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STICHTING Archaeological
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24th A&T Symposium

Power and Authority – an archaeologist's friend or foe?



Friday April 7th, 2017

Academy Building Groningen

Zernikezaal

Broerstraat 5

Groningen

STICHTING Archaeological DIALOGUES

Friday 7 APRIL 2017

Groningen University Academy Building, Zerikezaal, Broerstraat 5, Groningen

09:30	Registration desk open	
10:00	Word of welcome	
10:10	Keynote address: J. Brück <i>Bristol University</i>	Wealth, status and the individual in British Early Bronze Age burials: a critique
Session 1: From data to hierarchies		
11:00	C.W. Wiersma <i>Groningen Institute of Archaeology</i>	From domestic architecture to social hierarchies
11:30	S. van der Vaart and A. Louwen <i>Leiden University</i>	Ob arm, ob reich, im Tode gleich
12:00	E. Chaplin <i>Newcastle University</i>	The Theory of Late Roman British Elites or “How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Paideia.”
12:30	B. Harris <i>University College London</i>	Renfrew reloaded: the social organisation of monument construction in Neolithic Wessex
13:00	Lunch	
Session 2: Power to the people		
14:00	K. de Roest <i>Groningen Institute of Archaeology</i>	Power to...whoever shouts the loudest. Or, how to study a multi-vocalled past?
14:30	G. Savani <i>University of Leicester</i>	The Great Washed: How ‘Private’ Were Early Rural Baths in Roman Britain?
15:00	A. Kotsoglou <i>Cornell University</i>	It’s not me, it’s you: diversions of elite responsibility during the Late/Terminal Classic in the Maya lowlands.
15:00	Tea/coffee break	
Session 3: Selling the elite to a modern audience		
15:30	C. V. Alonso-Moreno <i>Universidad Autónoma de Madrid</i>	Mycenae Rich in Gold: Social Discourse, Bias and Performance in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens
16:00	L. Morehouse and N.A. Munawar <i>University of Amsterdam</i>	Whose Archaeology? A New Approach to Public Engagement in Post-Conflict Syria
16:30	J. Brück <i>Bristol University</i>	Final Discussion and Wrap-up
17:30	Closing remarks	
17:45	Drinks reception	

Power and Authority – an archaeologist's friend or foe?

Substantial scholarly effort has been directed towards the identification and study of elites and hierarchies in past societies. This Archaeology & Theory conference will debate power and authority in past societies and how archaeologist should deal with them.

From data to hierarchies

Archaeologists have demonstrated a vast variety of methods in order to identify elites. How should we define elites and social inequality? Are power and status reflected in the archaeological record? How do we make the interpretive step from our archaeological data to the social reality of the past? What assumptions guide these theories and are they justified in their considerations? For this session we invite contributions that reflect on bridging the gap between archaeological data and social hierarchies.

Power to the people

Theoretical discussions have conveniently assumed the existence of institutionalised, hereditary leadership. In doing so, a different, more complex and potentially more viable past reality is overlooked. Are Elite-models an excuse to ignore the complex reality of the past by offering a one-fits-all solution to project onto our archaeological data? How do we account for the influence of non-elites on the past? Where does the agency of the lower strata fit in? For this session we invite contributions that reflect on theoretical considerations towards hierarchies and how they potentially distort past social reality.

Selling the elite to a modern audience (translating theory to the public)

Modern (lay) audiences often only encounter archaeology in a museum context, where considerable resources are committed to presenting archaeology. Elites often take a central role in translating complex archaeological debates to concepts that are easily grasped by and evoke the interest of the public. This is often accomplished by displaying shiny objects, which limits the range of stories a museum can convey. How does this influence and reflect on theoretical debates and practice in archaeology?

ABSTRACTS

Keynote Address

Wealth, status and the individual in British Early Bronze Age burials: a critique.

