KLEOS

AMSTERDAM BULLETIN OF ANCIENT STUDIES AND ARCHAEOLOGY

5|2022

Kleos - Amsterdam Bulletin of Ancient Studies and Archaeology

ISSUE 5, 2022

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 is published once a year and its main goal is to provide a possibility to graduate and PhD students to publish their research. The journal thus 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.

Contact

Kleos
AAC - University of Amsterdam
Turfdraagsterpad 9
1012 XT Amsterdam
The Netherlands
▶ bulletin.kleos@gmail.com

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
- ▶ vu-nl.academia.edu/KLEOSBulletin
- ▶ www.facebook.com/bulletin.kleos/
- ▶ www.linkedin.com/in/kleos-bulletin
- ▶ www.instagram.com/bulletinkleos/

Disclaimer

Copyright and Photocopying

Cover Illustration

Sarcophagus at National Roman Museum, Baths of Diocletian (photograph by Sara Mura); the temple of Asklepios and Hygeia at ancient Messini (photograph by Hanna Hoogenraad); fresco at Monastery of Great Meteoron (photograph by Sara Mura); shipwreck at Museum of the Ancient Ships, Pisa (photograph by Sara Mura); mosaic with gorgon at the domus Coiedii at Suasa Senonum (photograph by Leon Theelen); statue of the Muse Polymnia at Centrale Montemartini (photograph by Sara Mura).

ISSN

2468-1555

Academic Advisory Council

Acknowledgements

The Kleos editorial board is supported by an interdisciplinary group of renowned scholars, covering fields from classic linguistics to archaeological theory and heritage studies, brought together within the Kleos Academic Advisory Council (AAC). The members of this board hail from prominent Dutch research institutes – such as ACASA. The AAC functions in an advisory role to the editors, providing them with advise in their consideration of specific theme issues or search for peer reviewers from particular niche areas. Thanks to their help, the editorial board has a wide network of experts and peer-reviewers at their disposal. Their endorsement is invaluable and paramount to guarantee the quality of the journal. The editors of Kleos would like to thank the following members of the Academic Advisory Council for their valued contribution to Kleos.

Prof. dr. M. van Bommel - Scientific aspects of conservation, cultural heritage studies.

Prof. dr. G-J. Burgers - Proto-historic and Roman Italy, landscape archaeology, heritage studies.

Dr. D.M. Burns - Coptic, Gnosticism, and Patristic and later Greek philosophy

Prof. dr. J.P. Crielaard - Proto-historic Mediterranean archaeology, archaeology of Greece and Southern Italy, interconnectivity and ancient globalization.

Prof. dr. M. Gnade - Archaeology of Central and Southern Italy, ancient ceramics, burial archaeology.

Prof. dr. K. Kleber - Near Eastern history and culture, first millennium Babylonia, Achaemenid Empire.

Prof. dr. C. Kroon - Classical Latin literature, Latin linguistics and narratology.

Prof. dr. R. van der Laarse - Heritage studies, modern conflict studies.

Prof. dr. M. Martijn - Ancient and patristic philosophy.

Prof. dr. H. Ronnes - Historical elite architecture (castles and country houses), heritage studies, ego-documents (travel accounts, memoirs).

Prof. dr. D. Slootjes - Roman History, Early Christianity, early Byzantium and Middle Ages, ancient geography.

Prof. dr. V. Stissi - Classical Mediterranean archaeology, survey

archaeology, Greek ceramics.

Prof. dr. J. Symonds - Medieval and modern world global historical archaeology, heritage studies and conflict archaeology.

CONTENTS

Editorial

Articles

Dialogue Articles

Letters and Reviews

KLEOS
AMSTERDAM BULLETIN OF ANCIENT STUDIES AND ARCHAEOLOGY

The fifth Kleos issue is out, our first lustrum issue! We are proud to present the work of starting scholars of (r)Ma and PhD-level. This issue also is a special one: it does not only contain regular Kleos papers, but also the proceedings of the conference 'Narrative and Storytelling in Archaeology'. With no precise intention in the original selection of the papers, both the conference and regular articles share the theme of 'narrativity'. Covering a wide range of subjects, the papers range from the application of this concept in the field of archaeology to classics. The papers are ordered in chronological order, leaving aside disciplinary divides.

The first paper, entitled *Why archaeologists should tell stories. Looking back at the NASTA 2021 Conference*, is written by Iris Korver, Sam Miske, and Morgan Schelvis. As the title suggests, the article introduces the concept of 'storytelling' in archaeology, addressing the key-moments of its application in the field and leading to the organization of the first edition of the Narrative and Storytelling in Archaeology (NASTA) conference on the 29th of April 2021. The authors present the structure of the conference, encompassing the essence of what drives us to tell stories and how narrative can impact and interest the academic community.

In the second paper, entitled *Ethical Considerations in Narratives of Death: The Case of the Tophet*, Sara Mura dives into the ethics of archaeological mortuary narratives in relation to a case study of how archaeologists have interpreted the archaeological mortuary data on child deaths in so-called Phoenician-Punic Tophet sanctuaries. By doing so, Mura shows how archaeologists are active agents who have the power to shape mortuary narratives, and the consequent need to raise questions surrounding our responsibilities as archaeologists and start a discussion on best practices for sensitive archaeological mortuary narratives.

In the third article, entitled *Narrativity in Olympiodorus' Commentary on Plato's First Alcibiades*, Dr. Cagla Umsu-Seifert discusses the philosophical approach of the Neoplatonic commentator Olympiodorus from a narratological perspective. In this commentary, Olympiodorus emphasizes the superiority of philosophical knowledge. Umsu shows that a narratological approach provides an understanding of Olympiodorus exegetical method: he interacts with his narratees through the Platonic

dialogue, in which an important role is reserved for stories dealing with Plato himself.

The fourth research paper, written by Brodhie Molloy and entitled *Trailing Behind or Taking Strides? An Investigation into the Decolonisation of Archaeological Material in the Museum*, examines the multiple contested heritages of museum artefacts held in the Western World. By using the British Museum as a test case, specifically though its Collecting and Empire Trail, it investigates the sharing of stories and narratives within a powerful institution and collecting environment. This leads on to a critique of the application and appropriateness of a decolonizing approach to a highly colonial past.

For the Dialogue Papers section, the fifth Kleos issue presents a dialogue article by Anna Silberg Poulsen and Dr. Csilla E. Ariese, entitled *Recreating an excavation in Minecraft Education Edition*. In this dialogue, Poulsen presents the methodological and theoretical approaches applied in the creation of a virtual field school map in Minecraft Education Edition. Contextualising their results within a wider debate of interactive pasts and education and videogames, Poulsen – and subsequently Dr. Ariese – reflect on the various possibilities and limitations this tool presents as an educational outreach tool within the field of archaeology.

The final paper included in this issue concerns the review by Suzanne den Boef of the event *ARCHON Day 2021*, held at the Allard Pierson Museum last October on the theme 'Decolonising Archaeology'. den Boef outlines the different presentations and goes deeper into some of the theoretical topics which were discussed at this one-day event.

As always, this issue would not have been possible without the help of our anonymous expert peer reviewers. We are extremely grateful to them for taking the time out of their busy schedules to peer review the papers and provide the authors with indispensable feedback.

Our editorial team has gone through some changes in the last year. Our team has been strengthened by three new editors whom we would like to officially give a warm welcome: Sílvia Maciel, Aldo Accinelli Obando (Archaeology) and Reinier Langerak (Ancient History). Even though they have started in the middle of the editorial process of issue 5, they have been an eager and passionate addition to the team. Sadly, Matthijs Catsman has decided that Issue 5 will be his last issue. Starting his editorial work in 2017 and being chief-editor since 2018, he has been an essential part of the editorial team for the last four issues of the journal. We would like to thank him wholeheartedly for his efforts and contribution to Kleos and to papers in the field of archaeology specifically.

Lastly, as is our tradition, the work on our sixth issue has already started. This issue will not only contain regular Kleos papers, but also the proceedings of the Immortal Materiality or Mortal Objects? conference organized by the students of the UvA-(r)MA course Matter Materiality and Material Culture. Also, the collaboration with Archon and the publication of the yearly Archon-Day's review will continue in the sixth issue. As such, the next issue promises to be a rich one, containing a plethora of interesting papers. We hope you look forward to this issue as much as we are enthusiastic to be working on it.

First, however, we hope you enjoy reading this issue!

THE KLEOS EDITORIAL TEAM

Why archaeologists should tell stories. Looking back at the NASTA 2021 Conference

Iris Korver, Sam Miske, and Morgan Schelvis

Introduction

Humans have an intrinsic need for storytelling.[1] Through the stories we tell each other about ourselves we can define our origin, identity, and future.[2] It could be argued that archaeologists already participate in "storytelling" because we share our findings through verbal presentations, or by writing academic articles. However, in this paper "storytelling" is considered as a creative or artistic practice (a term that can include sharing fictitious interpretations or creations with factious foundations) which aims to entice and interest the listener or the reader.[3] U. Hasson states that sharing stories is "one of the most effective ways to communicate", deeply connecting people, indicated by similar brain activity in people who are listening to similar stories.[4] Whereas most archaeological publications authored by academic and professional archaeologists cannot be considered creative or artistic: it is not akin to sharing a story to make people feel connected. Yet, archaeological remains feature prominently in the stories told by mass media, novelists, and ideologues alike.[5] Archaeologists themselves, however, have often refused to partake in storytelling such as this because of concerns about scientific impartiality or academic formality.[6] But are these concerns valid or is there value to be gained by archaeologists from telling stories?

Storytelling in archaeology was introduced by A. and M.

Iris Korver obtained her MA in Heritage, Memory, and Archaeology from the University of Amsterdam in 2021 and specialises in Mediterranean (pre-) historic archaeology. She is currently working as a Dutch archaeologist at a commercial company.
Profile page

Sam Miske obtained his MA degree in Heritage, Memory, and Archaeology from the University of Amsterdam in 2022. He is currently pursuing a PhD at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam on the topic of land dispossession under the Dutch East India Company in the early modern period.
Profile page

Morgan Schelvis obtained her MA in Heritage, Memory, and Archaeology from the University of Amsterdam in 2021 and specialises in Dutch historical archaeology. She is currently working as an assistant programme coordinator for Bèta-gamma at the UvA.
Profile page

1 Suzuki et al. 2018, 9468–9469.

2 Pruitt 2011; Given 2009.

3 Cornelius Holtorf describes a story as: "[A]n account of one or more characters acting out plots in a sequence of events that contain a distinctive beginning, middle and end." Holtorf 2010, 381.

4 Suzuki et al. 2018, 9468–9469

5 Pruitt 2011; Given 2009.

6 Deetz 1998; Praetzellis 1998; McKee/Galle 2000.

Praetzellis in the '90s and remained popular until the '00s.[7] M. Praetzellis organised a session on "Archaeologists as Storytellers" at the 1997 Society for Historical Archaeology conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology, which was attended and spoken at by the likes of J. Deetz and M. Beaudry, while A. Praetzellis organised the conference proceedings.[8] This session inspired the attendees to see storytelling as a powerful tool for communication and analysis, and to become more creative in both exploits.[9] The event showcased that storytelling does not negate science. It instead allowed to reclaim some excitement and inject some liveliness into 'dry' academic presentations by proposing wild theories and thoughts about what a site *could possibly* present.[10] Deetz was asked to write a discussion piece for the conference proceedings, in which he asked: "[w]hat is it that we do, and why do we do it? Simply put, archaeologists are storytellers. It is our responsibility to communicate to as wide an audience as possible the results and significance of our findings."[11]

The subject was addressed again during the first edition of the Narrative and Storytelling in Archaeology (NASTA) conference on the 29th of April 2021.[12] At the online conference, the speakers addressed why and how archaeologists should tell stories. NASTA 2021 focused more on storytelling than narrative as we, the organising committee, experienced a lack of it in contemporary archaeological scholarship.[13] Storytelling in archaeology is not taught at Dutch universities despite its potential. We (archaeologists) are often too focused on academic output, which as Deetz puts it often "translates in turgid, verbose, and dull prose".[14] Creative writing and storytelling do not have to equal fiction: we can also adjust our style of writing and communication, basing it on scientific data. Stories have power: they are political and evocative, just like archaeology, and it's our responsibility

7 Praetzellis 1998. Together, A. and M. Praetzellis edited and participated in the conference proceedings, published in the Historical Archaeology journal in 1998, with A. Praetzelli authoring the introductory paper, which is referenced here.

8 Praetzellis 1998.

9 Deetz 1998, 94.

10 McKee/Galle 2000, 14.

11 Deetz 1998, 94.

12 The conference was organised on the initiative of rMA students of the UvA in collaboration with Prof. James Symonds (UvA) and Dr. Aris Politopoulos (LU), while funded by Archon (Dutch research school of archaeology).

13 Since the organising committee is mostly from Europe, experience is based on that premise. However, due to involvement of scholars all over the world (e.g., Australia, India, the United States), it is safe to say that the lack of storytelling is felt in a wider area.

14 Deetz 1998, 94.

as archaeologists to learn how to engage (with) the general public, outside our academic circles.[15] The key difference between the current narrative and storytelling movement, and the first movement in the '90s and '00s, however, is that, as G. Lucas put it in his keynote talk, "in the '90s, narrative was emerging as kind of an antidote or counterpoint to science [...] whereas today, narrative is being embraced as part of the science of storytelling or the storytelling of science."[16]

The discussion at the Narrative and Storytelling in Archaeology (NASTA) conference focused on how archaeologists can think about our knowledge, how we can communicate this to our audiences, and how we can tell stories. How are we, as academics, able to tell stories that entice the public we regularly deal with? How can we interest them in what drives us? We could write popular science books, create video games, publish children's books, and so on. We can and should tell stories.

Structure of the conference

The NASTA conference focused on four different ways stories can influence us: the stories we share, play, feel and think. Each way channels a unique momentum of conveying information to other people. It also encompasses the essence of what drives us to tell stories and how the storyline can impact and interest us.

Share

The stories we share as archaeologists are the stories that reach the public through various media, including museum exhibits, books, and site tours. However, not all stories are conveyed as effectively as they could be. What is the most effective way to tell a story and why is it that some stories entice the public to great lengths while others do not?

The way a story is told is of great importance. T. Pruitt introduced us to the idea that knowledge and skills in how to convey your story can increase success of a museum exhibition or be the downfall of it, if the story is not thought out well.[17] Although there are multiple ways to convey a story, the success of it all hinges on the structure: the beginning, middle and end. Pruitt states that "most people include a strong opening or a thesis and a conclusion, but [...] lump together everything else in the middle."[18] However, she continues, "a middle should be a point of interest

15 Holtorf 2010; Lucas 2019.

16 Lucas 2021.

17 Pruitt 2021. The museum exhibition discussed in Pruitt's presentation served as a case study to illustrate the implications of how a story is told.

18 Pruitt 2021.

that is as important as the beginning or the end, it needs to be a focal point. [...] Storytellers often design their plots around the midpoint as the key moment where everything changes. [...] Think about your written communication: how often do you draft your paper or your display around a midpoint as the key moment of your communication?".[19]

Good storytelling is not just useful in the 'traditional way' of conveying archaeology.[20] The sharing of archaeological stories via social media is becoming highly influential, as it is easily accessible in the sense that it is free and often, fun! The concept of edutainment is making its way through academia and it is also something to be dealt with and taken into account.[21] Some archaeologists have amassed large numbers of followers, such as on the YouTube channel 'Dig it with Raven' and the Instagram account of Dr. Gino Caspari.[22] It is possible to connect to the public while introducing archaeology as a fun, easily accessible topic. However, as some have pointed out, this free sharing is not without controversy.[23]

'False' information regarding archaeology can be spread as easily through seemingly legitimate social media accounts as the information found at the legitimate channels mentioned above, and the line between 'real' and 'fiction' is not always clear to non-professionals.[24] 'Fake' does not have to equal 'bad'. It is entirely possible to use the information at your disposal to write historical fiction, to create a feeling of belonging.[25] However, some of it, such as carelessness with the publication of *aDNA* analysis, which has a tendency to headline into the newspapers and fuel conspiracy theories and (white) nationalism, has given the public interpretation of certain ideas a bad taste.[26] Academia has been debating how to convey the information in a manner that is as accurate as possible, which is why we need to step up our game when it comes to telling stories. We need to use an effective delivery method: a good story.[27]

19 Pruitt 2021. Emphasis by authors.

20 Traditional is here seen as museums, archaeological books, and site tours.

21 Edutainment: video games, television programmes, or other material, intended to be both educational and enjoyable.

22 Dig it with Raven is accessible on ▶https://www.youtube.com; Dr. Gino Caspari's account is accessible on▶ https://www.instagram.com.

23 E.g., Furholt 2018.

24 Pruitt 2011; Pruitt 2021

25 E.g., Pruitt 2011.

26 Wolinsky 2019; Lidz 2021; Akpan 2017. Here, aDNA stands for "ancient DNA", the DNA that is retracted from skeletons to identify the genomes.

27 Statement by the authors and NASTA conference organisers.

The amount of people 'liking' (pseudo-)archaeological content shows that people are interested in the stories we share. Archaeology has an undeniable allure for people, but archaeologists must learn to harness this allure in their own storytelling.[28]

Play

Another popular medium through which to experience the past is video games, many of which take place in historical settings (which have been fictionalised to various extents). There are also many initiatives from game corporations to incorporate archaeological and/or historical insights into the games to make them somewhat accurate, for example in the widely popular Assassin's Creed series. Here the creators attempted to recreate the past 'authentically' by trying to make the game locations look the way they would have during the time the game takes place.[29] The players of these types of games, for example, are 'transported' to a specific place and time in the past (e.g., in Assassin's Creed), get to learn about the Greek gods (e.g., in the game Hades), reimagine Medieval Europe through grand strategies (e.g., Crusader Kings and Civilization), or build cities in different eras (e.g., Anno and Civilization). It is an entertaining way to immerse people into the past and entice them to do their own research.

But despite the novelty of the medium, the old questions of scientific accuracy remain.[30] If the choice is between accuracy on the one hand, and engaging storylines and gameplay on the other, most game developers will choose the latter. The game industry, after all, worships not Athena the wise but Hermes the merchant.

Feel

Stories that make us feel are stories that have an impact. Feelings help us remember: the stories etch themselves into the brain due the invoked feeling.[31] Invoking feelings like empathy also helps to personalise the past. One of the most famous examples is Ötzi: Thirty years after his discovery, the mummy is known by its name and (reconstructed) face. The story of how he lived and died has

28 Idem.

29 For a thorough examination of the Assassins' Creed series, see for instance the discussion on Assassins' Creed by Politopoulos et al. 2019.

30 For discussions of historical accuracy in the Assassin's Creed games, see Malik 2020; Cheeda 2020.

31 For example: Hamilakis spoke of "sensorial assemblages", how the senses invoke feelings and memory and help deepen experiences, and that this counts for assemblages (such as archaeological objects) as well; Hamilakis 2017, 170.

been told and retold, even making its way into schoolbooks as a personification of 'his age'.[32] Relating stories in such a way that invokes feelings is bound to have a response, good or bad. This becomes most apparent in the archaeology of the recent past: the stories of slavery, the horrors of the World Wars or the aftermath, such as the Indonesian War of Independence.[33] If anything, the emotional connection might be the most important reason for people to engage with the past. How did people, our ancestors, live then, and why did they do so? It remains one of the hardest questions to answer.

The stories that make us feel like we belong, like we are important, maybe even a legacy of the past, are the stories that give us a sense of being. Giving a narrative to the people of the past helps us to connect, and helps us to understand the past in a different way than obscure facts and objects could do.[34]

Think

Stories on controversial topics allow us to think. To coordinate ourselves in a changing world, but also to position ourselves in relation to our own opinions. The stories that make us think have another way of impacting us than the stories we play or feel do. These stories allow us to critically assess how we make our own history and why it is relevant. However, as Lucas notices: there is an astute distinction between the professional and the other. Both make a distinct claim to knowledge and authority. However, one is considered more authoritative than the other. Stories that do not fit into the grand narrative that we as archaeologists support are treated as 'other', which in general is a mixed bag: the creational stories of Native Americans, but also, wholly unrelated, the idea that aliens have created the pyramids.[35] This meta-story of archaeology, as C. Holtorf called it, frames our interpretations, and thus frames our stories.[36] It contributes the background to the story, but at the same time excludes the stories that do not seem to fit.[37]

32 Pinkowski 2021.

33 Van Helden/Witcher 2019, 24–25.

34 This refers back to what was discussed in the introduction of this paper: Suzuki et al. 2018, 9468–9469; Pruitt 2011; Given 2009.

35 Lucas 2019, 5–6.

36 Holtorf calls the "underlying stories that frame any archaeology we conduct and make it significant to contemporary society" the "meta-stories of archaeology", which according to Holtorf, "make archaeological practices, objects and research results meaningful in an existential, social and political context in the present."; Holtorf 2010, 383.

37 Holtorf 2010; Holtorf 2021.

The meta-story of archaeology can also be interpreted as thinking about which stories we tell. How do we create a story from the archaeological 'rubbish' we find? Which choices do we make and why do we make them? Is the framework the narrative that leads us or do we create a new narrative every time we implement new information?

Conclusions

All in all, the authors have increasingly come to the conclusion that archaeology is storytelling. Stories can be found in the interpretations that lead us to our understanding of the past, the way we think about puzzling all these pieces of information together, and in the humanisation of material remains in order to invoke the feelings of the public when we share our ideas. Archaeology would not be where it is today without our need—and talent—for storytelling. And so, the story continues.

Due to a well-received conference, a second conference was held on the 20th of May 2022. Furthermore, we predict the continuation of NASTA for many years to come. The realisation of the impact that stories can have, and especially the influence archaeologists can have on narratives, should be taught, thought about, and treasured by all.

Bibliography

Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus: *Definition of storytelling*. Cambridge University Press.

Deetz, J., 1998: Discussion. Archaeologists as Storytellers, *Historical Archaeology* 32 (1), 94–96.

Furholt, M., 2018: Massive migrations? The Impact of Recent aDNA Studies on our View of Third Millenium Europe, *European Journal of Archaeology* 21 (2), 159–191.

Helden, D. van/R. Witcher, 2019: *Researching the Archaeological Past through Imagined Narratives. A Necessary Fiction*, London.

Holtorf, C., 2010: Meta-stories of archaeology, *World archaeology* 42 (3), 381–393.

Holtorf, C., 2021: *Meta-stories of archaeology revisited* (lecture, NASTA lecture series, online, 26/08/2021).

Given, M., 2009: Archaeology and Storytelling: Encounters with the Past in Scotland and Cyprus, *Historic Argyll*, 33–41.

Lucas, G., 2019: *Writing the Past. Knowledge and Literary Production in Archaeology*, London.

Lucas, G., 2021: *Narrative in Archaeology. Some Reflections* (keynote lecture, NASTA conference, online, 29/04/2021).

McKee, L./J. Galle, 2000: Scientific Creativity and Creative Science: Looking at the Future of Archaeological Storytelling, *Historical Archaeology* 34 (2), 14–16.

Politopoulos, A./A. A. Mol/K. H. Boom/C. Ariese, 2019: "History Is Our Playground": Action and Authenticity in Assassin's Creed: Odyssey. Advances in Archaeological Practice, *A Journal of the Society of American Archaeology* 7 (3), 317–323.

Praetzellis, A., 1998: Why Every Archaeologist Should Tell Stories Once in a While, *Historical Archaeology* 32 (1), 1–3.

Pruitt, T., 2011: *Authority and the Production of Knowledge in Archaeology* (PhD-thesis University of Cambridge).

Pruitt, T., 2021: *Examining Archaeological Stories: Understanding the Science and Impact of Storytelling* (lecture, NASTA conference, online, 29/04/2021).

Suzuki, W. A./M. I. Feliú-Mójer/U. Hasson/R. Yehuda/J. M. Zarate, 2018: Dialogues: The Science and Power of Storytelling, *The Journal of Neuroscience* 38 (44), 9468–9470.

Wolinsky, H., 2019: Ancient DNA and contemporary politics. The analysis of ancient DNA challenges long-held beliefs about identity and history with potential for political abuse, *EMBO reports* 20 (12), e49507.

Online sources

Akpan, N., 2017: How white supremacists respond when their DNA says they're not 'white', PBS News Hour (20 August). ▸https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/white-supremacists-respond-

genetics-say-theyre-not-white, accessed on 24/02/2022.
Cheeda, S., 2020: Assassin's Creed: 10 Times the Franchise Just Stopped Caring About Historical Accuracy, TheGamer (31 October). ▸ https://www.thegamer.com/assassins-creed-historical-accuracy-failures/, accessed on 24/02/2022.
Dig it with Raven. Youtube channel, ▸ https://www.youtube.com/c/digitwithraven, accessed on 05/04/2022.
Dr. Gino Caspari. Instagram page, ▸https://www.instagram.com/ginocaspari/?hl=en, accessed on 05/04/2022.
Lidz, F., 2021: 3,000 Years Ago, Britain Got Half Its DNA From France, DNA Study Suggests, New York Times (22 December). ▸ https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/22/science/archaeology-britain-migration-dna-reich.html, accessed on 24/02/2022.
Malik, R., 2020: Assassin's Creed: The 10 Most Historically Accurate Games in the Franchise, Ranked, GameRant (21 June). ▸ https://gamerant.com/assassins-creed-ubisoft-games-historically-accurate-ranked/, accessed on 24/02/2022.
Pinkowski, J., 2021: Ötzi the Iceman: What we know 30 years after his discovery, National Geographic (15 September). ▸ https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/tzi-the-iceman-what-we-know-30-years-after-his-discovery, accessed on 24/02/2022.

Ethical Considerations in Narratives of Death: The Case of the Tophet

Sara Mura

Abstract

Ethics have become a hot topic in the field of mortuary archaeology. Yet, while a lot has been said on the excavation, processing and display of human remains, the narrative(s) based on implications of published studies for the deceased and their culture have been mostly neglected.[1]

This paper takes its cue from Pluciennik's (2015) ethical assumptions regarding the narrative means of archaeological communication by re-addressing them to the death-related narrative of the Phoenician-Punic tophet, an open-air sanctuary used for the deposition of infants.[2] In their role of writers, archaeologists have the power (i.e. agency) to use narratives for presenting their data and outlining their results. From an ethical perspective, their approach to narratives raises questions on the responsibilities and limitations in the way the story of the dead is told.

In the case of the tophet, the plot linked to the burial of infants, who were presumably sacrificed through fire to seek the protection of deities, has become the central act of a meta-narrative spread over thousands of years, from biblical passages to present-day archaeological research. The development of these associated narratives has eventually affected the perception of these historical cultures by both scholars and the general public, as the Phoenician-Punic belief system has often been considered 'despicable'.

By retracing the development of such narratives from the ancient sources to the present-day archaeological application, I aim to use the tophet as a case study to exceed the traditional materialistic approach to ethics in archaeology and refine the scholarly understanding of how we, as archaeologists, negotiate

Sara Mura is a ROOTS PhD candidate at Kiel University (Germany). She holds Master's degrees in Archaeology and History of Arts (Cagliari) and Near Eastern and Mediterranean Archaeology (Leiden). Her main research interests lie in mortuary rituals and sensory archaeology in the Classic Mediterranean.

▶ *Profile page*

1 For examples of ethics in the excavation, processing and display of human remains see Sayer 2010.

2 See Pluciennik 2015.

and communicate a sensitive past through an analysis of narrative agency and dynamics among writer, character, and reader.

Introduction: The significance of narrative in understanding the past

The concept of narrative has been introduced to the study of archaeology during the 1960s-1970s, with the purpose of elaborating plots and characters in order to contextualise archaeological discoveries.[3] Since then, fictive stories, dialogues, visual performances, and multimedia contents have served as an instrument to better comprehend archaeological remains.[4] The recourse to these narratological tools has, however, pulled archaeology within a large debate on the ontological implications of humanities-based academics' role as 'writers of the past'.[5] The combination between narrative and empirical, source-based attested and verified data has irremediably raised questions on the necessity to draw a line between past and story, science and narration. In their role of authoritative voices, archaeologists' work too has become subject to the scrutiny for signs of subjectivisms, emotional and ethical implications.[6] Still, the discussion has not comprised all subfields of archaeology and this paper makes a niche for itself by focusing on the ethical ramifications of the use of narratives in mortuary archaeology.

