the sociology of science undertaken during the same period has been of some assistance here, especially in the discussion of the power of disciplines (e.g. Lemaine *et al.* 1976). These discussions have fostered an understanding of two important and different senses of the term 'discipline' — on the one hand a body of specialized knowledge and/or skills, and on the other, a political institution. While there has been no rejection of the former sense as being a critical facet of the identity of disciplines (this was also the primary concern of older-style disciplinary histories), in practice research and discussion has focused on the sense of disciplines as institutions marking out areas of human knowledge and socializing their members.

In this latter sense disciplines act as socializing mechanisms where individual and community values and interests collide, and where practitioners acquire their perceptions of what explanations and interpretations are cognitively plausible, what theories materially advance knowledge of observable and unobservable phenomena, what problems are worth pursuing, and what methodologies are likely to yield reliable knowledge of the phenomena under review. Analysis of the disciplinary 'culture' of practitioners allows us to chart the ways in which social and cultural 'givens' (normative values) can be incorporated as privileged assumptions analytically prior to induction by the contributors. Van Reybrouck and Kaeser are excellent examples of this approach.

Notwithstanding the value of having new case studies exploring well-defined problems, this collection is particularly useful for two additional reasons. *Ancestral Archives* clearly demonstrates the tremendous potential of micro-scale archival research in the history of archaeology. The bulk of the papers

are based on documentary records (personal papers, correspondence, images, catalogues, government archives and those of professional associations and the like) that have hitherto attracted little attention. These show a richness and diversity as resources for history-making both at the level of individual actors (see Nordbladh, Sherratt, Richard, Schlanger, Maischberger), and at other more general levels or contexts (Alexandri, Lewuillon, and Roughley, Sherratt & Shell). *Ancestral Archives* also demonstrates the diversity of the national experiences of archaeology, be it in France (Richard), Sweden (Nordbladh), Spain (Ruiz, Sánchez & Bellón), Greece (Alexandri), India (Boast) and South Africa (Schlanger), where nationalism, colonialism and internationalism (Kaeser) are deeply enmeshed in the development of archaeologi-

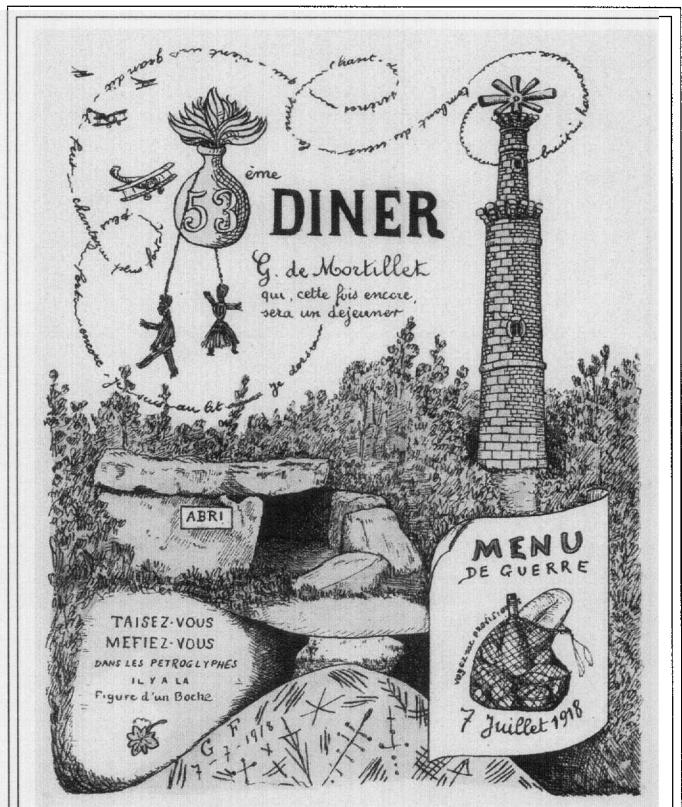


FIGURE I. Menu for the 53rd de Mortillet dinner (7 July 1918). Menu de guerre: looming aeroplanes, hanging puppets, watch towers, dolmens as shelters and petroglyphs concealing the figure of the enemy. (Drawing by Gustave Fouju.)

cal perspectives that created distinctive regional traditions of practice, based on a common inheritance of observational languages and concepts. The idea of there being a unity within the diversity of archaeologies past and present has been strengthened by the inclusion of new case studies and sources of information.

### Closing observations

Disciplines get the disciplinary histories they deserve, and it is the case that each new account of the archaeologist's project from the 19th century onwards has also led to a rewriting of disciplinary history by the advocates of new approaches (Murray 1987; 1998). Exploring new histories of archaeology can help us understand how the edifice of modern archaeology — its agendas, concepts, categories, patterns of socialization, and institutions — became established, and the processes which have underwritten its transformations. *Ancestral Archives* contributes to these broad questions of disciplinary identity and epistemology, but it also offers a great deal more.

Discussions of archaeology in nationalist and colonialist situations have strengthened our understanding of the importance of social and cultural context in archaeological reasoning.

However, they also stress the importance of archaeology *within* the histories of nations and communities since the early 19th century. In this sense the role of archaeology as a significant social and cultural force (in the second and third worlds, as well as in the first) underscores the point that archaeology does not belong only to archaeologists. Histories of archaeology, whether by archaeologists or others, have the capacity to further enrich our understanding of the origins of communities, ethnicities, nations and empires and of their transformations over the last two centuries.

This is a worthwhile objective, and so is an exploration of the ways in which archaeologists have sought to make sense of the past. Given the social and cultural importance of archaeology and the very real consequences of what might be described as misuses of disciplinary concepts and categories, it is incumbent upon practitioners to speak directly and honestly with our fellow archaeologists, and also with the wider communities that consume our productions. Ranging from the amusing and quirky (Sherratt) to the desperately sad accounts of life under totalitarianism (Maischberger), *Ancestral Archives* contains a wealth of insights and perspectives that will help us achieve these goals.

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