J. Brück, Bristol university

The discovery in 2002 of an extraordinarily wealthy Beaker burial just 3 miles from Stonehenge made headline news. Swiftly dubbed the ‘King of Stonehenge’ by the media, this adult male was accompanied by a remarkable array of objects including a pair of gold earrings, three copper daggers, five pots, two wristguards, four boars’ tusks, a shale belt ring, an antler pin, and a large number of struck flint items. It has of course been easy to envision this man as the archetypal Bronze Age chief, but here I will attempt to explore other ways of interpreting the objects in this grave – not as indices of his power and status, but as a means of constructing relational forms of identity and exploring ontological concerns around the social impact of death. Contemporary with this grave are other burials that also call into question an ‘ideology of the individual’. It is in fact evident that Early Bronze Age bodies were frequently subject to processes of fragmentation, manipulation and curation that suggest very different concepts of the body/self to those that underpin hierarchical and evolutionist models of Bronze Age society.

Session 1: From data to hierarchies

Chaired by: Daniël van Helden (University of Leicester)

Framework: From data to hierarchies. From domestic architecture to social hierarchies

dr. C.W. Wiersma, Groningen Institute of Archaeology

The definition of societies and the explanation of social changes are no longer lingering in neoevolutionary terms. New concepts have been introduced to define cultures and social change. One of these concepts is the dual-processual approach, as discussed by for example Feinman, Blanton and Brumfiel. Dual-processual theory focusses on variation in ancient political economies and makes a distinction between corporate or group-oriented political economies and those that are more exclusionary and individual-centered. With respect to the Greek mainland it was Renfrew who first wrote about group-oriented chiefdoms (corporate groups) and individualizing chiefdoms (exclusionary groups). These categories are not static, but move along a continuum and can even coexist in spatiotemporal contexts. Put otherwise, societies can cycle from the corporate context towards the exclusionary spectrum and back again. The built environment can communicate meaning, as argued by Rapoport and others. The corporate context and the network or exclusionary context exhibit different characteristics with respect to political and economic organization and they show different basic tendencies. For example, with respect to architecture, the corporate context emphasizes public construction, inclusive contexts, large cooperative labor tasks, and communal ritual. Corporate organization is not by definition egalitarian. Corporate structures may be hierarchical. Individual people may acquire ruling positions, but these leaders are relatively faceless and anonymous when it comes to representational art. The network mode emphasizes personal prestige, elite aggrandizement, exclusive contexts, and controlled access. Emphasis on linear descent systems and the primacy of descent from a common ancestor are also seen as indicative of network systems. When societies cycle from the corporate context towards the exclusionary spectrum or back, architecture is transformed. Therefore, a study of architectural change can, among other things, identify changing social and political strategies.

In this presentation, I discuss the dual-processual theory in more detail, in relation to domestic architecture. As a case-study I use house remains from Middle and Late Bronze Age Greece, to illustrate how changing architecture may be related to a transformation of societies from being corporate and more inclusive, to being more networked and exclusive.

Ob arm, ob reich, im Tode gleich (Citation from the first printed textbook of the Totentanz (ca. 1460 AD))

Sasja van der Vaart-Verschoof and Arjan Louwen, Leiden University

In this paper we discuss the burial customs practiced in the Low Countries during the Late Bronze – Early Iron Age (1100–500 BC) and the social inequality they (supposedly) reflect. Burials from this area and period range from Urnfield graves with cremation deposits and no grave goods or cremations buried in pots with a few grave gifts, to the extravagant Chieftains' burials in which the dead are buried with (imported) bronze vessels, elaborately decorated horse-gear and four-wheeled wagons, swords, tools and personal toiletries and ornaments. Traditionally these graves are divided into 'elite/sumptuous/rich' burials and 'normal/poor/simple' burials. A custom also reflected in our PhD-research topics – one of us has studied the former, while the other focuses on the latter. It has, however, become apparent to us that neither study can do without the other: it is impossible to understand the elite burials without considering 'the rest', and vice versa. Especially if one is interested in understanding the social structures of the past, it makes little sense to cherry pick the exceptional burials for study, when it is generally the majority that will tell you what life was really like in the past. For the area and period under discussion, for example, one of us focuses on some 70 elite burials, while the other studies the graves of approximately 48,000 individuals. By joining forces we have found that in reality we are not dealing with two 'blocks' of burials, but rather with a burial spectrum that flows from the, in terms of grave goods, very richest to the very poorest and that graves throughout the whole spectrum reflect a burial practice that involved fire, fragmentation and pars pro toto deposition.