Ethical considerations apply particularly to the mortuary archaeology field, where ethical concerns have mostly regarded the physical approach to human remains: the recovery, investigation, storage, and display of the dead. Such focus has led many scholars to debate on the political implications of archaeological activity and the necessity for the 'best practice' codes.[7] Yet, the ethical implications of the use of narratives to give the dead a voice by telling their stories, is still understudied.[8]

This paper is based on Pluciennik's research on the ethical implications of the use of narratives by archaeologists as means of communication by re-addressing them to the death-related narrative of the Phoenician-Punic tophet.[9] In their role as writers, archaeologists determine the way characters' behaviours are

3 In this paper, the term 'narrative' is used to indicate a story/plot involving one or more characters who act through a related series of events, that are systematically presented to explain and determine the ways in which the world is experienced. The analysis of the structure of the narrative is known as narratology (Pluciennik 1999, 654–655; Praetzellis 2014).

4 Praetzellis 2014.

5 Cf. White 1973; Munslow 2007.

6 Cf. Holtorf 2010; Williams 2019.

7 Cf. Zimmermam 1998; Sayer 2010; González-Ruibal 2018.

8 See footnote 5.

9 See Pluciennik 2015.

comprehended, negotiated, and divulged to readers. Thus, ethics are an essential topic to be included in the academic debate as a means to refine our understanding of the responsibilities and limitations in the way stories about the past are told.

What is the role of archaeologists when interpreting and expressing death-related topics through narrative? How can the discussion about the ethics of using narratives (in the dissemination of knowledge through written academic forms) refine our understanding of the dynamics between archaeology, the public, and the people of the past? This paper intends to explore these questions by examining the notions of the agency of archaeological narratives and the narratological dynamics involving the writer (i.e. the archaeological scholar), the character/narrative (i.e. the reconstruction of the past), and the reader (i.e. the wider public).

I present the case of the Phoenician-Punic tophet as an extreme example of how later narratives about a particular mortuary ritual linked to the practice of child sacrifice and burial has defined, over centuries, an entire culture. Used as a grand, long-lasting 'story' from biblical passages to present-day archaeological research, the plot linked to the open-air sanctuary has become part of a meta-narrative, which is difficult to elude.[10] Ethical considerations on the responsibilities and limitations in its use aid in illustrating these dynamics. In fact, they help us rethink archaeological practice and the current academic debate on ethics in mortuary archaeology.

After contextualising the case of the tophet by providing a historical and archaeological background, I will illustrate how its archaeological study has been intertwined with its history of previous historical, literary narratives. I will then proceed to discuss how ethical considerations represent a way to refine our understanding of the archaeological process in using and presenting data.

Reconstructing the 'story' of the tophet

Archaeological Evidence

The history of Phoenician and Punic heritage has not been passed to us by direct written sources, but through archaeological remains and indirect written sources. Originally from the region corresponding approximately to present-day Lebanon, Phoenicians colonised the Mediterranean between the second half of the 9th

10 A meta-narrative is a grand story that attempts to provide a comprehensive, universal account to various events expressed through narratives. In simple words, it can be described as a narrative about narratives (Pluciennik 1999, 656).

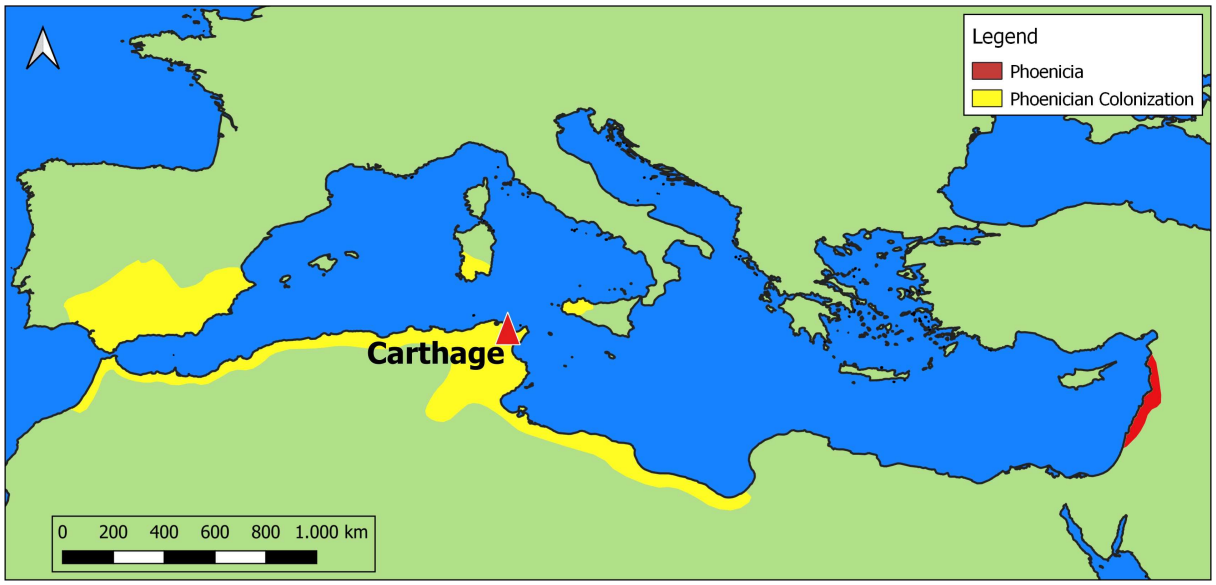


Figure 1.
Map of the Mediterranean showing the location of Phoenicia and the areas colonized by Phoenicians between 9th-6th century BCE (created by author; map courtesy of Natural Earth via QGIS).

and the mid-6th centuries BCE (figure 1).[11] It is towards the end of the 9th century BCE, that the foundation of Carthage is currently dated: a cosmopolitan colony on the modern Tunisian coast inhabited by Phoenicians and North Africans. This Punic metropolis developed into a naval and military power and colonised the western Mediterranean between the 6th and 2nd centuries BCE (figure 2).[12]

The spread of open-air sanctuaries dedicated to infant burials was simultaneous to the Punic colonisation throughout the central Mediterranean (figure 3).[13] Although areas of infant cremations had been identified since the 19th century, which lead archaeologists to presume the existence of tophets as mentioned in the literature, it is the excavation of the burials at Carthage in 1921 that turned the spotlight on the Phoenician-Punic heritage.[14] The finding of the well-preserved sanctuary triggered an academic debate on the cause of death of the children and the implication of the ritual

11 Cf. Aubet Semmler 2019; Killebrew 2019.

12 The chronology of Carthage's foundation is based on the radiocarbon dating of faunal remains discovered at the site (Docter et al. 2008, 382–384). In regards to the period of Punic colonisation, see Dridi 2019, 149–150. The map shows the extent of the Punic colonization around 270 BCE, before the First Punic War, when Corsica, Sardinia and Sicily were still under Carthage's control.

13 Nine sanctuaries are commonly recognized as proper Phoenician-Punic tophets: Tharros, Monte Sirai, Sulky, Bithia, Nora, Cagliari in Sardinia; Motya in Sicily; Carthage and Sousse/Hadrumentum in Tunisia (Xella 2013, 261). No tophet has been found in the Near East proper. Several tophet-type sanctuaries have been identified in North Africa, dating between the 3rd century BCE and 2nd century AD (D'Andrea 2014). However, as this paper focuses on the representation of Phoenician-Punic culture and they were in use after the end of Punic period, they have not been included in this paper.

14 Punic funerary markers were discovered since 1817 but scientific excavations started only in 1922 (Bénichou-Safar 2004, 1; D'Andrea 2018, 7–33, 61–62 and mentioned bibliography).

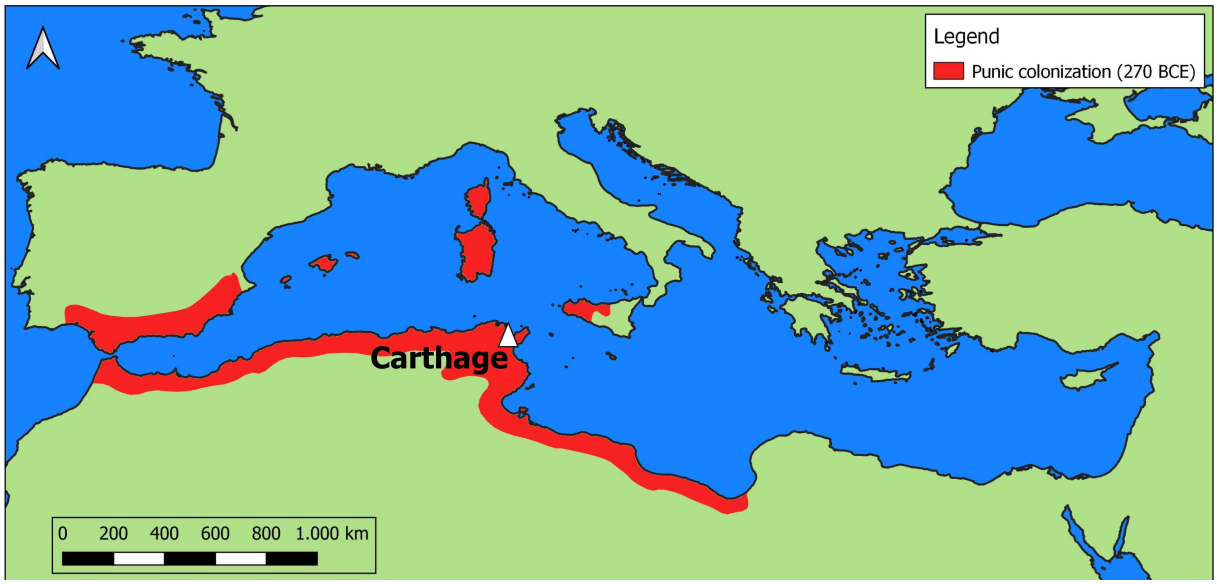


Figure 2.
Map of the Mediterranean showing Punic colonization around 270 BCE (created by author; map courtesy of Natural Earth via QGIS).

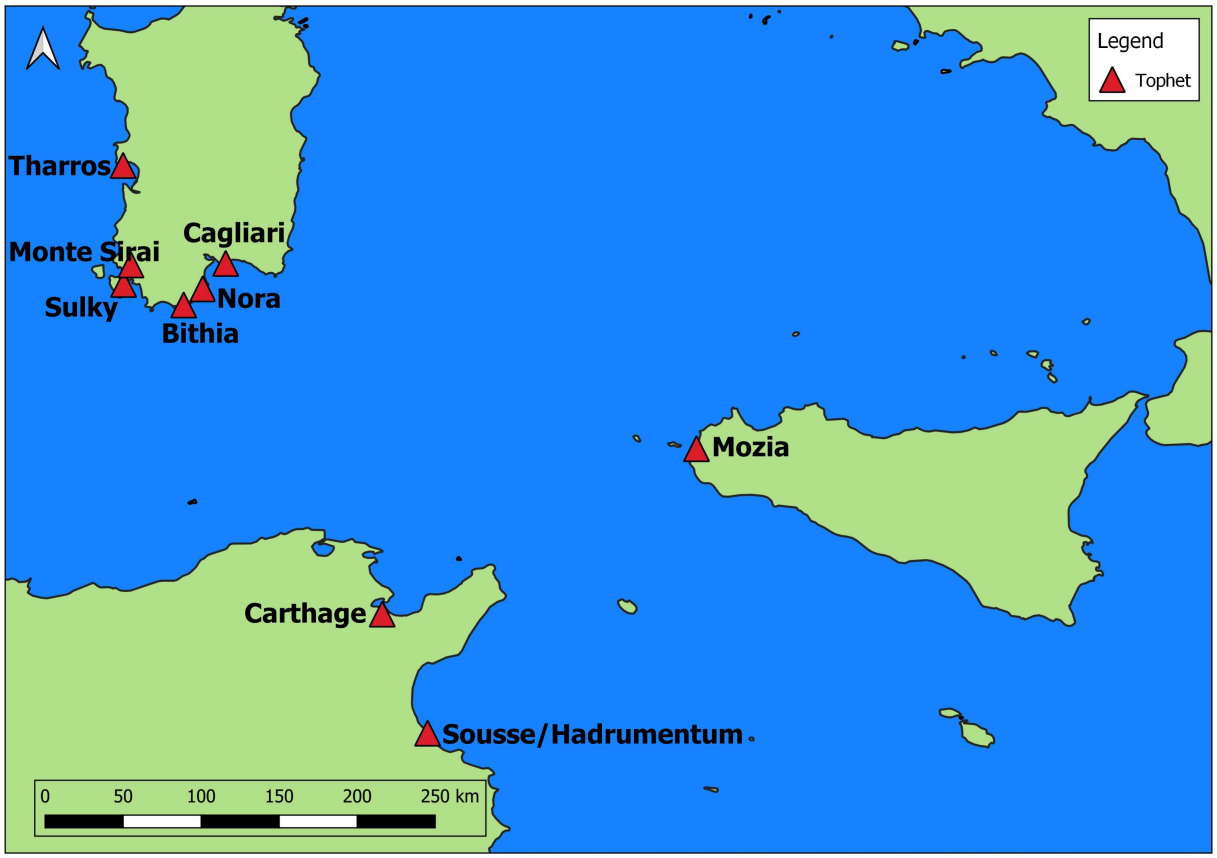


Figure 3.
Map of the central Mediterranean showing the location of the nine (officially) identified tophets (created by author; map courtesy of Natural Earth via QGIS).

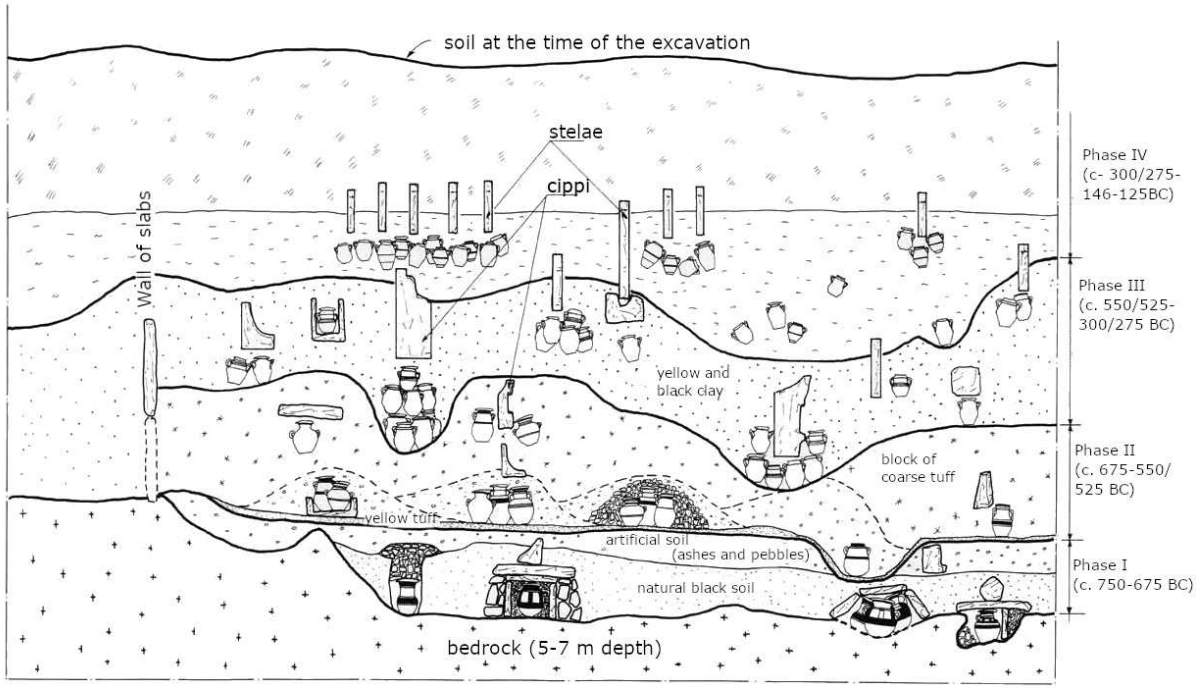


Figure 4.
Carthage, tophet: stratigraphic scheme (adapted from Bénichou-Safar 2004, plate XXV).

itself, and that is still ongoing.[15]

The Tunisian site presents features that recur at other Phoenician colonies such as Motya in Sicily and Tharros in Sardinia: located in an enclosed, peripheral area of the settlement, urns containing the cremated remains of infants and/or vegetal and animal remains were deposited into pits cut into the bedrock or inside 'small chests' made of stone slabs (figure 4).[16]

Occasionally, unburned personal items, such as jewellery and amulets, were deposited inside the urns. Covered with soil, the depositions were overlapped by stone elements of various forms (pillars, thrones, stelae) carved with iconographies and inscriptions in honour of the deity Baal Hammon and Tinnit (figure 5).[17] The

15 See D'Andrea 2018; McCarty 2019; Xella 2020 for a review on the debate.

16 Among the animal remains, it has been possible to identify the following species: mostly young ovicaprine, but also cow, pig, fish, bird and seldomly wild animals such as deer (D'Andrea 2018, 21–22). For a detailed description of Carthage's tophet and its excavations, see D'Andrea 2018, 61–62 and mentioned sources.

17 Regarding the markers at Carthage (including the study of the engraved decorations and inscriptions), as well as the matter on the disproportional number between markers and urns and their relationship, see Bénichou-Safar 1988; Docter et al. 2003; Quinn 2011; Stager 2014; McCarty 2019.

content of the inscriptions is highly debated.[18] Traditionally, it is interpreted as consisting of the name of the dedicant, a dedicatory formula, and the final invocation of a vow establishing a contract between the dedicant and the deities: once the demand of the worshipper had been granted, a sacrifice, i.e. the child, was offered in return. The term indicating the ritual (or offering), mlk, has been translated as 'sacrifice/offering', but whether this act consisted either of the killing of the infant, the deposition of the urn or the animal sacrifice, is still unclear.[19] The place of the ritual was indicated in the epigraphies as bt, which has been translated as temple, or sanctuary.[20] Apparently, the sacred area could not be moved and once the maximum capacity was reached, a layer of soil was deposited on top of the previous level and used for new burials.[21]

The evidence indicates, irrefutably, that the tophet was not a mere cemetery, but a sacred area linked to a religious cult. Yet, the interpretation of this cult – whether associated with child sacrifice – is still highly debated.[22] The aim of this paper, however, is not to establish whether the blood ritual took place or not, but to investigate the complexities of the associated narrative. The hypothesis of the infant sacrifice did not arise exclusively from the archaeological data but was the result of a literary tradition that can be traced back to ancient times.

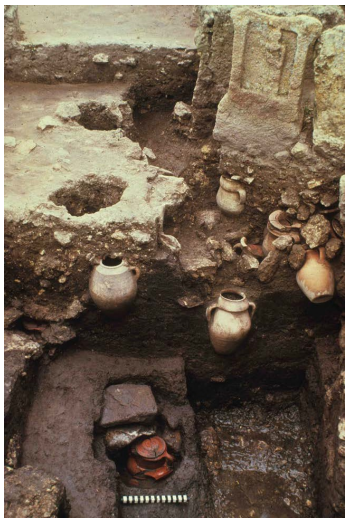


Figure 5.
Carthage, tophet: detail of stratigraphy (c. 800–300 BCE) during excavation (after Stager 2014, 23).

Back to the narrative

The term used by archaeologists to indicate the open-air sanctuary like the one found in Carthage comes from the vocalization of the consonants *tpt*, which are used in the Hebrew Bible to refer to an area in Jerusalem where a foreign ritual was performed involving sons (and daughters) 'burnt as offering' to seek the favour of deities.[23] Unfortunately, it remains unknown how Israelites at the time referred to this sacred place.[24]

18 Regarding the markers at Carthage (including the study of the engraved decorations and inscriptions), as well as the matter on the disproportional number between markers and urns and their relationship, see Bénichou-Safar 1988; Docter et al. 2003; Quinn 2011; Stager 2014; McCarty 2019.

19 Ruiz Cabrero 2008; Amadasi Guzzo/Zamora 2013.

20 Bonnet 2011, 374; Xella 2013, 263–264, 268–269.

21 See note 12.

22 McCarty 2019, 317.

23 The reference to the tophet can be found, among the others, in the following passages: *Deutoronomy* 12, 31 and 18, 9–14; *2 Kings* 23–10; *Jeremiah* 7, 31–2 and 19, 4–6; *2 Chronicles* 33, 6; *Isaiah* 30, 33 and 57, 5–6; *Leviticus* 18, 21 and 20, 2-+5; *Ezekiel* 16, 20–21. See also following footnote 25. For comments on the abovementioned passages, see Xella (2013, 263–265), D'Andrea (2018, 34–53) and mentioned bibliography.

24 Quinn 2011, 404, note 13; McCarty 2019, 313.

Regarding the identification of the deities, a few passages in the book of Jeremiah (19, 4–6; 32, 35) in the Old Testament specifically refers to Baal.[25] In other passages the word mlk is present.[26] As mentioned before, the same word is carved on the funerary markers, but its interpretation differs based on its context. In the Bible, it is commonly interpreted as 'deity' and, likely, 'offering'. With respect to the epigraphies, scholars now tendentially agree in interpreting the word as 'offering'.[27] However, from the Middle Ages (9th–10th century), when the authoritative version of the Hebrew bible was written (i.e. the Masoretic Text), until the 1930s and the new linguistic studies, the word was vocalized as 'Melek' (or 'Moloch') and translated as the name of a pagan god associated to the human sacrifice.[28]

Stories about similar rituals by the Carthaginians were also reported by Greek-Roman authors, who stated they performed them mostly in times of crisis, such as military defeats or plagues.[29] Diodorus (*Library of history*, 20, 6–7) describes the ritual in Baal's honour specifying that: "There was in the city a bronze image of Kronos [i.e., Baal Hammon], extending its hands, palms up and sloping towards the ground, so that each of the children when placed there on rolled down and fell into a sort of gaping pit filled with fire".[30]

A further step in the construction of the analysed narrative occurred in Medieval time with the commentaries to the Masoretic Text, which described Moloch as a humanoid figure with a bovine

25 *Jeremiah* 19, 4–6: "Because the people have forsaken me and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah have known; and because they have filled this place with the blood of innocents, and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it enter my mind – therefore, behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when this place shall no more be called Topheth, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnm, but the Valley of Slaughter" (English Standard Version, www.biblia.com). *Jeremiah* 32, 35: "They built the high places of Baal in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech, though I did not command them, nor did it enter into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin" (English Standard Version, www.biblia.com). For an analysis of these passages, see Xella 2013, 264.

26 *2 Kings* 17, 17; *Jeremiah* 2, 23; 19, 4–6; 32, 35. See Xella (2013) for a review of the biblical passages.

27 See D'Andrea 2018; McCarty 2019; Xella 2020 for a review on the debate.

28 Rabbis assumed that 'Molek' derived from "the Semitic root meaning 'king', that it referred to an idol god" (Heider 1985, 2). For a review of the debate on the term, Heider 1985; Day 1989.

29 Among the others: Cleitarchus, *Fragment* 137 (4th century BCE); Curtius Rufus, *Historiae* 4, 3, 23 (1st century AD); Tertullian, *Apology* 9, 2–4 (end of the 2nd century AD); Justin, *Epitome of The Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus* 18, 6, 9–12; 7, 1–2 (3rd century AD). For a review on the ancient sources: Xella 2009; D'Andrea 2018, 135–139.

30 Translation of Diodorus (1st century BCE) after Geer (1983): "[...] ἦν δὲ παρ' αὐτοῖς ἀνδριὰς Κρόνου χαλκοῦς, ἐκτετακὼς τὰς χεῖρας ὑπτίας ἐγκεκλιμένας ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, ὥστε τὸν ἐπιτεθέντα τῶν παίδων ἀποκυλίεσθαι καὶ πίπτειν εἴς τι χάσμα πλῆρες πυρός".

head.[31] This image became fundamental in the creation of the child sacrifice's narrative, as it affected the modern literature and the popular imagination. While many scholars widely discussed the theological implications of this figure and its association to sacrificial rituals before the archaeological discovery of the tophets, its name started spreading among the general public through literary works, such as John Milton's Paradise Lost (1667).[32] It is with the historical novel Salammbô (1862), by Gustave Flaubert, that the association between the cruel deity and the Phoenician-Punic culture was emphasized. The novel – named after the fictive character of Salammbô, the sister of the chief magistrate of Carthage – was set at the end of the First Punic War (second half 3rd century BCE) in the exotic Tunisian city. In the thirteenth chapter, the author describes how living babies were thrown in the flames in front of the esoteric Moloch's statue. The choice of Flaubert of mixing the biblical sources and the ancient authors appears to be a poetic license to create an epic story.[33] Nonetheless, it enhanced the previous narratives, particularly Diodorus', by using them as historical sources, despite the fact that no archaeological evidence supported the presence of the idol in the Western pantheon.[34] Subsequently, Flaubert's plot was reused by the Italian writer Gabriele D'Annunzio, who wrote the screenplay for one of the first Italian blockbusters, Cabiria ('born from the flame'), directed by G. Pastrone in 1914 (figure 6).[35] The link between the cruel Moloch and the blood sacrifice practiced by the Carthaginians was further emphasized on the big screen.

Figure 6.
Poster of Cabiria by N. Morgello, 1914 (adapted from Library of Congress, ▸ https://www.loc.gov).

These indirect sources show that the 'story' of the sacrifice originated in the Phoenician motherland and, subsequently, spread with the colonization of the Mediterranean. As Carthage became the new military power, the role of main character passed from the Phoenicians (indicated in the Bible as Canaanites) to the Carthaginians. As the story was told by authors of different cultures and times, the deity was identified with different names: from the biblical Baal or Moloch, to the Greek Kronos and the Latin Saturnus. The 'plot', however, kept including the human sacrifice. No archaeological evidence has attested the existence of the tophet in the Near East, and it has been argued that these stories about infant sacrifices were only derogative propaganda spread for either religious or political reasons. It has been argued that the

31 Moore 1897, 161.

32 Regarding the theological studies see for example: Münter 1821; Tiele 1881. About Milton's work: Milton 2000.

33 Dugan 1969, 194; D'Andrea 2018, 60.

34 Gutron 2008; Campus 2013, 172–174; D'Andrea 2018, 60.

35 See Alovisio/Barbera 2006 for more information on the Italian production.

'human sacrifice' was indeed a literary 'topos', a commonplace associated to other 'barbarian' ancient cultures, to which Cicero refers in his *De Republica* (3, 15).[36]

Moreover, this summary illustrates how, over two millennia before the archaeological excavations, the narrative of this historical ritual has become a narrative about narratives, legitimizing and reinforcing itself by following a main plot: from the biblical passages to the cinematographic adaptation, the story has developed throughout different genres, gaining fixed elements such as recurring characters and settings. As it will be further shown in the next section, with the discovery of the urnfield at Carthage, the literary narratives have been integrated within the archaeological research using them as a source to explain the archaeological evidence. Concurrently, the archaeological knowledge of this Phoenician-Punic ritual has reinforced the popular imagination. Characters and settings have become an integral part of the academic narrative as shown by the fact that the area in which the tophet of Carthage is located, is currently known as Salammbô.[37]

Archaeology-narrative relationship

From a narratological perspective, the archaeological research conducted from the 19th century until today can be linked to three key moments, which mark a shift in the approach to the pre-existing narratives.[38]

In the 1920s, the first scientific analyses of the urnfield seemed to support the story of the ancient sources – and thus, Flaubert's. Other scholars, instead, such as C. Saumagne, were open to the idea of sacrifice but exhorted for caution in associating it to Flaubert's work.[39] In this narrative, the work of O. Eissfledt in the 1930s represented an important change in the academic research. Although a connection between tophets and sacrificial rituals had already been hypothesized, he was the first to combine the data from the mentioned indirect literary sources and the uncovered epigraphies indicating the practice of some sort of ritual to corroborate the idea of child sacrifice. Moreover, by using the

36 "*Quam multi, ut Tuari, in Axino, ut rex Aegypti, Busiris, ut Galli, ut Poeni, homines immolare et pium et diis immortalibus gratissumum esse duxerunt!*". For the discussion on the reliability of indirect sources on the practice of human sacrifice by Punic people, see Stavrakopoulou 2004, 141–148; Campus 2013, 171; Xella 2013, 265.

