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# Historiographical Approaches to Past Archaeological Research. Introduction

## Summary

For many years now, developments in the historiography of sciences and humanities have led to the call for a revised history of archaeology and a move away from hagiography and presentations of scientific processes as an inevitable progression. Historians of archaeology have begun to utilize approved and new historiographical concepts and tools to trace how archaeological knowledge has been acquired as well as to reflect on the historical conditions and contexts in which this knowledge has been generated. This volume seeks to contribute to this trend. By linking theories and models with case studies from the nineteenth and twentieth century, the authors illuminate implications of communication on archaeological knowledge and scrutinize routines of early archaeological practices. The usefulness of different approaches such as narratological concepts or the concept of habitus is thus considered.

Keywords: History of archaeology; history of science; historiographical approaches.

Ausgehend von Entwicklungen in der Geschichtsschreibung von Natur- und Geisteswissenschaften wird seit vielen Jahren auch eine veränderte Historiographie der Archäologie(n) gefordert und die Abkehr von Hagiographie und Darstellungen wissenschaftlicher Prozesse als unvermeidlichem Fortschreiten. Archäologiehistoriker/innen nutzen bewährte und neue historiographische Konzepte und Instrumente, um zu untersuchen, wie archäologisches Wissen erworben wurde, und um die historischen Bedingungen und Kontexte der archäologischen Wissensgenerierung zu reflektieren. Zu diesem Trend will der vorliegende Band beitragen. Die Autorinnen und Autoren verknüpfen Theorien und Modelle mit Fallstudien aus dem neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert, um Auswirkungen von Kommunikation auf den archäologischen Wissensprozess zu beleuchten und Routinen früher archäologischer Praktiken zu hinterfragen. Überprüft wird auf diese Weise der Nutzen verschiedener Ansätze wie narratologischer Konzepte oder des Habituskonzepts.

Keywords: Geschichte der Archäologie; Archäologiegeschichte; Wissenschaftsgeschichte; historiographische Ansätze.

How to write the history of archaeology? For many years now, developments in the historiography of the sciences and the humanities have led to the call for a revised history of archaeology and a move away from hagiography and presentations of scientific processes as an inevitable progression. Historians of archaeology have begun to utilize approved and new historiographical tools in order to trace how archaeological knowledge has been acquired as well as to reflect on the historical conditions and contexts in which this knowledge has been generated. Thus, past achievements of the archaeological disciplines are no longer presented without historiographical reflection. It is understood that the goal of archaeology's history cannot be "to legitimize current practices by giving them a respectable ancestry"<sup>1</sup> and the risk of 'presentism' or 'present-centeredness,' resulting in studies carried out from a present perspective with an according modern agenda, has been identified.<sup>2</sup>

Actual history of science, respectively of archaeology, is supposed to trace the production of scholarly knowledge instead of reviewing past research from a more advanced modern view or to extract normative guidelines for current research.<sup>3</sup> It aims at scrutinizing concepts and practices in light of their historical contexts, asks how discoveries were made and how they were identified or defined as such, how archaeological research categories developed, in what ways they were conditioned by social and political interests, or how specific topics were emphasized by biographical aspects, individual preferences or social interaction. However, in order to trace how archaeological knowledge has been produced and to reflect on the historical contexts in which this knowledge has been generated, it is important to carefully inspect the historiographical approaches, the models, theories and methods that are applied, and to discuss their merits and limitations in light of the specific needs of the historian of archaeology.

Still, there is an alternative perspective claiming that the history of archaeology is considered to be complementing theoretical discussion, critically assessing modern archaeological practices and enabling archaeologists "better to understand the orientation of current research and potentially enable changes."<sup>4</sup> This way of investigating historical sources is based on archaeological research, i. e. on modern scientific standpoints and current questions, and not on ideas of the past (that might no longer be central to modern research). Bert Theunissen therefore suggested to rather characterize those "as scientific criticism or scientific review than as history of science."<sup>5</sup> In order to tell standpoints apart it is indeed important to clearly distinguish studies aiming at normative guidelines for today's archaeology from actually historical analyses of past archaeological research.

1 Corbey and Roebroeks 2003, 1.

2 Kaeser 2008, 11.

3 For detailed information on objectives and trends in

the history of science see Hagner 2001.

4 Gramsch 2006, 15. – Translation by the authors.

5 Theunissen 2001, 150.

Most of the authors' ideas collected here were first presented during a workshop in 2010, entitled "New historiographical approaches to archaeological research". The workshop explicitly focused on discussing methodologies and sought to raise questions concerning not yet approved approaches towards the history of archaeology. It thus aimed at exploring and possibly broadening the spectrum of available historiographical frameworks, concepts, and methods for novel histories of archaeological research.