The Theory of Late Roman British Elites or “How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Paideia.”

Elliot Chaplin, Newcastle university

The Late Roman world was a deeply stratified, heterogeneous society. Any attempts to study the elite of the late Roman Empire will reveal that even within this small percentage of society, there was huge variation, and to cast the blanket term “elite” over this incredibly diverse group of people may be somewhat reductionist. So what, then is the value of the term “elite”? Does it have a value in discussions of the archaeology of Rome and Roman Britain? By examining cultures such as ancient Mesoamerica, early modern China and early modern Japan it is possible to see some common threads through research surrounding elite culture. One primary issue in discussions of elite culture is finding its boundary. Although huge portions of the archaeology of the Roman Empire are focused on the activities of the elite in society, many writings fail to come to terms with what an elite is in the Roman Empire, merely assuming a definition as being self-evident. Although in many cases it is clear upon examination what is and what is not elite this approach becomes deeply problematic at the fringe of what can be considered elite. In light of recent political developments in the Western world, the divide between the elite and the rest of society has been thrown into the limelight. This paper intends to deconstruct the term elite, using anthropological and historical analogy from a variety of different cultures and time periods in order to perhaps better understand Late Roman elite culture and thereby better understand our current socio-political situation. It ultimately comes to focus on the term Paideia, critically discussing its relevance and value to the archaeology of late Roman Britain and whether it can be considered a fair metric of elite society in this context.

Renfrew reloaded: the social organisation of monument construction in Neolithic Wessex

Barney Harris (Doctoral Student, Institute of Archaeology, University College London)

In 1973, Colin Renfrew published *Monuments, mobilisation and social organisation in Neolithic Wessex*. This seminal study examined how the amount of time invested in monument building in Wessex changed throughout the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age periods. Renfrew's (1973) calculations appeared to demonstrate that the number of 'man-hours' invested in building monuments increased from c. 4000-2000 BCE. The absolute number of individual monuments fell over the same period. He explained the trend by arguing that a number of hierarchical, centrally controlled chiefdoms had emerged in Wessex by the Late Neolithic / EBA period. He surmised that whilst the small, egalitarian tribal groups of the earlier Neolithic had built many, small monuments, the later and more populous polities of the Late Neolithic harnessed labour en masse from vast geographical territories in order to build the few great henge enclosures of Stonehenge, Avebury and Dorchester.

This paper questions two assertions central to Renfrew's (1973) study: firstly, that the labour expended on constructing the prehistoric monuments of Wessex steadily increased over time and, secondly, that the absolute labour invested in monumental constructions can legitimately be used as an index of hierarchical control. To inform this discussion Renfrew's (1973) study was replicated and significantly expanded. The new data do not support Renfrew's (1973) claims for a gradually emerging elite represented through increased labour investment. Rather, there is considerable diversity in the amount of labour invested in constructing early forms of Neolithic monument and, in certain cases, the time spent building them appears to be related to their position and visibility within the landscape. The above supports an alternative narrative of social change in Neolithic Wessex that goes beyond the explanatory frameworks of hierarchical control and elitism; the time spent building monuments was likely contingent upon a variety of physical and social factors that belied a fundamental and particular reimagining of the landscape.

Session 2: Power to the People

Chaired by: Femke Lippok (Leiden University)

Power to...whoever shouts the loudest. Or, how to study a multi-vocalled past?