37 One of the land in which part of the tophet was found known before 1921 as Regulus-Salammbô (Bénichou-Safar 2004, 2, note 7).

38 For a detailed chronological review of the archaeological research see D'Andrea 2018, 59–98.

39 Saumagne 1922; Gutron (2008) provides a clear overview of this moment in the history of archaeological research, emphasizing how the work of Flaubert greatly affected the worldwide perception of the Phoenician-Punic culture.

Punic epigraphies containing the term mlk, he reassessed the traditional interpretation of the biblical Molek/Moloch as 'offering' rather than 'deity'.[40] Archaeological research thus used the well-known narrative of the blood sacrifice to better understand the archaeological material while altering the narrative itself in terms of characters.

A second key moment corresponds to the phase of the 1980s: available sources were re-examined in more critical studies, redirecting scholarly attention to the credibility of the ancient sources about the infant killing.[41] This is the case with the studies conducted by H. Bénichou-Safar and S. Moscati, who suggested that the tophet was a cemetery for children and unborn babies.[42] In this way, the archaeological approach to the traditional narrative was marked by a significant change as the entire plot was re-evaluated.

To conclude, more in-depth studies particularly involving bioarchaeological analysis have further instigate the academic debate in the last two decades.[43] In these studies, scholars – amongst others, C. Gutron, C. Bonnet, J. C. Quinn, and A. Campus – have outlined a different narrative, showing the necessity for a change of perspective and the use of archaeological remains to reassess the previous narratives.[44] They have argued that the traditional focus on the human sacrifice – to either corroborate or refute the theory – has diverted attention from the past context of the site, limiting archaeological research. This new, nuanced narrative has reinterpreted the tophet as a place to communicate with the gods, altering the perception of the setting in which the ritual – whether it included a sacrifice or not – occurred.[45]

Despite the opposite positions assumed by archaeologists over the century old history of the tophet since its discovery, the narratological analysis presented above highlights how the various narratives on the tophet and the archaeological research on the site appear intertwined. Archaeological research has started by integrating the previous narrative and using it to explain the archaeological findings. Subsequently, archaeological material has been used to explain the narrative. Characters and settings have changed and new meanings have been investigated, leading to an alteration of the narrative itself. However, in this process, archaeological studies are ceaselessly interconnected to the

40 Eissfledt 1935 after Heider 1985, 34–39; D'Andrea 2018, 62.

41 See Bonnet (2011, 385, note 1) and Quinn (2011, 404, note 16) for a comprehensive bibliography that covers the period from the 1980s to 2000s.

42 Bénichou-Safar 1981; 1982; Moscati 1987.

43 For more literature on the research from 2000 to 2017, see D'Andrea (2018, 84–97).

44 Gutron 2008; Bonnet 2011; Quinn 2011; Campus 2013.

45 Bonnet 2011; Quinn 2011; Campus 2013.

historical, literary narrative, whether they follow the narrative or attempt to respond to it with a different approach. Throughout the various approaches and new studies, the story of human sacrifice has been difficult to escape from and it has affected scientific studies.

Discussing ethical implications

The narratological analysis of both the historical and archaeological narratives has outlined that, based on the way the plot and its characters are constructed, the writer conveys a specific story to the reader. Introducing ethics in this context means to dive into the relationship the writer creates between the characters and the readers of the narrative. An ethical approach allows to better understand the behaviour of archaeological scholars who, as writers, comprehend, negotiate and divulge the past (i.e. the actions of the characters) to the wider public (i.e. the readers). To better grasp the dynamics of this relationship, it is necessary firstly to examine the concept of agency with respect to the writer's role, then to analyse the approach writers have with the public.

AGENCY is the ability and condition to intentionally act and exercise power in the creation of objects, which are therefore embedded with a certain purpose.[46] When discussing narrative ethics and the question who has the prerogative to tell a story, agency is an important aspect to consider.[47] Overall, archaeology exercises a certain authority over narratives as it shapes the transmission of past events and knowledge through the production of narrative which are considered to be authoritative due to their scholarly nature. Though, the level of this power (as well as the responsibilities) tends to change according to the period and place in which the narrative has been developed, the state of the research and its socio-cultural context.

In the case of the tophet, the application of a holistic approach, which takes into account the development process of the tophet's narratives in its entirety, aids in re-evaluating the various associated narratives as a whole rather than separate sources (and interpretations), introducing the idea of a meta-narrative. Throughout time, each narrative has been developed by being linked to the previous one, creating a grand-story in which the main plot about the children sacrifice has legitimized itself by referring to and explaining the previous sources. In this process, the archaeological narrative is part of a wider meta-narrative. This concept highlights a system of politics and strategies in which

46 Hodder 2003, 32.

47 Pluciennik 2015.

archaeologists are situated. On the one side, this system varies according to the used narrative – whether this focalizes on the idea of sacrifice or its neglection – and the cultural and political implications it brings with regarding the Phoenician-Punic heritage. On the other side, consciously or not, archaeologists have an active role in the use of a narrative and the way this might be manipulated to fit the archaeological research. Introducing the concept of ethical implications allows to raise the matter of their role in the narrative and to question whether or not they are conscious of how narratives have been used before them, and how they now use them according to their own socio-cultural context. In this perspective, the role of archaeologists as writers varies based on their approach to the past: they can act either as author (creator of the narrative), medium (intermediate of narratives created by others) or as a more active participant to the debate (player in the narrative).[48]

Supported by their academic background, authors use narratives as authoritative scientific voices, which are simultaneously descriptive and explanatory.[49] This concept is applicable especially in regard to the first sixty years of studies after the excavation of Carthage's tophet, in which the literary plot of infanticide is used as the main source to contextualize the physical evidence and produce reliable representations of the past. In terms of ethical implications, in their role as academics, authors reinforce the grand narrative which they are part of by presenting it as evident truth.

With the revision of the narrative in the 1980s, a more post-processual attitude characterized academic studies, which has opened archaeological research up to multidisciplinary approaches and questioned the use of pre-existing narratives based on the material evidence.[50] This new approach shows that archaeologists have become, consciously or not, more aware of their agency in the narratives they create. Scholars start a more nuanced debate in which they assume the role of medium, in the sense of mediators rather than producer of the past. As writers, archaeologists act as 'anti-narrators', dismantling and re-evaluating the traditional narratives, by reconsidering characters not as passive personages but active parts of the story with their own voice. As medium, academics act as intermediaries between characters and readers.

Over time, archaeologists have consciously become active

48 The identification of these three roles is based on Pluciennik's (2015, 59–67) assumptions.

49 Pluciennik 2015, 59–61.

50 Moscati 1991; Fantar 2000; Stager/Greene 2000; Gutron 2008; Bonnet 2011; Quinn 2011; Campus 2013; Shaw 2016.

51 Pluciennik 2015, 61–67.

participants in the discussion on the narratives' modern political implications.[51] As scholars, they have spoken up in the name of their characters, whether attempting to normalize the idea of human sacrifice for a modern audience which does not share the same beliefs of ancient cultures, or to 'clean the name' of Phoenicians and Punics from this 'accusatory' narrative of child killings. In order to better understand these new roles, it is necessary to discuss the relationship scholars have established between Phoenician-Punic culture and the readers.

WRITER-CHARACTER-READER DYNAMICS are based on multi-layered relations in which archaeologists' intentions are crucial. Once we understand the role of the writer and its agency, it is necessary to contextualize it with respect to the subjects of the narrative and how they are presented to the readers.

For what concerns the subjects, in the analysis of the practical aspects of mortuary archaeology, the ethical concerns usually apply to either the deceased or the descendants.[52] In the case of the tophet, on the contrary, both ancient and modern writers have tended to focus on the individuals who performed the ritual, rather than the sacrificed infants. This attitude matches a tendency to objectify the cremated individuals, which is already detectable in the ancient epigraphies: the name of the worshipper was carved on the stelae, while the name of the children was left untold.[53] The narrativized characters are the Phoenicians and the Punic people in general, although the previous sections of this paper have shown particular attention directed to the Carthaginians.

Pluciennik suggests that, when acting as authors, writers do not make any 'concession' to the reader, in the sense that they present their data without taking into account the readers' necessity apart from the one for clarity.[54] I suggest this is true also for what concerns the characters: when referring to previous narratives to explain the physical evidence, archaeologists tend not to consider the ethical implications of the way Phoenicians and Punic people are presented to the readers. As it will be shown in the next paragraphs, this tendency determines a certain imagery that has affected the perception of the Phoenician-Punic heritage as primitive and barbaric. The idea of blood sacrifice has developed into a proper label due to an overgeneralization of all Phoenician-Punic people despite the fact that the practice has not been attested in all Phoenician/Punic colonies.[55]

52 For example: Zimmermam 1998; Sayer 2010.

53 Bonnet 2011, 383.

54 Pluciennik 2015, 61.

55 Gutron 2008; Quinn 2011, 389–391, 403; Quinn 2013, 29; Campus 2013, 174–190; Xella 2020.

In both their role of medium and more integral part of the debate, writers establish a relation between the characters and the readers in multiple ways, not only through academic studies but also newspapers addressed to a less specialized public. Sabatino Moscati, also known as the 'father' of the Phoenician and Punic studies, left a significant mark in this sense in the late 1980s. Phoenician culture had been broadly marginalized by classicism and orientalism. In this scenario, the stigma of the ritual infanticide had been used as a valid reason to sustain the barbaric, and thus, inferior status of the Phoenician civilization with respect to the Roman and Greek one.[56] As a response, Moscati directed a public campaign to rehabilitate its role in Mediterranean history and reach the academic autonomy of this field of studies; to do so, he actively worked to erase the stain of barbaric rituals.[57] The apex of his work was the largest exhibition ever dedicated to the Phoenicians at Palazzo Grassi (Venice) in 1988 and the publication of its catalogue in the same year.[58] Many international newspapers reported the results of this academic politics, celebrating the rediscovery of Phoenician culture.[59]

In more recent times, the spotlight has been reclaimed by the Tunisian archaeologist M.H. Fantar. The researcher has become an integral component of the narrative by presenting himself as a descendant of the Phoenician and Punic culture and publicly talking about the moral and cultural repercussion his own heritage has suffered due to the association to infant sacrifice. His direct relationship with the past characters was reported by A. Higgins for The Wall Street Journal in 2005, as part of a debate between Fantar and the archaeologist L. Stager.[60] Inspired by an academic dialogue between the two opposite scholars published in the Archaeology Odyssey journal, Higgins illustrates the role the opposite academics have played in the modern political implications of Carthage's past in an article titled 'Carthage Is Trying To Live Down Image As Site of Infanticide'.[61] Fantar is introduced not as a mere researcher but rather as heir of the Phoenician-Punic culture who "is campaigning to clear his forefathers of a nasty stigma: a reputation for infanticide".[62] L.

56 Garnard 2019, 704–705.

57 Among the others, Moscati 1987; Moscati/Ribichini 1991.

58 Moscati 1988.

59 The following articles are accessible online: Suro 1988, ► https://www.nytimes.com; Jenkins 1988,►https://www.washingtonpost.com; Bascetta 1988,►https://ilmanifesto.it.

60 The article is fully accessible online on the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette's webpage, ►https://www.post-gazette.com/.

61 Fantar 2000; Stager/Greene 2000.

62 Higgins 2005.

Stager is, instead, presented as a traditionalist, who attempts to normalize the ritual by explaining that it was indeed a common practice among ancient populations. The article is cleverly constructed of captivating references and definitions which call for modern morality's disdain, as Carthage is described as a 'serial killer of children'.[63]

Lastly, in 2014 Maev Kennedy published in the Guardian an article with the title 'Carthaginians sacrificed own children, archaeologists say', taking its cue from the studies previously published in the Antiquity journal by J. C. Quinn.[64] The article presents the scholar in her role of supporter of the infanticide theory who tries to negotiate with a past which is often perceived by the public as unbearable, claiming: "This is something dismissed as negative propaganda because in modern times people just didn't want to believe it".[65]

Despite the different interpretations, in their roles of more active speakers, archaeologists are not only giving back a voice to the groups who had been previously confined to their role of narrativized subjects, but attempt to create a relation with modern readers who do not feel any particular connection with them.[66] The application of an ethical perspective with respect to the narrative of the tophet sheds new light on the dynamics at play among archaeologists in their role of writers, the represented characters and the public. Whereas archaeological authority is irrefutable, acknowledging archaeology's narrative as situated as well as the relations it helps create, refines our understanding of the way data is approached, elaborated and communicated.[67] A narrative is more than a story: it is a plot that creates assumptions and correlations affecting both characters' story and readers' perception. Nonetheless, as with all media communication, narratives have limitations: once communicated, the way the public perceives, reuses, and often politicizes the archaeological results based on modern conceptions, remains out of researchers' control.[68]

Conclusion: The responsibilities of writing the past

In this article I have tried to approach the mortuary archaeology field and its relation to data from an innovative perspective,

63 Ibid.

64 The article by Kennedy is fully accessible online on The Guardian's webpage, ▶ https://www.theguardian.com. About the academic article published in Antiquity, see Xella et al. 2013.

65 Kennedy 2014.

66 Holtorf 2010, 388–390.

67 Bernbeck 2015.

68 Williams 2019, 8.

emphasizing the role archaeologists play in shaping the modern perception of historical heritage. In doing so, I have attempted to answer the following questions.

What is the role of archaeologists when interpreting and expressing death-related topics through narrative?
The introduction of the concept of archaeology as a narratological act brings mortuary research into the mix of a larger debate on the role of archaeologists - in fact, of all academics involved with the study of historical events - as 'writers of the past'.[69] In particular, it involves the highly argued notion of the 'historical significance' of the archaeological narrative (i.e. the implications of the writer's choices in using a narrative to explain the past).[70]

When focusing on the content of the archaeological texts, rather than the form, the significance of the archaeological text in terms of historical reconstruction is believed to lie in the scientific data. This is true for Punic archaeologists – and all archaeologists in general – who have used their authoritative scientific voices to largely claim the truthfulness of their positions in regards to the tophets based on the presented solid data – whether sustaining or neglecting the sacrificial ritual.

Yet, when shifting attention to the form of the text, the essence of the historical reconstruction lies in the writer's ability to comprehend and construct a narrative-structure based upon the available evidence. In this regard, the agency and intentionality of the writer is inevitably re-evaluated. From a narratological perspective, the form of the text (the narrative) represents a structural fabric in which the scientific data – the value of which is not questioned here – are inserted. This fabric involves the personal choices the archaeologist-writer has made about, amongst others, their role in the narrative, presentation of the characters, the author's relationship with them, and focalisation. The authority and power of archaeologists influence the description and explanation of the events with respect to the characters. Moreover, they have the power to (re)create connections between the researched subject(s) and the modern communities in various ways. The created narrative frames the data and leads the readers to the writer's conclusion. In this respect, the positions of the Punic archaeologists assume new meanings: a change of their role becomes visible over the decades as they move from being creators of, to intermediates and active participants in the narrative. In light of this, an ethical discussion of archaeologists' role as writers is imperative.

69 Cf. Munslow 2011.

70 Munslow 2011, 84–85.

How can the discussion of the ethics of using narratives (in the dissemination of knowledge through written academic forms) refine our understanding of the dynamics between archaeology, the public, and the people in the past?

The case of the tophet shows the variety of intentional authorial decisions that were applied in the creation of its several archaeological narratives. This intentionality and its impact on the writer-character-reader dynamics call for an ethical approach and healthy self-criticism in the field of mortuary archaeology. The study of the dead is not limited to the excavation, treatment and display of human remains. It also involves the narration of their story in written forms. It is my view that just as the form of processing and presenting the physical remains is considered crucial, so is the form of the narrative involving mortuary studies. This is especially true when the narrative is assumed to be representational of the cultural identity of a past society, like in the case of the tophet and its related ritual performances.

By introducing the concept of ethics in this debate, new light is shed not only on the role of the archaeologist-writer but also on his/her responsibilities. This consideration, however, does not have to lead to the erroneous idea that, in this context, the ethical duty of the archaeologist is to narrate the truth.[71] The academic research per se relies on an empirical-analytical understanding of the past. The narrative, instead, is fabricated. However this does not mean it is not compatible with the truth. This is because the narrative is an 'epistemic-inspired' product of aesthetics and choices based upon authors' backgrounds (scientific and non-scientific).[72] This explains how the analysis of the same solid data can lead to opposite narratives, as often happens in archaeology. Were infants sacrificed within Phoenician-Punic communities? The remains of cremated infants, offerings and shrines are empirical evidence of the use of cremation for people of a specific age category within an area where religious rituals were practiced along with mortuary ones. On the contrary, the offered academic interpretations on the way these individuals died are the results of the authors' agency in creating a certain dynamic between narrative, data, characters and readers. From a narratological perspective, divergences must not automatically be labelled as untrue and dismissed.[73] The engaging angle of this tension between empirical data and created narratives is how the narrative iserfused with meaning as well as its impact on the story of an extinct culture. Furthermore, it is also true that 'scientific'

71 Scand 2010, 35.

72 Munslow 2011.

73 Scand 2010, 35.

methodologies and interpretations change over time as a result of scientific progression and new discoveries. Does this make the previous narratives untruthful? Or are they simply the product of the author's time?

The ethical responsibility of the archaeologists lies with their acknowledgement of how the narrative fabric is developed. I sustain that archaeologists would benefit by reviewing the priority of content over form and their role in authoring their research as 'past'. It is time to elaborate the debate on the level of clarity, openness and self-awareness we pursue both as archaeologists and writers. As Munslow suggests in regard to historical understanding, the "question is not always what did the agent do in the past, but what does the historian [in this case, the archaeologist] want his/her agent to do in his/her story?".[74] I would also add: Why does the author want his/her character to behave in that way? As the historian suggests, it is a matter of 'narrative explanation' rather than archaeological interpretation.[75]

The case of the tophets shows that academic research may be inextricably linked to the used narrative and its cultural and political 'baggage'. Even when writers attempt to step away from the traditional narrative, this is never entirely put aside but rather, transformed. The use of a narrative can, inadvertently, become embedded in the research, turning from a mediatory to an explanatory tool, ultimately affecting methodology and results. The form and origin of the story are as important as the story's content. These considerations illustrate how a narrative can evolve through time and genres, determining a broad spectrum of dynamics and meanings in which archaeologists' intentions can be crucial.

Moreover, this paper confirms how fragile the balance between archaeologists and readers can be, especially when treating such a sensitive matter as death. Acknowledging the network in which the research is developed, the implications of the used narrative and our role in it as writers represents a measure to enhance our understanding of the archaeological process in using and presenting data. The awareness of our responsibilities and limitations constitutes a step further in providing justice to the dead's heritage through our communicative tools, it also aids in moving beyond the constrictions of popular sensibilities and ideas.
This perspective does not entail neglecting empirical archaeology. But I do stress the necessity to critically reflect on the structure and function of narratives concerning mortuary archaeology. This approach provides the opportunity to further complement

74 Muslow 2011, 85.

75 Ibid.

archaeological practice and ethical research, shifting focus from the commonly discussed practical challenges to new theoretical ones.

Acknowledgements

This paper and the research behind it would not have been possible without the support of many people, among which I would particularly like to thank Prof. P. van Dommelen for his guidance and encouragement.

I would also like to thank the NASTA committee for the opportunity to present this paper at the event 'NASTA, Narrative & Storytelling in Archaeology' (held on April 2021), as well as the two anonymous peer reviewers and the editors of Kleos for their helpful comments.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Flaubert, G., 1862. *Salammbô*, Paris: M. Lévy.

Secondary sources

Alovisio, S./A. Barbera 2006: *Cabiria & Cabiria*, Torino.

Amadasi Guzzo, M.G./J.A. Zamora, 2013: The Epigraphy of the Tophet, in P. Xella (ed.), The Tophet in the Ancient Mediterranean, *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici* 29–30 (2012–2013), Verona, 159–192.

Aubet Semmler, M. E., 2019: Tyre and Its Colonial Expansion, in C. López-Ruiz/B. R. Doak (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean*, Oxford University Press, 75–88.

Bénichou-Safar, H., 1981. À propos des ossements humains du tophet de Carthage, *Rivista di Studi Fenici* 9, 5–9.

Bénichou-Safar, H., 1982. *Les tombes puniques de Carthage. Topographie, structures, inscriptions et rites funéraires*, Paris, CNRS.

Bénichou-Safar, H., 1988: Sur l'incinération des enfants aux tophets de Carthage et de Sousse, *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 205 (1), 57–67.

Bénichou-Safar, H., 2004: *Le Tophet de Salammbô à Carthage. Essai de reconstitution*, Collection de l'École Française de Rome 342, Rome.

Bernbeck, R., 2015: From Imaginations of a Peopled Past to a Recognition of Past People, in R. M. Van Dyke/R. Bernbeck (eds.), *Subjects and Narrative in Archaeology*, University Press of Colorado, 257–269.

Bonnet, C., 2011: On Gods and Earth: The Tophet and the Construction of a New Identity in Punic Carthage, in Gruen, E. S. (ed.), *Cultural Identity in the ancient Mediterranean*, Los Angeles, 373–387.

Campus, A. 2013: Il tofet tra mito e rito. Rationes rerum. *Rivista di filologia e storia* 2, 167–194.

D'Andrea, B., 2014: *I tofet del Nord Africa dall'età arcaica all'età romana (VIII sec. a. C. – II sec. d. C.)*, Studi archeologici (Collezione di studi fenici 45), Pisa – Roma, Fabrizio Serra.

D'Andrea, B., 2018: *Bambini nel "limbo". Dati e proposte interpretative sui tofet fenici e punici*, Collection de l'École française de Rome, 552, Rome : École Française de Rome.

Day, J., 1989: *Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Docter, R. F./E. Smits/T. Hakbijl/I. L. M. Stuijts/J. van der Plicht, 2003: Interdisciplinary research on urns from the Carthaginian

tophet and their contents, *Palaeohistoria*, 43–44 (2001/2002), 417–433.

Docter, R.F./F. Chelbi/B. Maraoui Telmini/A.J. Nijboer/J. Van der Plicht/W. Van Neer/K. Mansel/S. Garsallah, 2008: New Radiocarbon Dates from Carthage: Bridging the Gap between History and Archaeology?, in Sagona, C. (ed.), *Beyond the Homeland: Markers in Phoenician Chronology*, Leuven, Paris, and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 379–422.

Dridi, H., 2019: Early Carthage: From Its Foundation to the Battle of Himera (ca. 814–480 BCE), in C. López-Ruiz/B. R. Doak (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean, Oxford University Press*, 141–154.

Dugan, J.R., 1969: Flaubert's Salammbô, a Study in Immobility, *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur* 79 (3), 193–206.

Fantar, M. H., 2000: Were living Children Sacrificed to the Gods? No, *Archaeology Odyssey 3* (6).

Garnard B.K., 2019: Phoenicians and Carthaginians in the Western Imagination, in C. López-Ruiz/B. R. Doak (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean*, Oxford University Press, 697–711.

Geer, R. M., 1983: *Diodorus of Sicily, X. Books XIX, 66-XX*, *The Loeb classical library, 390*, 2nd Edition, London.

González-Ruibal, A., 2018: Ethics of Archaeology, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 47, 345–360. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102317-045825

Gutron, C., 2008: La mémoire de Carthage en chantier : les fouilles du tophet Salammbô et la question des sacrifices d'enfants, *L'Année du Maghreb* 4, 45–65.

Heider, G.C., 1985: The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*. Supplement Series 43.Sheffield: JSOT Press.

Hodder, I., 2003: The "social" in Archaeological Theory: An Historical and Contemporary Perspective, in L. Meskell/R. Pruecel, *A Companion to Social Archaeology*, Malden MA: Blackwell, 23–42.

Holtorf, C., 2010: Meta-Stories of Archaeology, *World Archaeology* 42 (3), 381–393. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00438243.2010.497382

Killebrew, A. E., 2019: Cannanite Roots, Proto-Phoenicia, and the early Phoenician Period: ca. 1300-1000 BCE, in C. López-Ruiz/B. R. Doak (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean, Oxford University Press*, 39–56.

McCarty, M. M., 2019: The Tophet and Infant Sacrifice, in C. López-Ruiz/B. R. Doak (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean*, Oxford University Press, 311–326.

Mickel, A., 2012: *Archaeologists as Authors and the Stories of Sites*. Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing.
Milton, J., 2000: *Paradise Lost*, London-New York: Penguin Books.
Moore, G.F., 1897. Biblical Notes. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 16 (1/2), 155–165.
Moscati, S., 1987: *Il sacrificio punico dei fanciulli : realtà o invenzione?*, Quaderni dell'Academia Nazionale dei Lincei 261, Roma.
Moscati, S., 1988: *I Fenici*, Milano: Bompiani.
Moscati, S., 1991: *Gli adoratori di Moloch. Indagine su un celebre rito cartaginese*, Milano.
Moscati, S./S. Ribichini, 1991: *Il sacrificio dei bambini: un aggiornamento*, Quaderni dell'Accademia nazionale dei Lincei 266, Roma.
Münter, F.C.C.H., 1821: *Religion der Karthager*, 2nd Edition, Copenhagen.
Munslow, A., 2007: *Narrative and History*, Palgrave Macmillan.
Munslow, A., 2011: The Historian as Author, *SPIEL* 30 (1), 73–88.
Pluciennik, M., 1999: Archaeological Narratives and Other Ways of Telling, *Current Anthropology* 40 (5), 653–78.
Pluciennik, M., 2015: Authoritative and Ethical Voices. From Diktat to the Demotic, in R. M. Van Dyke/R. Bernbeck (eds.), *Subjects and Narrative in Archaeology*, University Press of Colorado, 55–81.
Praetzellis, A., 2014: Narrative and Storytelling for Archaeological Education, in C. Smith (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology*, Springer, 5135–6138.
Quinn, J. C., 2011: The Cultures of the Tophet: Identification and identity in the Phoenician Diaspora, in E. S. Gruen (ed), *Cultural Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean*, Los Angeles, 388–413.
Quinn, J. C., 2013: Tophets in the «Punic World», in P. Xella (ed.), *The Tophet in the Ancient Mediterranean*, Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici 29–30 (2012–2013), Verona, 23–48.
Ribichini, S., 1990: Il sacrificio di fanciulli nel mondo punico: testimonianze e problemi, in *Riti funerari e di olocausto nella Sardegna fenicia e punica. Atti dell'incontro di studio (S. Antioco, 3-4 ottobre 1986)*, Quaderni Cagliari 6 (Supplemento), 45–66.
Ruiz Cabrero, L. A., 2008: Dedicantes en los tofet: la sociedad fenicia en el Mediterráneo, *Gerión* 26 (1), 89–148.
Saumagne, C., 1922: Notes sur les découvertes de Salammbô, *Revue Tunisienne*, 231–251.
Sayer, D., 2010: *Ethics and burial archaeology*, London: Duckworth.
Shaw, B. D., 2016: Lambs of god: an end of human sacrifice, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 29, 259–291.
Stager, L. E., 2014: *Rites of Spring in the Carthaginian Tophet*, Babesch Byvanck Lecture, Leiden.

Stager, L./J. A. Greene, 2000: Were Living Children Sacrificed to the Gods in Punic Carthage? Yes, *Archaeology Odyssey* 3 (6).

Stavrakopoulou, F., 2004: *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Tiele, C.-P., 1881: La Religion des Phéniciens, *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 3, 167–217.

White, H., 1973: *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.

Williams, H. 2019: Dead Relevant: Introducing The Public Archaeology of Death, in H. Williams/B. Wills-Eve/J. Osborne (eds.), *The Public Archaeology of Death*. Sheffield: Equinox, 1–16.

Xella, P., 2009: *Sacrifici di bambini nel mondo Fenicio e Punico nelle testimonianze in lingua greca e latina – I*, Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici sul Vicino Oriente antico 26 (2009), Verona, 59–100.

Xella, P., 2013: «Tophet». An overall interpretation, in P. Xella (ed.), *The Tophet in the Ancient Mediterranean*, Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici 29–30 (2012–2013), Verona, 259–281.

