

# Foreword

Archaeology is not about the past. For a substantial part of my life as an archaeologist, I have assumed that archaeology *was* about the past. When I decided to devote my life to it, I was convinced that archaeology was not only the world's most entertaining outdoor activity, but also that it was about studying societies from the past on the basis of their material remains. And after completing my studies, during the next step in my career, supported by a grant for a number of years, that is what I thought I was doing. Then came the practice of work outside academia, and I found out that in fact my profession comprised two distinct branches. On the one hand there was the archaeological research that I had been involved in, and apart from that there were also the sites and monuments that had to be taken care of, the archaeological heritage or resource management. Managing archaeological resources has little to do with the past and, by definition, is in the present. I learned that the purpose of this work was primarily to preserve archaeological sites as a source of information about the past.

The value of archaeological resources to society is of course considerably wider than that, and I have been finding out about value-based approaches to heritage, stakeholder involvement, and multiple interpretations of the past ever since. Nevertheless, I have long believed in the dichotomy between archaeological research that produced knowledge of the past and archaeological resource management that dealt not just with the archaeological fabric but with the heritage values ascribed to it and that was inherently political as a result.

I now know that such differentiation is not a useful distinction. It can be used to explain certain phenomena and ways in which the discipline has developed, for example as related to commercialization. But investigations in the history of archaeology have made it abundantly clear that our discipline is like the other social sciences and humanities in that all research is directly related to social and political development and current themes and tendencies. In fact, the birth of modern archaeology itself can be directly related to major social and political developments in Europe around the beginning of the nineteenth century at the end of the Enlightenment, when Napoleon had been defeated and Europe was being transformed. The new nation-states needed to create or redefine their national identities and found themselves in a need of national past and shared heritage.

Antiquaries had been studying the classical world for centuries before, but it is not a coincidence that the first professorship in the world to explicitly include nonclassical, prehistoric archaeology, dates from 1818 in The Netherlands and was followed rapidly by more such posts in other European countries.

What is studied about the past is thus directly related to what is relevant in the present. Moreover, it is also directly related to *how* it is studied and *where*. Different academic traditions are of crucial importance, for research, just as different legal and political systems determine how heritage resources can be managed. Local communities and native populations alike are claiming direct involvement not only in heritage resource management, but also in archaeological research. The new concepts of value-based management and value-centered conservation of archaeological resources have brought fundamental changes to the role of the archaeologist. From an expert uncovering truth he has now become an interpreter of changing meaning and significance.

I obviously do not want to imply by all this, that all archaeology is only about the present. There are many archaeologies and they can certainly bring us valuable insights about the foreign country that is our past, and its physical remains that survive all around us and below our feet. That is why the present book is so important. Its editor has brought together an impressive number of case studies from all around the world that testify to the different ways of how the past and the present interact in the different traditions that have developed around the world. Even in the age where Anglo-American models of studying the past and managing heritage are seemingly dominant, this has changed relatively little and diversity remains. In many contributions, little distinction is made between research archaeology and heritage management, and the discipline as a whole is set in its national context. Where archaeological heritage is strongly contested, either because neo-colonial agendas persist such as in Africa and the Near East, or because the colonizers never left and appropriated the land, such as in the Americas and Australia, it becomes especially clear that archaeology is not neutral. The arguments and interpretations of archaeological research can reinforce political arguments of the day just as they are being inspired or even explicitly used by those arguments. And by defining what heritage is to be valued and what not, archaeological stewardship is linked to political choice.

It is fortunate that the present collection of papers has been assembled, so that we have not only the possibility for international and cross-cultural comparison, but we also have the benefit of viewing some very different perspectives and vantage points from a diversity of authors, which makes reading of this book all the more interesting.

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