Karla de Roest (PhD-candidate Archaeology, RUG)

Until recently, it was thought that the urnfields of the late North-western prehistory were prime examples of equality, in which everyone had his own spot (Hessing & Kooi 2005). New research however shows ample differentiation (e.g. Heirbaut 2011; Hermsen & Van der Wal 2012). Firstly, there is variation in number of, quality, and 'richness' of grave goods. Secondly, physical anthropological evidence shows that not everyone ended up alone in a grave. Finally, some (age) groups seem to be missing entirely and apparently ended up somewhere else. From these new insights, it follows that archaeologists ought to reconsider their research questions. Of course, archaeology is concerned with understanding the past. The pressing question is, with whose past exactly? Our conclusions are based on grave finds, and, simultaneously, we notice that not everyone received the same grave monument or the same amount of finds. Are we willingly reconstructing the past on incomplete recordings? Can historical research do justice to all groups a society consisted of – and should it? The term 'multi-vocal' has in fact two definitions. It refers not only to the existence of more than one voice or vision, but also to something that is unclear or ambiguous. In our research it is important that we are aware of that ambiguity. As will be demonstrated, multiple candidates can be identified that impose their authority on the way we reconstruct the past. We need to take into account both who voices the past – and, if there is a choice, whose voice we reconstruct (e.g. Meskell 1997; Scott 1999; Nelson 2006). Additionally, we need to ask whether everyone's view of society or way of life can be reconstructed. How do we show that the execution of practices indeed reflects a communal idea?

In this paper, Iron Age elites and 'commoners', but also archaeologists, are examined by questioning authority, stratification, and differentiation. Examples based on graves dating between c. 1000 BC-200 AD demonstrate that each of these groups voices the past in a different way.

The Great Washed: How ‘Private’ Were Early Rural Baths in Roman Britain?

Giacomo Savani (University of Leicester)

In the Roman Empire, an appreciation of baths and bathing was among the few common socio-cultural traits shared by people with the most diverse cultural and social backgrounds. Perhaps because of their popularity in antiquity and their archaeological distinctiveness, antiquarians, as well as many modern scholars, have tended to take for granted the function of these buildings and, more importantly, their socio-cultural significance. This is particularly true in a provincial context such as Britannia, where Romanists have been primarily interested in military and public baths, neglecting the variegated field of rural bathing. Focusing on South-East England, this paper will discuss the role that bathing practices had in constructing a ‘middle ground’ (White 1991; Gosden 2004: 82, 104-113) between the newcomers and the natives in the aftermath of the Roman conquest and the reasons behind the early appearance of villa baths in this region, sometimes decades before the construction of their urban counterparts. Instead of viewing rural baths as merely functional buildings prerogative of the elite, this study highlights the complexity of their socio-cultural implications. Modern assumptions about property and individualistic choices have so far prevented scholars from investigating the broader impact that these facilities had in rural contexts. A careful analysis of the archaeological evidence suggests that some of them might have been accessible to at least a part of the rural population living in the surroundings of villas, potentially influencing and affecting the lives and identities of a far larger group of people than previously thought.

References:

Gosden, C. 2004: *Archaeology and Colonialism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
White, R. 1991: *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

It's not me, it's you: diversions of elite responsibility during the Late/Terminal Classic in the Maya lowlands.

Anastasia Kotsoglou, Department of Anthropology, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York

For the ancient Maya, the distribution of power was codified through notions of divine rulership. The cosmological legitimation of ruling elites endowed them with glory in times of success and responsibility in times of turmoil. Recent scholarship has fervently examined the various political stratagems employed by Maya rulers during parts of the Late/Terminal Classic (750-900 AD), arguably one of the most socio-ecologically turbulent eras of the Maya world. Many of these studies, however, have emphasized negotiations of power at urban centers altogether relegating hinterland sites to the periphery of analysis. Recent excavations at Tzak Naab, a rural site located 7km northwest of the urban polity of La Milpa (in modern day Belize), suggest that political maintenance and associated ritual practices were not exclusively urban affairs. This case study presents the possibility that through the co-opting of such practices--and the built environments they were enacted in--forms of power and control were systematically employed by elites in order to redirect their responsibility and potential negative consequences. With particular attention to public plazas and temple complexes, this paper aims to situate rural communities within a framework of intensified political relevance during a critical period. By considering how inversions or co-optations of familiar ritual practices might reflect changing political dynamics and broader elite-nonelite negotiations, this paper explores what such sites may tell us of the shifting anxieties and priorities of these inhabitants.