However, the appropriateness of the term 'new' in the workshop's title has been questioned by the participants (contribution Serge Reubi).<sup>6</sup> It was claimed that the application of methods of literary studies (contribution Felix Wiedemann) or prosopography (contribution Amara Thornton), the consideration of social entanglements and communication structures behind scientific facts and processes following Ludwik Fleck (contribution Marianne Sommer), Bruno Latour's model of actor-networks (contributions Amara Thornton, Géraldine Delley) or Pierre Bourdieu's habitus concept (contribution Fabian Link) are not new but have been utilized in investigations for decades.

While this stands without question, it does not, however, hold true for the history of archaeology. Such models and theories were first applied to the history of archaeology only around the beginning of the twenty-first century, when the trend was to make history of archaeology a more significant part of history of science. Since then historians of archaeology have regularly questioned the notions of continuous advancement and cumulative progress of concepts and knowledge in archaeological research. Accordingly, historians of archaeology have made various efforts to approach past research from different starting points and all sorts of new perspectives were embraced. Thus, new key aspects were discovered after the history of archaeology took its 'practical turn' at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In consequence, there have been various investigations, publications and conferences concerning the history and sociology of archaeological practices, notably field work practices.<sup>7</sup> In addition, with the adoption of new research perspectives, the scope of sources widened as well. For one, the research network "Archives of European Archaeology" was launched in 1999 claiming to more intensively investigate unpublished material since previous histories of archaeology had mainly been dealing with published sources of past research only. The network's primary focus is the exploitation of all sorts of "archives of the discipline", be it the unpublished material in libraries, museum depots or government archives.<sup>8</sup> Another kind of new sources introduced to the history of more recent archaeological research were oral histories, e. g. interviews with former staff members of particular excavations or senior scholars.<sup>9</sup> The revival of history of archaeology did not only offer new research opportu-

6 Reubi in this volume, esp. 225.

7 E. g. Lucas 2001; Davidovic-Walther 2009; Eberhardt 2011; Jensen 2012.

8 <http://www.area-archives.org/index.html> (visited on

07/07/2015); Schlanger 2002; Schlanger and Nordbladh 2008; Huth and Moro Abada 2013.

9 Smith 2006.

nities or open new source categories. Methodological issues were also raised anew taking up points from historiographies of other scientific disciplines as e. g. scientific biography as a research method.<sup>10</sup> This volume seeks to contribute to the presented trend by linking theories and models with case studies and rearrange the sets in which archaeological thinking is believed to develop.

Marianne Sommer discusses the implications of communication on scientific knowledge. She deals with the controversies regarding the scientific evidence of the so-called eoliths in eighteenth and nineteenth century archaeology, i. e. the question of whether these objects were archaeological artifacts or created by natural processes. Sommer follows Ludwik Fleck among others in explaining how the popularization of scientific knowledge is less a top-down phenomenon but rather a cycle which again generates scientific knowledge. Thus, Sommer shows how scientific objects, namely eoliths, came into being by verbal and visual communication, and by their incorporation into current thinking patterns such as evolutionary progression.

Irina Podgorny tracks back routines of early archaeological observation and documentation methods. How the practices of other fields not only influenced but also shaped the archaeological grip on evidence is presented in her contribution in detailed case studies. Political administrative forms, engineering drawings and medical perspectives could impact the ways in which archaeological features were seen and recorded. It becomes apparent how complex the origins of communicative practices are and how these practices – instead of being invented in matter-of-factly scientific strategies – regularly evolved out of habits and routines.

Amara Thornton presents a combined approach that consists of biography, prosopography and network analysis to identify the specific participants and members of early archaeology in twentieth century British Mandate Palestine and Transjordan. She broadens the scope of already known network categories such as disciplinary or gender-based networks attempting to meticulously encompass all parties that have been involved in defining and establishing the discipline of archaeology in early twentieth century Palestine and Transjordan. She thus explores how the wider archaeological network, including protagonists such as professional archaeologists, political authorities or private elites, operated.

Géraldine Delley researches the so called ‘natural science methods revolution’ in Swiss archaeology that is related to radiocarbon and tree-ring dating methods. She investigates the impact of these two methods on the research practice of the archaeology of ancient Swiss lake-dwellers between 1950 and 1985. Delley shows the profound changes that methods from the natural sciences provoked within Swiss archaeological research of the 1960s. However, these changes were primarily not rooted in a general modernization

10 Kaeser 2004; Link 2014.

in the sense of progress, but were influenced by other activities of scholars generally, e. g. mobilizing financial resources from politicians by applying certain rhetorical strategies.

