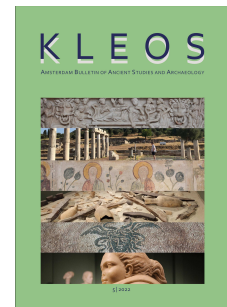




# KLEOS

AMSTERDAM BULLETIN OF ANCIENT STUDIES AND ARCHAEOLOGY



Issue 5, 2022

## CONTACT

bulletin.kleos@gmail.com

[www.kleos-bulletin.nl](http://www.kleos-bulletin.nl)

---

---

## INFORMATION ON PUBLICATION

Full Title: ARCHON Day 2021: Decolonising Archaeology

Author: Suzanne den Boef

Published: Kleos - Amsterdam Bulletin of Ancient Studies and Archaeology / Issue 05 / September 2022

Pages: 108-111.

ISSN: 2468-1555

**Link to these articles:** [www.Kleos-bulletin.nl](http://www.Kleos-bulletin.nl)

## RECOMMENDED CITATION:

den Boef, Suzanne, 2022: ARCHON Day 2021: Decolonising Archaeology, *Kleos - Amsterdam Bulletin of Ancient Studies and Archaeology* 5, 108-111.

---

---

## KLEOS - AMSTERDAM BULLETIN OF ANCIENT STUDIES AND ARCHAEOLOGY

is a peer-reviewed, open access academic online journal, launched in 2014, which publishes current research and review articles by graduate and PhD students, as well as starting independent researchers, from the fields of archaeology and ancient studies (i.e. classics and ancient History). Kleos also provides reviews of recent books, conferences and exhibitions. The journal mainly aspires to serve as a platform for starting academic careers, and help students and starting researchers to share their research, gain experience in publishing, and improve their scientific skills. At the same time the journal aims to provide an overview of the research being conducted within the fields of archaeology, ancient history and classics, and support the interdisciplinary dialogue between these adjacent academic disciplines.

## SUBMISSIONS

The editors invite submissions of original research on any topic related to ancient history, classics and archaeology. Information on the editorial policy, the submission process, as well as guidelines for authors and other matters that concern potential contributors, is to be found on our website. For further information, authors and readers are referred to:

[www.kleos-bulletin.nl](http://www.kleos-bulletin.nl)

[vu-nl.academia.edu/KLEOSBulletin](http://vu-nl.academia.edu/KLEOSBulletin)

## DISCLAIMER

The editors cannot be held responsible for errors or any consequences arising from the use of information contained in this publication. The opinions expressed in the articles and reviews published in Kleos are those of the authors and not of the editors, nor of the Amsterdam Centre for Ancient Studies and Archaeology (ACASA). The publication of advertisements in Kleos or on the website does not constitute any endorsement by the editors of the products or institutions advertised.

## COPYRIGHT AND PHOTOCOPYING

Authorisation to photocopy items for academic, educational and personal use is granted. Check for information about the terms and conditions of use: [www.kleos-bulletin.nl](http://www.kleos-bulletin.nl)

# ARCHON Day 2021: Decolonising Archaeology

Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam. October 29, 2021

**Suzanne den Boef**

## INTRODUCTION

ARCHON Day is an annual event, during which a specific theme is explored. This year, the main theme was 'Decolonising Archaeology', a topic that is currently relevant in the archaeological field. ARCHON, the Dutch research school of archaeology, aims to unite (r)MA and PhD students with researchers and professors to spark debates about current issues in archaeology. With this year's ARCHON Day, this aim was fulfilled by discussing the role of colonisation in archaeology with students and researchers from different universities in the Netherlands and the negative influence this topic still has on present day research.

## SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

The event started with an introduction given by **Dr. Philip Verhagen**, the scientific director of ARCHON and Assistant Professor at the Vrije Universiteit, welcoming the attendees, introducing ARCHON and the programme of the day.

In the first and keynote lecture, *The Archaeology of Ancient Africa: Decolonising Practices and New Perspectives*, **Dr. Marike van Aerde** (Leiden University) and **Samater Ahmed Botan** (PhD candidate at Leiden University) argued that the impacts of colonial research are still influential in current research. They used research carried out in Africa and India by Europeans in the early 20th century, including the Kingdoms of Aksum and the Greco-Bactria as case studies to support their arguments. When looking at the research of these kingdoms, the indigenous artefacts are ignored in favour of Roman and Greek artefacts. These biases led to long-lasting misinterpretations, of which some are still thought of as true today. The two presenters showed the importance of understanding how these civilisations were like in the past by employing various scientific methods, including chemical analysis. By employing science, they try to study these past civilisations as truthfully as possible and simultaneously get away from Eurocentric interpretations of archaeological data.

*Suzanne den Boef is currently a Research Master student at the Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University. When she was a bachelor's student in Archaeology, she discovered that she is very fond of ancient Greek sanctuaries. At present, she is writing her rMa thesis on the cult of Demeter in Greek apoikiai (home, away from home).*

► [Profile page](#)

Then the poster session took place during which several RMA and PhD students presented their research. Many posters were related to the main theme 'Decolonising Archaeology', although any academic poster was accepted to participate in the session. This session allowed the audience to walk their way through a line of posters, which each contained subjects relevant and necessary to pay attention to. Furthermore, it led to interactions and discussions between senior researchers, PhD and Research Master students, which is one of the main aims of ARCHON. This made it possible for researchers to build networks by discussing archaeology, a passion that united all participants.