Session 3: Selling the elite to a modern audience

Chaired by: James Symonds (University of Amsterdam)

Mycenae Rich in Gold: Social Discourse, Bias and Performance in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens

Claudia Valeria Alonso-Moreno, PhD candidate, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

“...Inside the tombs, I have discovered fabulous treasures and ancient objects of solid gold. These treasures alone are enough to fill a large museum which will become the most famous in the world and will attract myriads of foreigners to Greece...”. These prophetic words are part of the telegram that the legendary Heinrich Schliemann sent to King George I on the occasion of the discovery of Grave Circle A. The magnificent facture of the mask found in Grave V lead Schliemann to the assumption that it covered the face of Agamemnon. Although we know that these tombs were not the burials of Homeric kings and heroes, the pieces from Grave Circle A are the axis of the Mycenaean exhibition showed in the National Museum of Athens: indeed, the so-called “Agamemnon’s Mask” is not only the first piece we envisage from this part of the Museum, but the very first artefact you can see from the National Archaeological Museum when you cross its doors.

Due to the undeniable prominence of the emblematic collection from Grave Circle A in the Museum, this paper will examine the message conveyed about Mycenaean society, which stories are told and which not, and the impact in the visiting audience. Moreover, the theoretical debate about Mycenaean society, the definition of their elites and the consideration of non-elites, will be evaluated in the light of the display of the Mycenaean collection in the National Museum of Athens. Finally, this paper will show how, although the exhibition is astonishing and unforgettable, offers a biased and poor vision of Mycenaean society, in which central concepts such as agency, work, production or social struggle are completely neglected.

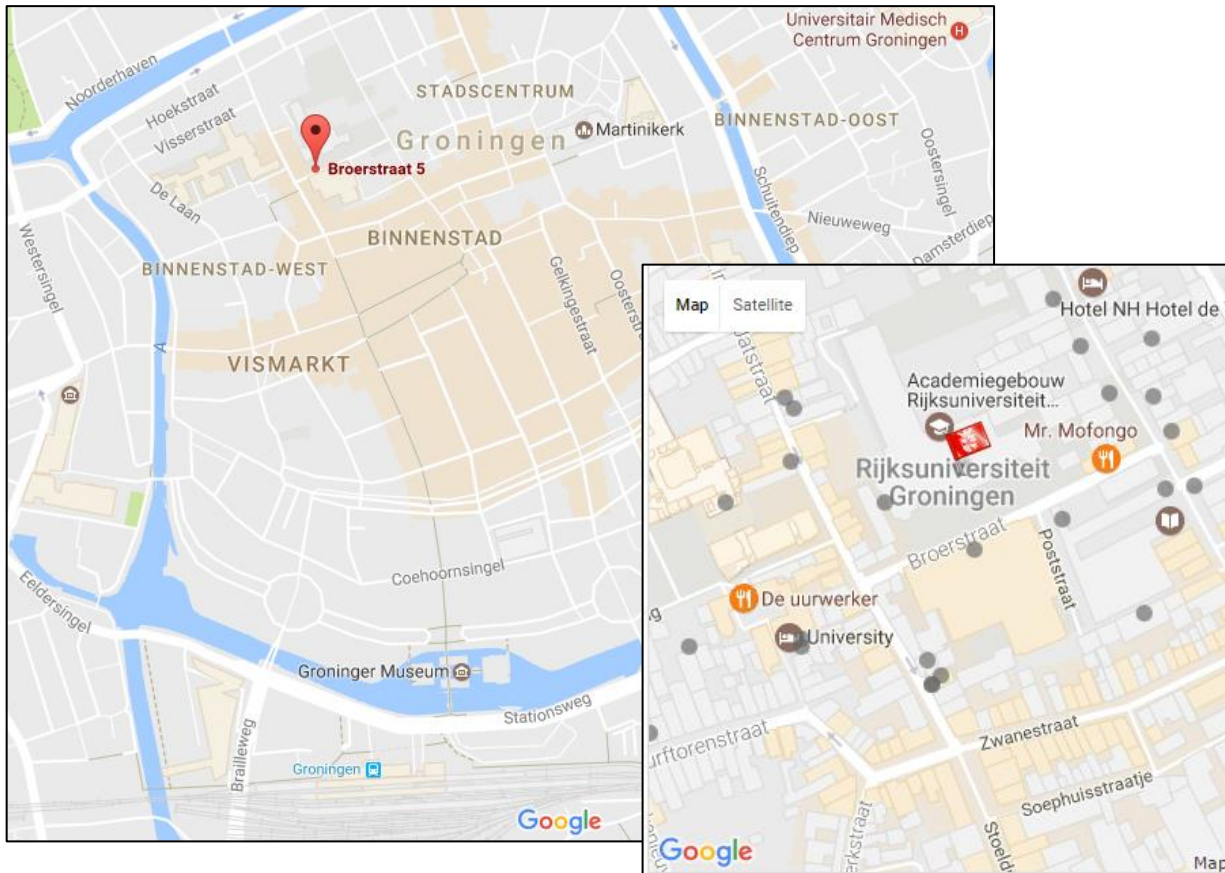
Whose Archaeology? A New Approach to Public Engagement in Post-Conflict Syria