Xella, P., 2020: The Ideology of the Tophet. Some Ethno-Anthropological Remarks, in S. C. Pérez/E. Rodríguez González (eds.). *A Journey between East and West in the Mediterranean, Proceedings IX International Congress of Phoenician and Punic Studies*, MYTRA 5, 271–279.

Xella, P./J. Quinn/V. Melchiorri/P. van Dommelen, 2013: Phoenician bones of contention, *Antiquity* 87, 1199–1207.

Zimmerman, L. J., 1998: *When Data Become People: Archaeological Ethics, Reburial, and the Past as Public Heritage*

Online sources

Bascetta, M., 1988. I Fenici Riabilitati, Il Manifesto (4 Marzo), ▸ https://archiviopubblico.ilmanifesto.it/?SearchTitle=Fenici&SearchAuthor=Bascetta&SearchCategory=&SearchTag=&SearchEdition=&SearchMonth=03&SearchYear=1988&OrderFields=00&OrderMode=00, accessed on 17/02/2022.

Cabiria, 1914. [New York: N. Morgello, New York: Amalgamated L.I.P. from B.A. Label]. Photograph. ▸https://www.loc.gov/item/2007676108/, accessed on 23/06/2021.

Higgins, A., 2005: Carthage Tries to Live Down Image as a Site of infanticide, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (May 26). ▸ https://www.post-gazette.com/news/world/2005/05/26/Carthage-tries-to-live-down-image-as-site-of-infanticide/stories/200505260319, accessed on 12/03/2021.

Jenkins, L., 1988: Phoenicia The Forgotten civilization, *The Washington Post* (March 20). ▸ https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/style/1988/03/20/

phoenicia-the-forgotten-civilization/fba2a4f1-f50a-4f23-b846-cdf8cfc0c13a/, accessed on 17/02/2022.

Jeremiah 19, 4-6. English Standard Version. ▸ https://biblia.com/bible/esv/jeremiah/19/4-6, assessed on 16/02/2022.

Jeremiah 19, 4-6. English Standard Version. ▸https://biblia.com/bible/esv/jeremiah/32/35, accessed on 16/02/2022.

Kennedy, M., 2014: Carthaginians sacrifice own children, archaeologists say, *The Guardian* (January 21). ▸ https://www.theguardian.com/science/2014/jan/21/carthaginians-sacrificed-own-children-study, accessed on 23/01/2021.

Suro, R., 1988: A Neglected Civilization Gets Its Due in Venice, *The New York Times* (March 15). ▸ https://www.nytimes.com/1988/03/15/arts/a-neglected-civilization-gets-its-due-in-venice.html#:~:text=The%20Palazzo%20Grassi%20museum%20has,the%20Mediterranean's%20varied%20cultural%20currents, accessed on 17/02/2022.

Narrativity in Olympiodorus' *Commentary on Plato's First Alcibiades*

Cagla Umsu-Seifert

Abstract

Olympiodorus, a Neoplatonic commentator from the 6th century AD, has been the subject of much scholarly debate. His commentaries focus more on Plato's literary style than they do on theoretical issues. The philosophical significance of his works is therefore disputed. Following the recent evaluation by H. Tarrant (2021), this paper will reassess Olympiodorus' philosophical approach in light of the analyses on narrativity and classics by I. J. F. de Jong (2014) and on Neoplatonic narratives by M. Asper (2013). After outlining some stories from Olympiodorus' *Commentary on Plato's First Alcibiades*, I discuss their contents and functions. In this commentary, Olympiodorus characterises the philosophers, especially Plato, as superior to political authorities. In addition, he identifies certain narrative strategies of Plato and applies them in his own explanations, thus establishing the link between his exegesis and Plato's philosophy. With stories reflecting the superiority of philosophical knowledge, Olympiodorus emphasises the merits of Platonic education and thereby of his own teaching.

Dr. Cagla Umsu-Seifert has studied Classics in Istanbul, Berlin and Munich. She completed her PhD in Greek Philology at LMU Munich in 2021 with a thesis on Olympiodorus' Commentary on Alcibiades. She researches on late-antique philosophy and literature, with a focus on the reception of Plato and literary strategies in Neoplatonic commentaries. She currently works as a lecturer at the Department of Greek Philology at LMU Munich.

▶ *Profile page*

Introduction

Olympiodorus of Alexandria has been a controversial figure in terms of his role in the Neoplatonism of Late Antiquity. He lived approximately between 495 and 570 AD and was the "head" (σχολάρχης) of the Alexandrian philosophy school.[1] His lectures on the works of Plato and Aristotle have come down to us in the form of commentaries. Researchers on Late Antiquity have taken an interest in Olympiodorus, particularly since he has been called the "last pagan teacher" of philosophy.[2] On the other hand, a number of scholars have dismissed Olympiodorus' commentaries

1 On the Alexandrian School in the Late Antiquity, see Sorabji 2014.

2 For example, by Festugière 1966, 1589 and Westerink 1990, 336.

as instructional texts for students.[3] Their emphasis on the linguistic and literary features of the Platonic dialogs provided a contrast to the works of Proclus, which had a stronger theoretical emphasis.[4] Contrary to this view, H. Tarrant has recently argued that Olympiodorus represents a new understanding of Plato's style.[5] Further study of Olympiodorus' commentaries is still required to determine the specifics of his exegetical method.

This paper proceeds from the thesis that a narratological perspective is helpful in accessing characteristic elements of Olympiodorus' exegesis. First, I will give a brief overview of the concepts of narrativity regarding their relevance both to Plato and to the Neoplatonic commentaries. This is followed by an overview of Olympiodorus' socio-historical context and his *Commentary on Plato's First Alcibiades* (hereafter referred to as the *Commentary on Alcibiades*). The subsequent sections examine certain narratives in this commentary, based mainly on the story of Plato's life. Finally, I will discuss Olympiodorus' strategies as narrator and his place in the Platonic tradition. His novel contribution to Platonic philosophy can be explained, as this paper will argue, by his use of narratives as a literary device.

Narrativity in Plato and in Neoplatonic Commentaries

First, I should clarify what I understand with the term 'narrative'. As described by I. J. F. de Jong, "[…] a narrative text is a text in which a narrator recounts a series of events".[6] This definition sets two main criteria for a narrative: 1) a narrator and 2) a sequence of events.

If storytelling is an act of communication, it has always a narrator who presupposes a narratee or narratees.[7] The narrator, defined as a necessary main principle of any narrative, is considered as a narrating subject that is not automatically equated with the author.[8] Any narrative is directed to an addressee, which is called a narratee. Narratees do not have a merely receptive role, but they also influence the perception of a narrative by providing the reader with figures of addressees.[9] A sequence of events, on the other hand, is not considered a prerequisite for all narratives:

3 An illustration of this position is Westerink's statement that in Olympiodorus' case "it might be more correct to speak of a teaching routine than of a philosophy" (Westerink 1976, 23).

4 For an overview of the scholarly discussion on this subject, see Griffin 2014.

5 Tarrant 2021, 219, argues that Olympiodorus conceives of inspiration as an experience not reserved for philosophers. Thus, according to Tarrant, Olympiodorus portrays Plato as both humble and exalted through his inspirations and determines the value of a speech not by its style but by the person who speaks.

6 De Jong 2014, 17.

7 Ibid., 28.

8 Ibid., 18.

9 Ibid., 33. Readers can identify with or distance themselves from these fictional addressees.

only in some cases do they comply with a 'story' involving a set of events that are causally related to each other.[10]

It has been argued that a narrator, who comments on the reported events, does so for a purpose.[11] The 'narrativity' of a text corresponds to its use of narratives in this sense.[12] An examination of narrativity is determined by several key factors such as forms and contents of stories, their interaction with narratees, and the identity of the narrator. It is, therefore, necessary to place concrete stories into their overall textual and socio-historical context in order to assess their narrativity.

In search of the ancient examples of narratives, researchers have taken Plato as one of the most notable subjects. The reason for this was not only that Plato laid the theoretical foundations for literary criticism, but also that he used narratives in his philosophical reasoning. Several kinds of narrativity have been exposed in the Platonic dialogues, including those without a narrative frame. The 'dramatic dialogues' such as the *Alcibiades* are not narrated in a third person, but, nevertheless, Socrates reports on historical persons or events in the course of the conversation. Plato also has 'pseudo-diegetic' dialogues, in which the narrator suppresses his role as such and instead presents the real actors as the actual narrators.[13]

The exploration of narrativity in Plato's philosophy, to be sure, is not only an invention of modern scholarship. Neoplatonic commentators regarded the stories of Platonic dialogues as more than subsidiary remarks and recognized their philosophical value. The greatest contribution to this exegetical method in Late Antiquity has been probably made by Proclus (412–485 AD), whose commentaries on several dialogues of Plato are partially extant.[14] Proclus' exegesis is distinguished by an extended philosophical discourse that takes the language of Plato's text as the starting point for the interpretation of its theoretical facets.[15] This approach is followed by a focus on specific aspects of texts, such as narratives, as can be seen in Olympiodorus. He develops Plato's brief references to extended reports, introduces the story behind

10 Ibid., 38. In this paper, I will use the term 'story' not in this technical sense, but in the sense of a single narrative.

11 Lyotard 1984, 27–31, has exposed certain functions of narratives such as legitimisation.

12 On different meanings of the term 'narrativity', see Abbott 2014.

13 Genette 1980, 236–237, and De Jong 2014, 17, describe Plato's *Theaetetus* as an example for this category, since the narrator says that he avoids the tag 'he said', thus describing the scene as it happens actually, and not being a narrative of a past event.

14 On the reception of Proclus in general, see Layne/Butorac 2017; on his *Commentary on Alcibiades*, see Tarrant/Renaud 2015, 177–185.

15 Proclus frequently mentions the explanation of λέξις, "the phrase", referring to the "wording" of the text in his *Commentary on Alcibiades* (185.17–19, 207.19–208.2, 237.13–17, 252.3–5, 330.15–16).

the dialogue and its characters, and explains some arguments with accounts on historical figures.[16] An analysis of the narratives in Olympiodorus' commentaries is therefore of particular importance, as it can shed light on his exegetical approach to Plato and thus contribute to research on Platonism.

In the case of philosophical commentaries, it would be appropriate to speak of narratives with 'overt narrators' who clearly manifest themselves as such throughout the text.[17] Yet particularly in the stories, according to M. Asper, we can glance at the narrator as author through the narrative.[18] In these instances, the narrator speaks as author and refers to subjects beyond the commented text. Furthermore, the implementation of narratives in a commentary gives the exegete the opportunity to present his views without being strictly bound to his source. Several Neoplatonic commentators include narratives in their works. As Asper shows, not only Proclus, but also other Neoplatonist commentators Simplicius, Eutocius and Philoponus (all three studied in the Alexandrian school in the 5th–6th century AD) were aware of the functions of narratives for strategic purposes – either to construct a philosophical 'tradition' or to establish the commentators' status as part of this tradition.[19] This aspect of Neoplatonic exegesis is found also in the commentaries of Olympiodorus, for they are largely concerned with explaining Plato's stories and inventing new ones.

Olympiodorus' Commentary on Alcibiades in its historical framework

The schools of Alexandria played an essential role in the intellectual scene of Late Antiquity particularly through the teachings of Alexandrian Neoplatonists.[20] Even though philosophers might have experienced challenges in the Justinian period (527–565 AD), at the same time Alexandria witnessed the establishment of philosophy as a professional school discipline.[21] Olympiodorus contributed to this development as a teacher by

16 Some of these narratives are already present in Plato and Proclus, such as about Cyrus and Xerxes (Plato, Alcibiades 105b–c; Proclus, Commentary on Alcibiades 150.24–151.8). However, some stories that are either absent or briefly skipped by Proclus are described in detail by Olympiodorus, such as on Plato's encounter with the tyrant Dionysius (see below in section 4).

17 De Jong 2014, 26.

18 Asper 2013, 436. On narrative theory in ancient texts, see Hodkinson/Faulkner 2015, 3 and Finkelberg 2019, 13–14. A further study on narrative strategies in Proclus' hymns is conducted by Devlin 2015.

19 Asper 2013, 442–443.

20 For a general overview of the schools in Greco-Roman Egypt, see Cribiore 2001, 15–44. See also Watts 2006 and Sorabji 2014 on the Alexandrian school of philosophy in Late Antiquity.

21 Watts 2006, 209–210, refers for this thesis to Damascius' statement that the Alexandrian chair of philosophy was publicly funded (Damascius, *Vita Isidori*, fragment 124 in Zintzen 1967).

presenting Platonic philosophy as the best method of education. His commentaries consist of school lectures, his 'narratees' thus being primarily disciples of philosophy.[22] As they are the written form of the lectures, Olympiodorus' commentaries are also directed at the readers.[23] In these texts, it becomes evident that Olympiodorus aims at addressing his audience through an easily accessible level of philosophical interpretation.

In the context of education, Neoplatonic commentators regarded Plato's *Alcibiades* as the starting point for teaching Platonic philosophy.[24] This view is based on the Neoplatonic ordering of the dialogues according to their 'steps of virtue' the first of which is 'political virtue', that is, the excellence of a person who lives and acts in society.[25] In Neoplatonic exegesis, the political virtue is identified with Plato's *Alcibiades*, with which Olympiodorus begins his curriculum. His *Commentary on Alcibiades* consists of 28 sections (πράξεις, mostly translated as "lectures"), explaining in each of them certain parts of Plato's *Alcibiades* in a consequent order. The structure of the text is clearly arranged: each lecture begins with a "sentence" (λῆμμα) taken from the dialogue, expands on its theoretical contents (θεωρία), followed mostly by a section at the end of the lecture that elaborates on grammatical and linguistic details word by word (λέξις).[26]

Before beginning his exegesis of Plato's *Alcibiades*, Olympiodorus introduces Plato and his philosophy in a detailed preamble. This introduction, known as the 'Life of Plato', constitutes a distinctive feature of Olympiodorus' *Commentary on Alcibiades*. Although preliminary lectures played a key role in Platonic education, few introductory texts have survived.[27] Another example which originated contemporary to Olympiodorus,

22 On the concept of narratee see De Jong 2014, 27–28.

23 If it is granted that his commentaries largely correspond to his formulations in the lectures, being written down "from his voice" (ἀπὸ φωνῆς) simultaneously. It was assumed that this task was carried out by one of his disciples (Westerink 1982, VIII). This 'student-editor' does not reveal himself, which may indicate that the text remains faithful to the original lecture. There are other cases where the student claims authorship, as in Ammonius' commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, which is titled as Ammonius' ὑπομνήματα, "edited notes", originated from Proclus' lectures.

24 For a comprehensive overview of the *Alcibiades* in the Platonic tradition see Tarrant/Renaud 2015.

25 The Neoplatonists regarded a certain virtue as σκοπός, "the purpose and the central theme", of each dialogue. On the scale of virtues in Neoplatonism, see Griffin 2015, 7–13.

26 In commentaries, a λῆμμα refers to a – usually summarizing – part of the source text to be commented on in the following section. In a more specific sense, it means, a "statement", something "that is taken to be". The structure of θεωρία and λέξις was common to almost all Alexandrian commentators, which demonstrated, according to I. Papachristou 2021, 4, their educational purposes. On λέξις see above note 15.

27 On the set of preliminary issues in the genre of commentary, see Mansfeld 1994, 2–7 and 10–39.

the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, existed as an individual treatise.[28] By contrast, Olympiodorus appends his introduction to the *Commentary on Alcibiades*. In this commentary, Olympiodorus reinforces the idea of political virtue with stories that introduce role figures. The most important of these figures, Plato, the founder of Platonic philosophy, is presented in detail at the very beginning.

The Life of Plato: The Role of Biographical Narrative

Prior to Olympiodorus, Plato's biography was treated by several authors and examined in the Platonic tradition.[29] It has been assumed that Proclus had written an introduction to Platonic curriculum, though it is not possible to determine if he had Plato's biography in this work.[30] Further, Olympiodorus mentions Damascius as his other source on the *Alcibiades*, whose commentary is completely lost. The only other biography of Plato written in Late Antique Alexandria is contained in the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*.[31] As mentioned before, the *Anonymous Prolegomena* was not related to a particular commentator or commentary work, but rather represented an individual introduction. Thus, Olympiodorus provides the unique example of a Platonic commentary that begins with a biography of Plato.[32] A. Motta has argued that Olympiodorus deliberately placed this episode at the beginning of his *Commentary on Alcibiades*.[33] This implies a special function of this biography and makes it particularly interesting as a story. Moreover, this is the only case where one narrative takes up an entire lecture, while other shorter accounts are scattered throughout the commentary. The *Life of Plato* is therefore the appropriate starting point for examining the content and function of Olympiodorus' narratives.

28 According to Westerink 1962, L, this treatise is dated to the later sixth century AD, probably being written by one of Olympiodorus' students or inspired by him. This introduction mentions "the life story of the philosopher" (τὴν ἱστορίαν τοῦ φιλοσόφου, *Anonymous Prolegomena* 28.3) as the starting point for admiring Plato's philosophy. Motta 2021, 36, states that the importance of biographies in the Platonic tradition was based on the thesis that a philosopher's life and teachings were interconnected.

29 An example in the Platonic tradition is Apuleius' *De Platone*. Doxographical literature such as Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* (3.1) provides another source.

30 There is a comprehensive account of the content of the Neoplatonic introductory tradition in the later *Anonymous Prolegomena* (28.1–16). On the thesis of a lost introductory treatise of Proclus, see Mansfeld 1994, 28–30. Westerink 1962, XLI, considers the life of the philosopher, the first point in the *Anonymous Prolegomena*, as not derived from Proclus.

31 *Anonymous Prolegomena* 1.10–6.22.

32 Despite separate publications of Olympiodorus' *Life of Plato* (for example, by Casaubon), the manuscript tradition places this text after the title of the *Commentary on Alcibiades* and thus as its introduction. For a description of the manuscripts, see Westerink 1982, VII–VIII and Duke 1989.

33 Motta 2021, 36.

Biographical narratives in philosophical works do not merely provide 'historical' information about a person, but also help to state an argument effectively. Most of such accounts in the Neoplatonic commentaries might be examined, as Asper suggests, under the concept of 'grand narrative': they construct and establish a 'Platonic tradition' with the function of legitimisation and reproduction of its authority, "[...] which is precisely the character of master narratives."[34] Moreover, according to Asper, the commentators form and maintain a group identity through their expositions on the content of Platonic philosophy, on the character of a philosopher, and on an ideal student.[35]

Olympiodorus depicts Plato in such a manner that the personal development of the philosopher strengthens the status of his philosophy. About Plato's education, he states that the philosopher had been engaged in other domains such as poetry until his encounter with Socrates. This experience represents a turning point in Plato's life for Olympiodorus, after which he devoted himself exclusively to philosophy.[36] In the following passages on his life, Olympiodorus reports on Plato's visits to several outstanding scientific centres, such as Egypt and Persia.[37] These remarks point out the superiority of Plato's knowledge, since he was not only educated in the fields known in Athens, but also by Egyptian priests and Persian Magi. At the same time, Plato was a lover of the works of nature, as a philosopher should be.[38] This reason brought him to Sicily and led him to a life-changing experience: Plato's encounter with Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse. In the following, I will examine Olympiodorus' narrative on Plato's confrontation with Dionysius to highlight his discourse on authority.

Contrasting authorities: philosopher and politics

Several authors have discussed Plato's first trip to Sicily in terms of his political philosophy.[39] To provide a rationale for this journey, Olympiodorus combines the previous explanations with an emphasis on Plato's political ambitions, thus setting a different accent. First, he presents the traditional reason for Plato's first

34 Asper 2013, 444, uses 'master narrative' as a term for grand narrative. A grand narrative is described as an account that constructs origins and progress in a particular field, creates a definition of 'correct' science, and the identity of its practitioners (Lyotard 1984, 38).

35 Asper 2013, 454.

36 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 2.76–77.

37 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 2.135–145. Riginos 1976, 64, suggests that Plato's Egyptian journey is probably a later invention, for which Cicero and Diodorus are the earliest sources.

38 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 2.94–95.

39 On Sicilian voyages and the anecdotes related to them see Riginos 1976, 70–85.

trip, namely that the philosopher went to Sicily out of scientific curiosity to see the volcano on Mount Aetna.[40] Subsequently, Olympiodorus notes that Plato also met Dionysius the Great there. This encounter was by no means a coincidence, as Olympiodorus asserts this in the remark that follows. In fact, he adds, Plato's goal from the beginning had been to transform the tyranny of Dionysius into an aristocracy.[41] The same reason recurs on Plato's second journey after the death of Dionysius the Elder, when his son Dionysius comes to power. Olympiodorus reports that Plato again travelled to Sicily after being informed of the political situation by a letter from Dion, who had accompanied him on his first trip.[42] Only the third journey, according to Olympiodorus, is not primarily political, but is intended to help Dion, who had been thrown into prison by Dionysius the Younger.[43]

In his account on Plato's Sicilian trips, Olympiodorus relies mainly on the literary tradition.[44] His narrative, for its part, requires special attention since it takes up a considerable portion of Plato's life, although Olympiodorus is aware that it causes some inconsistencies. Firstly, Olympiodorus remarks that with these journeys he interrupts the section on Plato's education.[45] Nevertheless, he decides to retain this narrative, implying that it has special significance. Secondly, the *Anonymous Prolegomena* skips the Sicilian episode in a single sentence.[46] Not for all Neoplatonists, then, did these journeys constitute an essential part of Plato's biography.[47] As a result, it seems obvious that Olympiodorus' account of this episode in Plato's life has the purpose of raising a particular issue. With reference to the Sicilian episode, Olympiodorus introduces a central discussion of Platonic political philosophy: the tension between the political authority and the authority of knowledge, which is identified with the figure of the philosopher.[48]

40 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 2.94–96.

41 Olympiodorus gives this explanation in the *Commentary on Alcibiades* 2.97–100, with the finishing remark διὸ καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀφίκετο, "this is why he went to him".

42 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 2.117–119.

43 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 2.128–133.

44 According to Riginos 1976, 72, a register of three voyages with their reasons became the standard version after Apuleius. On other accounts on the Sicilian episode, see Riginos 1976, 70–85.

45 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 2.143–144.

46 *Anonymous Prolegomena* 4.11–13.

47 Westerink 1962, XXXIII, states that in the traditional form of Plato's life the Sicilian episode does not interrupt Plato's education, while in the version of Olympiodorus it does. This, according to Westerink, might have been a reason for the author of the *Anonymous Prolegomena* to dismiss this episode.

48 On the conception of authority in Platonic tradition see Erler et al. 2021, 1–11 and Umsu-Seifert 2021, 102–104.

The divergent positions of Plato and Dionysius are traditionally expressed through their conversation.[49] Dionysius' first question is about whom Plato regards as happy. Plato's answer is Socrates, although the tyrant thought that the philosopher would give his name. This first question demonstrates that happiness cannot be reached through political power without knowledge. The literary *topos* of a tyrant's inquiry about the happiest person can be traced back to Herodotus' description of the encounter between Solon and Croesus.[50] In response to another issue about the duty of a statesman, Dionysius says that it consists in distributing justice properly.[51] Plato, however, disapproves of it as a subordinate part of politics and says that a statesman should rather make his citizens better. To the last question, whether a tyrant is courageous, Plato offends Dionysius stating that a tyrant fears everyone – and that leads to his ejection from Sicily.[52]

Olympiodorus relates this passage to Plato's political philosophy to further illustrate the contrast between philosophical and political authorities. By claiming that Plato had a political goal from the beginning, Olympiodorus intends to express the juxtaposition of Plato and Dionysius as the philosopher's elaborate opposition to the tyrant. As A. S. Riginos remarks, the three questions by Olympiodorus are not closely related, but combined to show an increasing boldness in Plato's answers.[53] In addition, Olympiodorus suggests on several occasions that a philosopher can be superior to a tyrant with the help of reason, since a tyrant's power is deprived of reason.[54] This idea appears in Plato's reply to the second question concerning a ruler's duty: in Olympiodorus' representation, Plato highlights the ethical duty of the ideal ruler, that is, improving citizens, which stands against the merely pragmatical work of administration. On the contrary, a philosopher's power is the knowledge that a tyrant cannot take away.[55] Finally, the timidity of the tyrant, a traditional topic, is given as Plato's last response, showing that the philosopher was not afraid of the increasing threats posed by Dionysius.

In this manner, Olympiodorus contrasts the courage of a philosopher with the fearfulness of a tyrant. A similar point is taken up in other passages of the commentary, as in the case of

49 For an overview of the several versions of this conversation, see Riginos 1976, 75–79.

50 Ibid., 75. Cf. Herodotus 1.29–33.

51 Cf. ibid., 78 on the sources of this view in Platonic dialogues such as the *Gorgias*, as well as in Diogenes Laertius and in Plutarch.

52 The cowardice of tyrants was a literary topos in Antiquity, for example in Plutarch's *Life of Dion*, 9.8. Diogenes Laertius (3.18–19) differs in this point and notes that Dionysius was offended because Plato told him that a tyrant should be superior in virtue.

53 Riginos 1976, 76.

54 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 226.10.

55 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 36.15–17, 55.15–16, 146,11.

the philosopher Anaxarchus, who did not fear death against the tyrant Nicocreon.[56] Another example concerns the question of whether a philosopher teaches for money, where Olympiodorus refers to Zeno, who accepted money not for himself, but to help students in need. From this point, Olympiodorus proceeds to Zeno's opposition against Nearchus, the tyrant of Elea, since these both cases – taking money and his reaction against the tyrant – are examples of Zeno's strategy of 'pretending'. Here we find the story of how Zeno deceived Nearchus: when asked if he knew who was conspiring against the tyranny, Zeno pointed to the tyrant's bodyguards. After they were killed, the tyrant himself was an easy target.[57]

All these examples taken together suggest that Olympiodorus composes Platonic stories in such a way as to underline his philosophical theses. He uses several other methods to convey his narratives with greater efficiency, which will be discussed in the following.

Olympiodorus' role as narrator of Plato

In the Platonic dialogues, Socrates occasionally takes the role of an interpreter of the emotional responses of other speakers. This feature presents Socrates, the narrator, as omniscient, which also renders Plato as an author, an authority on knowledge.[58] As illustrated by K. A. Morgan, Socrates' remarks on the thoughts and emotions of other speakers do not serve merely as descriptions, but also show him in full control of the conversation as well as relaying the emotional reactions of other speakers as an omniscient narrator.[59]

Olympiodorus applies the same technique for demonstrating his knowledge of Alcibiades and Socrates in his *Commentary on Alcibiades*. As an example, he comments that Alcibiades does not have an answer to give, which shows that the commentator knows about Alcibiades' state of knowledge. He also visualises Alcibiades as a young man at a loss and ashamed of his own ignorance in the presence of Socrates.[60] Furthermore, Olympiodorus interprets Socrates' strategy and the reasons that lead the philosopher to behave and speak in a certain way. Since the philosopher was in love with Alcibiades in a godlike manner, he approached the young

56 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 105.5, *Commentary on Plato's Gorgias* 36.3.9–11. This account probably draws on Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 9.59.

57 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 140.5–15. A possible source of this story is the account of Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, 9.26.

58 Morgan 2004, 361–362.

59 Ibid., 363.

60 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 83.18–20.

man to bring him to perfection.[61] Through similar remarks, Olympiodorus presents his knowledge of Socrates' 'inner world' and thoughts. This puts him as the narrator on the *Alcibiades* to the same status as Plato.

Olympiodorus' method of interpretation is further supported by another strategy that directs the perceptions of his audience. He calls his narratees' attention to particular literary features of the dialogue, so that "[…] the narratee is drawn into a world."[62] This is achieved at first by emphasising the perception of the text through seeing and hearing. Olympiodorus' frequent use of the second person imperative 'see' (ἰδού) can be regarded in this sense.[63] The narratee is invited either to 'see' a statement in the text and understand its meaning, or there is a visualization of the elements in the dialogue through vivid descriptions of characters as well as historical events or persons.[64]

The second person imperative enables Olympiodorus at the same time to address his narratees directly. In this way, he reproduces the effect of the Platonic conversation between different speakers. Direct addresses to the second person imitate Socrates' speech to Alcibiades, with phrases such as 'here you have' (ἔχεις), meaning an idea, or theory.[65] Olympiodorus points out that Socrates addresses Alcibiades at the right time and in an appropriate manner, to wake him up and bring him to the path of knowledge.[66] In a further implication, he also refers to Plato's text as talking to us.[67] These remarks accentuate the point that Olympiodorus wants to establish a direct interaction between the reader and Plato's text, which he asserts to have originated with Plato and Socrates. Consequently, he adopts the same strategy to ensure that his narratees enter an interaction with the dialogue from his perspective. The status of Socrates and Plato is thus transferred to Olympiodorus, who becomes an omniscient commentator and shapes the reception of Platonic philosophy.