**Dr. Aminata Cairo** (University of Kentucky) gave an interactive workshop titled *Inclusive Research* on methods of inclusive research (figure 1). This was done in a unique way, which was refreshing. She began the workshop by addressing the audience and telling her story. This story was not a comfortable one, as she talked about power relations, inequality, and prejudice. However, she proved that these stories must be heard to form a connection with other human beings. Inspired by Cairo's story, all the participants got to know one another more intimately during this workshop by sharing stories and emotions. The essence of the workshop was that we, as *Homo sapiens sapiens*, are all the same. We may look different, act differently or live in a different neighbourhood, but we all belong to the same species and share the same humanness. We can exchange stories with one another, which creates a bond between people. This should also be considered when carrying out research in archaeology. Now the voices of the people, who have been previously ignored, need to be listened to. Researchers cannot continue conducting their investigations with a Western bias: the indigenous people have a story to tell as well.

The ARCHON Day 2021 ended with a panel discussion on decolonising practices in archaeology, moderated by **Dr. Sean Desjardins** (University of Groningen). The panel members were **Prof. Dr. James Symonds** (University of Amsterdam), **Tariq Ali Sheik** (PhD candidate at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), **Dr. Joseph Sony Jean** (Leiden University) and **Maia Casna** (PhD candidate at Leiden University). This discussion showed that topics about decolonisation in archaeology are still necessary to discuss at events like ARCHON Day. One participant was not open to the idea being introduced by the panel members: indigenous people in the Americas conducting their own archaeological research in regions they had previously inhabited without any Western/European researchers being part of such investigations. The participant argued that this was discrimination, as it excluded Europeans from participating in field schools and other activities, which are



**Figure 1**  
*Aminata Cairo is presenting her interactive workshop on how to conduct research in an inclusive, decolonising way. Photo taken by Eline Verburg.*

currently only open to indigenous people. The panel members effectively showed that this way of thinking is the reason why indigenous people finally deserve to conduct their own research without a Western perspective bias.

## **SYNTHESIS**

### ***EUROCENTRISM***

In most cases, early archaeological research has been conducted by Europeans, most notably French, German, Italian and British people. These researchers were obsessed with the Greek and Roman cultures, the so-thought founders of Western civilisation, and projected this Graeco-Roman bias on archaeological research. Van Aerde and Botan's lecture showed how this eurocentrism leads to problems when the archaeological record is not fully studied. Non-Greek and -Roman artefacts were considered as 'barbaric' and therefore ignored and not studied at all. The panel discussion also showed the problem of eurocentrism in archaeology, as Western researchers tend to think they are entitled to conduct research in any part of the world.

### ***MISINTERPRETATIONS***

By holding on to colonialism in archaeology, researchers give in to the biased way of thinking of 18th and 19th century Europeans. The previously mentioned Graeco-Roman bias for instance results in misinterpretations of the archaeological record, as it gives

misleading information. Van Aerde and Botan showed this in their lecture by stating that Arikamedu in India is still referred to as a Roman port, even though there are more Arabian and Indian sherds present than Roman ones, which are not even from Roman but from local Indian production. They argue that a scientific approach is necessary as it presents unbiased, hard facts. Some of the posters from the poster session stressed this perspective as well by using a non-euro-centric approach during research. To be qualified as a good project, a researcher needs to let go of his or her own norms and values to properly study a society in the past.

#### *LISTENING TO THE SILENCED VOICES*

One of the very painful and irrational misconceptions about colonialism is the thought of the superiority of European culture, ideas, and people. Everything different from what the Europeans believed was branded as 'barbaric' and, thus, irrelevant. Cairo's workshop demonstrated that this is not the case and should be the opposite. It is now time for the previously silenced people to come out of the shadows and tell their stories. A balance must be created between the people who speak too loud (Europeans) and the people who never talk (indigenous people). Several posters from the poster session also tapped into this issue and urged present archaeologists to better themselves compared to the earliest archaeologists by finally listening to indigenous people and including them in projects that are carried out in the area they inhabit. They have a right to know their history and often can contribute to research as they are knowledgeable about the land they and their ancestors have lived in for multiple generations. This type of knowledge could by no means be acquired without the aid of the local people.

#### **CONCLUSION**

ARCHON Day 2021 was successful in fulfilling their aim: bringing both students and researchers together to have fruitful discussions about decolonisation in the archaeological field. The speakers showed that the results of colonisation processes starting in the 16th century are still present today in archaeological research. This event was important in the sense that it created awareness of the current issues on (de)colonisation in archaeology. Furthermore, the participants expressed hope for the future that its presence will slowly be eliminated, so that research can be approached with a decolonised view, in which the voices of the long-oppressed natives are finally taken into account. To quote Marike van Aerde: "Colonialism is in every sense outdated", something that is still not agreed upon in the academic world, signalling that events like ARCHON Day 2021 should still be held today.