Lindsay Morehouse MPhil, Nour A. Munawar MA—University of Amsterdam

Since the beginning of the 20th century, archaeology as a discourse in the Middle East has been characterised as being a specialty of the elite class. This fact has been stimulated by the attitude of people that tends to encourage their young generations to go for the more practical and “lucrative” sciences such as medicine and law. This tendency has created a huge gap between the society and archaeology as a discipline which ultimately resulted in neglecting any field that studies the material culture of the past. Postcolonial regimes that have been ruling the MENA region have also reinforced this gap. For instance, archaeology is one of the fields that is controlled and regulated solely by the government. This argument is apparently supported by the archaeology law in Syria, where the property of archaeology only belongs to the government.

This has generated a top-down approach which eventually asserted the idea of making archaeology as a discourse of the society’s elite. Recently, the “reconstruction” of a replica of Palmyra’s Arch of Triumph under the supervision of the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums in Syria (DGAM) –the highest national authority of archaeological sites in Syria, is an illustrative example. It has been widely criticized for numerous reasons, one of which being the use of the top-down approach which neglected the viewpoints of local stakeholders. The concern is now to continue working with such approach to reconstruct all the archaeological sites in the aftermath of Syria’s war. We argue that such approach must be opposed and concurrently replaced by the bottom-up approach wherein the progression and decision can be generated from the individual elements of the society to the whole. This can be attempted through the application of public archaeology methods, constitutional reform, and the promotion of (G)localisation of heritage. This paper goes on to investigate the possibility of applying the bottom-up approach in the post-civil-war recovery. We go beyond to also show how the inclusion of the individual and collective memories of local people in the reconstruction process can reimagine archaeology as an inclusive and healing discourse.

Location



The location is marked with a red flag on the map.

Faculty/Service

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Car park

There are only some parking spaces available for disabled people. Visitors are therefore advised to use the [general parking facility Ossenmarkt](#). From the Ossenmarkt car park, cross the nearest bridge and walk straight into the Oude Boteringestraat. Turn the second street right (third if you count the alley) and enter the Broerstraat. The Academy building is located on your right.

Disabled people

Two parking spaces for disabled people are available at the Academy building parking lot. Please contact the reception upon arrival if you wish to make use of these spaces. (Tel. 050-363 5250). Reservations in advance cannot be made.

The building has a special side-entrance with an elevator on the left-hand side. From here you have access to the Academia Restaurant and various floors of the old Academy Building (1111), as well as the adjoining new building (1112).