61 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 44.1–15.

62 Morgan 2004, 362.

63 In total 268 times in all his commentaries. This imperative is also used with similar frequency by Philoponus, while it is completely absent in Proclus' works. An interesting parallel is found in Christian commentators such as Origen, who uses this imperative in more than 450 instances, as a TLG text search shows.

64 Cf. the expression ἰδοὺ ὁ κανών, "see the rule" or "principle" (Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 112.8). Further, Socrates addresses Alcibiades with "see in me intellect and god" (8.5), and Olympiodorus states that one should see the meaning of the text (46.10–11). An example for the descriptions of characters is that one can "see" Alcibiades' care for reputation (101.1–2).

65 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 140.16–17, 145.6, 185.7.

66 Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 191.1–5.

67 With the remark "as the text says", ὥς φησιν ἡ λέξις (Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Alcibiades* 177.11; cf. 204.3).

Closing remarks

This overview has shown that Olympiodorus applies narrativity to constitute his approach as a precise interpretation of Plato's philosophy. In the *Life of Plato*, Olympiodorus expresses his authority as a commentator on Plato by presenting the philosopher as a character in his narrative. He demonstrates a comprehensive knowledge of Plato's life and thought, similar to what Socrates does as narrator in the Platonic dialogues. By highlighting philosophical authority in the context of Plato's life, Olympiodorus sets two hierarchies: 1) the superiority of the life led according to knowledge and philosophy; and 2) the philosopher's power against the tyrant. Both hierarchies design Platonic philosophy as the most reliable way to gain any authority. This in turn asserts and strengthens the authority of the commentator that is based both on his status as a teacher of Platonism and on the overall superiority of the philosophical knowledge. Accordingly, Olympiodorus emphasises his belonging to the Platonic tradition and enables his students as 'narratees' to position themselves within this philosophical heritage.

The significant role Olympiodorus grants to stories does not mean that he simplifies philosophical theories or presents simple elements of common knowledge. His narratives have multiple functions, such as constructing and assuring philosophical authority, establishing the link with the Platonic tradition and approaching his audience appropriately. References to philosophers in opposition to tyrants, such as Plato against Dionysius or Zeno against Nearchus, draw attention to the discourse on the Platonic education and political authority. These stories about the philosophers serve as interpretive and educational tools in Olympiodorus' teaching concept. By adopting a communicative style, Olympiodorus further addresses his narratees and invites them to interact with the Platonic dialogue. In conclusion, the analysis of Olympiodorus' narratives reveals the pedagogical and identity-forming character of his philosophy. Examining Olympiodorus' commentaries from a narratological perspective, therefore, provides the means for understanding the specifics of his exegetical method.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the editors of Kleos for their continued support and helpful comments. I would also like to thank the two anonymous peer-reviewers who provided valuable feedback and suggestions on my paper.

Bibliography

Abbott, H. P., 2014: Narrativity, in P. Hühn/J. C. Meister/J. Pier/W. Schmid (eds.), *Handbook of Narratology*, Berlin/NewYork, 587–607.

Asper, M., 2013: Narratives in (late-antique) commentary, in M. Erler/J. E. Heßler (eds.), *Argument und literarische Form in antiker Philosophie*, Berlin, 435–456.

Cribiore, R., 2001: *Gymnastics of the Mind. Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, Princeton/Oxford.

De Jong, I. J. F., 2014: *Narratology and Classics. A Practical Guide*, Oxford.

Devlin, N., 2015: A Philosopher and His Muse: The narrative of Proclus' Hymns, in A. Faulkner/O. Hodkinson (eds.), *Hymnic Narrative and the Narratology of Greek Hymns*, Leiden/Boston, 183–205.

Duke, E., 1989: Evidence for the Text of Plato in the later 9th Century. *Revue d'Histoire des Textes* 19, 19–29.

Erler, M./J. E. Heßler/F. M. Petrucci (eds.), 2021: *Authority and Authoritative Texts in the Platonist Tradition*, Cambridge.

Festugière, A.-J., 1966: Proclus et la religion traditionnelle, in *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire offerts à André Piganiol*, Vol. 3, Paris, 1581–1590.

Finkelberg, M., 2019: *The Gatekeeper: Narrative Voice in Plato's Dialogues*, Leiden/Boston.

Genette, G., 1980 (1972): *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. by J. E. Lewin, Ithaca, New York.

Griffin, M. J., 2014: Pliable Platonism? Olympiodorus and the Profession of Philosophy in Sixth-Century Alexandria, in R. C. Fowler (ed.), *Plato in the Third Sophistic*, Berlin, 73–101.

Griffin, M. J., 2015: *Olympiodorus. Life of Plato and on Plato First Alcibiades* 1–9, London/New York.

Griffin, M. J., 2016: *Olympiodorus. Life of Plato and on Plato First Alcibiades* 10–28, London/New York.

Hodkinson, O./A. Faulkner, 2015: Introduction, in A. Faulkner/O. Hodkinson (eds.), *Hymnic Narrative and the Narratology of Greek Hymns*, Leiden/Boston, 1–16.

Layne, D. A./D. D. Butorac (eds.), 2017: *Proclus and his Legacy*, Berlin/Boston.

Lyotard, J.-F., 1984 (1979): *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by G. Bennington and B. Massumi, Manchester.

Mansfeld, J., 1994: *Prolegomena. Questions to be settled before the study of an author, or a text*, Leiden.

Morgan, K. A., 2004: Plato, in I. J. F. de Jong/ R. Nünlist/ A. Bowie (eds.), *Narrators, Narratees, and Narratives in Ancient Greek Literature. Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative*, Volume one,

Leiden/Boston, 357–376.
Motta, A., 2021: The *Life of Plato* in Introductory Schemes: The Preface to Olympiodorus' Commentary on the First Alcibiades (in Alc. 1.1-3.2), in A. Joosse (ed.), *Olympiodorus of Alexandria. Exegete, teacher, Platonic Philosopher*, Leiden/Boston, 31–54.
Papachristou, I., 2021: *John Philoponus on Physical Place*, Leuven.
Riginos, A. S., 1976: *Platonica. Anecdotes concerning the Life and Writings of Plato*, Leiden.
Sorabji, R., 2014: The Alexandrian classrooms excavated and sixth-century philosophy teaching, in P. Remes/S. Slaveva-Griffin (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, London, 30–39.
Tarrant, H., 2021: Special Kinds of Platonic Discourse: Does Olympiodorus Have a New Approach?, in A. Joosse (ed.), *Olympiodorus of Alexandria. Exegete, teacher, Platonic Philosopher*, Leiden/Boston, 206–220.
Tarrant, H./F. Renaud, 2015: *The Platonic Alcibiades I. The Dialogue and its Ancient Reception*, Cambridge.
Watts, E. J., 2006: *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria*, Berkeley/Los Angeles.
Westerink, L. G., 1990: The Alexandrian Commentators and the Introductions to their Commentaries, R. Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed. The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence*, London/Ithaca, 325–348.
Westerink, L. G., 1982 (1956): *Olympiodorus. Commentary on the first Alcibiades of Plato*. Critical Text and Indices, Amsterdam.
Westerink, L. G., 1976: *Olympiodorus. Commentary on Plato's Phaedo*, Amsterdam.
Westerink, L. G., 1962: *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, Amsterdam.
Zintzen, C., 1967: *Damascii vitae Isidori reliquiae*, Hildesheim.

Online Resources

TLG: *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae. A Digital Library of Greek Literature*, stephanus.tlg.uci.edu, accessed on 17/02/2022.
Umsu-Seifert, C., 2021: Olympiodorus on Philosophical Education: An Undogmatic Approach? *Symbolae Philologorum Posnaniensium Graecae Et Latinae* 31 (2), 97–107, ▶https://doi.org/10.14746/sppgl.2021.XXXI.2.8, accessed on 01/03/2022.

Trailing Behind or Taking Strides? An Investigation into the Decolonisation of Archaeological Material in the Museum

Brodhie Molloy

Abstract

Holding claim to "[...] two million years of human history and culture.", the British Museum, UK, is an archetypal example of how powerful a museum can be in sharing stories.[1] The museum's origins, however, are steeped in the complicity of British colonialism – noted as one of the three powerful enlightenment institutions, the museum's collecting and display of archaeological material from colonised nations ultimately served imperialistic narratives. How can the museum and, more generally, those who are involved in the display of archaeological objects now begin to engage with this past? This paper uses the 'Collecting and empire trail' at the British Museum to critically discuss the benefits of a decolonial approach - rooted in an evolving, self-reflexive practice - to the display of archaeological materials. It reflects on the updated stories told to the public regarding the objects and how these can begin to appropriately address the colonial pasts of the museum's collections.

Brodhie Molloy is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Leicester. She recently completed her Research Master's in Heritage, Memory and Archaeology at the University of Amsterdam where she wrote her thesis on communicating traditional academia to the public. Her main interests lie in accessible heritages and utilizing archaeology as a storytelling tool.

▶ *Profile page*

Introduction

Museums are more than glass cabinets.

Operating at the 'intersection of scientific work and public display', for many, museums offer one of the few opportunities to interact with archaeological material and the stories of the past they invoke.[2] Museums here hold a privileged position as key disseminators of historical narratives, or 'meta stories'.[3] 'Meta-stories' are the stories that materialise from the study of the past which contextualise and engage with the present society. This ultimately creates a level of responsibility on the behalf of museums regarding the stories the public receives and recalls from visiting. These stories are constituted by the archaeologists and

1 British Museum 2021–e.

2 Forgan 2005, 573.

3 Holtorf 2010.

curators that develop museum displays, prompting consideration to how our practice(s) influence these stories.

This notion, that Museums have a role in telling stories to society, is not a new revelation but instead can be traced as a fundamental factor in the establishment of the early European public museums. Recognised as one of the 'active tools' to have emerged from Empire, museums like the British Museum were designed to tell the stories that supported Empire's actions, and visually reinforce these with material culture.[4] These often operated on a homogenised and formalised version of the past, exclusively from the Western perspective.[5] Such narratives deprived the objects of their full stories and visitors of the ability to confront the activities and extent of colonialism.

Nowadays, the atrocities of Empire are undeniable. Yet, a 2014 YouGov poll found that 59% of the British public believe it is 'something to be proud of', with almost half of people thinking that overall, those who had been colonised were better off.[6] As those who study the past, we know this to be historically untrue. The poll suggests an absence of narratives that explicate the activities and negative impacts of British colonialism. Engaging in a decolonial discourse can help illuminate and challenge these inherent colonial roots of British institutions, such as the early imperial museum's 'collecting' and displaying of archaeological materials.[7]

This paper reflects on the British Museum's position as an imperial institution in a post-imperial world, and its engagement with its colonial past. It explores why and how those involved in the display of archaeological material can begin to counteract the established narratives of the past through a decolonial approach. The approach encourages a re-learning of the knowledge and stories that were blind-sided or forgotten due to the systems and structures of colonialism. Seeking to disrupt the traditional roots of knowledge production, a decolonial practice promotes a shift in representation of those marginalised and silenced through history, and whom we deem an expert of such history(ies).[8] This approach encourages museums to utilise their collections "[...] in self-reflexive ways as a contemporary resource to produce meaning." and contextualise the objects it owns.[9] This is particularly relevant for the 'Collecting and empire trail' launched by the British

4 Sleeper-Smith, 2009; Giblin/Ramos/Grout, 2019, 471.

5 Ibid.

6 YouGov 2014.

7 Referring to the early – and problematic – practice of the sponsored acquisition of cultural material from colonised lands.

8 Hamilakis 2016; Akinruli 2019, 571.

9 Deliss 2015.

Museum in August 2020 that focused on "[...] how many objects in the Museum were acquired in the context of colonialism [...]".[10] The paper comments on the trail's efforts to investigate how the Museum is addressing and communicating the narratives of its archaeological collections from the age of Empire.

Archaeologists, Curators, Museums, and Their Pasts

J. Symonds argues, it is appropriate to accept archaeological works as socio-political acts.[11] This demarks the subjective stance of the researcher, shaped by their cognitions and ontological processing, as well as contemporaneous accepted practice(s) in the field. The acceptance that, like all fields, archaeology cannot produce an objective truth does not negate their existence. Instead, it evidences the power productions of the past and its capacity to hold and encourage a decolonial perspective.[12] As the active agent in constituting different pasts in the present, the archaeologist, curator, and museum, and their subjective tendencies, help reveal understandings of the present environments within which they operate.[13] Furthermore, archaeological material – and its assigned narratives – can serve contemporary agendas. The idea that the past is "[...] a constructed fiction that serves present interests [...]" is not a new phenomenon.[14] Interest in archaeological preservation, regardless of era, maintains the continuous paradox of assigning value and meaning to assets for future generations- whether for holistic and political values or as part of sustainable development policy.[15]

It is important to acknowledge the 'meta-stories' that the study of archaeological materials manifests, and operates, within contemporary society.[16] These are underlying story-frameworks that shape any archaeological narrative and make it significant to society, relating a given object to the present.[17] These are palatable for society due to the intuitive connections that the study of the past can generate; association to being human, to a sense of belonging, and to recognising an alternative way of life.[18] By cognising the affective and reactive nature of archaeological materials within society, we can examine how museums reverberate pasts that help inform societal perceptions of

10 British Museum 2021–f.
11 Symonds 2019, 10.
12 Knell 2007, 14.
13 Lucas 2018, 72.
14 Pinsky 1989, 89.
15 Harvey 2003, 473.
16 Holtorf 2010, 381.
17 Holtorf 2010, 383.
18 Holtorf 2010.

Empire.[19]

It is important to reflect on the position of museums as one of the three powerful enlightenment institutions – the census, the map, and the museum – noted to have consolidated early nationalistic and imperial agendas.[20] Furthermore, there is recognition in the academic world that the "[...] novel nineteenth-century colonial archaeology [...]" established a foundation for the 'museum'.[21] The development of archaeology in this age of cultural exploitation and reproduction established an inherent political core to archaeological museum display – which was so intrinsic that almost everyone was unaware of it.[22] The 'classificatory, geographic-demographic' practice of said archaeologists fundamentally made it possible to assemble information and reproduce the idea of a colonised nation.[23] The museum has continued to act as an interface between archaeological research output and the thousands of visitors who attend.

Internationally recognisable, this paper looks at the British Museum which opened as the first national public museum of the world in 1759 and has continued to prosper in its display of archaeological material. Holding claim to "[...] two million years of human history and culture", the British Museum, UK, is an archetypal example of how powerful a museum can be in sharing stories.

Decolonial Approaches

The notion of post (about post-colonial) is indicative of a reality that is past colonialism whereas the discourse proposed in this paper, de-colonial, recognises the ongoing and contemporary nature of colonialism. Rather poignantly, as J. Pagán-Jiménez points out, many of the prominent postcolonial theorists tend to produce theories in a European and North American context.[24] Pagán-Jiménez's research in Latin America led him to conclude that a post-colonial approach was not universally relevant. Highlighting that Latin Americans already practice knowledge production from their worlds and thus "have always had a voice".[25] In this way, a postcolonial archaeology that attempts to "give back the past" is redundant.[26] Pagán-Jiménez's discussion on Latin America also emphasises the reductive and static notion of 'post-

19 Moser 2010, 22.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 178.

22 Ibid., 183.

23 Ibid., 185.

24 Pagán-Jiménez 2004, 209.

25 Ibid.

26 Shepherd 2007, 111.

colonial' itself. As many have critiqued, a post-colonial discourse is oxymoronic in the sense it implies the colonial is a thing of the past. On the contrary, colonialism has not ceased to exist, nor is it a linear and homogenous experience globally.[27] To counter this, Y. Hamilakis advocates for a shift from postcolonial discourse to 'decolonial archaeologies'- the nature of decolonialisation being a continual process, as opposed to an achievable target.[28] This removes the premise that there is a tangible end goal, instead reinforcing a reflexive and evolving practice. More importantly, such reflexivity prompts archaeologists and curators to continually decolonise their approaches, practices and ontological understandings and prompts thoughtful engagement with contested histories.[29]

The discourse is also exploring how a decolonial approach manifests in the museum environment. Sleeper-Smith argues that museums should engage in the decolonial process by focusing on their self-presentation and preservation in the representation of pasts.[30] Her research focused on the display of indigenous communities in South and North American museums. It highlights the importance of multi-vocality in the re-representation of the museum's traditional narratives.[31] The OF/BY/FOR ALL Change Network aims to advise cultural organisations on adopting the company's namesake for local communities.[32] Working with the Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, the organisation promotes the adoption of an agenda that no longer serves an institutional agenda, but puts '[...] collections, knowledge, and expertise [...]' to use where appropriate for the communities it serves.[33] The Weltkulteren Museum experimented with the introduction of an 'unfinished collection' that was designed to disrupt the traditional display of cultural materials.[34] By keeping the inventory of the exhibition open, visitors and contributors can continue to engage and explore the dynamic contexts of the objects on display.[35] This decentring of a homogenised or mainline narrative is synonymous with a decolonial approach.

Repatriation is a distinct discourse worth noting. L. Nilsson Stutz notes how repatriation can be crucial in the redefining of previously colonised nations and helps to restore their culture and

27 Pagán-Jiménez 2004; Hamilakis 2016.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.; Minott 2019, 564.

30 Sleeper-Smith 2009.

31 Sleeper-Smith 2009, 133.

32 Van der Vaart et al. 2021.

33 Van der Vaart et al. 2021, 135.

34 Deliss 2015, 33.

35 Ibid.

past.[36] They argue that archaeology should be more active in this process, having been "[…] an integral part of the colonialist project […]".[37] Stutz acknowledges that western archaeological and museum practices have not reacted with enough impetus.[38] Repatriation is a viable solution, but not necessarily a sustainable one. Many museums maintain a defence that by engaging in the repatriation process, it would set a precedent for more repatriations – acting as a domino effect, this would potentially be cataclysmic in reshaping and even destroying the structure of the institution.[39] Ultimately, this is something that would not be warmly received by museums' respective institutions across the Northern Hemisphere. Regardless, legislation such as the British Museum Act 1963 (UK) vetoes the Museum's ability to dispose of almost all its collections.[40] We must also consider that not all countries seek the repatriation and reconciliation process, and that it can be a traumatic experience.[41] This is not to say we should not repatriate but acknowledges its inherent legal complexity, whilst being a consensual and representational process.

Symonds argues that archaeology's messages must be more visible, and believes it is necessary to re-focus public consumption of what the discipline offers.[42] In this sense, archaeology is required to re-assert its voice in the museum - and therefore in society – and effectively participate in heritage future-making.[43] Hicks suggests that adopting the practice of 'Necrography' – the recording or recognition of the loss of a past or meaning any object experienced when inherited by the British empire – can expose and better display the symbiotic relationship between early archaeological works and the museum.[44] Giblin et al. similarly suggest a commitment to museums exploring the "[…] critical histories of empire […]' related to objects in their collections.[45]

Archaeology must remember it is not the sole keeper of the past. Archaeologists should not only be self-reflexive, but they must also be willing to 'step back' and acknowledge the value of

36 Nilsson Stutz 2007, 4.

37 Ibid, 1–2.

38 Ibid, 4.

39 Quntar 2017, 23.

40 Replacing the 1902 Act of the same name, the British Museum Act 1963 forbade the Museum from disposing of its possessions (apart from rare special circumstances). It also oversee the splitting on the Museum with the newly-independent Natural History Museum. See also UK Government, 1963; Hansard Parliament, 2021.

41 Hamilakis 2016, 681.

42 Symonds 2019, 6.

43 Ibid.

44 Hicks 2020, 236

45 Giblin et al. 2019.

indigenous and minority voices in the field.[46] N. Shepherd notes the necessity for a new level of critical reflection that grounds archaeological understanding of the past in archaeology's history, returning the past back to the people, by decentralising the role of the archaeologist.[47] This means inviting these voices outside the field to tell their objects' stories and can be achieved through museum engagement with, and platforming of, these communities. However, it is not always possible to connect with voices that have been lost to the past. Thus, a decolonial approach significantly benefits from decentralising the archaeologist or curator's narrative. This can be achieved through the elevation and support of indigenous and minority academics.[48] It also requires an acceptance and equality for 'archaeologists' or 'experts' that are not strictly academic.[49]

Case Study: 'Collecting and empire trail'

A way that we could better develop these connections with society is through readdressing the modus operandi of archaeology's dominant social platform – the museum. The role of the museum is especially powerful here as where it is noted that archaeologists do not own the past, museum institutions have a literal and consolidated ownership of the material that carries the past. For this paper, focus will be on the 'Collecting and empire trail' (hereafter trail) at the British Museum; a guided trail that highlights further information to the colonial histories of some of the objects in the museum. It's collections largely substantiated by resultant spoils of colonialism, the British Museum has continued to be at the centre of debate surrounding the presentation and retention of objects.

But how does the 'imperial' museum – an institution that has never been pre-colonial – successfully work to decolonialise it's position?[50] In August 2020, the museum launched its trail initiative with the aim to teach "[...] how colonial relationships shaped the British Museum's collection [...]".[51] We can recognise this as the museum's attempt to begin the process of engaging with the colonial contexts of its collections.

Available online and in-person, it initially covered 15 objects in the museum's possession, highlighting their individual complex histories (figure 1).[52] To follow physically, visitors navigate

46 Shepherd 2007, 111.

47 Shepherd 2007, 111.

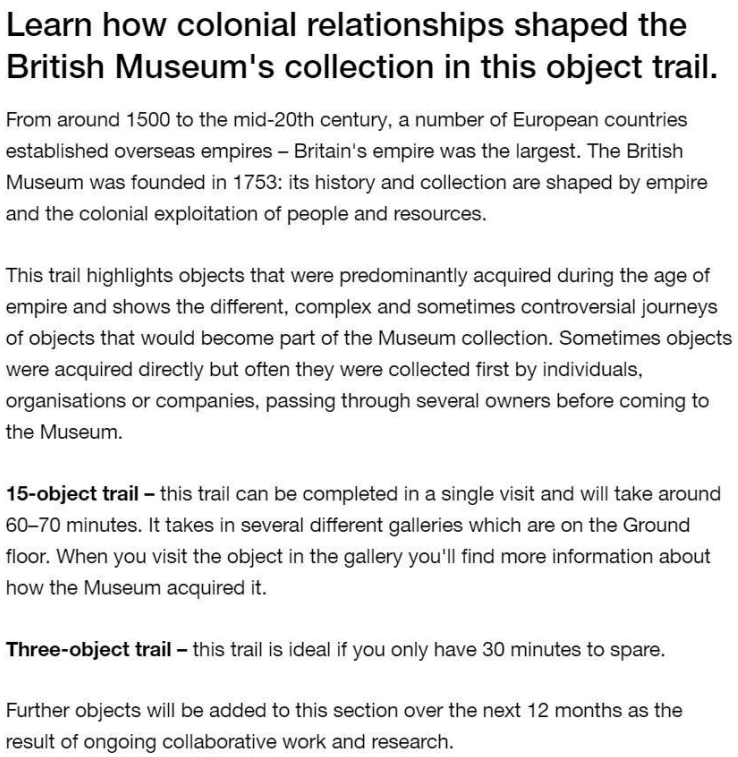
48 McGuire 2008, 37.

49 Leone 2005; Hamilakis 2016.

50 Minott 2019, 560.

51 British Museum 2021–b.

52 Ibid.



Learn how colonial relationships shaped the British Museum's collection in this object trail.

From around 1500 to the mid-20th century, a number of European countries established overseas empires – Britain's empire was the largest. The British Museum was founded in 1753: its history and collection are shaped by empire and the colonial exploitation of people and resources.

This trail highlights objects that were predominantly acquired during the age of empire and shows the different, complex and sometimes controversial journeys of objects that would become part of the Museum collection. Sometimes objects were acquired directly but often they were collected first by individuals, organisations or companies, passing through several owners before coming to the Museum.

15-object trail – this trail can be completed in a single visit and will take around 60–70 minutes. It takes in several different galleries which are on the Ground floor. When you visit the object in the gallery you'll find more information about how the Museum acquired it.

Three-object trail – this trail is ideal if you only have 30 minutes to spare.

Further objects will be added to this section over the next 12 months as the result of ongoing collaborative work and research.

Figure 1
Collecting and empire trail website description (after ▸ https:/www.britishmuseum.org/visit/object-trails/collecting-and-empire-trail).

themselves via trail icons on objects along the trail (figure 2). This experience is accompanied by a leaflet covering the information found in the trail displays alongside the respective objects (figure 2). The trail follows a generic format of a brief biography of the object and the subsequent story of how it came to the museum. This paper recognises three poignant matters with the trail: the choices (to date) made on object inclusion; the content of these new object descriptions; and the authorship and production process of the trail.

Choices

Since launching, the trail has had the addition of one new object – the Milk vessel from Somalia (figure 3).[53] This appears disproportional compared to the size of the museum. It is important to learn the biographies and extended histories of all the objects in the Museum's collection but, it seems the selection made for the trail is not representative of contemporarily contested and societally relevant objects.

The list of notable contested or 'complex' objects within the Museum's possession is extensive, and their histories reify the difficulties museums must overcome when serving multiple stakeholders (for example the legality in the acquisition of the Parthenon Marbles). However, the Benin Bronzes have received

53 British Museum 2021–b.

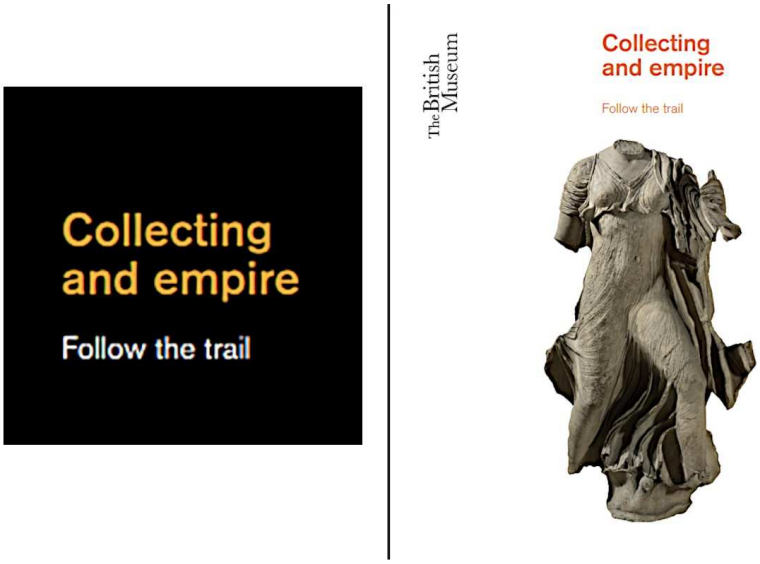


Figure 2
'Collecting and empire trail' icon found on objects part of the trail and leaflet (▸https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/Collecting_and_Empire_object_trail_leaflet_British_Museum_2021.pdf).

Figure 3
Milk vessel from Somalia (▸https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/Collecting_and_Empire_object_trail_leaflet_British_Museum_2021.pdf).

greater focus regarding their ownership over the past 12 months – with the (il)legality and horrors behind their acquisition story not as contested. This feels like a missed opportunity, as a collection of 900 objects, the story of the Bronzes clearly demonstrates the role of British colonialism in curating the museum's collections.[54] Such choices can ultimately only be understood and justified through dialogue from the curator(s), who are unknown. Furthermore, the application of additional information for every object in the museum's collection is simply unfeasible, especially with factors such as unknown provenances. It also highlights the limitations of the sector brought by a lack of staffing/funding and the resultant need to make refined choices on what to include.