How scientific objects come into being in archaeological research is the topic of Ulrich Veit's contribution. Drawing on Hans-Jörg Rheinberger's conception of 'experimental systems', Veit focuses on the case of Iron Age 'princely seats' (*Fürstensitze*). In doing so, he presents a discourse that has undergone many years of discussion and critique within the German community from a previously unknown perspective. Veit traces how this epistemic object developed in several steps of knowledge transformation and reveals that the places of archaeological research are not scientific environments themselves, but results of concrete processes followed by researchers with different social groups involved.

Three case studies on the presentation and self-presentation of colonial archaeologists in Dutch East India during the 1920s and 1930s are explored by Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff. Referring to post-colonial theory, the authors investigate to what extent early archaeology continues to affect the archaeology of post-colonial Indonesia and whether the idea of colonial archaeologists as actual 'discoverers' of the prehistoric past remains valid until today. Bloembergen and Eickhoff are able to show that the creation of archaeological knowledge not only reproduced colonial hierarchies but included various forms of indigenous involvement as well.

Felix Wiedemann considers the possibilities of applying narratological concepts for studying the historiography of archaeology. Drawing on Hayden White, Paul Ricoeur and others, he uses for one the example of archaeological narrations from the nineteenth and early twentieth century on human migration in the Near East. Wiedemann analyzes how archaeologists arranged supposed historical events (such as migrations) within their accounts to arrive at coherent plots. The historical role that was ascribed to migrating groups or 'peoples' such as "founders or destroyers of human culture" relied less on archaeological findings but rather on the composition of a specific plots, subject to the political context of the time.

Fabian Link explores the epistemic changes in the scientific constructions of prehistoric archaeology from the 1930s to the 1960s, taking the example of the East German archaeologist Gotthard Neumann. For this purpose, he uses a combined approach of conceptual history and Bourdieu's field- and habitus-theory. Focusing on the impact of *völkisch* thoughts in Neumann's publications he argues that the importance of these ideas in prehistory was strongly linked with the social interactions Neumann had with Nazi politics but, primarily, with the professional success he had with this strategy.

In the closing contribution, Serge Reubi takes up the discussion about the alleged 'novelty' of the approaches adopted in this volume. Examining the differences between historiography of the natural sciences and historiography of the social sciences including archaeology, Reubi discusses the difficulties of establishing joint methodological stan-

dards due to the different research traditions of the two fields. In his view, most history of the social sciences is still concerned with normative ideas within one discipline. Such history – as for example the history of archeology – does not go beyond the space of established perspectives of the discipline under examination. Due to this “single-disciplinary approach” historians of archaeology are unable to escape the ‘presentist trap’. Reubi sees this buttressed by the name of our workshop in 2010, when we identified approaches as “new” because we had in mind an ‘isolated’ history of archaeology instead of regarding archaeology as one field within a general history of science. He claims that historians of archaeology are to give up single-disciplinary approaches and should consider a broader view by embracing approaches from other disciplines and experts from a general history of science.

This book includes a wide range of concepts, from the history of experimentation in the life sciences to methods drawn from literary studies, and it is written by archaeologists, historians of modern history and historians of science. Its aim is thus to add to the demanded ‘modernized’ history of archaeology, that is, to a multi-disciplinary approach in researching the history of archaeology.

We would like to thank the Excellence Cluster Topoi for making the fruitful workshop possible on which the present book is based and for having the volume published. Within Topoi scholars examine the relation between spatial orders and knowledge in antiquity. Like all research enterprises, their projects are based on questions, methods and concepts established for decades within their disciplines. This was accounted for during the first phase of Topoi, when the research group CSG-V provided a platform for the investigation and discussion of the history of archaeology in general, and also a framework for our workshop.<sup>11</sup> Each of the contributions here have been peer-reviewed twice, and we are most thankful to all anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback and comments that helped in improving the papers. Furthermore, many thanks are due to all participants of the workshop in 2010, especially the speakers Felicity Bodenstein, Stefanie Klamm and Pamela Jane Smith who did not see their papers through to publication. Last but not least we wish to thank Alison Borrowman, Joshua Crone, Will Kennedy, Nadine Riedl, Jutta Schickore and Dominika Szafraniec for their essential contribution to this volume with regards to content, proofreading, typesetting and organization.

11 The research group CSG-V (short for “Cross-sectional-group V”) was a subsection of research area E in Topoi I (2007–2012): <http://www.topoi.org/group/e-csg-v-topoi-1/> (visited

on 07/07/2015). – Special thanks go to Kerstin Hoffmann, coordinator and creative mind of the CSG-V, for her support in every respect.

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