It must be acknowledged that the trail's online version has a "Further reading" section that recognises the contested nature of both the above-mentioned objects (figure 4). There is a hyperlink that leads to the statements by the Museum on its position with each of the objects, and detailed object biographies. However,

54 British Museum 2021–d.

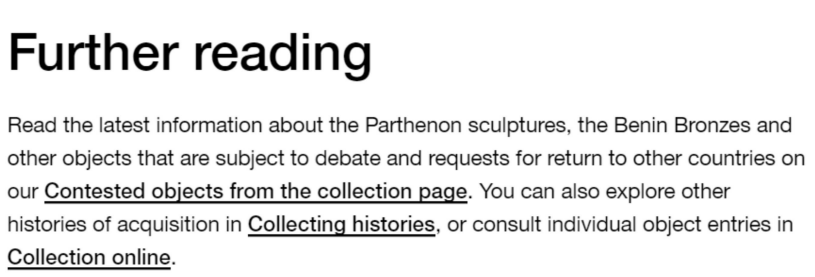


Figure 4
'Further reading' section at the bottom of the British Museum's website verison of the Collecting and empire trail (after ▸ https://www.britishmuseum.org/visit/object-trails/collecting-and-empire-trail).

hyperlinks do not work in real life and this information is not included on the trail's accompanying leaflet. Visitors are left unaware not only of these 'contested' and colonial origins, but also do not learn of the Museum's positionality and current efforts. This is especially disappointing as, whilst institutions in Berlin and Aberdeen announce decisions to return the Benin's in their possession, the British Museum continues to fail to truly vocalise it's contested history and acquisition story.[55]

What is included

The trail highlights new information about the objects and their biographies. The leaflet loosely explores the culpability of the Museum in the British Empire's colonial exploitation – but fails to elaborate what this 'exploitation' consisted of - that led to most of the Museum's collections (figure 5). This is the most fundamental failure that can be traced throughout the trail's original line-up.

The rhetoric of the trail's object descriptions and contextual text conflates all kingdom's and empire's endeavours with colonialism – seemingly attempting to contextualise the acquisition of the artefacts as only natural or normal human behaviour. Furthermore, it follows a tone that recognises colonial collection and acquisition as the acts of individuals. Noting famous British collectors of the 19th-century, the trail fails to expand on the history(ies) of the people who experienced colonialism and relate to the objects. For example, the description of the West African drum echoes this failure to expand on the deeper colonial context of the object's journey (figure 6). The trail gives a brief description of the drum's probable migration across the Atlantic on a slave ship, mentions the drum's function, then notes its journey through western hands to physician and collector Sir Hans Sloane in England (figure 6).[56] Many non-academics, and academics not in the field, are likely unaware of the extensive role Britain had in the Atlantic slave trade, especially as it does not feature in the national curriculum. The trail dedicates a section to Sloane and

55 Packard 2021.

56 21 to the below.

Exploring *Collecting and empire*

The British Museum was founded in 1753 and its history and collection are intimately linked to that of the British Empire. From around 1500 to the mid-20th century, a number of European countries established and maintained overseas empires – Britain's was the largest. A substantial part of the wealth of the British Empire came from the transatlantic slave trade and the colonial exploitation of people and resources.

This trail highlights objects predominantly acquired during the 19th and early 20th centuries. It shows the different, complex and sometimes controversial journeys of objects to the Museum. Often, objects were collected first by individuals or organisations, sometimes passing through several owners before coming to the Museum.

This trail takes in several galleries, most of which are on the Ground floor. Viewing all the objects, in the order listed, will take around 60–70 minutes. When you visit each object you'll find more information there about how the Museum acquired it.

Previous page: A sculpture from the Nereid Monument, Turkey, about 380 BC.

Dance costume (*Bwaii ni Mwaie*), Kiribati, various dates 1982–2017.

Figure 5
Introduction to the Collecting and empire trail, page 2 (▸ https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/Collecting_and_Empire_object_trail_leaflet_British_Museum_2021.pdf).

West African drum, collected in Virginia, 1700-1750

This wooden drum is the earliest African-American object in the British Museum. It was made by Akan people in West Africa over 300 years ago. The first enslaved Africans arrived in North America in 1619 and we assume the drum crossed the Atlantic aboard a slave ship, but this is not known for certain. Drums were played during these journeys and captives were forced to dance for exercise in order to keep them healthier amid the horrendous conditions. Around 1730, a Reverend Clerk acquired the drum in Virginia, then a British colony and now a state within the USA. The drum passed from him to Sir Hans Sloane in England where it became part of his collection, incorrectly recorded as a Native American drum. Recent scientific examination revealed that the main body of the drum is made from a variety of wood found in West Africa.

Figure 6
West African drum, collected in Virginia and its description at page 21 (after ▸ https://www.britishmuseum.org/visit/object-trails/collecting-and-empire-trail; ▸ https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/Collecting_and_empire_object_trail_large_print_guide_The_British_Museum_May_2021.pdf).

Sir Hans Sloane and the British Museum

In his will, Sloane, a wealthy physician, offered his entire collection to the public in return for a payment of £20,000 to his heirs. Sloane's collection, with several additional libraries and collections, became the foundation of the British Museum, which was established on 7 June 1753 by an Act of Parliament.

Sloane's career as a collector began in 1687 when he became physician to the Governor of Jamaica, then a British colony. Sloane worked as a doctor on plantations worked by enslaved people. With assistance from English planters and enslaved West Africans he assembled a collection of 800 plant specimens, animals and local tools and personal items. On returning from the Caribbean Sloane married an heiress to Jamaican sugar plantations worked by enslaved people, profits from which allowed him to greatly expand his collections.

Room 1: Enlightenment

Puppets and masks from Java, 1700–1816

These objects were collected by Sir Stamford Raffles (1781–1826), a British colonial official. Between 1811 and 1816 Raffles was Lieutenant-Governor of Java, infamously known for authorising an attack on the most powerful Javanese court. During his time there, he amassed collections and reports on aspects of the island that appealed to early 19th-century European ideas about civilisation, particularly national history and antiquities. All of Raffles' papers were lost when the ship returning him to Britain in 1824 sank, so we will never know for certain how his objects were obtained. Stylistic features and the unused condition of the puppets and masks displayed here indicate that they were probably gifts or were purchased by Raffles, rather than being acquired through looting. Raffles' collection was

Figure 7
Information on Sir Hans Sloane and the British Museum, pages 22-23 (▸ https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/Collecting_and_Empire_object_trail_leaflet_British_Museum_2021.pdf).

almost casualises his ownership of slaves, noting how this contributed to his success in building an expansive collection (see figure 7).[57] Explications on the context, purpose and origins of the Atlantic slave trade would be an easy and clear way to engage in these 'uncomfortable' histories and disseminate such knowledge with a significantly large audience.

A similar underplaying of the events in which these objects are contextualised can be seen with the information accompanying the Soup plate from China (figure 8). For this object, the information leaflet (figure 9) provides a short excerpt on The British East India Company and China, noting the relationship between the two had led to the First Opium War.[58] This records the events lightly, and illuminates how the trail's overriding matter-of-fact tone leaves a lot up to the audience's own understanding or further research. This is baffling as the information leaflet provides more specificities regarding the kind of wood the Shield from New South Wales (another trail object) was made from. By only mentioning events the museum does not appropriately contextualise the colonial entanglements of the objects.

Figure 8
Soup plate from China, 1740s (▸ https://www.britishmuseum.org/visit/object-trails/collecting-and-empire-trail).

Overall, the information provided by the trail, either as object descriptions or an information leaflet, fails to align the full narrative of how archaeologist, museum and colonising endeavours acted in a semiotic relationship to perpetuate a justified imperialist narrative. This is poignant as the trail was curated with the direct aim to contextualise the colonial histories of the museum's collections. Here, the trail's curators would benefit by adopting a Necrography approach.[59] This would demonstrate both a given object's pasts as part of colonialism,

57 British Museum 2021–c, 22.

58 Ibid., 25.

59 Hicks 2020.

whilst recognising that this entails a loss of its other pasts that curators and archaeologists are unable to necessarily comment on. Through failing to explicate how British institutions and the empire directly led to the collection of many of the objects on display, the trail ultimately rescinds a degree of culpability for the British's past and ongoing colonial impact. It is not objective to leave out the details and extent of British colonialism and results in a trail that appears to demonstrate the variety and breadth of items within the British Museum's collections rather than adding further contextualisation to the actual object or present narratives.

Figure 9
Collecting and empire trail large print guide (▸https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/Collecting_and_empire_object_trail_large_print_guide_The_British_Museum_May_2021.pdf).

Authorship - Made by: who knows?

The trail is, past the point of having the British Museum stamp, authorless. The leaflet notes it is the product of "[...] ongoing research and collaborative work."[60] Without knowing the details and extent of such 'collaborative work' one can only assume that this trail is written from the view of the museum itself, and thus does not differ from the traditional institution-led dialogue which fundamentally opposes a decolonialising process.

This may seem an interesting point considering the British Museum's proclaimed title of encyclopaedic – as it fails to comprehensively provide the global narratives and stories they purportedly perpetuate. This is discipline-wide, R. McGuire highlighted, as the nature in which archaeology manifests follows a pattern of exclusion to non-professional communities.[61] This engrained silo-ing of expertise towards the academic only serves a shoehorned agenda and limits the vibrancy of knowledge-sharing and cultural contact.[62] By genuinely engaging with local or historically impacted communities in decentralising practices – from initial research stages through to dissemination and display within the museum – we can begin to open avenues and platform voices previously (and continually) marginalised or overwritten.

De-centralising the academic 'specialist', and thus decolonial practice, is exemplified by one of the objects on the trail's list – Dance costume from Kiribati, 1987–2017 (figure 10). The project description highlights the object was part of a co-curated project with members of the Kiribati community in the UK (fiure 10).[63] For this project, members of the community were a prominent voice in the creation and development of the display which was completed with this costume in 2017. This object is demonstrative of the potential to actively engage and incorporate communities in the

60 British Museum,2021–a.

61 McGuire 2008.

62 Matthews 2009, 80.

63 British Museum 2021–c, 33.

Dance costume from Kiribati, 1987-2017

This display was co-curated with members of the Kiribati community in the UK. In the Kiribati islands dance is a way of storytelling, remembering and passing on cultural knowledge. The community members were keen that dance should be a prominent element of this display. One of the participants, Victoria Burns, created the film nearby which shows a dance performance. When work began on this project during 2016 the Museum's collection did not include a complete dance costume, but only some of the elements that you can see here. The rest of the costume was acquired in 2017 through the contacts of the

Kiribati community. Some of the additional items were donated, others were newly commissioned and made in Kiribati especially for this display.

Figure 10
Dance costume from Kiribati, 1987-2017 and the provided description. Final (15th) object of initial trail 2020 (▸ https://www.britishmuseum.org/visit/object-trails/collecting-and-empire-trail; ▸ https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/Collecting_and_empire_object_trail_large_print_guide_The_British_Museum_May_2021.pdf).

learning of the past. It would be encouraging for the museum to not only continue with initiatives like this, but to also adopt this open collaboration for all its work – starting with the trail's description and narrative selections.

Conclusion

Today acting as community hubs, food banks, and vaccination centres (figure 11), museums continue to prove they are more than glass cabinets. Exploring the British Museum's 'Collecting and empire trail', this paper assesses the narratives constructed from archaeological remains in the imperial museum and their contemporary public dissemination. The trail is a positive step towards decolonising the museum, recognising this initial dialogue around the 'complex' histories of some of the objects within the Museum's collection.

We can take encouragement that the British Museum has begun to engage in these processes, whilst maintaining that there is still more work to be done. Greater transparency in relation to collaboration/curatorship of the trail would better inform our understanding of the choices made – as it continues to be narrated with no known authorship. Future updates should seek to include notoriously contested items like the Benin Bronzes that feature more prominently in society, arguably being poster-boy cases for the aspirations of the trail. Engagement with indigenous and marginalised communities is imperative and would provide an invaluable resource for illuminating other pasts of the objects, as demonstrated with the Kiribati community work. Fundamentally, archaeologists and curators are liable for the constituted pasts on offer to the public surrounding archaeological objects on display. Continuing to detach this notion from the 'complex' historical

Figure 11
Black Country Museum operating as a vaccine centre 2021 (‣ https://www.expressandstar.com/news/health/coronavirus-covid19/2021/05/07/black-country-living-museum-to-only-give-second-dose-of-covid-vaccine-as-programme-moves-to-next-phase/).

contexts does a disservice to not only the silenced voices of empire but also to the field's reputation as serving and educating society. Despite the critiques, the trail is a stride forward in the decolonising of the museum's archaeological collections. It is our responsibility to keep this process developing or, otherwise, face trailing behind.

Bibliography

Akinruli, L. C. M. C., 2020: Speaking With The Other and Not About The Other. Reflections for Post Colonial Archaeology, *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 30 (4), 571–586.

Deliss, C., 2015: *'Collecting Life's Unknows', Decolonising Museums*, Ed. L'Internationale Online, L'Internationale Online.

Forgan, S., 2005: Building the Museum: Knowledge, Conflict, and the Power of Place, *Isis* 96 (4), 572–585.

Foucault, M., 1978: *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, London: Penguin.

Giblin, J./I. Ramos/N. Grout, 2019: Dismantling the Master's House: Thoughts on Representing Empire and Decolonising Museums and Public Spaces in Practice: An Introduction, *Third Text* 33 (4), 471–486.

Hamilakis, Y., 2016: Decolonial archaeologies: from ethnoarchaeology to archaeological ethnography, *World Archaeology* 48 (5), 678–682.

Hicks, D., 2020: *The Brutish Museums. The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*, London: Pluto Press.

Holtorf, C., 2010: Meta-stories of archaeology, *World Archaeology* 42 (3), 381–393.

Knell, S., J., 2007: *Museums in the Material World*, London: Routledge.

Leone, M., 2005: *The Archaeology of Liberty in an American Capital*, California: University of California Press.

Lucas, G., 2018: *Writing the Past: Knowledge and Literary Production in Archaeology*, London: Rouledge.

McGuire, R., H., 2008: *Archaeology as Political Action*, California: University of California Press.

Moser, S., 2010: The devil is in the detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge, *Museum Anthropology* 33, 22–32.

Nilsson Stutz, L., 2007: Archaeology, Identity and the Right to Culture. Anthropological perspectives on repatriation, *Current Swedish Archaeology* 15, 1–16.

Pagán-Jiménez, J. R., 2004: Is all Archaeology at Present a Postcolonial One?: Constructive Answers from and Eccentric Point of View, *Journal of Social Archaeology* 4 (2), 200–213.

Pinsky, V./A. Wylie, 1989: *Critical Traditions in Contemporary Archaeology: Essays in the Philosophy, History and Socio-politics of Archaeology*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Quntar, S. A., 2017: Repatriation and the Legacy of Colonialism in the Middle East, *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology & Heritage Studies* 5 (1), 19–26.

Shepherd, N., 2007: What Does It Mean 'To Give the Past Back to the People'? Archaeology and Ethics in the Postcolony, in Y. Hamilakis/P. Duke (eds.), *Archaeology and Capitalism: From*

Ethics to Politics, One World Archaeology Series (54), Left Coast Press: California.

Sleeper-Smith, S., 2009: *Contesting Knowledge: Museums and Indigenous Perspectives*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Symonds, J., 2019: Difficult Pasts and Haunted Presents: Contemporary Archaeology and Conflict in an Age of Global Uncertainty, *Acta Universitatis Losziensis. Folia Archaeologica* 34, 5–21.

Van der Vaart, M./C. Schreuder/D. Theuns/D. Carasso, 2021: Facing the Challenges of Truly Being Of, By, and For All, in G. Black (ed.), *Museums and the Challenge of Change: Old Institutions in a New World*, Routledge: London.

Online sources

British Museum, 2021–a: Collecting and empire trail leaflet, ▸ https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/Collecting_and_Empire_object_trail_leaflet_British_Museum_2021.pdf, accessed on 24/05/2021.

British Museum, 2021-b: Collecting and empire trail, ▸ https://www.britishmuseum.org/visit/object-trails/collecting-and-empire-trail, accessed on 25/05/2021.

British Museum, 2021-c: Collecting and empire trail large print guide, ▸ https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/Collecting_and_empire_object_trail_large_print_guide_The_British_Museum_May_2021.pdf, accessed on 25/05/2021.

British Museum, 2021-d: Contested objects collection- Benin Bronzes, ▸ https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/contested-objects-collection/benin-bronzes, accessed on 26/05/2021.

British Museum, 2021-e. Homepage, ▸ https://www.britishmuseum.org/, accessed on 17/06/2021.

British Museum, 2021-f: Tweet, ▸https://twitter.com/britishmuseum/status/1296872142596907009?s=20, accessed on 17/06/2021.

Packard, C., 2021: Path Toward Restitution of Benin Bronzes Advances in Germany and UK, Hyperallergic, ▸ https://hyperallergic.com/633045/path-toward-restitution-of-benin-bronzes-advances-in-germany-and-uk/, accessed on 05/05/2021.

UK government, 1963: British Museum Act 1963 – 1963 CHAPTER 24, ▸ https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1963/24/enacted, accessed on 15/08/2021.

YouGov, 2014: The British Empire is 'something to be proud of', YouGov, ▸ https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2014/07/26/britain-proud-its-empire, accessed on 28/03/2021.

Recreating an excavation in *Minecraft Education Edition*

Anna Silberg Poulsen

Abstract

Minecraft has been used for reconstructing archaeological sites for outreach purposes several times. *Minecraft* alongside other games has been used in the classroom for educational purposes in primary and secondary schools, as well as in high schools.[1] This paper discusses the application of *Minecraft* as an educational outreach tool within the field of archaeology, and how it can be enhanced by adding a narrative.

This paper presents a *Minecraft Education Edition* map, where a player experiences a virtual field school and learns about archaeological fieldwork practices. The purpose of the map can be twofold: either to test pre-existing knowledge of fieldwork techniques, or as a general outreach tool used in schools or museums.

The excavation carried out in the virtual field school is based on a small portion of the Neolithic levels of the multi-period site of Çatalhöyük, Turkey. The project includes a small fictional story to provide instructions and introduce players to the setting of the *Minecraft* excavation. It is found by interacting with the first NPC (Non-Player Characters) the player encounters. Due to the design of *Minecraft*'s 1 m^3 blocks it is impossible to include the vast number of finds found at an excavation; this might change with future updates, as the developers Mojang Studios have announced that archaeology will be coming to *Minecraft*.[2]

While it has not been possible to test the map on students due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project was streamed by the *VALUE foundation* with Colleen Morgan and Anna S. Poulsen as guests at the *#ArGaCon2020*.[3] The project indicates that *Minecraft Education Edition* is well suited for communicating archaeological fieldwork by using a popular game for school or undergraduate

Anna Silberg Poulsen is a recent master graduate of Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology at the University of Copenhagen. They received their bachelor's degree in 2019 from the University of Copenhagen, with an Erasmus exchange to the University of Edinburgh in 2018. They participated in the online Archaeogaming conference #ArGaCon2020 with a showcase of the Minecraft Education map hosted by the VALUE Foundation and Colleen Morgan. They have also participated in various fieldwork projects.

▶ *Profile page*

1 Sáez- López et al. 2015; Boom et al. 2018.

2 The game studio which developed the game and continues to update it; Mojang Studios 2020.

3 VALUE Foundation 2020.

students.

Introduction

Using video games to communicate archaeology might not be the most immediate thought for most, but in recent years scholars and cultural institutions have become more aware of the benefits of using video games to illustrate history.[4] Archaeologists have begun to explore video games as material culture, the virtual worlds they contain and their physical copies. This type of research is also known as archaeo-gaming.[5] Although video games are virtual worlds created primarily to be entertaining, most contain educational elements, in the form of moral questions, concepts of levelling up skills or managing cities and empires.[6] Using games to discover different experiences and immersing oneself in the story, is a good way to learn, and can supplement the more traditional ways of teaching. It does so by allowing the player to experience and interact with the material in a more kinaesthetic way compared to the traditional teaching methods.[7]

A game which has been used to communicate archaeology to a wide audience is *Minecraft*.[8] This article explores a project made in *Minecraft Education Edition*, with the aim of visualising the archaeological excavation process and creating a digital environment to teach archaeological methods within the constraints of the game.[9] Most of the archaeological *Minecraft* maps are mainly focused on creating reconstructions of historical monuments or on exploring a world with recreated monuments within it, the presented map focuses on the act of excavating and interpreting the remains.[10] The project is partially based on the late Pre-Pottery Neolithic levels (6940–6400 cal BCE) of the 4040 north area of the eastern mound, of the multi-period site of Çatalhöyük, Turkey (see figure 1 for a map of the site).[11]

The aim of this paper is not to provide a comprehensive guide on how to adapt archaeological material to Minecraft or detail the benefits of using games in education in general, as there are

4 Politopoulos et al. 2019, 164.

5 Reinhard 2018, 2.

6 Politopoulos et al. 2019, 164.

7 Sáez- López et al. 2015.

8 See Edwards et al. 2021; Langiso-Barestti 2021; McGraw et al. 2017; Politopoulus et al. 2019; Morgan 2015.

9 *The Education Edition* of *Minecraft* is a version of the game created with education in mind, see ▶ https://education.minecraft.net/en-us/discover/what-is-minecraft. Contact the author for access to the Minecraft map.

10 Politopoulus et al. 2019, 167; Langis-Barestti 2021, 63–64; McGraw et al. 2017; Morgan 2015; Graham 2014, 2015; Edwards et al. 2021; and for lesson material created by the *Minecraft* education edition community see the available lessons under History and Culture.

11 See Der/Issavi 2017,192, table 1 for dating of the occupational levels across the site.

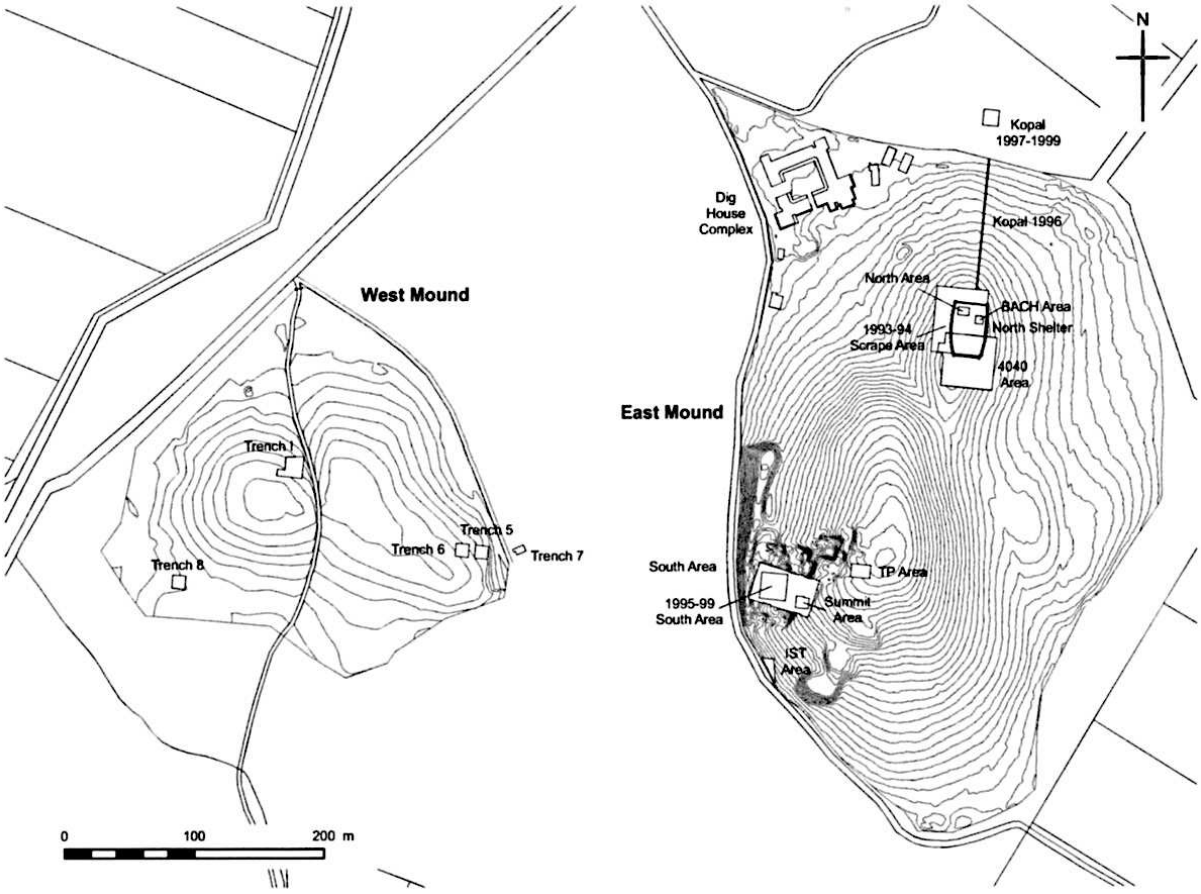


Figure 1
Plan of Çatalhöyük showing the two mounds and the excavation areas (created by Camilla Mazzucato, the Çatalhöyük Research Project).

several articles available on both topics.[12] Rather, this paper focuses on the application of *Minecraft* as an educational outreach tool within the field of archaeology, and how it can be enhanced by adding a narrative. Firstly, an outline will be provided of the game *Minecraft* and its usage in archaeological research. Secondly, the Virtual field school map created in *Minecraft Education Edition* will be presented. Thirdly, the methods and theoretical approaches applied in the creation of the map and its virtual world, and how the map can be used for teaching will be discussed. Finally, the results will be contextualised in a discussion section related to a wider debate of interactive pasts and education and videogames.

MINECRAFT AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Minecraft is a popular open world sandbox game, where the player can roam freely in its virtual world. *Minecraft* is one of the most widely-played games in the world.[13] Players are free to dig holes and explore the underground and build structures wherever they

12 For what concerns studies adapting archaeological material to *Minecraft*, see Graham 2014 and Edwards et al. 2021. A small selection on the use of games for educational purposes include: Boom et al. 2018; McKinney et al. 2020; Politopoulos et al. 2019.

13 Langis-Barsetti 2021, 64.

please.[14] The game does not have an obvious storyline or quests to complete, it invites the player to create their own meaning and their own goals.[15] The game world consists of 1x1m blocks of different kinds, creating a simple pixelated look. The player needs to dig to gain materials like stone, iron, and copper. Because digging is central in the game, it is ideal for exploring the principles of stratigraphy, an important component of understanding any archaeological excavation.[16]

Several archaeologists have developed *Minecraft* projects with the aim of using the popular game to invite different audiences to become more aware of cultural heritage, in a different way than the traditional methods such as presentations and publications.[17] In 2015 a Scottish team of archaeologists, together with the edutainment company *Immersive Minds*, made several *Minecraft*-based projects under the title *Crafting the Past* for the Scottish heritage festival *Dig It!* 2015.[18] The makers incorporated several Scottish sites and had players interact with their reconstructions and excavations.[19] All the maps contain stories, and the player is usually guided by NPCs (Non-Player Character), although elements are left for the player to explore on their own. The adaptation of St Kilda is a good example of their work, since it includes narratives of local voices and features an excavation.[20] The download page of the different worlds has an introduction to the region and an explanation of what the player can expect. The maps also include introductions to intangible heritage of the regions, available in the form of audio files.[21]

Crafting the Past inspired a new project in 2019, *RoMeincraft* by the *VALUE foundation*, which focused on reconstructing Roman sites along the Limes in the province of South-Holland in the Netherlands at a 1:1 scale.[22] The aim was to create more awareness of the Roman past amongst local communities.[23] The project did

14 McGraw et al. 2017, 168.

15 Politopoulos et al. 2019, 167.

16 Harris 1979.

17 Politopoulus et al. 2019, 167; Langis-Barestti 2021, 63–64; McGraw et al. 2017; Morgan 2015; Graham 2014; Graham 2015, and lesson material created by the *Minecraft* education edition community see the available lessons under History and Culture.

18 Edutainment is the combination of entertainment and education, *Immersive Minds* primarily use *Minecraft* as a platform for their edutainment projects. McGraw et al. 2017, 167.

19 McGraw et al. 2017, 173–174, the Minecraft maps are available for download at their website, ▶https://www.craftingthepast.co.uk/.

20 Dig it/Immersive Minds 2022, St Kilda.

21 Crafting the Past 2021.

22 *VALUE Foundation* is a Dutch non-profit organisation founded in 2017, expanding on the pre-existing VALUE (Videogames and Archaeology at Leiden University) project, ▶https://value-foundation.org/; Politopoulos et al. 2019, 167–168.

23 Politopoulos et al. 2019, 167.

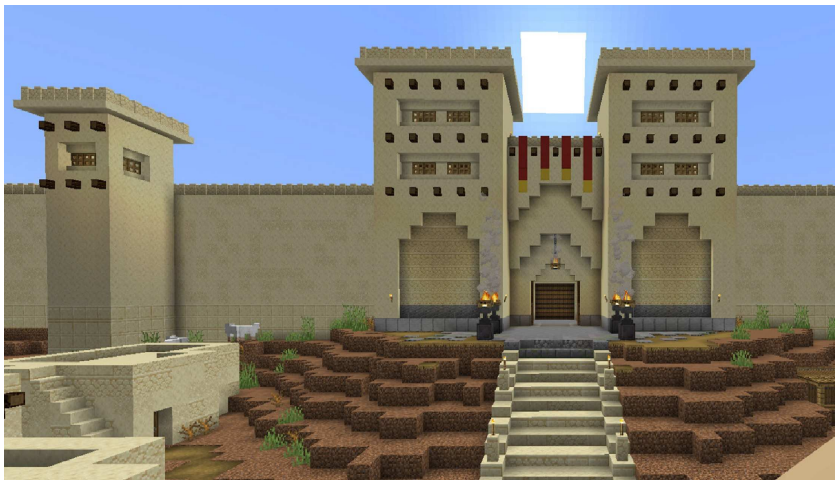


Figure 2
Reconstructed gate from Kunulua (Tell Tayinat), created by Dominique Langis-Barsetti, CRANES project (after Langis-Barsetti, 2021, figure 5, edited by the author).

not include a narrative to entice the player to reconstruct buildings, but the participants had plans and reconstruction drawings to help them reconstruct the Roman forts.[24] The player was free to interpret the plans and instructions, which, for example, led to the creation of a rollercoaster inside a Roman fort.[25]

One of the most recent examples of the use of *Minecraft* for archaeological reconstruction is *CRANE*'s recreation of the Neo-Hittite city Kunulua, (figure 2) an adventure map which will be available for players to download, when the project is finished, so that they can learn more about the Iron Age culture.[26] *Minecraft* was chosen for this project due to its popularity, with the expectation that using a popular platform will encourage people to discover more about the Neo-Hittites.[27] Once the map is finished it will include mini-quests, which the player can take in order to learn more in an engaging manner, such as learning Luwian hieroglyphs by helping a scribe NPC sort the royal archives.[28]

Another recent example is the *Bryn Celli Ddu Minecraft experience*, which was developed by the team behind the Bryn Celli Ddu Public Archaeology Landscape Project during lockdown in 2020.[29] The aim of the project was to develop a digital version of the project which could be a digital world in which to show the site as well as be a place for school children to meet and learn about heritage within the lockdown restrictions present at the time. The

24 Politopoulos et al. 2019, 167.

25 Politopoulos et al. 2019, 167–168, 172.

26 *CRANE* (the Computational Research on the Ancient Near East), directed by Tim Harrison, University of Toronto. According to the latest updates on the project, the elaboration of the map is still in progress, but once there are news, they will be posted to the *CRANE* website. For additional information, see Langis-Barsetti 2021, 62.

27 Langis-Barsetti 2021, 65.

28 Langis-Barsetti 2021, 69.

29 Edwards et al. 2021, 2, 7.

landscape around the site was recreated based on methods described by Shawn Graham, which involves transforming a DEM into a 3rd party program *Worldpainter* and use it to create custom maps for *Minecraft*.[30] The process made it possible to transfer the world created in Worldpainter into *Minecraft Education Edition*, and thereby implementing the real world environment of the valley of Afon Braint, Wales, where Bryn Celli Ddu is located, into Minecraft.[31] The addition of the original landscape, rather than an autogenerated one meant that the players could get a sense of wandering through the landscape and "discovering" the site.[32] The creators also included additional elements, like signs and a Neolithic house, to explain what life had been like during the Neolithic and make the map easier to use for teaching purposes.[33]

The projects described above all showcase why *Minecraft* can be used as an effective outreach tool to bring archaeological research to new audiences. However, they all seem to involve modifying the base game to include elements such as NPCs and custom blocks, not to mention using 3rd party programs to add custom maps to the game to recreate real world landscapes. Some of these steps, except creating a custom map, can be avoided by using the *Education Edition*, as shown by the Bryn Celli Ddu map, since that version of *Minecraft* was created with education in mind and has functions specifically for adding NPCs and note-taking. These features make it possible to write instructions or lesson plans and document the process.[34] The *Education Edition* comes with its own set of problems as it is based on the Bedrock version of *Minecraft*, which makes it more difficult to modify. Moreover, an education licence is needed to play the game.[35]

It is not just archaeologists and other heritage specialists who have realised *Minecraft*'s potential as a place to communicate archaeology and cultural heritage. On October 3rd 2020, the *Minecraft* team presented a first look of the *Minecraft* update *Caves & Cliffs (1.17)*.[36] The development team presented the new update which included adding an archaeology system to the game in the form of a new tool, the brush, and archaeological excavation areas where the player can use the new tool to find relics of the past and rare materials.[37] The inclusion of the archaeology system in the game has since been pushed back, and it is currently unknown

30 Graham 2014.

31 For more information about the progress see Edwards et al. 2021, 8–9, 13.

32 Edwards et al. 2021, 12.

33 Edwards et al. 2021, 11.

34 Kyle 2020; Minecraft Wiki 2020; Edwards et al. 2021, 1.

35 Minecraft Wiki 2020; Sáez-López et al. 2015; Edwards et al. 2021, 13.

36 Mojang studios 2020.

37 Mojang Studios 2020.

when this will be implemented.[38] The implementation of archaeology directly in the game without the use of user created modifications is an exciting prospect, especially considering how Minecraft already has been used to communicate cultural heritage to a wider audience.[39]

Creating a virtual field school in Minecraft Education Edition

The *Minecraft Education Edition* map presented in this paper was created with a target group of schoolchildren, from ages 5 and up. However, the age group who would benefit the most are 12+ since they would be able to dive into the more theoretical aspects of the map. Moreover, the map can also be used to explain archaeological theories and the excavation process to archaeology students, and other interested parties.

The *Minecraft Education Edition* was used to construct an excavation area, which is based on a part of the Çatalhöyük excavations (figure 3). Çatalhöyük is an archaeological site located in the Konya plain in central Anatolia, close to the modern town of Çumra in Turkey. The site is spread over two mounds: the Neolithic East mound and the Chalcolithic West mound on the west side of the Çarşamba River.[40] The site was discovered by James Mellaart in 1958. The first excavation season ran from 1961 to 1965, and excavations are still ongoing.[41] The site was chosen for this project because of the large amount of available data, as the site is very well published, and most of the archaeological data is freely available on the website's research portal and through publications.[42] Furthermore, the Çatalhöyük Research Project has used 3D recording techniques to record the excavation process.[43] The project has also allowed for non-traditional research projects like Colleen Morgan's *Second Life* project, and Ruth Tringham's *Dead women do tell tales*, which both explore engagement and interpretations, to mention two examples of several projects.[44] These non-traditional projects also show the importance of daring to think outside the box and encourage archaeologists to approach their material in different ways, whether it is to make a digital reconstruction, or construct a narrative around a burial.[45]

38 Mojang Studios 2021a.

39 Dig it!/Immersive Minds 2015; Politopoulos et al. 2019; Langis-Barsetti 2021; Sáez-López et al. 2015; Morgan 2015; Edwards et al. 2020, 4–6.

40 Lercari 2017, 10, for a detailed chronology see Der/Issavi 2017, 192.

41 Mellaart 1967, 11; Hodder/Cessford 2004, 19–20; Çilingiroğlu et al. 2020, 1.

42 Çatalhöyük Research Project 2021.

43 Forte 2014.

44 Morgan 2009; Wolle/Tringham 2000, 213–215; Tringham 2014, 162.

45 Morgan 2009; Tringham 2014.

Figure 3
Map comparison between the excavation plans, left Çatalhöyük area 4040, right Minecraft adaptation of the same area, at 1:1 scale. Map of site (Map of the Çatalhöyük area 4040 created by Camilla Mazzucato, Çatalhöyük Research Project, adapted by author).

The design of the excavation site in the minecraft map, was based on the published excavation reports from Çatalhöyük regarding structures and their last use phase.[46] The aim was to adopt the real-life site as accurately as possible, which is why the structures were reconstructed at a 1:1 scale whenever possible. The soil above was freely adapted and small finds in the form of skulls and pottery were spread out throughout the layers; soil changes were marked by using different blocks (figure 4). The landscape around the virtual field school was originally intended to replicate the landscape of the Konya plain, where the site of Çatalhöyük is located. However, the map file was imported incorrectly from *Worldpainter*, and as a result, the map found in the game no longer resembles the landscape of the Konya plain but rather a strange auto-generated world, with a sharp drop to the rest of the map (figure 5). Fortunately, the imported file with its strange borders provides a limited exploration area for the player, in comparison to the otherwise vast digital adaption of the Konya Plain, and the limitless auto generated world which is standard in *Minecraft*. The new map allows for a freer adaptation of the archaeological material from Çatalhöyük and forces a more creative and innovative approach to incorporate the autogenerated landscape into a wider historical narrative of places and people.

The player can explore the landscape by participating in an archaeological survey of the area around the village where the player starts their game. Furthermore, a quest which focuses on resource procurement was included to allow the player to explore

46 Cessford 2007; Eddisfort 2014; Farid 2014a; Farid 2014b; House 2014.

Figure 4

Image of a section of the excavation in Minecraft, and a wall showing the different blocks and with a sign showing the block name, and what they mean in an excavation context (created by author).

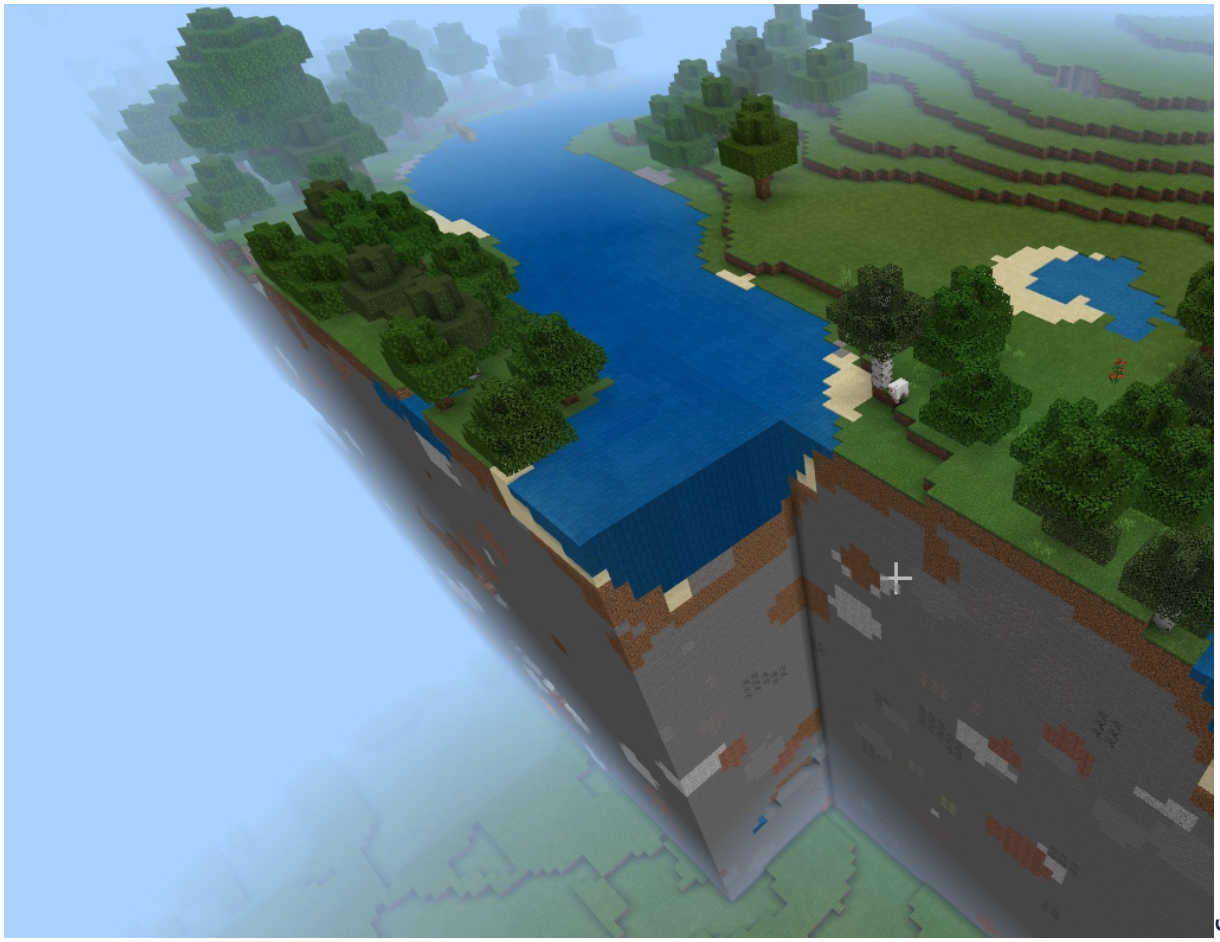


Figure 5

World border of Education map (created by author).

Figure 6
Images of various sites found in the map (created by author).

the steps involved in creating a product, it allows them to follow the *chaîne opératoire* from sheep to banner. The survey quest was implemented to encourage the players to explore the *Minecraft* landscape, and to give the players a sense of exploration, the quest allows them to utilise archaeological survey techniques, and to satisfy their sense of discovery, and it hopefully inspires them to think about the historic landscape around them in the real world. The archaeological sites created for the survey side quest are not related to Çatalhöyük or attempts at recreating real world sites. The sites include a functioning aqueduct, a small mediaeval hamlet with a ship setting, and a ruined temple (figure 6). The added structures function in similar ways to the auto-generated structures in *Minecraft*.[47] It is also possible to conduct experimental archaeology by creating a custom banner. This side quest takes the player through the process which goes into creating textiles from shearing the sheep to get wool, to gathering plants to make dye.[48]

The map is populated by NPCs which the player can interact with. Most of these are archaeologists, and their role is to inform the player about different kinds of archaeological specialisations, and how they contribute to the interpretation of archaeological remains. In most cases, they also present external links to artefacts

47 Minecraft Wiki 2021a; Mojang 2021b.

48 Poulsen 2020.

found at Çatalhöyük, which exemplify their profession. Figure 7 illustrates how this works in game by showing the interaction with the flint specialist. Players are encouraged to talk to the various NPCs standing around the excavation and in the dig house, who will help them with more information about excavation techniques and remind them of the importance of recording the excavation process. The auto-generated world is populated by *Minecraft*'s non-hostile 'mob', villagers, cats, sheep, and added NPCs, and the player starts their game in a typical *Minecraft* village where they encounter an NPC "The Mayor", who gives them instructions on how to play the map. The excavation area, the exploration of which is considered the main task to complete, is located east of the town, and is based on the 4040 area of the north part of the East mound of Çatalhöyük (see figure 3). The mayor NPC also introduces the player to the fictional story of why and how the excavation came about within the fictional narrative. The story was created to make the map feel more immersive to the players and provide them with an instruction on how to approach the map and the gameplay within it. The guide also serves as an introduction to archaeological fieldwork practices, which the player can learn more about by interacting with various archaeologist NPCs.

Digging in Minecraft

Much of the gameplay in a standardised version of *Minecraft* revolves around collecting resources, including digging to find raw materials in the ground. *Minecraft* has a coordinate system, which is displayed on screen and can be used to navigate the world. Furthermore, this coordinate system tells the players where they are in relation to the world height.[49] It seemed obvious to make use of this game mechanic when creating an archaeological excavation, since most players are familiar with the game mechanic, and would be able to use it to document locations of finds, and sites.

A small-scale test was made in *Minecraft Java edition*, based on the information available on Building 77 from Çatalhöyük.[50] Figure 8 is a screenshot taken from a recording of the test excavation illustrating how an excavation could be carried out.[51] The test proved it was possible to construct something which was similar to a real excavation, with soil changes and cultural layers. It also demonstrated that it was possible to do this in a way which seemed natural to the regular *Minecraft* player, since it uses tools

49 Minecraft Wiki 2021b.

50 House 2014.

51 Figure 3 can be seen as a short video by following this link: ▶https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKiVa8wFtIw.

Figure 7
Illustrates the interaction between the player and the Flint Specialist NPC (created by author, the website referred to is the Çatalhöyük Research Project, photo by Jason Quinlan, ▸ http://www.catalhoyuk.com/node/48).

already implemented in the game, such as pickaxes and shovels and regular blocks to represent soil.

Adding a narrative to ignite imagination

A narrative; a short fictional story, was added to frame the excavation and make the player feel part of the team of NPC archaeologists who are tasked to excavate the site. The fictional story in the game is brief, introducing the excavation and the archaeological team working on it.[52] The narrative leaves it up to the player to decide what they want to do in the map, appealing to people's desire to discover and explore, and inspiring the archaeological imagination, in line with *Minecraft*'s fluid playstyle of.[53]

The guides are optional, as is the choice of the player to interact with the NPCs. This means that it is up to the player to choose how they interact with the virtual environment around them. Furthermore, the short fictional introduction serves as worldbuilding for the autogenerated map. While the excavation is based on the real excavation of the 4040-north area of Çatalhöyük, it is up to the player to interpret the excavation and survey, based on the knowledge they have acquired in the game, and the narrative they have developed while playing.

The guide for teachers, instead, discusses which parts of archaeology cannot be taught by using *Minecraft* as a medium. For instance, there is a problem with implementing small finds, as the standard block size is 1 m^3.[54] There are only a few selections of smaller objects, such as skulls, flowerpots, and bonfires, which can serve as representatives of the large amount of pottery sherds

52 Poulsen 2020.

53 Perry 2019, 356; Witcomb 2007, 357–359; Hearne 2019, 154–156.

54 Poulsen 2020.

found in excavations dealing with ceramic periods, and the mass of animal bones found during excavations. It is also impossible to illustrate things like finds washing and flotation sampling for archaeobotanical remains. Despite these challenges *Minecraft* can still be used to exemplify how archaeologists work in the field. Perhaps when the archaeology update is added to *Minecraft*, it might be possible to use special archaeology blocks which have the in-game equivalent of small finds.[55]

Discussion of the virtual excavation experience in Minecraft

The *Minecraft Education Edition* map illustrates how *Minecraft* can be used to explain archaeological fieldwork in a way which incorporates archaeological theory and methods. It differs slightly from how Mojang has presented their idea of incorporating archaeology in the game. Their concept seems to function similarly to other autogenerated structures in the game with little or no explanations of archaeological practise.[56] The presented map can be used as a field simulator, since it replicates the parts of the field school experience, similar to the *Southampton-York Archaeological Simulation system*, which consisted of a computer-based model designed to teach students of archaeology about fieldwork practices before going into the field.[57] Using the *Education Edition* map in teaching would entail several advantages. Thanks to the accompanying guides that explain the process and theories behind the archaeological process, students would have the opportunity to strengthen their analytical skills before going on fieldwork in the real world. They would be able to practice excavation, recording, and interpretation skills with respect to both archaeological excavations and landscape surveys. Creating a digital alternative to real life excavation, like this *Minecraft* map, is beneficial not just for outreach purposes, but also for teaching the principles of an excavation remotely in case of another lockdown prohibiting access to field schools and excavations, as well as an additional teaching tool in to explain and explore excavation techniques and theories.

The map gives students an opportunity to learn in an immersive environment, providing a more embodied learning experience, when compared to traditional teaching methods, mediated through classroom teaching. A digital excavation makes it possible for non-archaeologists to learn how archaeologists work in the field, and be part of it, without potentially disturbing cultural heritage.

55 Mojang Studios 2020.

56 Mojang Studios 2020

57 O'Flaherty 1988, 491.

Figure 8
Test excavation in Minecraft, screenshot from video [▸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKiVa8wFtIw] (created by author).

The different aspects of the *Minecraft* field work map offer the player a different approach to archaeology which might not be so familiar to the public. The survey quest allows players to explore the digital environment around them, and hopefully this exploration of landscape would inspire the player to think about their surroundings in a different way when they are done playing. The other side quest, centring on the creation of a banner, is meant to make the player think about resource procurement and how products are made, but also how a banner can be used to signify relations between people, whether it is through sports teams or flags. This quest is more creative and might appeal to a different audience, who prefer a task with less running around, all the while it is still tied up on archaeological principles.

Recreating an excavation in *Minecraft* at a 1:1 scale is a time-consuming task, approximately a full working week, for the excavation area in this project. Creating a true reconstruction of a historical site is impossible, especially when working with the game constraints in *Minecraft.* Moreover, the excavation in the *Minecraft* map only shows a snapshot of the living phase dated to the late Neolithic and the infill of the structures, which is an inaccurate portrayal of the complexity of the real site, where buildings have several building phases and floor levels.[58] Despite this, I believe this attempt at recreating an excavation shows how it is still possible to learn some of the basic methods used by archaeologists in the field, even though the excavation itself is simplified.

Using games like the *Minecraft Education Edition* excavation map, and the other projects mentioned in this paper, to attract a different audience offers opportunities for people to engage in archaeology in a different way in comparison to visiting museums, watching documentaries, and reading books. It gives the player

58 House 2014.

power to experience archaeology almost as a physical experience, by making them conduct the excavation and their own interpretations of their findings.[59]

Conclusion

The *Minecraft Education Edition* excavation map presented in this paper illustrates how already existing game mechanics can be exploited to create an archaeologically focused experience. This project represents an original alternative to other archaeology maps out there, which are generally focused on communicating a time period by recreating a site or several as seen in *RoMeinecraft*, the Bryn Celli Ddu experience, and CRANE's Kunulua project.[60] The presented fieldwork map is accompanied by a fictional narrative, constructed to introduce the player to the setting of the map and help them imagine themselves as a part of the excavation team. In a classroom setting, it would hopefully encourage the player to explore the world and help them feel more connected to what they are doing, as well as inspire them to think about heritage in the landscape around them.

The *Minecraft Education Edition* excavation map shows that it is possible to use *Minecraft* to illustrate how archaeologists work and allow the player to experience the excavation process. Additionally, this project illustrates that it is possible to teach players about the principles of stratigraphy through videogames, by showing them how the different layers of soil change, illustrated by the different block types in *Minecraft*.[61]

It is obvious that the virtual excavation experience needs to be tested further, but since it was created as a student project, as a part of my master's degree studies at the University of Copenhagen, during the first 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, it lacked the resources and connection to be play-tested by school children or undergraduate students. Despite this, I believe that this *Minecraft Education Edition* map is an innovative showcase of what the *Education Edition of Minecraft* can offer archaeologists, and it illustrates how a popular game can be used to communicate different aspects of archaeology beyond recreating real world sites. I think it could be an alternative way to get acquainted with excavation methods and general considerations about fieldwork. Of course, it cannot, and should not replace fieldwork, but it can provide a virtual world to train in and a possibility to explore things from a different perspective. It will be interesting to see what happens in the *Minecraft* community once the archaeology update

59 Morgan 2010; Morgan 2009; Perry 2019; Hearne 2019.

60 Politopoulos et al. 2019; Langis-Barsetti 2021; Edwards et al. 2020.

61 Harris 1979.

is released, and how it can be used by researchers.

Bibliography

Boom, K. H. J./C. E. Ariese/B. van den Hout/ A. A. A. Mol/ Politopoulos, A., 2018: Teaching through Play: Using Video Games as a Platform to Teach about the Past, in S. Haugeneuer (ed.), C*ommunicating the Past in the Digital Age: Proceedings of the International Conference on Digital Methods in Teaching and Learning in Archaeology* (12th–13th October 2018), London, 27–44.

Cessford, C., 2007: Building 1, in I. Hodder (ed.), *Excavating Çatalhöyük: South, North and KOPAL Area Reports from the 1995–99 Seasons*, British Institute at Ankara, McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 405–530.

Der, L./J. Issavi, 2017: The Urban Quandary and the 'Mega-Site' from the Çatalhöyük Perspective, *Journal of World Prehistory* 30, 189–206.

Eddisfort, D., 2014: Building 49, in I. Hodder (ed.), *Çatalhöyük Excavations - The 2000–2008 Seasons*, British Institute at Ankara, Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, 313–356.

Edwards, B./B. B. Edwards/S. Griffiths/F. F. Reynolds/A. Standford/ M. Woods, 2021: The Bryn Celli Ddu Minecraft Experience: A Workflow and Problem-Solving Case Study in the Creation of an Archaeological Reconstruction in Minecraft for Cultural Heritage Education, *Journal of Computing and Cultural heritage* 14 (2), article 23.

Farid, S., 2014a: Buildings 52/51, in I. Hodder (ed), Ç*atalhöyük Excavations - The 2000–2008 Seasons*, British Institute at Ankara, Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, 357–397.

Farid, S., 2014b: Building 82, in I. Hodder (ed), *Çatalhöyük Excavations - The 2000–2008 Seasons*, British Institute at Ankara, Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, 505–510.

Forte, M., 2014: 3D Archaeology : New Perspectives and Challenges — The Example of Çatalhöyük, *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies* 1 (2), 1–29.

Harris, E. C., 1979: *Principles of Archaeological Stratigraphy*, London.

Hearne, R. L., 2019: 'The archaeological imagination': New ways of seeing for mental health recovery, in T. Darvill/K. Barrass/L. Drysdale/V. Heaslip/Y. Staelens (eds.) *Historic Landscapes and Mental Well-being*, Archaeopress, Oxford, 153–162.

Hodder, I./C. Cessford, 2004: Daily Practice and Social Memory at Çatalhöyük, *American Antiquity* 69 (1), 14–17.

House, M., 2014: Building 77, in I. Hodder (ed.) *Çatalhöyük Excavations - The 2000–2008 Seasons*, British Institute at Ankara, Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, 485–503.

Langis-Barsetti, D., 2021: Building Kunulua Block by Block, *Near Eastern Archaeology* 84 (1), 62–70.

Lercari, N., 2017: 3D visualization and reflexive archaeology: A virtual reconstruction of Çatalhöyük history houses, *Digital Applications in Archaeology and Cultural Heritage* 6 (August 2016), 10–17.

McGraw, J./S. Reid/J. Sanders, 2017: 'Crafting the Past - Unlocking New Audiences', in A. A. A. Mol/C. E. Ariese-Vandemeulebroucke/K. H. J. Boom/A. Politopoulos (eds.), The Interactive Past: Archaeology, *Heritage & Video Games*, Leiden, 167–184.

McKinney, S./S. Perry/A. Katifori/ V. Kourtis, 2020: Developing Digital archaeology for Young People: a model for fostering Empathy and Dialogue in Formal and Informal Learning Environments. In: S. Hageneuer (ed.), *Communicating the Past in the Digital Age: Proceedings of the International Conference on Digital Methods in Teaching and Learning in Archaeology (12-13 October 2018)*, London, 179–195.

Mellaart, J., 1967: *Çatal Hüyük: A Neolithic Town in Anatolia*, London.

Morgan, C. L., 2009: (Re)Building Çatalhöyük: Changing virtual reality in archaeology, *Archaeologies: Journal of the World Archaeological Congress* 5 (3), 468–487.

O'Flaherty, B., 1988: The Southampton-York Archaeological Simulation System, in *Computer Applications & Quantitative Methods in Archaeology* 1988, 491–497.

Perry, S., 2019: The Enchantment of the Archaeological Record, *European Journal of Archaeology* 22 (3), 354–371.

Reinhard, A. D., 2018: *Archaeogaming: An introduction to Archaeology in and of Video Games*, New York, Oxford.

Politopoulos, A./ C. Ariese/K Boom/ A. A. A. Mol, 2019: 'Romans and Rollercoasters: Scholarship in the Digital Playground', *Journal of Computer Applications in Archaeology* 2 (1), 163–175.

Poulsen, A. S., 2020: *Gaming and archaeology*, unpublished, exam for Project based course, Near Eastern Archaeology, Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, University of Copenhagen.

Sáez-López, J./ J. Miller/E. Vázques-Cano/M. Domíngeuz-Garrido, 2015: Exploring application, attitudes and integration of video games: MinecraftEDU in Middle School, *Educational Technology and Society* 18 (3), 114–128.

Tringham, R., 2014: Dido and the Basket: fragments towards a non-linear history, in Brown, S., Frederick, U., and Clarke, A. (eds), *Object Stories: artifacts and archaeologists*, California: Left Coast Press, 161–169.

Recreating an Excavation in *Minecraft Education Edition*: A Response

Csilla E. Ariese

Abstract

In their paper, Poulsen presents a unique custom-made map, designed in and for *Minecraft's Education Edition*. In the blocky virtual world of *Minecraft*, this map takes the player into a fictional landscape where they are asked by the mayor, as part of a fictional narrative, to conduct an archaeological excavation of a dig site. Although the landscape and narrative are fictional, the *Minecraft* dig site itself is modelled on a section and cultural layer of the well-known real world archaeological site of Çatalhöyük. Furthermore, the player is asked to engage in some very real archaeological methods to excavate, document, and interpret their *Minecraft* dig site. The author's approach to map making in *Minecraft's Education Edition*, including their mixing of fact and fiction, is highly original in the field of interactive pasts.

Thanks to a 'Streaming the Past' episode of the *VALUE Foundation* featuring the author as guest, I was able to view the excavation map 'in action' and get an even better feel for the excellent design of the map.[1] Poulsen has created a fantastic – but idealized and risk-free – setting in which players can learn and practice basic archaeological excavation methods and approaches. Much of the chaotic complexities of real life, however, are absent due to the nature of Minecraft.

Before reflecting on the pros and cons of the author's methodology, I would like to begin by briefly expanding on the context of their contribution in three areas: as part of education through video games, within the field of interactive pasts, and compared to other creative projects that combine archaeology with *Minecraft*.

Dr. Csilla E. Ariese is a museologist specializing in community engagement and practicing decoloniality. She is Senior Lecturer at the Reinwardt Academy had has worked as postdoctoral researcher at Leiden University and the University of Amsterdam in the BRASILIAE, ECHOES, and NEXUS1492 projects. Her PhD was titled The Social Museum in the Caribbean (2018). She is co-founder of the VALUE Foundation and editor of the books The Interactive Past (2017) and Return to the Interactive Past (2021).

▶ *Profile page*

Video Games & Education

There is plenty of research – too vast to summarize here – that

1 VALUE 2020.

explores the benefits and drawbacks of learning and formal education through video games. As Poulsen mentioned, video games offer the learner a tactile component of (generally mild) physical activity which is beneficial to kinaesthetic learner types.[2] However, video games – and even more so those using Virtual Reality – are complete virtual worlds in which several, if not all, senses are activated simultaneously. This deep immersion offers an engagement that is generally effective for all learner types, as well as an environment that provides entertainment besides education. As Mata Haggis-Burridge has effectively illustrated, all games are a mix of education and entertainment – even if these two are rarely equally balanced.[3] Although the potential drawbacks of education through video games are duly noted, it should be clear that the author's decision to create an educational experience in a video game has significant benefits over traditional classroom settings – all the more so considering the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to find safe out-of-class alternatives.

Interactive Pasts

The field of interactive pasts, which brings together a vast range of engagements between interactive digital media (video games) and the past (archaeology, history, heritage), is relatively new but has been highly productive.[4] Academics, students, players, and game developers have all been involved in using, exploring, rethinking, and learning about and through the past. Let me illustrate the variety of approaches with a small selection. Andrew Reinhard has used the game *No Man's Sky* to apply real world archaeological survey techniques as part of the collaborative *No Man's Sky* Archaeological Survey project.[5] Ashlee Bird has explored the problematic and harmful representations of Indigenous peoples in various video games, choosing to create an Indigenous mod for *Super Mario Bros*.[6] John Aycock uses computer science methods to reconstruct early video games through their remaining code and/or artefacts.[7] Florence Smith Nicholls has worked with topics such as

2 Howard Gardner developed the foundation model of multiple intelligences (1983) which was used by Neil Fleming in 1987 to design the VARK-model according to which learners can be categorised into different learning types (visual, aural, read/write, and kinaesthetic). Fleming 1995; Gardner 2011 [1983].

3 Haggis-Burridge 2021, 78.

4 For a historical overview of the field, see Mol et al. 2017.

5 Reinhard 2018, 101.

6 Bird 2021.

7 E.g. Aycock/Kroepfl 2021.

queer gaming and dark tourism, as well as researching the application of archaeological methodologies (mapping and photography) in video games.[8] As one of the founders of the *VALUE Foundation*, we have had our own explorations with interactive pasts, which include heritage outreach, academic conferences, workshops for students with game developers, teaching interactive narratives, and research on various games.[9]

Minecraft & Archaeology

As Poulsen already mentioned, there have been several projects to date which combine archaeology/heritage with *Minecraft*. Individual players, academics, and cultural institutions such as museums have made maps and built structures. Indeed, as the author astutely recognized, the majority of these projects have focused on **building**: the British Museum hosted a server to (try to) reconstruct the entire museum, TateCraft attempted to reconstruct the Tate's galleries and individual artworks whilst Crafting the Past has reconstructed (mainly) Scottish heritage sites. Our own *RoMeincraft* focused on reconstructing Roman archaeological sites in the Netherlands.[10] Some maps of other (mostly famous) heritage sites made by players are shared for download with the community. *Minecraft*'s creative mode (possibly aided with the use of some mods) is highly suitable for building and the popularity of *Minecraft* makes it relatively easy to find players or engage the public in builds.

Excavating, however, is another matter. Crafting the Past's map of an excavation of the Roman fort at Watling Lodge is a notable exception, as is computer scientist Christopher Gutteridge's buried Roman villa which he created last minute for a university Family Day by replacing all the 'air' blocks of a Villa map with 'dirt'.[11] Although digging is a core mechanic of *Minecraft*'s survival mode to gather resources, creating archaeological excavations in (either creative or survival mode) *Minecraft* has been challenging and has only rarely been successfully achieved. As a sandbox game with a (potentially) giant world in which the player

8 Florence Smith Nicholls' research can be accessed through their webpage, ▶https://florencesmithnicholls.com/category/archaeogaming/.

9 Much of the VALUE Foundation's work can be found through our websites,▶https// :interactivepasts.com/ and ▶https://value-foundation.org/.

10 Miller 2014; The VoxelBox 2014; all of Crafting the Past's projects are available through their website,▶https://www.craftingthepast.co.uk/; Politopoulos et al. 2019; all of the maps of the RoMeincraft project are available through the website, ▶https://romeincraft.nl/.

11 For Crafting the Past's Watling Lodge map see,▶https://www.craftingthepast.co.uk/watlinglodge; Gutteridge 2016.

can destroy and build, it is difficult to 'direct' play towards digging a specific area, to a specific depth, carefully and slowly. Players familiar with the game are used to 'digging' or destroying at high speeds, removing entire rows or columns without looking at the individual blocks more closely. Thus, an entire cultural layer in a *Minecraft* excavation could be gone before you know it. The challenges are even greater when players – especially strangers – need to co-operate in the same world.

Benefits

Poulsen's approach of using the *Education Edition* offers some unique possibilities to counter some of the challenges of the base game. Whereas the regular game requires mods to alter the in-game world and its rules, some of these possibilities are inherently embedded in the *Education Edition*. For instance, for our *RoMeincraft* projects – which used the regular game in creative mode – we needed to use mods to disable TNT blocks or portals.[12] Alas, we did not think of doing this until *after* a participant at an event had blown up several structures others had painstakingly built. Even so, a child managed to add code that spawned colour-changing sheep (arguably, a much cuter counterplay). For the excavation map, Poulsen was able to set important rules. For instance, only inside the excavation area of the dig site can a player dig or destroy blocks. Furthermore, the blocks that can be dug 'feel' more resistant and cannot be demolished as quickly, the tactile element guiding the player to excavate in a slower tempo. The player's inventory is also restricted, so the dig site cannot be built full of structures and rollercoasters.

The educational materials the map provides its players, as well as in-game instructions and examples, are furthermore essential components of this excavation. Naturally, it is possible in regular *Minecraft* to put down a sign with writing on it, but Poulsen has expanded on this with the sign showing and describing soils and layers (see figure 5). Even more important are the opportunities in the map to record and document the site, using an in-game camera and a field journal in which the player can write detailed records of every layer, profile, feature, and find. Thanks to the NPCs who each have their own expertise to share, the player is given a full course in excavation methods and approaches.

The fictional narrative and landscape in which the player is steered towards the dig site are helpful to ensure that the excavation map can function as a field school where the main goal is to learn methods, rather than as a real excavation where the

12 Boom et al. 2020, 39–41; Politopoulos et al. 2019.

main goal is to learn about the people who used the site. The player is not placed under great pressure to correctly interpret the site archaeologically. Naturally, interpretation is an important part of archaeological research, but by using a fictional narrative the players can practice arguing their own explanations.

Finally, the Education Edition shows players who are new to *Minecraft* the basic commands they will need to navigate the world, right in the game screen. This is an important feature for those excavation students who may never have played *Minecraft* before. Being able to play the map solo also ensures that the player is not hindered by others.

Challenges

There are two core challenges in Poulsen's approach of using *Minecraft's Education Edition* to create a custom map of an excavation. Firstly, the nature of *Minecraft*'s design and its 1 m^3 blocks make it challenging to recreate a real archaeological site accurately to scale. In their article the author already mentioned this by writing that small finds could only be represented by skulls and a block type representing a cultural layer. However, locating and carefully excavating small finds is an important technique for students to learn in field schools. Even many common archaeological features such as post holes or hearths tend to be smaller than a single *Minecraft* block. The need to rely on predominantly square shapes also makes it difficult to accurately recreate rounded or more complex shapes. As a result, the player's job of recording features in the virtual dig site is quite different from what they would need to be able to do in real life. The confusing complexities of real archaeological sites, of which Çatalhöyük with its crisscrossing structures and overlapping layers from different construction periods is a prime example, do not translate well to *Minecraft* (if at scale). This is already clear in the adaptations Poulsen had to make between the real and the virtual dig site (see figure 4). It would be interesting to experiment how this issue might be tackled by choosing to recreate real sites in *Minecraft* at bigger scales, or by choosing to construct entirely fictional sites in which the absence of certain types of finds and features could 'make sense'.

The second main issue has to do with the virtual excavation's intended audience and the context of use. It is not entirely clear from the article what the author envisioned when setting out to create this map. Is this map to be used by school children at home? By university students in class? By families in museums? Both students and children are mentioned, but no ages or settings are specified. These parameters would have been important to define at the start to be able to assess whether Poulsen's approach and

the resulting map are appropriate, as well as to understand what the educational impact of the map may be. From my limited insight into the map through the aforementioned stream, it is my impression that it would work best as a virtual field school in a formal setting at a university level. Specifically, novice archaeology students could play the map in a computer lab under the mentorship of a teacher. This teacher would be an important part of the learning experience, functioning as supervisor of the excavation, ensuring that students follow excavation protocol (i.e., to photograph each layer before excavating to the next layer), providing additional personal experience from real life excavations, and helping students with anything that may come up during the virtual dig. It is unfortunate that due to a COVID-19 lockdown the map could not be disseminated and play tested. I am sure many would enjoy playing this map and learning how to excavate a site like an archaeologist – without risking sunburns or scorpion stings!

Bibliography

Aycock, J./H. Kroepfl, 2021: The Desolation of Vixens, in C. E. Ariese/K. H. J. Boom/B. van den Hout/A. A. A. Mol/A. Politopoulos (eds.), *Return to the Interactive Past: The Interplay of Video Games and Histories*, 45–56, Leiden: Sidestone Press.

Bird, A., 2021: Synthetic Spaces and Indigenous Identity: Decolonizing Video Games and Reclaiming Representation in C. E. Ariese/K. H. J. Boom/B. van den Hout/A. A. A. Mol/A. Politopoulos (eds.), *Return to the Interactive Past: The Interplay of Video Games and Histories*, 103–116, Leiden: Sidestone Press.

Boom, K. H. J./C. E. Ariese/B. van den Hout/A. A. A. Mol/A. Politopoulos, 2020: Teaching through Play: Using Video Games as a Platform to Teach about the Past, in Sebastian Hageneuer (ed.), *Communicating the Past in the Digital Age: Proceedings of the International Conference on Digital Methods in Teaching and Learning in Archaeology* (12–13 October 2018), 27–44, London: Ubiquity Press.

Gardner, H. E., 2011 [1983]: *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, New York: Basic Books.

Haggis-Burridge, M., 2021: Personal and Social Recent History in Fragments of Him: Defining and Exploring 'Immersion' in Video Games, in C. E. Ariese/K. H. J. Boom/B. van den Hout/A. A. A. Mol/A. Politopoulos (eds.), *Return to the Interactive Past: The Interplay of Video Games and Histories*, 75–88, Leiden: Sidestone Press.

Mol, A. A. A./C. E. Ariese-Vandemeulebroucke/K. H. J. Boom/A. Politopoulos, 2017: Tutorial: An Introduction to Archaeology, Heritage, and Video Games, in A. A. A. Mol/C. E. Ariese-Vandemeulebroucke/K. H. J. Boom/A. Politopoulos (eds.), *The Interactive Past: Archaeology, Heritage & Video Games*, 7–18, Leiden: Sidestone Press.

Politopoulos, A./C. E. Ariese/K. H. J. Boom/A. A. A. Mol, 2019: Romans and Rollercoasters: Scholarship in the Digital Playground, *Journal of Computer Applications in Archaeology* 2 (1), 163–175.

Reinhard, A. D., 2018: *Archaeogaming: An Introduction to Archaeology in and of Video Games*, New York: Berghahn Books.

Online sources

Fleming, N. D., 1995: I'm Different; Not Dumb: Modes of Presentation (V.A.R.K.) in the Tertiary Classroom, in A. Zelmer (ed.), *Research and Development in Higher Education Volume 18: Proceedings of the 1995 Annual Conference of the Higher Education and Research Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA)* (308–313), Hammondville: HERDSA. ▸http://www.

vark- learn. com/ wp- content/ uploads/ 2014/ 08/ different_not_dumb.pdf, accessed on 28/02/2022.

Gutteridge, C., 2016: Minecraft Archaeology Day. *Southampton Web and Data Innovation Team*, 25/07/2016. ▸https://blog.soton.ac.uk/webteam/2016/07/25/minecraft-archaeology-day/, accessed on 28/02/2022.

Miller, J., 2014: British Museum to Be Digitally recreated in Minecraft, *BBC*, 23/09/2014. ▸https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-29281051, accessed on 28/02/2022.

The VoxelBox. 2014. #TateCraft: Bringing Art to Life – ik Prize 2014 Finalist [Video], *YouTube*, 15/01/2014. ▸https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7B9rfHXJrHo, accessed on 28/02/2022.

VALUE. 2020. VALUE Excavates Çatalhöyük in Minecraft! #ArGaCon2020 [Video], *YouTube*, 31/07/2020. ▸https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UprhjdkJQH4, accessed on 28/02/2022.

Recreating an Excavation in *Minecraft Education Edition*: Final Thoughts

Anna Silberg Poulsen

The initial article "Recreating an Excavation in Minecraft Education Edition" focused on exploring how the game *Minecraft* has been used in the past to communicate cultural heritage by museums and archaeologists to a wider audience.[1] It also presented a *Minecraft Education Edition* map created by the author which attempted to recreate the archaeological field school experience in the game.[2] Unfortunately, the field school map could not be tested in a classroom due to the circumstances of its creation during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. This short paper will reflect on the two main challenges raised in the response paper by Dr. Csilla E. Ariese. The first challenge for the *Minecraft Education Edition* map is the simplification of the excavation process, because of the choice of representing something 1:1 scale when the blocks themselves take up 1 m^3. The second challenge for the map is its unclarity of the target audience for the field school map, and how the map would need to be changed to embrace the different audiences.

Anna Silberg Poulsen is a recent master graduate of Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology at the University of Copenhagen. They received their bachelor's degree in 2019 from the University of Copenhagen, with an Erasmus exchange to the University of Edinburgh in 2018. They participated in the online Archaeogaming conference #ArGaCon2020 with a showcase of the Minecraft Education map hosted by the VALUE Foundation and Colleen Morgan. They have also participated in various fieldwork projects.
▶ *Profile page*

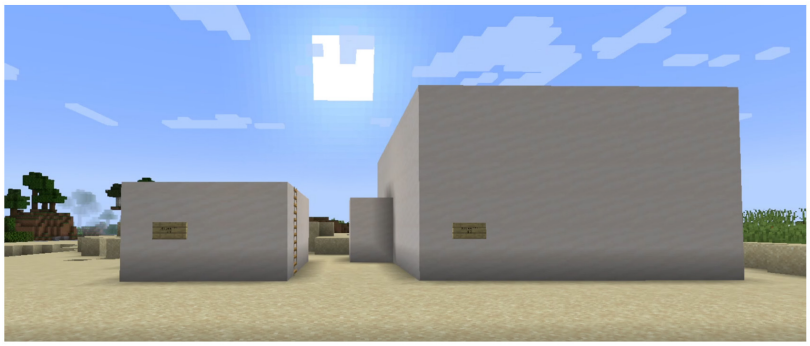
Questions of Scale and Complexity

Minecraft's pixelated look does not accurately represent the real world, and it is not meant to be a hyper realistic recreation of the real world, and that is probably one of the reasons why the game has remained popular since its release in 2009.[3] As pointed out in the response article, the size and shape of *Minecraft* blocks causes issues if one wishes to represent something detailed at a 1:1 scale when compared to real world measurements. A solution to this, as observed in a short comparison video of a reconstruction of building 77 (figure 9), and as suggested by the review article, is to

1 Politopoulos et al. 2019; Langis-Barsetti 2021; Edwards et al., 2021.

2 The map can be acquired by contacting the author. It was created as a part of a master level course at the University of Copenhagen.

3 Langis-Barestti 2021, 63.



a

b

c

Figure 9
Comparison of space in reconstructions of building 77, a) the exterior of the two reconstructions. Left 1:1, and right 1:2; b) Interior of 1:1; c) interior of 1:2. Watch the video for a walkthrough of the two buildings at ▸ https://youtu.be/YnIDxesoalg (created by author).

increase the scale of structure.[4] The altered size made it possible to include more decorations. However, changing the scale of a structure alters the perception of the structure and distorts the proportions. I would argue that increasing the scale of a structure or a feature alters the experience of space, as can be observed in figure 10. The increased dimensions make the structures appear unproportionally large, which can impact the player's experience and understanding of the feature, by making it appear more grandiose than it is in real life. The challenge of scale and how to adapt it to *Minecraft*, is only relevant if the goal of the map is to recreate a real excavation site, and thus have to grapple with the concepts of transferring physical objects into the digital space. The scale is also important when considering how to communicate the aims of the research. I chose to keep the scale at a 1:1 to make the height of the character and the construction fit in with its surroundings (see figure 6). Furthermore, I would argue that *Minecraft* is not suited for learning how to excavate small finds, but rather to explore concepts of simple stratigraphy and interpretations of structures.

It is possible to create a more complex excavation experience in *Minecraft*, either by adding more complexity in the layers above the structures, or by increasing the physical dimensions of the excavation. But even if the spatial boundaries of the excavation are enlarged, it will still be difficult to use them to teach how to excavate small finds, because the blocks without modifications, when broken, leave a void of 1 m^3. In excavations in the real world layers of soil are carefully removed with a trowel, and brushed

4 Youtube video can be found online, ▸https://youtu.be/YnIDxesoalg.

clean for photographs before the next layer is removed. *Minecraft* in its current state is not the best fit for recreating complex experiences of excavating a multi-period site like Çatalhöyük. Nevertheless, I would argue that depending on the intended target audience like the group this *Minecraft* map was developed for, a simple excavation should be sufficient to give an insight into how archaeologists work in the field, and how they generate knowledge. If a project demanded it, I am sure it would be possible to produce a highly complex excavation experience in *Minecraft* by increasing the scale, and by creating custom textures for the world. Ultimately, the scale of an excavation or structures are dependent on the experience one wishes to replicate in *Minecraft*.

The field school map is another way of highlighting the importance of small finds. This is done by interacting with the archaeology NPC's like the Flint specialist, figure 7, who explains how their specialisation contributes to the interpretation of a site. By interacting with the hyperlink, the player is taken to a website which shows an Obsidian mirror found at Çatalhöyük.[5] Further fictional complexities were added to the excavation area in the form of changing soil types (figure 4), and features like pits and burials. In hindsight, I should have added at least one of the later levels of occupation from the real excavation area, but at the time, I was afraid that doing so might prevent a player, who is less familiar with archaeological methods, to dig beyond the first level of features, without prompting from a teacher or an NPC.

Summing up, I do not think that *Minecraft* in its current state, 1.18.2 (Java edition) and 1.18.12 (Bedrock edition), is suitable for teaching how to excavate a delicate context or how to extract small finds. Those skills are a vital part of most excavations as the response by Dr. Csilla E. Ariese rightly points out.

It is possible that *Minecraft* might add features which makes it possible to excavate certain blocks more delicately, but even then, I doubt the experience will be comparable to the real-world experience.[6] For now, the best way to implement similar excavation techniques is to modify the base game, with mods like *Fossils and Archaeology Revival* which adds palaeontology and archaeology to the game.[7] It would be interesting to see how the concepts presented in the field school map could be explored in a modded version of Java version.

5 Çatalhöyük Research Project, 2021.

6 ▶https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBvZ2Iqmm3M&t=2185s.

7 The mod can be downloaded through Curse forge, ▶https://www.curseforge.com/minecraft/mc-mods/fossils/files, see the Wikipedia for more information on the features in the mod, ▶https://fossils-archeology.fandom.com/wiki/F/A_Miod_Revival_Wiki.

Single target audience?

The map in its current form can be used in different scenarios, and for different age groups. As the response article points out, the age groups who would gain the most archaeological knowledge from the map are the archaeologists and archaeology students playing and exploring the map. However, I would argue that a map like this could be used in primary and secondary schools, as well as high schools, to communicate the general practices of archaeology. *Minecraft* is already present in the classroom and used to teach those age groups about science, mathematics, and history.[8] It would be interesting to present an alternative to the current history lessons, which primarily consists of reconstructing or exploring a historical site.[9] A map like the field school map presented in the research article could add a more scientifically based explanation of archaeological practices, which people in my experience are generally interested to learn more about. The map could also explain how archaeology contributes to the general understanding of human history.

I think a concept like the field school map with a more complex stratigraphy, perhaps constructed at a larger scale, could be a valuable tool to introduce university students, as well as high school students to how archaeologists work in the field. The map could also be altered to fit the communication needs of a museum, like the projects made by Crafting the Past and TateCraft, and with the assistance of staff or teachers, be used to communicate a simplified version of excavation techniques as they are presented in the map.[10] Having a teacher or professor in the room to answer questions students might have about archaeology, would be instrumental to highlight how *Minecraft* does not depict a realistic excavation experience. The importance of a "real world" guide to help with the map would undoubtedly have become obvious if the map had been tested in a classroom setting. The map comes with two guides, one intended for students, and one intended for the teacher. The guide for students is aimed primarily at high school students, but it could be used in an undergraduate class on introductions to archaeological methods. The guide intended for the teacher goes more in-depth with where to find more references on different archaeological methods, but it also explains the drawbacks of using Minecraft to represent the complexities of a real-world excavation.

8 Sáez-López et al 2015; Macgregor 2019. Lessons can be found on ▶ https://education.minecraft.net/en-us/resources/explore-lessons.

9 Mojang Studios 2022.

10 Dig It!/Immersive Minds 2022; Tate 2014.

Conclusion

The Education Edition field school map can be seen as a development of other archaeogaming *Minecraft* projects like VALUE foundations *Romeincraft* and *Crafting the Past*.[11] Most projects primarily focused on reconstructing the past in *Minecraft* and only two of Crafting the Past's maps, St. Kilda, and Watling Lodge, feature an archaeological excavation.[12] *The Education Edition* map took the seeds planted by the previous projects and created a virtual field school experience which focused on archaeological excavation in *Minecraft*, and added additional elements like landscape survey, similar to Shawn Graham's survey project.[13] The field school is populated by NPCs who provide guidance and archaeological knowledge to the players as they explore the map and begin their excavation.

The field school map was not meant to replace all aspects of the excavation experience, but to explore the possibilities of recreating a simplified version of the experience, while creating awareness of its shortcomings, like the inability to add small finds which makes up most to the archaeological record. It would be interesting to take the concept further and develop different maps for different purposes, a simpler version for schools, and potentially museum outreach, and more complex versions for university level teaching. A more complex version of the map would involve expanding and rethinking the excavation area to better reflect the reality of the overlapping layers of Çatalhöyük more accurately. It could also be interesting to have archaeology students develop their own fictive or real excavations, which would force them to actively reflect and engage with stratigraphy in a different way, and potentially help them understand it better when they are on an excavation.

The blocky design of *Minecraft* creates a different experience than excavating in the real world, but I think a map like this, despite its difficulties with representing small finds, could be used as a teaching tool to get an idea of what an excavation can be like. It could be a way for "people outside the field" to get a taste of what archaeological excavations are like, even if it is less detailed than an excavation in the non-virtual world. The map would be ideal in a focused lesson on archaeology in schools as a supplement to ordinary history lessons, but it can also be elaborated upon and used to introduce archaeology students to basic excavation methods as a part of their training before they go on their first fieldwork.

The map makes it possible to partake in archaeological

11 Politopoulos et al. 2019.

12 Dig It!/Immersive Minds 2022.

13 Graham 2015.

excavations in a risk-free environment, both from the sun and wild animals, which can interfere with the excavation. It provides a safe space to learn the basic principles of archaeological excavation.

Bibliography

Edwards B./B. B. Edwards/S. Griffiths/F. F. Reynolds/A. Standford/M. Woods, 2021: The Bryn Celli Ddu Minecraft Experience: A Workflow and Problem-Solving Case Study in the Creation of an Archaeological Reconstruction in Minecraft for Cultural Heritage Education. Journal of Computing and Cultural heritage, 14(2), article 23.

Langis-Barsetti, D., 2021: Building Kunulua Block by Block, Near Eastern Archaeology, 84(1), 62–70.

Politopoulos A./C. Ariese/K. Boom/A. A. A. Mol, 2019: 'Romans and Rollercoasters: Scholarship in the Digital Playground', Journal of Computer Applications in Archaeology, 2(1), 163–175.

Sáez-López J./J. Miller/E. Vázques-Cano/M. Domíngeuz-Garrido, 2015: Exploring application, attitudes and integration of video games: Minecraft EDU in Middle School, Educational Technology and Society, 18(3), 114–128.

Online Sources

Çatalhöyük Research project, 2021: Research Portal, ▸ http://www.catalhoyuk.com/research, accessed on 24/05/2021.

Dig It!/Immersive Minds, 2022: St Kilda, ▸ http://www.craftingthepast.co.uk/st-kilda, accessed on 08/01/2022.

Graham S. 2015: Somewhere in the desert… a temple, ▸ https://electricarchaeology.ca/2015/03/24/somewhere-in-the-desert-a-temple/, accessed 10/08/2021.

Macgregor, J. 2019: How teachers are using Minecraft in the classroom, PC Gamer, ▸ https://www.pcgamer.com/how-teachers-are-using-minecraft-in-the-classroom, accessed on 31/03 /2022.

Mojang Studios, 2022: Minecraft Education Edition – History and Culture kit, ▸ https://education.minecraft.net/en-us/resources/history-and-culture-subject-kit, accessed on 31/03/2022.

Tate, 2014: IK Price 2014 Shortlist: Tatecraft, ▸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXC8JUmb12U, accessed on 31/03/2022.

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), Taariq 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.

KLEOS - AMSTERDAM BULLETIN OF ANCIENT STUDIES AND ARCHAEOLOGY

ISSUE 5 | 2022

ISSN: 2468-1555